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Self-Knowledge at the Margins

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Self-Knowledge at the Margins

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Abstract

Self-Knowledge at the Margins

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This dissertation is a collection of three papers – "Knowing Oneself for Others," "Stereotype Threat and the Value of Self-Knowledge," and "Self-Knowledge, Epistemic Work, and Injustice" – in which I address the connections between self-knowledge production and social inequality. I explain, using a variety of contemporary political and cultural examples, that marginalized individuals are more likely to be required to know certain things about themselves than socially privileged individuals, especially about those aspects of their lives and identities which are essential to their being marginalized. I argue that this should make us rethink our basic understanding of epistemic injustice, which is typically thought of as involving the prevention of marginalized individuals from producing knowledge. More specifically, in "Knowing Oneself for Others," I introduce the notion of "compulsory self-disclosure," a social phenomenon in which an individual is forced to reveal things about themselves, often in ways that further contribute to their oppression. "Stereotype Threat and the Value of Self-Knowledge" addresses how self-ignorance can actually be desirable for individuals facing stereotype threat, and I argue that treating stereotype threat as an epistemic injustice issue can actually harm rather than help individuals in certain cases. Finally, in "Self-Knowledge, Epistemic Work, and Injustice," I assess the reasoning behind the assumption that marginalized people are self-ignorant; I argue that we need to appreciate the central role that epistemic work plays in self-knowledge production to understand why the standard assumption about marginalized self-ignorance is misguided. Ultimately, I would have us think of self-knowledge production as not just epistemic work but as work that is often emotionally difficult and even metaphysically transformative – coming to have self-knowledge in certain ways can quite literally change who you are. In light of this, the overarching aim of this work is to argue for there being an inextricable link between an individual's knowledge of themselves and their social status, as well as to discourage readers from thinking of the production of self-knowledge as inherently desirable or as a wholly epistemic issue.

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Introduction

Self-knowledge, when it matters, isn't cheap. As I sit here writing this introduction, I am acutely aware of the costs of coming to have self-knowledge. Coming to know what I want to say, what my motivations were for writing this dissertation rather than nearby possible dissertations, what my own thoughts are about what I've written, what my philosophical strengths and shortcomings are, how my social context has influenced what I've done for the past several years, is difficult work. It is a type of work that only certain people in certain contexts are expected to do, and I think we should be concerned about this, both philosophically and socially. Convincing you that this is true is the overarching aim of my papers.

My choice of topic is, in many respects, the predictable result of my philosophically coming-of-age during a decade when you'd be hard-pressed to find a top journal that hasn't published feminist work on epistemic injustice. With the proliferation of papers identifying new varieties of epistemic injustices running at full tilt, it is difficult to avoid being both influenced by and critical of this sweeping trend in feminist epistemology. Equally influential is the growing number of openly LGBTQ analytic philosophers working on philosophy of gender, especially within analytic metaphysics. For better or worse, there is now a growing sense within the discipline that everyone, not just LGBTQ philosophers, need to engage with this work. This growing acceptance of and engagement with queer analytic philosophy encouraged me as I first began working on self-knowledge and introspection to connect that work to my experiences as a queer person. Finally, it is hard to ignore the impact that Kate Manne's book, *Down Girl*, had after its publication in 2017. Manne's book was widely read outside of our discipline and even outside of academia altogether, having a significant effect on public discussions of misogyny. It is not hard to see why – she uses vivid, contemporary, *real* examples while managing to maintain a high degree of philosophical rigor, leaving readers feeling like they are engaging with content that is philosophically substantive while being straightforwardly relevant to hot-button political issues. As someone working in analytic feminist philosophy, it was nearly impossible to read her work and not want to aim for a similar sort of immediate social relevance.

All this is to say that the work that follows is in many respects a product of its time. I hope that this is in fact to its benefit, given the fundamentally social nature of most of the philosophical questions and concerns I raise. That being said, the broad topics I cover are not merely trendy. It is no secret, of course, that self-knowledge has been a topic of philosophical concern since at least Plato's time, as evidenced by the oft-quoted maxim, "Know Thyself," inscribed at the 4th century BCE Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Discussions of justice, too, clearly have ancient roots. More interesting and far less widely known is the fact that there is a text that predates Plato by roughly 1,400 years that, I think, shows that concerns about injustice and self-knowledge have most likely existed for at least as long as there have been humans to record them. So, to better introduce the topic of my dissertation, let me tell you a story.

In the ancient Egyptian story, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* – which is one of the earliest works of political philosophy we have in writing (Jeffers 2013) – we meet the titular "peasant," Khunanup, who is a farmer and trader. While traveling to market to trade his goods for supplies, he is tricked by Nemtinakht into trespassing on the High Steward Rensi's land, which is just next to the road on which Khunanup was traveling. Nemtinakht sets up a roadblock so that Khunanup has no choice but to stray from the road slightly. Nemtinakht, who works for Rensi, takes this opportunity to seize Khunanup's goods and donkeys as punishment. Khunanup is outraged, and goes to Rensi himself to demand that his possessions be returned. Khunanup proves to be extremely well-spoken in his statements about *ma'at* (a term which is usually translated as "justice," but can also mean "truth" or "order" (Jeffers 2013)), so much so that Rensi tells the king, Nebkaure, about the eloquence of his complaints. Rather than righting the situation immediately by forcing Nemtinakht to return Khunanup's belongings, the king tells Rensi to make Khunanup continue to give speeches about *ma'at* and to record them. To ensure that Khunanup continues to make speeches, Rensi does not reveal that he finds the speeches pleasing or persuasive and even goes so far as beating Khunanup to keep him desperate. After the ninth speech, Rensi and the king reveal their admiration of Khunanup's eloquence, show him the written records of his speeches, and Rensi finally punishes Nemtinakht. In the end, Khunanup is not only given back the property that was stolen from him, but all of Nemtinakht's own wealth as well.

It is in Khunanup's eighth complaint that the connection between self-knowledge and oppression becomes most clear. He says,

> "Fear of your high position hinders my appeal to you,
> yet you cannot know my thoughts –
> And so your quiet man is back,
> and he would make his grievances clear to you.
> He should not fear the one to whom he puts his plea…" (Foster 183-184).

Khunanup recognizes that he is hesitant to speak his mind to Rensi because of their extremely unequal social positions, while also recognizing that he has no choice but to gather his thoughts and express them to this man who is regularly beating him. But of course, this is the crux of both the irony and tragedy of the tale – in making his grievances so clear, in putting them so well, Khunanup is drawing out his own pain. As R. B. Parkinson, in his introduction to a translation of the text, explains, "The eloquence which ensures the peasant's success is also the cause of his prolonged suffering: he is so eloquent that, after the first introductory petition, the king commands that no response be given, simply to force him to continue talking" (Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe*, 55, quoted in Jeffers 2013).

I do not mean to include this story to justify or legitimize my choice of topic – philosophical work does not need historical precedent in order to be worthwhile or interesting. Rather, I think it is helpful to have an initial example of the social phenomenon with which I am concerned that is disconnected from our current political landscape, an example involving issues in which a contemporary reader will have no stake. Of course, essential to the quality of my work are examples in which you might very well have a stake (indeed, in which I think you *should* have a stake), but those can wait. So, the general point this particular example helps to clarify is this: people like Khunanup, people who are in extremely socially precarious positions, are often required to explain themselves in order to survive. They must explain their thoughts, motivations, and actions to win over those who have control over their lives (or some aspect of their lives, at least), and of course, they must do so *eloquently* to be taken seriously. Rather than this process of sharing hard-earned self-knowledge being fulfilling, it is often painful and only undertaken to prevent an even worse outcome.

There are many questions we might ask in light of examples like that of Khunanup; there are two that are central to my papers and are worth inviting you to keep in mind. The first: how best to categorize this sort of hardship? As yet another kind of epistemic injustice? There is no doubt a kind of satisfaction that comes with neatly putting a case like this into a box, and doing so can have its benefits. Social phenomena which can be fit into such boxes can be more easily identified, tracked, and dealt with. It gives people terms to identify and discuss experiences they have in common with others like them. But I hope to convince you that in this case, this would invite us to oversimplify an issue that can be more thoroughly and deeply understood when it is not framed as a primarily epistemic problem. This is not to say that we can't come up with a good label for this phenomenon at all – I do introduce the term "compulsory self-disclosure" for precisely this purpose – but I would have us resist the urge to categorize it as a type of epistemic injustice merely because it involves knowledge production.

The second central question is, I think, more important. How are individuals changed, or even harmed, in the process of producing self-knowledge? How might the production of self-knowledge be particularly susceptible to causing harm or at least being transformative? The difference between self-knowledge and knowledge about other things, plainly, is that the object of knowledge is the knower themselves. As I will argue in more detail later, sometimes we have to change ourselves in order to come to have self-knowledge – if you're asked whether you like vanilla or chocolate ice cream better and you've never tried either, you might reply with a simple "I don't know which I prefer," or you might seek out some ice cream experiences in order to develop ice cream preferences. You turn yourself into someone with a preference for chocolate ice cream, in part because it is common for people to expect you to have a bit of self-knowledge about ice cream preferences. This might seem like an innocent example, but I hope it will be obvious how it is related to later more serious examples involving, for instance, questions about individuals' sexuality and gender identities.

On that note, and as a final introductory remark, I use examples throughout my papers that involve people facing injustice due to their gender or sexuality because that is the primary form of oppression with which I (and many of the people close to me) am most familiar. But of course there are, unfortunately, a plethora of ways that an individual can be socially marginalized, and rarely is that marginalization constant across contexts. So I think that any reader, regardless of their social position, will have experiences that are relevant to the issues I raise, both as someone facing some kind of injustice and as someone contributing to others' hardship. I strongly encourage readers to make these connections, to avoid thinking of "marginalized" as a term that either applies to you or does not, and I hope that reading this work will leave you with more self-knowledge than before, self-knowledge that you feel was worth the trouble.

I. Knowing Oneself for Others

Abstract

In this paper, I introduce the term "compulsory self-disclosure" to pick out and describe a distinct type of oppression faced by individuals from many marginalized groups. I illustrate what compulsory self-disclosure looks like in practice through the use of contemporary political and cultural examples involving women and LGBTQ people, and I argue that a key feature of compulsory self-disclosure is that the victim is pressured into producing self-knowledge and then sharing that knowledge with others. I go on to explain why I think it is incorrect to think of compulsory self-disclosure as a kind of epistemic injustice.

I. The Curious Case of the Kavanaugh Hearing

On September 27, 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford told the American public that she was sexually assaulted as a teenager by Brett Kavanaugh, Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court. Prior to the hearing, the Senate Judiciary Committee – the body in charge of investigating Kavanaugh – knew many things about Dr. Ford and her allegations against Kavanaugh. They knew that she had written a confidential letter about the sexual assault to Senator Dianne Feinstein at the end of July, and that she wanted it to remain confidential for fear of public backlash (Kelly and Estepa 2018). Thanks to this letter and later correspondences with Dr. Ford, they knew what her allegations were. They knew that she passed a polygraph test while attesting to the truth of her claims about Kavanaugh (Brown 2018). They knew that two other women came forward in September with similar allegations (Farrow and Mayer 2018, Walters 2018). They knew that Dr. Ford's allegations were consistent with what she had told therapists in 2012 and 2013 about her sexual assault history (Brown 2018). Senator Feinstein, as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, tweeted before the hearing: "I've found every single piece of information from Dr. Christine Blasey Ford eminently credible, sincere and believable. She knew this would have a huge effect on her life and she was incredibly brave to come forward."

Despite Dr. Ford's wish to keep these matters confidential, despite the overwhelming evidence the committee had prior to the hearing, and despite the committee's ability to request an FBI investigation in lieu of a public hearing, the hearing took place. Over the course of the proceedings, it became increasingly clear that even if Dr. Ford could have gone so far as to produce photographic evidence of the event in question, the committee would not have blocked the nomination of Kavanaugh. She presented an admirably clear account of what occurred, which was consistent with all the prior information made available to the committee. Kavanaugh, in contrast, gave exasperated and angry responses, many of which focused on how it is normal for teenage boys to drink beer: “Sometimes I had too many beers. Sometimes others did. I liked beer. I still like beer. But I did not drink beer to the point of blacking out, and I never sexually assaulted anyone” (Transcript 2018). More importantly, he dodged questions about whether he would be open to an official FBI investigation about the allegations, questions that he should have had no reason to dodge, given his emphatic and persistent denial of the truth of the allegations.

It is tempting to see this case as yet another instance of women’s testimony not being believed due to sexist biases, what Miranda Fricker and most feminist epistemologists would call “testimonial injustice.” But this case and others like it are not so simple. The hearing – the *public* hearing – was not in the interest of collecting evidence. The committee had already been presented with ample evidence to support the allegations, at least enough to merit an FBI investigation. And if they simply did not believe the allegations, it is not clear why they didn’t try to simply sweep Dr. Ford under the rug. What the public hearing did achieve was not anything epistemically motivated. Simply put, the hearing ensured that Dr. Ford would have to *expose herself* to the entire country as a victim of sexual assault and as the primary accuser of Kavanaugh.

This requirement that women “expose” themselves to others is not limited to situations involving sexual assault or legal cases, and women are not the only ones who are subjected to it. Women who are emotionally reserved are “cold,” trans people who refuse to reveal the intimate details of their transition are “deceptive,” Black people who don’t want to talk about their experiences of racism with white people are “reverse racists,” and so on. These examples point to a particular type of oppression that many marginalized people face, and the difficulty that I’ll grapple with in this paper is how best to understand what is going on in these situations – which I will broadly label as cases of “compulsory self-disclosure” – and why the harms involved should not be understood as testimonial or hermeneutic injustice, despite sharing surface-level features with epistemic injustice cases.

The specific types of cases that I think are most useful and interesting to focus on are those like the Kavanaugh hearing case, which broadly involve women being required to be "legible" or psychologically open to men, as described in great detail by Kate Manne (2018) in her work on misogyny. Queer people are faced with a similar social requirement to clearly categorize and "out" themselves, which Foucault discusses at length in *The History of Sexuality* (though not exactly in the LGBTQ terms that we are familiar with today). These are both, I will explain, types of cases in which marginalized subjects are compelled to produce self-knowledge for the benefit of others, those privileged others ultimately having an interest in maintaining certain oppressive social power relations.

There are already theoretical tools within social epistemology that we can use to try to understand the oppression at work in compulsory self-disclosure cases, but, as I've already suggested above, I'll argue that Miranda Fricker's popular notions of epistemic injustice are inadequate to the task, primarily due to their being concerned with the suppression, not compulsion, of knowledge production. Nora Berenstain's more recent work on epistemic exploitation is slightly more fitting, but still misses the mark. We need an explanation of why this sort of compulsion to produce self-knowledge for others is harmful, and the existing conceptual tools do not allow us to appreciate how this forced self-disclosure is not a purely epistemic matter or a straightforward issue of epistemic distributive justice. The profound impact that the production and sharing of self-knowledge has on one's emotional well-being and sense of self cannot be reduced to merely epistemic terms, as I'll argue with the help of Arlie Hochschild's work on emotional labor. Furthermore, social power relations shape what counts as epistemically fair within our own epistemic community to begin with, and it is not clear that within the white, hetero-patriarchal community in which we live, our epistemic standards of fairness work in favor of socially oppressed groups. This final point will not be fully defended in this paper, but in raising it, I will point to the need for a thorough critique of the epistemic injustice literature as a whole, and I will gesture at how I hope to do so in future work.

I should include some clarificatory remarks about terminology before moving on to the body of the paper. For our purposes here, take “cisgendered person” to pick out anyone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth, that is, anyone who is not transgender or non-binary. I will often use “queer” as an umbrella term, but it is important to note that not all LGBTQ+ people are personally comfortable with describing themselves as “queer.” The terminology used within the queer community evolves quickly, so I hope that anyone reading this years after I have written it will excuse any language that I use that has become outdated or offensive. I will also use “oppression” throughout the paper as a broader and more fundamental category than “injustice.” Roughly following Cudd (2006), I am assuming that individuals are oppressed due to being members of a social group that is subjected to constraints to which other social groups are not. “Constraints” may include "legal rights, obligations and burdens, stereotypical expectations, wealth, income, social status, conventions, norms, and practices" (Cudd, 50). These constraints, furthermore, must cause harm. On this understanding of “oppression,” which I take to be widely accepted, it does not make sense to say, for instance, that a man is “oppressed” by his overbearing family. While it is certainly true that anyone of any social group can be subjected to unfair treatment, “oppression” is meant to pick out harmful treatment against individuals *qua* members of social groups, and this treatment stems from things like institutionally-engrained stereotypes, material conditions, and traditions.

II. Women's Self-Knowledge and Misogyny

As many readers will already know, Kate Manne's 2018 book, *Down Girl*, aims to make us think about misogyny in a new way. According to what she calls the "naïve" conception of misogyny, a person (usually a man) is a misogynist if and only if he fits a certain psychological profile. This profile must involve a deep hatred of women *qua* women. Instead, Manne argues, we should understand misogyny as a feature of patriarchal social environments – misogyny is structural, not psychological. The key benefits of her structural approach are that it better explains our everyday use of "misogyny" – misogyny is a common feature of patriarchal societies, not limited to random cases of pathological gynophobia – and that it allows us to be in a position to identify instances of misogyny more readily. More specifically, Manne argues that "misogyny ought to be understood as the system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance" (33). In other words, women will face hostility of a distinctively misogynist kind when they fail to meet the expectations of the patriarchal social order.

It is not hard to imagine what these expectations are. The goods and services that women are required to give include affection, adoration, respect, love, acceptance, nurturing, kindness, security, soothing, as well more concrete services like housekeeping, sex, and childrearing. And we can easily imagine what women (and people who others mistakenly assume are women) face when they do not meet these expectations. The backlash can be as simple as name-calling to punishment as horrible as domestic violence, sexual assault, and murder. Women face similar dangers if they try to take things to which they are not entitled (according to patriarchal norms), things like leadership positions, money, prestige, and power in general. Nor can women ask men for feminine-coded services without facing misogynist policing. Essentially, "women are tasked not only with performing certain forms of emotional, social, domestic, sexual, and reproductive labor but are *also* supposed to do so in a loving and caring manner," all while never asking for this labor to be reciprocated in kind (46).

This background on Manne's central claims in *Down Girl* is important to understand, given the particular form of women's "labor" that I'd like to focus on. The types of labor listed in the quote above do not include epistemic labor, and indeed, given the pervasiveness of attempts to silence women and to disbelieve their testimony, one would think that there is no place for the contribution of any sort of "female knowledge" in a patriarchal society. Rampant testimonial injustice (more on this in section IV below) against women who speak out for themselves is what one would expect. Although Manne never explicitly says that any of the services women are expected to give men have to do with producing knowledge, she does suggest throughout the book that in patriarchal societies, women's minds are not their own, and I think these observations point to how women are both expected to perform certain kinds of epistemic work and how the product of this work is often self-knowledge in particular.

For instance, in her analysis of catcalling, she explains,

> in certain cases [of catcalling] this bid for [the woman's] attention is more focused on her mind not being allowed to be (a) turned inward (such that she is thinking her own thoughts), (b) withheld from him via her putting up emotional 'walls'…or (c) averse to the attention that he foists on her boisterously and sometimes aggressively or threateningly…she may be required to look 'open' or 'transparent.' (115)

This expectation that women be mentally and emotionally "open" for men is not limited to scenarios involving street harassment. Even in close relationships, this expectation is at play; the man in the relationship "needs to be assured that she means what she says. And he needs to know that she won't suddenly change her mind, and form new and threatening intentions, with no warning" (119). In other words, women who withhold their inner thoughts, intentions, desires, etc.

from their male partners are seen as untrustworthy and even emotionally threatening and dangerous to men. Importantly, men are usually not held to a similar standard of openness, and when they *are* similarly open, they are seen as less masculine and their female partner is seen as overly-demanding.

Even when men are not seeking this mental and emotional openness in order to explicitly exert control over women, it is still needed to render many of the other feminine-coded goods meaningful. As Manne explains, "a dominant man needs to be able to 'read her mind' to be assured that the relevant personal services are *genuine*. Kindness is not kindness without good will toward the other as the primary motivation, for instance" (131). So this openness is in a certain sense more fundamental than any of the other services required of women, insofar as psychological openness is necessary to guarantee that almost all of these services are performed in a satisfactory way. To sum up, then, "misogyny tends to punish failures not only to demonstrate the 'openness' or *legibility* of her mind, but also the constancy of her intentions or the strength of her resolve to keep her promises" (118, my emphasis).

All of this gets at the same patriarchal rule: that women's minds must be an open book so that they can be monitored and changed, if necessary. And unless we discover a way to actually read others' minds, the only way to ensure this openness is to force women (and other people who are subordinated in a patriarchal society) to produce self-knowledge *for others*. In other words, subordinated individuals must report things about themselves to privileged individuals, things about which privileged individuals are not required to report. Most importantly, this self-knowledge must be *legible* to those whose purposes it will serve, presented in terms that are easily understood third-personally. Self-expression in the form of abstract art, for instance, won't do. This requires that women constantly assess and label their own mental states in socially recognizable terms and that they seek professional help when they are incapable of doing this on their own.

The aim of this forced self-knowledge production is never the well-being of the woman. Rather, her mind must be an open book so that a man can trust her and so that he can confirm that the affection and attention she gives him is genuine, that is, that she is not manipulating or misleading him. Perhaps even more insidious is the fact that if he is to change her mind, he first must understand what is in it. Gaslighting – psychological manipulation that makes someone doubt themselves, either with respect to their own grasp of the facts or to their soundness of mind itself – requires that the woman first lay her cards on the table, so to speak, so that they can be replaced with new cards that will ensure she will lose the game (Abramson 2014, Stark 2019). As Manne describes, many victims of relationship abuse testify against their abusers at first, only to slowly come to believe that they were never abused, their abusers convincing them that they misinterpreted normal behavior as abuse. But this change of the victim's mind can only occur if they reveal their original feelings and beliefs. It is only after this initial self-knowledge is made into third-personally available knowledge that the abuser can then gaslight the victim.

This quite clearly ties back to my original example: the Kavanaugh hearing. Understanding compulsory self-disclosure as a type of oppression aimed at manipulation and control makes it clear that the hearing, rather than being an innocent fact-finding mission, was part of a larger culture of misogyny that often forces women to be mentally "legible" to others, rendering them vulnerable to psychological abuses like gaslighting.

III. Transforming Desire into Discourse

Women are not the only group who are pressured to produce self-knowledge for the benefit of privileged others and for, more generally, the maintenance of a social structure in which they are oppressed. Most queer people face a similar pressure, which most commonly takes the form of being expected to come out in any and all settings in which they find themselves.

It is common to think of the operations of structural oppression as being repressive – they silence, censor, smother. This is the idea that underlies most contemporary work on epistemic injustice. For instance, Dotson (2011) focuses on silencing and self-censorship. Pohlhaus (2012) draws our attention to the tendency of those in power to willfully misunderstand or ignore people who are less privileged than they are. Coady (2010) has us think of epistemic injustice as an unfair distribution of epistemic resources that ultimately prevents certain groups from producing knowledge. An outcome of events counts as epistemically unjust, on these views, if it unfairly prevents people from coming to have knowledge or from sharing knowledge. And this is precisely the notion of social power and oppression that Foucault aims to challenge in *The History of Sexuality,* which is as much a work of epistemology as it is queer theory.

Essentially, what we learn from Foucault is that oppressive social structures can be maintained and strengthened not by limiting or silencing discourse, but by *encouraging* discourse in ways that are beneficial to those structures. He points specifically to seventeenth century confessional practices within the Christian tradition as an example of this: "[a]n imperative was established: Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse" (21). Instead of attempting to repress desires outright, the religious injunction was to articulate and share one's "sinful" thoughts and feelings;

in requiring this openness about transgressions, the Church was able to exert a level of control over its members that straightforward repression could not achieve. He explains further,

> the Christian pastoral…sought to produce specific effects on desire, by the mere fact of transforming it – fully and deliberately – into discourse: effects of mastery and detachment, to be sure, but also an effect of spiritual reconversion, of turning back to God, a physical effect of blissful suffering from feeling in one's body the pangs of temptation and the love that resists it…this carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself. (*History of Sexuality*, 23)

This confessional practice is not limited to Catholicism. The things we are pressured to disclose in various social situations are numerous – "one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles" – and they are disclosed in numerous ways – "one confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves" (Foucault 59). And of course, Foucault was making these observations long before the rise of social media; that people without social media accounts are today seen as deviant and anti-social and are often pressured to join social media sites is an extreme continuation of the confessional practice Foucault described decades ago.

What's more, it is only through this constant process of "confessing" that one takes one's place as a certain type of individual in society. The individual is "authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization," Foucault explains (58-59). In more contemporary and colloquial terms, identifying *as* someone of a particular identity requires describing yourself to others in a way that fits with common notions about what it is to be an individual of that sort. An individual's public production of self-knowledge, then, is not some superfluous activity that one can choose to engage in or not; it is necessary to one's having a clear place in society.

It should be clear, I hope, that when it comes to sexuality and gender identity, individuals who are not straight or cisgender are expected to "confess" in this way to a far greater extent than cis or straight people, both in terms of frequency and psychological depth. Think about the practice of coming out to one's friends, family, perhaps to one's colleagues or employer, and even (in the case of celebrities and politicians) to the general public. It is quite obvious that straight people are never expected to come out as straight, nor are cis people ever required to come out as having a particular gender identity. If you were to ask a straight person to explain how they know they are straight or to tell a personal story about when they "realized" they were straight, you would be met with confusion and perhaps even hostility. But these are questions that LGBTQ people expect to encounter about their sexuality or gender.

In short, it is not enough to simply come out as gay without giving an explanation. I think it is extremely revealing to turn to examples involving celebrities to defend this point. Celebrities not only set the standard for what coming out should look like, but they also have a way of drawing out the public's normally unspoken attitudes about queer people. Over twenty years ago when Ellen DeGeneres very publicly came out as a lesbian and encountered huge amounts of both public support and homophobic retaliation at once, she could not simply say, "Yep, I'm gay." The infamous April 14th, 1997 *Times* cover also promised readers an explanation from Ellen on "why she's coming out." One of the questions she faced in that interview was "Is being gay something you struggled with?", and she responded with a personal story about her dating history, how she felt about her attraction to women when she was a teenager, and how she eventually realized she wasn't straight.

Little has changed in the 24 years following that interview. Celebrities often still feel immense pressure not just to come out, but to tell a story about the development of their sexuality, the pressures to conform that they've endured, and the challenges they've overcome. When Elliot Page, another very prominent actor, first came out at a Human Rights Campaign event in 2014, they explained how they struggled to be "authentic" in the film industry, while LGBTQ news outlets lauded them for their openness. "We really get to see [their] whole heart," said the editor of *Autostraddle*, the queer website that first broke the news (Bernard). And YouTube coming out videos, many of which are extremely detailed, are becoming increasingly more common and well-watched. Again, due to the widespread influence of YouTube as a media platform, I think it is very socially telling to take these examples into account. Daniel Howell, a British YouTuber with 6.5 million subscribers, posted a 45-minute-long video, "Basically I'm Gay," going into extensive detail about his experiences of childhood bullying, why he hasn't talked publicly about his relationships, and why he prefers using the term "gay" instead of "bisexual" or "queer" to describe himself. This video went viral when he posted it, and it now has over 12 million views. Similarly, Eugene Lee Yang, one of YouTube's immensely popular "Try Guys," not only posted an "I'm Gay" video but an accompanying "Why I'm Coming Out As Gay" video as well. Together, the two videos have almost 30 million views. Perhaps the most shocking example of this trend was when Nikkie de Jager, who runs one of the most popular makeup tutorial channels on YouTube called "NikkieTutorials," came out as transgender in a video, "I'm Coming Out," which currently has almost 38 million views. What makes this particular case so notable is that de Jager was blackmailed into coming out by someone who knew she was trans; they threatened to publicize that information without her permission.

These social media influencers often have many good intentions when publishing this type of queer content. They provide young queer people with positive role models and foster a sense of online community among their queer followers by openly identifying as LGBTQ, and so I am by no means condemning their decisions to come out. What I *am* condemning is the unspoken and unquestioned expectation that queer celebrities explain themselves to the public, regardless of the personal impact it will have on them. There is a deeply-rooted sense of entitlement at work here – a sense that the public is *owed* certain personal information – that is directly connected to what trans philosopher Talia Mae Bettcher (2007) has described as the "persistent stereotype of trans people as deceivers." She explains that this "evil deceiver" stereotype is rooted in the "natural attitude" about gender: your genital status at birth determines what gender you are, and so if you present as a different gender, you are lying about your genital status and your "real" gender. By not coming out, then, a trans person is constantly lying. This basic idea – that if you don't come out, you are lying about yourself – is pervasive, not just when it comes to gender but also to sexual orientation. In a cis- and hetero-normative society, we are presumed to be straight and cis until proven otherwise, and so choosing to not come out often amounts to an admission that you are straight and cis.

It's revealing to look at what happens when online celebrities who aren't straight or cis choose *not* to "officially" come out, especially when they are gender non-conforming, that is, when they openly defy gender norms in the way they dress or act. The queer comedian Chris Fleming, as part of his stand-up comedy video, "Am I a Man?", includes numerous comments he has received on earlier videos about his gender presentation: "That dude looks like a girl!", "wat the heck is that a girl? or a boy?", "that is a dude right?", "is that a man or a woman?", "is it a woman?", "This guy/woman freaks me out for some reason", "boy or girl", "What is this thing?? A male or a female??". The collective confusion and panic in these comments is the reality that many gender non-conforming people face constantly, both on the internet and in person, when they do not "pass" as a cis or straight person. They are expected to explain themselves, even to people who are in no way potential romantic or sexual partners, as if they have been caught in a lie.

The final point that I think is vital to acknowledge here is that it is still extremely common for transgender people in particular to be pressured into therapy by their families and doctors, taking the pressure to explain oneself to a different, medicalized level. LGBTQ identities are technically no longer pathologized – homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness in 1973, and it was only in 2013 that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* stopped using the term "gender identity disorder" to describe the experiences of trans people. But many doctors specializing in gender confirmation surgeries will expect that their trans patients meet with a therapist numerous times to "confirm" that they are indeed trans and that they understand what medical transitioning will mean for them both physically and emotionally. Going through therapy prior to medically transitioning is even legally required in certain countries. Denmark, for instance, despite being the first country to officially recognize that being trans is not a mental illness, still requires that trans people seeking gender confirmation surgeries receive a psychological evaluation before any medical steps can be taken (Russo). Keep in mind that there are many other "life-altering" surgeries that cis people can elect to receive without being required to see a therapist – sterilization procedures and various types of plastic surgery, for instance, are quite relevant to think about here in comparison to gender confirmation surgery. Both involve significant and permanent changes to the patient's body, and in the case of sterilization procedures like tubal ligations, the impact on fertility is effectively equivalent to that of gender confirmation surgeries.

What these observations show us is that the expectation that people with "aberrant" or "sinful" desires turn those desires into discourse, as Foucault would describe it, is alive and well. And as with women being compelled to disclose their thoughts and feelings to men for the benefit of men, LGBTQ people being compelled to come out and make themselves "legible" to the general public is usually not something that they do for their own well-being, especially in the case of trans people being coerced into coming out for fear of being labeled a liar. Often, the process of deciding which gender or sexual orientation category you fit into is emotionally arduous, especially if you do not conform to either of the two main gender categories or if you are not a monosexual (i.e. if you are attracted to more than one gender). For many people, it would be much easier to avoid having to figure out how to label oneself, which is why it is becoming much more common for people to simply identify as "queer" in a purposefully unspecified way.

Nonetheless, the pressure to come out as someone with a specific sexual or gender identity remains, largely due to the fact that most of our everyday interactions require that everyone's gender and sexual identities be common knowledge. The fact that we can quickly and easily lump people into clearly delineated categories makes life easier, given the various hetero-patriarchal constraints on our interactions. The most obvious example is our use of gendered pronouns; gender non-conforming people make it impossible for others to simply assume which gendered pronouns to use when referring to them. The use of gendered titles and honorifics poses similar problems (any gender non-conforming person living in the south understands the awkwardness that ensues when a service worker incorrectly uses "sir" or "ma'am" and then realizes their mistake). These might seem like minor issues, but they point to the much deeper and troubling fact that we are taught from a very early age and in almost all social contexts to treat men and women differently. And when someone is not clearly a man or a woman, they disrupt our ability to behave "normally" towards them.

Interestingly, this points to a connection between Manne's observations about misogyny and the pressures LGBTQ people face to come out. If someone isn't clearly a straight cis woman, it is impossible to know if they should be the subjected to all the expectations, punishments, and rewards that go along with occupying that social position. The patriarchal system that encourages misogynic policing requires that it be clear which gender and sexual categories people fall into. One way to thwart the system, then, is to refuse to even begin to produce the sort of self-knowledge that is a prerequisite for fitting oneself into these categories.

IV. Compulsory Self-Disclosure and Epistemic Injustice

So far, I've simply tried to give a clear picture of what compulsory self-disclosure looks like in practice and how it is used to maintain a hetero-patriarchal social order. But it is not entirely clear yet whether compulsory self-disclosure can be adequately described as a form of epistemic oppression or injustice. Given that it involves the production of self-knowledge and the sharing of knowledge with others, we can at least say that it necessarily involves epistemic activity. And so the best and easiest place to start in our attempts to better understand what sort of harms are at play is with Fricker's work on epistemic injustice. Given the widespread impact of her central notions – testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice – it makes sense to see whether their usefulness extends at all to the issues I've described above.

Testimonial injustice, for Fricker, is an unjust credibility deficit, and hermeneutical injustice is an unjust intelligibility deficit. In other words, testimonial injustice occurs when an individual is not treated as credible due to their social position, rather than because of any legitimate epistemic faults. This unjust credibility deficit prevents the individual from sharing knowledge with others and will generally undermine the individual's ability to contribute to any collective epistemic endeavors, such as scientific research or criminal investigations. It is important to note that testimonial injustice can also occur when someone with social privilege is given an *excess* of credibility, as we see when, for instance, the testimony of white people is automatically taken more seriously than that of black people for no legitimate epistemic reasons (Medina 2011). Hermeneutical injustice is a somewhat deeper problem, in that it occurs when marginalized individuals are prevented from developing or having access to the epistemic resources they need in order to understand and adequately describe certain experiences. In other words, these individuals are prevented from rendering their experiences intelligible to others and sometimes even to themselves. Hermeneutical marginalization, which is the precursor to full-on hermeneutical injustice, can take many forms: being denied an education; being socially isolated from others with a similar background or experiences; being prevented from entering into professions that help to develop and spread concepts and theories, like academic research, journalism, and politics.

It is not hard to see that when it comes to cases involving compulsory knowledge production (like the examples I've described above), Fricker's two kinds of epistemic injustice cannot help us. This is due to the fact that in general, "epistemic injustice" as it is used in the Fricker-style literature is meant to criticize social situations that *prevent* socially marginalized people from having or sharing knowledge. And this is for good reason; the goal of this growing body of literature is to change the status quo from one in which marginalized voices are silenced to one in which they are amplified and taken seriously.

Of course, there may be certain cases in which marginalized individuals are forced to share more about themselves than necessary because privileged individuals hold them to higher standards of evidence than others. Such cases would count as instances of testimonial injustice – due to the marginalized individual being seen as less credible or trustworthy because of their race, for instance, they have to provide more evidence to support their claim that p is true than a white person would have to provide to convince others of the truth of the same proposition. This is one way of interpreting the coming out scenarios I've described above. You might think that queer people are expected to give explanations of themselves where straight cis people do not because people generally don't believe queer people's avowals of sexual orientation or gender identity without substantial (and unnecessary) amounts of evidence. Admittedly, I think this does happen frequently, but I think it is naïve to think that all demands for queer self-disclosure are simply driven by epistemically unjustified disbelief. Imagine if Ellen had simply said "Yep, I'm gay," and left it at that. The public response would not have been one of doubt. Instead, it is likely that she would have been hounded by magazines and talk shows wanting interviews, precisely *because* they believed her.

There are also many situations in which marginalized subjects must explain themselves to others due to hermeneutical marginalization and injustice. Imagine, for instance, a woman trying to explain that she had been sexually assaulted by her husband in the 1960s before the recognition and criminalization of marital rape. In this case, she would have difficulty not just convincing others to believe her but articulating what it was that had happened to her, given the widespread assumption at the time that nonconsensual sex within marriage was conceptually impossible.

The cases I've been focusing on, though, do not involve the unintelligibility issues that are the hallmark of hermeneutical injustice, just as they do not involve the characteristic disbelief and withholding of credibility of testimonial injustice. They are cases in which the marginalized individual is *believed* and *understood*, and despite this, they are asked to reveal more about themselves, to share even more details with others.

In order to fully capture why certain cases of compulsory knowledge production (which is a type of knowledge production that is much broader than compulsory self-disclosure as I've described it above) are epistemically unjust or oppressive, we need to develop a new way of thinking about epistemic oppression. Thus far, most of the focus has been on making sure that no one is prevented from producing knowledge when they epistemically ought to be allowed to, and the underlying assumption here is that knowledge production should be prized above all other epistemic goals. This approach ignores the fact that knowledge production is *difficult*, that it can go badly in many senses, and that it can actually work against the person(s) doing the production for non-epistemic reasons. This should push us in the direction of expanding our understanding of epistemic oppression; we should not assume that preventing someone from producing knowledge is the only way to epistemically harm them.

V. Epistemic Exploitation and Compulsory Knowledge Production

In her recent work on what she calls "epistemic exploitation," Nora Berenstain (2017) has also raised worries about Fricker's approach to epistemic injustice being too limited. She focuses on cases in which socially marginalized individuals are expected or required to educate privileged people about oppression. For instance, when university departments expect their faculty of color to do all the work involved in making their departments more welcoming for students of color, much of that work will take the form of faculty of color explaining why certain actions or policies are exclusionary, microaggressive, or racially biased to their white colleagues. In these sorts of situations, the testimony and hermeneutical expertise of people of color is actually *sought out*, not disregarded or actively silenced, and this is why we cannot understand these cases using models of epistemic injustice that assume that all such injustice takes the form of knowledge *suppression*.

Berenstain's notion of epistemic exploitation, which exclusively focuses on marginalized people educating privileged people about oppression, is admittedly quite limited in its scope as well. But we can use her work to figure out why epistemic exploitation, understood more broadly, is harmful for marginalized individuals and to see if compulsory self-disclosure is a form of epistemic exploitation.

Let's say, then, that epistemic exploitation occurs when someone uses you for their own benefit and doesn't compensate you adequately for your epistemic work. This way of characterizing epistemic exploitation is inspired by Marx's understanding of material exploitation, which occurs when a worker is used to produce something that is more valuable than what they are paid for their labor. Perhaps most obviously, the epistemic version of this is harmful in the same way that any exploitative exchange is harmful: someone is doing valuable work but is not being compensated for it in a way that is commensurate with that value. Berenstain also points out that doing epistemic work for other people always comes with an opportunity cost; if you have to take the time to educate someone else, you can't use that time for other things that might be more important to you. In cases where the person could have done the epistemic work for themselves but simply didn't want to exert the effort to do so, exploiting others for knowledge also stems from and feeds into a certain sort of epistemic viciousness: epistemic laziness. Interestingly, in Cassam's (2019) work on epistemic viciousness, he argues that epistemic vices are marked by the fact that they prevent us from "gaining, keeping, or sharing knowledge." Given the possibility of using epistemic exploitation as a means to *gain* knowledge, epistemic laziness is not necessarily a vice that interferes with the agent's acquisition of knowledge; it might simply motivate them to go about getting knowledge in indirect, low-effort ways.

When it is an individual who is already socially marginalized being exploited in these sorts of interactions, there is the added complication that if the oppressed person refuses to educate their exploiter, they will be blamed for perpetuating ignorance about oppression among privileged people. But if they do educate their exploiter, there is always a chance that their efforts will still make them worse off if the exploiter doesn't like what they learn.

Given these details about epistemic exploitation, is it right to think of compulsory self-disclosure, which does involve producing self-knowledge for someone else, as epistemically exploitative? And perhaps more importantly, if these compulsory self-disclosure cases do involve epistemic exploitation, is that actually what makes compulsory self-disclosure *harmful*?

Importantly, for a situation to count as involving compulsory self-disclosure, it need not be the case that the person producing the self-knowledge is not adequately compensated for their epistemic work in some way or other. For instance, when a woman is extremely open and honest about her feelings with a man, thus putting him at ease about her motivations and the genuineness of her attention, it may be that she is compensated for this with praise, affection, or protection. Of course, there may be cases in which the compensation is nowhere near adequate, given the difficulty of the epistemic work put into the self-knowledge production, but this is not an essential feature of compulsory self-disclosure. A lack of compensation, though, is necessary for exploitation, and so compulsory self-disclosure will not always count as exploitative.

Another reason for thinking that the compulsory self-disclosure cases I've discussed don't fit with the epistemic exploitation model is that the main goal of epistemic exploitation for the exploiter is the gaining of "easy" knowledge. They get to epistemically benefit from the efforts of others without putting in similar efforts themselves. It doesn't matter to them who in particular they are exploiting. But in cases where a gay person is pressured to come out or a woman is pressured to be emotionally vulnerable, it matters very much that *that* particular person is being compelled to reveal things about themselves. This suggests that the aim of these interactions is not simply the gaining of knowledge, but is instead primarily aimed at psychological control that happens to have an epistemic component. In other words, pressuring the self-knower into disclosing things about themselves is not done simply for the sake of knowing more about them; it is done to gain power over them in one way or another.

This leads us to the second and more pressing question I raised above: even if compulsory self-disclosure sometimes does involve epistemic exploitation or some other sort of epistemic injustice, is the epistemic exchange involved in the disclosure really what makes it *harmful*? I think not, and to fully understand the extent of the harm involved, we need a better understanding of the *emotional* work that goes into self-knowledge production and, ultimately, a more nuanced understanding of self-knowledge itself.

VI. The Managed Self: Emotion Work and Self-Knowledge

In discussing emotional work, it is important to clarify some terminology. Since Arlie Hochschild introduced "emotional labor" in 1983, the common usage of it has drifted quite far from her original meaning. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild is careful to make it clear that "emotional labor" in her sense only occurs when employees are required to regulate and simulate emotions for their jobs. The book focuses on flight attendants in particular, but her insights apply to any job where emotional manipulation and management – what we might think of as "self-regulation" more generally – is an essential part of what it is to do that job well. As Hochschild describes in a recent interview, "[e]motional labor, as I introduced the term in *The Managed Heart,* is the work, for which you're paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feeling for the job. This involves evoking and suppressing feelings" (Beck 2018). Today, the term "emotional labor" is used in a wide variety of ways, but it is most commonly used to describe the sort of emotional awareness and management that is usually only expected of people who aren't white cismen. Hochschild does introduce a term for emotional management in this broader sense in her book – "emotion work" – and is careful to distinguish from "emotional labor." She explains:

> I use the term *emotional labor* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*. I use the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in private context where they have *use value*. (7)

Following Hochschild, I'll use "emotion work" to describe the management and creation of emotions involved in the compulsory self-disclosure cases I'm interested in. A woman responding to her suspicious husband's questions about her friendship with a male coworker, for instance, requires an impressive degree of emotion work. I do not say this to suggest that such women are deceptive, but rather that they have to be extremely careful in how they explain themselves when faced with men who are capable of harming them. Similarly, a gay person coming out to their family must be prepared to remain calm and collected even when faced with the possibility of being treated extremely badly. The emotion work involved in these situations is very similar to the emotional labor of flight attendants that Hochschild describes; it may involve faking emotions that are expected of you, regulating or completely hiding emotions that others might respond badly to, and, when the work is done expertly, actually getting yourself to feel the emotions required for the situation to end well.

Of course, we have to perform emotion work almost every time we interact with someone else, and the worries I express here about the emotion work involved in compulsory self-disclosure should not be taken to imply that every instance of socially-required emotional regulation is harmful or oppressive. But Hochschild correctly points out that being required to engage in this sort of emotional regulation excessively and in very specific ways can have profound psychological impacts. She explains,

> There is a cost to emotion work: it affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel…When the transmutation of the private use of feeling is successfully accomplished – when we succeed in lending our feelings to the organizational engineers of worker-customer relations – we may pay a cost in how we hear our feelings and a cost in what, for better or worse, they tell us about ourselves. (21)

In short, it is impossible to constantly try to convincingly display certain emotions without that having an impact on what emotions you do in fact have or take yourself to have. What we must not do, Hochschild argues, is assume that "how we manage or express feeling is *extrinsic* to emotion," nor should we understand feeling as a "periodic abdication to biology" (27). In other words, it is impossible to know about your own feelings as a detached observer, and the act of managing an emotion or expressing a feeling in a particular way can change the managed state into something else entirely.

This is why trying to understand compulsory self-disclosure purely in terms of an exchange of knowledge that is then used to the advantage of the privileged other is deeply misleading. The crux of the issue is that the object of knowledge in these cases is the marginalized subject herself. She is not being asked to pass along information about the world or about other people; she is being asked to expose herself. And to think that this can be done in the same manner that one reports on the scene outside one's office window is to deeply misunderstand the work, both epistemic and emotional, that is required to expose oneself in that way. Even if you lie about what the weather looks like from your office, you can still double check that it is in fact the way you originally saw it. But emotions, attitudes, and even beliefs are not readily-observable clouds in the sky, undisturbed by what you do and say. Being asked to constantly report on your mental states and to tell a story about yourself, and to do all this in recognizable and culturally-acceptable terms, can change the very states you are attempting to disclose.

The fundamental harm, then, of compulsory self-disclosure is that the marginalized subject is slowly forced to change things about themselves for the benefit of someone else, and eventually, "by taking over the levers of feeling production, by pretending deeply, she alters herself" (Hochschild 33). And the new feelings and attitudes formed by this process of self-disclosure, not objectionable simply because they are new, are harmful because they have not arisen out of activities aimed at her own well-being, but instead have been formed due to her working to appease and please others.

Note, too, that she may in fact end up with more self-knowledge than she started with, given the requirement that she be "in touch with" her feelings and attitudes in order to manage and disclose them. By telling another person that you feel a certain way, you might bring it about that you do feel that way. This is a potentially self-verifying process, one that is more likely to produce knowledge than when you communicate to others about the world or other people. This process, then, is not harmful due to its somehow resulting in self-ignorance or in the other knowing more about her than she does herself.

VII. Conclusion: What do we do when "epistemic injustice" is inadequate?

Everything that I've argued so far points to a fairly straightforward conclusion: that compulsory self-disclosure, despite fundamentally involving self-knowledge production, is not ultimately an issue of epistemic injustice. In light of the insights from Hochschild's work, it is admittedly tempting to coin a new category: emotional injustice. Just as Fricker introduced "epistemic injustice" to pick out instances in which someone is harmed in their "capacity as a knower," so too might we think of emotional injustice as occurring when someone is harmed in their capacity as an emotional agent. While I'm sure this suggestion will be appealing to many readers, I'd like to close the paper by giving two reasons why introducing a new unique category of injustice specifically for emotional harm would not serve us in working against this form of oppression.

First, given the long history of feminists working *against* the idea that knowledge and emotion are diametrically opposed, it seems unwise to build this distinction into any theories having to do with sexist oppression. To do so would suggest that to be harmed as a knower and to be harmed as an emotional agent are two entirely separable harms and, similarly, that one's capacity to know and one's capacity to feel are also separable. In the case of self-knowledge in particular, I hope I have successfully shown why this separation is impossible.

Second, I am hesitant to continue to use the language of "injustice" to categorize harms against marginalized individuals while ignoring the deep theoretical connections that "justice" talk has with a *distributive* notion of fairness. While philosophers working on epistemic injustice usually avoid putting things in terms of the fair distribution of epistemic goods and resources, the use of terms like "credibility deficit" make the link between justice and distribution of goods almost impossible to ignore. And what it might mean to say that "emotional goods and resources" have been distributed unfairly is deeply unclear, keeping in mind that "fairness" is not a politically-inert or philosophically uncontroversial notion. It almost goes without saying that a distribution being "fair" or "just" does not automatically mean, for instance, that the distribution is one under which everyone's needs are met.

This distancing of "justice" talk from concerns about oppression goes back to Marx (somewhat ironically, given feminist standpoint theory's roots in Marxism), who never claimed that the distribution of resources under capitalism was an "injustice." He understood the prevailing mode of production as being *prior* to the state and its legal institutions, meaning that material conditions precede questions of justice. Notions of what is just or unjust only arise in the context of a mode of production. “Justice is not a standard by which human reason in the abstract measures human actions, institutions, or other social facts,” explains Allen Wood in his work on Marx’s conception of justice. Justice is, rather, “a standard by which each mode of production measures *itself*.” While you might reasonably disagree with the Marxist understanding of what “justice” is and how it arises, the central point remains that “justice” is not theoretically uncontroversial.

While I cannot fully address this issue here, I hope that briefly discussing these concerns has made it clear why I am not eager to introduce a new type of “injustice” into the mix. Calling attention to the existence of compulsory self-disclosure, explaining what it looks like in practice, and explaining the harmful effects it can have is, I think, enough to demonstrate that it is a form of oppressive control. We don’t need to further label it as an injustice to appreciate this.

II. Stereotype Threat and the Value of Self-Knowledge

Abstract

In this paper, I argue in favor of several related positions about the connection between self-knowledge production and stereotype threat. First, I reject the view that stereotype threat always causes epistemic injustice by providing a hypothetical but realistic case in which an individual is affected by stereotype threat but suffers no negative epistemic consequences. Second, using the same key case, I argue that having false self-beliefs in and of itself is not undesirable, nor is self-knowledge always desirable. Finally, I connect this to empirical work on how best to combat stereotype threat in classroom settings, pointing out that the unquestioned assumption that self-knowledge is always something to be desired is at work in proposed solutions that prioritize teaching students about stereotype threat.

Introduction

In this paper, I will describe a scenario that challenges a very basic epistemological assumption, namely, the assumption that self-knowledge is always desirable. The scenario I will explain below involves stereotype threat. Very roughly, stereotype threat is the feeling of being threatened by a stereotype, in that your actions might confirm the stereotype or that others might judge you in light of the stereotype. What I want to illustrate is that when an individual is faced with stereotype threat and has also internalized the stereotype in question, they could inadvertently end up with self-knowledge due to their behavior in response to the threat confirming their stereotypical self-belief. A girl, for instance, might believe that she is bad at math due to internalizing common negative stereotypes about girls, and this belief could end up being made true due to the effect of stereotype threat, and the effect of her belief itself, on her behavior. In these cases, I argue that it would be far better for individuals who have internalized stereotypes to end up with false beliefs about themselves rather than confirming those beliefs. In short, acting against one's self-beliefs can sometimes be desirable in light of practical and ethical concerns.

The case I analyze below will also force us to rethink what it means for an individual to suffer from epistemic injustice. We will see that often, individuals who are subjected to negative stereotypes must choose between being worse off overall but knowledgeable and being better off overall but lacking knowledge that they might have had otherwise. To put it briefly, it is not clear that the best response to epistemic injustice is to simply make sure that individuals will end up with the knowledge that they were prevented from having. Ultimately, I will argue that non-epistemic solutions have the potential to leave victims of stereotype threat better off than epistemic solutions.

I'll also address how the cases I discuss are related to what Katherine Jenkins (2020) calls "ontic injustice," which is the harm that occurs when someone is "socially constructed as a member of a certain social kind where that construction consists...of their being subjected to a set of social constraints and enablements that is wrongful to them." This harm, which Jenkins argues does not reduce to some sort of psychological harm, is a moral injury that involves what Jean Hampton (1992) describes as an "affront to value or dignity." Jenkins explains that this moral injury involves there being a mismatch between an individual's actual moral value and the value that they are represented or treated as having. I'll explain how negative stereotypes contribute to the imposition of harmful constraints on the individuals to which they apply, and we'll also see that individuals can actually morally harm themselves by believing things about themselves on the basis of negative stereotypes. This will further bolster my opposition to understanding these sorts of cases in terms of epistemic injustice.

I. Stereotype Threat Overview

I'll follow other philosophers working in this area (especially Goguen 2015 and McKinnon 2014) in relying on the empirical work of psychologists Steele, Spencer, and Aronson (2002) for a more thorough characterization of stereotype threat and an initial description of its behavioral impact. Steele et. al explain,

> [w]hen a negative stereotype about a group that one is part of becomes personally relevant, usually as an interpretation of one's behavior or an experience one is having, stereotype threat is the resulting sense that one can then be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype, or that one might do something that would inadvertently confirm it (384).

The classic example with which many readers will already be familiar focuses on the stereotype that women are worse than men at math. In their 1999 paper, Spencer, Steel, and Quinn gave math tests of varying levels of difficulty to mixed gender groups, priming one group with gender stereotypes while telling a different group that women and men do equally well on the tests being administered. They found no significant performance difference between men and women in the group primed with anti-stereotypical information, while the group primed with stereotypes as well as a control group that was told nothing prior to the test both ended up with women scoring significantly lower on average than men. This experiment and others like it have led to an intense focus on what is called the "underperformance effect" of stereotype threat, with empirical studies aimed not only at trying to understand the underlying mechanisms responsible for the effect but also at testing various ways of preventing it.

More recent work on stereotype threat has invited theorists to expand their thinking about the impacts of stereotype threat beyond the underperformance effect. As Stacey Goguen explains in her recent paper (2016), two other extremely important but less-discussed effects are disengagement and domain avoidance. To illustrate what domain avoidance might look like, Goguen gives the example of a woman registered for an undergraduate math class who, after realizing that people in the class might use the stereotype that women are bad at math to form judgements about her, drops the class in the first week of the term and switches to a class where no negative stereotypes will be at play. Disengagement might look like a similar student who, instead of dropping the math class, doesn't fully participate in the course, perhaps out of fear of underperforming were she to really make an effort or due to discomfort around male classmates and instructors who might jump to conclusions about her based on stereotypes about women. Disengagement and domain avoidance are perhaps even more important to study than the underperformance effect, insofar as they are relevant even in situations in which there are no tests to be completed or similar sorts of graded tasks.

It is important to note that individuals who are affected by stereotype threat need not have any conscious thoughts or judgments involving the stereotype when they engage in domain avoidance or disengagement or when they underperform on tests. For instance, the female college student who drops her math class during the first week of term might not be able to make the connection between the stereotype and her behavior. Such individuals might even adamantly disbelieve the stereotype that is at play and so assume that it does not have any role in explaining their actions. But of course, stereotype threat does not require an endorsement of the stereotype by the person who is threatened – it only needs to be the case that *others* might rely on the stereotype to make judgments about that person. In other words, the stereotype merely needs to be relevant enough to the domain in question that it would be reasonable to expect some people to rely on it to make judgements.

What makes stereotype threat interesting to many philosophers is that it seems to come with profound epistemic costs. Gendler (2011), for instance, engages with the empirical literature on the mechanisms underlying the underperformance effect, and points out that individuals facing stereotype threat "may temporarily lose access to the contents of their true beliefs…[and] may temporarily lose confidence in their true beliefs" due to the impact of the threat on working memory as well as its more obvious impacts on self-confidence. Goguen takes these observations about epistemic costs further, arguing that this temporary lack of confidence, if it occurs often enough and in many different contexts, can result in a more all-encompassing self-doubt, which at its worst can "undermine our sense of our own humanity and our sense of ourselves as rational, reliable knowers."

When stereotype threat has this kind of epistemic impact on an individual, it is quite clear that it fits perfectly into Fricker's (2007) general way of understanding epistemic injustice: it is an instance of someone being wronged in their capacity as a knower. The individual in question is, in short, prevented from producing knowledge. Importantly, this can reach the level of full-blown epistemic oppression if the impact of stereotype threat is consistent and systemic. I'll explain later why I think this epistemic picture is not quite complete, but for now, this is enough background to set us up for looking at the connections between stereotype threat, its effects, and self-knowledge production.

II. Self-Knowledge at a Price

In light of these details about stereotype threat and its behavioral effects and epistemic costs, let's imagine a scenario where a child, Alex, is raised as a girl and internalizes the stereotype that girls are physically weaker than boys. Of course, Alex might not have a belief that exactly matches this stereotype, but she might have thoughts that are informed by it, like "I am weaker than all the boys in my class" and "I shouldn't try out for the football team, I wouldn't be good at it."

At first, when Alex is young and at an age when most able-bodied children have very similar physical capabilities, these stereotype-based beliefs will most likely be false. In fact, Alex might discover that she is actually stronger than a lot of her male classmates if she found herself in the right circumstances to test her abilities and were encouraged to physically exert. But it is unlikely that such circumstances will arise precisely because of stereotype threat; whenever the stereotype that girls are weaker than boys is salient, we can imagine that Alex will react in all the ways that have been observed in the empirical research. And negative gender stereotypes like the one in question have a frustrating way of being salient in almost *all* contexts. She might avoid tasks that require physical strength completely; for instance, when a teacher asks for help carrying boxes of books, she might not volunteer. She might choose not to try out for the football team despite liking football. She might disengage during certain activities, like gym class games, for fear of performing badly. A lack of self-confidence might result in underperformance despite her trying her best, further reinforcing her sense that she should avoid such tasks completely.

Over time, these ways of dealing with stereotype threat will actually contribute to her being physically weaker than boys her age because she has avoided fully engaging in activities that might cultivate physical strength. To be clear, I am not trying to place any sort of blame on Alex for this. It is to be expected that an individual who constantly faces negative stereotypes about her physical capabilities will avoid physically demanding activities and will underperform on disengage during those tasks that she can't avoid. And this will inevitably have a real physical impact when it occurs constantly for an individual's entire childhood and adolescence.

What these ways of reacting to stereotype threat do guarantee, though, is that Alex's original stereotype-based beliefs – that she is weaker than all the boys in her class and that she is bad at football – will be slowly made true. She will have gained self-knowledge in a surprising and unfortunate way, not by changing her self-beliefs but by changing herself. From an epistemic perspective, then, she might seem better off than when she was younger and had false self-beliefs about her comparative strength.

Let's imagine what would have happened to Alex if she had managed to avoid the effects of stereotype threat. If she had instead disregarded her stereotype-informed beliefs about herself and had pursued strength-oriented activities (perhaps thanks to a particularly encouraging teacher or coach), it's possible and even likely that she could have developed physical strength alongside her male classmates over the years, and so she would have continued to make those stereotype-based self-beliefs false. Because such gender stereotypes are so pervasive, and beliefs formed on the basis of them are so ingrained, it is also very plausible that even if Alex herself were an example of someone whose abilities disproved the stereotype, she would likely still harbor false self-beliefs that align with the negative stereotype.

I should stress, especially for readers who were not raised as girls, that this hypothetical case is not far-fetched or even a rarity, and we actually find comparable effects on sports performance in certain groups of men. In Stone (2002), researchers looked into the effect of stereotype threat on athletic performance among male athletes, and they found that when sports tests are presented as being tests of “natural” athletic ability, white athletes are likely to feel threatened by the stereotype that white people have lower natural athletic ability than people of color (especially Black people, who are often stereotyped as being naturally athletic). In response to this stereotype threat, white athletes practiced less, presumably in an attempt to avoid the domain in which the stereotype applies. This domain avoidance resulted in the white athletes’ performance being negatively affected in games.

Again, I should clarify that I am not suggesting that the poor performance of these white athletes or Alex’s comparative weakness involves these individuals actually believing the stereotype itself – they might adamantly insist that the stereotype is false if you were to ask them about it. Instead, I am arguing that many individuals in these situations are likely to have specific self-beliefs that stem from the general stereotype (e.g. “I’m just not as agile as the Black guys on the team”). These self-beliefs are a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy when paired with constant stereotype threat; these factors together change the behavior of the individual and as such, slowly change the individual themselves. The self-knowledge that results from this process is, I think, detrimental to the individual, insofar as it continues to encourage them to behave in ways that conform to the negative stereotype.

To put this in slightly different terms, the Alex case demonstrates that it is sometimes preferable to act against your self-beliefs, that is, to act irrationally. When she is just starting to get involved in sports, Alex might truly believe that she is weaker and generally worse at sports than all the boys on her team or in her class, and she might truly believe that it would be easier, both socially and physically, if she stopped trying to be involved in sports. In short, the pervasiveness of the stereotype that girls are weaker than boys guarantees that Alex is put between a rock and a hard place. She can go against what she believes about herself and her social environment in order to slowly change things about herself, which will result in practical and maybe even moral benefits (more on this later), but would leave her with false beliefs about herself; or she can rationally respond to what she believes, which will allow her to maintain both self-knowledge and knowledge about the world, but which will come with negative non-epistemic effects.

III. Rethinking the Connection between Stereotype Threat and Epistemic Injustice

As I explained above, philosophers such as Gendler and Goguen have pointed out an apparent link between stereotype threat and epistemic injustice. As Gendler explains, when stereotype threat looms during an exam, the stress involved is likely to have an impact on your ability to access relevant beliefs that, in the absence of the threat, you would be able to access and employ. So, according to this argument, stereotype threat impacts your ability to put knowledge to use and as such, it is a source of epistemic injustice. More broadly, Goguen explains that these epistemic effects of stereotype threat – underperformance on tests, impaired ability to recall information, lack of self-confidence, etc. – will further reinforce damaging stereotypes about certain groups (like women) being irrational. This is an even more troubling way in which stereotype threat is supposedly a source of epistemic injustice, in that it leads others to question the rational status of certain individuals and can even lead to the individual themselves doubting their own rationality.

I do not want to argue that the specific scenarios that Gendler and Goguen have in mind don't involve epistemic injustice. Instead, I want to push back against the overly general and tempting conclusion that stereotype threat always causes epistemic injustice. The Alex case that I've described, in which Alex ends up confirming her stereotype-informed beliefs due to how stereotype threat impacts her behavior, is importantly different from the usual approach to discussing the epistemic costs of stereotype threat. The stereotype in this case – that girls are weaker than boys – has nothing to do with the intellectual ability or rational status of individuals in the stereotyped group. What this means is that when Alex engages in all the standard behaviors that we would expect of someone trying to avoid stereotype threat, she does not incur any of the epistemic costs that we see in cases involving stereotypes about intellectual ability or rational status. In fact, there is an epistemic benefit, namely, that her self-beliefs are confirmed by her behavior, leaving her with self-knowledge. We can also imagine that if she has beliefs about women's strength in general or the status of women in society, these beliefs will at least seem to be confirmed by her behavior as well. Rather than feeling irrational and doubtful of the veracity of her own beliefs, it is entirely plausible that she will have less reason to doubt herself when her behavior and physical abilities confirm common stereotypes that are pervasively and regularly endorsed by others as well as some of her own beliefs.

This is not to say that there is no sort of injustice at play here whatsoever or that Alex doesn't end up with self-doubt of any kind. Clearly, she will end up with doubts about her physical capabilities. But the sort of deeply-embedded *epistemic* self-doubt that is the result of negative stereotypes about rationality will not be at play here (although of course, as a girl, Alex is likely to have that sort of self-doubt as well, but not due to stereotypes about girls' physical abilities). What this shows us is that stereotype threat does not automatically bring epistemic injustice with it; it only does so in collaboration with certain kinds of stereotypes, that is, those stereotypes that make claims about the epistemic status or abilities of certain groups of people.

You might think that there is still reason to bring epistemic injustice into the picture in the variation of the Alex case in which she somehow avoids being subjected to stereotype threat, acts against her beliefs about her physical abilities, and eventually ends up falsifying those self-beliefs through consistently behaving in non-stereotypical ways. Isn't it a sort of epistemic injustice that if she gets stronger and improves at football, she'll end up with some false self-beliefs? This clash between an individual's abilities and achievements and their beliefs about themselves is probably most familiar to readers in the context of discussions of "imposter syndrome," that is, "the phenomenon of feeling like a fraud and like your successes aren't really yours" (Slank 2019). It would be too much of a tangent to fully discuss imposter syndrome here, but I mention it to convince the reader that maintaining self-beliefs that are at odds with your behavior, abilities, and achievements is extremely common. It is not strange, then, to imagine that Alex would stick to her stereotypically negative self-beliefs – e.g. that she is weaker than her male peers – despite disconfirming them through her own actions. And so again, the question is: doesn't this seem like a kind of epistemic injustice? In order to explain why I think it is inadequate to characterize this issue merely in terms of Alex being forced to have false beliefs about herself, we need to discuss a different kind of injustice.

IV. Ontic Injustice and Self-Ignorance

As defined by Jenkins (2020), an individual

> suffers ontic injustice if and only if they are socially constructed as a member of a certain social kind where that construction consists, at least in part, of their being subjected to a set of social constraints and enablements that is wrongful to them.

In this definition, it is extremely important to note that Jenkins is not thinking of these constraints and enablements as being "wrongful" because of psychological or physical harms that result from them (e.g. men being psychologically harmed due to emotional constraints placed on them). Instead, what is essential to this kind of injustice is something called "moral injury," a term that Jenkins adopts from Hampton (1992). Moral injury, Hampton explains, is an "affront to value or dignity" which results in an apparent reduction in the moral worth of the "injured" individual. In other words, "the way [the individual is] treated gives the false impression that they have lower moral worth than they really do" (Jenkins 193). This moral injury can, of course, occur at the same time as physical or psychological injury, but it is reducible to neither.

It is not hard to see how stereotypes play a role in society's subjecting people to constraints and enablements. Just to switch things up a little, consider the effect of the stereotype that men are more rational and less emotional than women. This enables men to do certain things with more ease than women – share and defend their opinions, pursue careers in fields like mathematics, etc. – while also constraining them with respect to their expression of emotion. When a man's emotional reaction to a personal tragedy, for instance, is laughed at, ignored, not treated as serious or important, or discouraged, he has suffered an ontic injustice. Because he is treated as having less value in that instance than he actually has, he has suffered a moral injury, a moral injury which can be traced back to his being socially constructed as a member of a social kind and subjected to constraints on emotional expression.

Returning to the second version of Alex's case, where she ends up pursuing sports but acquires false self-beliefs in the process, it is harder to see how there might be ontic injustice occurring. Despite her internalizing the stereotype about girls being weak, in this scenario, Alex has somehow managed to not be constrained by the stereotype in a morally injurious way. Perhaps her desire to play football outweighed her negative self-beliefs about being weak; you can fill in the details however you like. The point is that the ontic injustice, if there is any in this case, is not coming from Alex's *actions* being constrained. Clearly, though, her beliefs about herself are constrained. Despite her social environment being flexible enough to allow her to cultivate physical strength, the negative gender stereotype still constrains what Alex *feels and thinks* about herself. So, to put this in Hampton's terms, she is morally injured because she does not think of herself as having as much value as she actually does. And where there is moral injury due to constraints imposed by the way an individual is constructed as a member of a social kind, there is ontic injustice.

While it is true that we could put this in terms of epistemic injustice, it seems more appropriate to put it in terms of ontic injustice. Jenkins' notion of ontic injustice captures what is so troubling about Alex having these sorts of false self-beliefs – they aren't bad simply because they are false, they are bad because of their morally injurious content. To put it bluntly, there is something bad about having negative beliefs about yourself, regardless of their being false.

If you are not satisfied by Jenkins's definition of ontic injustice, there are relevantly similar theories of injustice that can get us to essentially the same conclusion about the Alex case. Dembroff (2018) introduces what they call "ontological oppression," which occurs when "social kinds operating in a context unjustly constrain the behaviors, concepts, or affect of certain groups." My Alex case nicely illustrates how something as abstract as a "social kind" might actually manage to constrain individuals on an everyday basis via internalized stereotypes. Ásta (2019), similarly, has developed a theory of "categorical injustice," which we see when "agents are systematically thwarted in their attempts at performing actions by how they are socially constructed." This notion is more limited in that it focuses merely on the performance of actions; without acknowledging the harms that can occur due to constraints on mental states like emotions and beliefs, cases like that of Alex, where individuals manage to break free from constraints merely in how they behave but not in how they think about themselves, will not count as instances of categorical injustice. Because of Jenkins's explicit description of moral injury as part of her theory of ontic injustice, I find that, of the available theories of injustice that might apply to this case, hers is the most satisfying.

V. The Value of Self-Knowledge

So far, the original case I've presented has forced us to think in a more nuanced way about the connection between stereotype threat and epistemic injustice, and it has also illustrated that individuals can suffer from moral injury and ontic injustice due to having negative self-beliefs that stem from stereotypes. The case has also given us a minor but non-negligible reason to prefer certain theories of injustice over others.

Now, I'd like to consider the value of self-knowledge, especially as it relates to efforts to combat stereotype threat and injustice more generally. In the literature on epistemic injustice, the way that this injustice is discussed puts all the focus on the prevention of individuals from producing or sharing knowledge, and a large part of combatting this oppression of marginalized individuals should be through preventing or remedying this lack of knowledge, or so we are led to believe. We can see this in the way that epistemic injustice theorists explain the social phenomena with which they are concerned. Dotson (2014) tells us that epistemic oppression is "epistemic exclusion that hinders contribution to knowledge production," and we are meant to understand epistemic exclusion as an "infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduces [their] ability to participate in the epistemic community" (Dotson 2012). Along similar lines, from Fricker (2007), we get the notion of epistemic injustice as occurring when one is wronged "specifically in one's capacity as a knower."

To get a better understanding of these general notions of epistemic oppression and epistemic injustice, we can turn to specific varieties of epistemic injustice that feminist philosophers have identified. There is testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007), where a socially marginalized agent is denied credibility due to their social position; hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007), where some aspect of an agent's life is unintelligible due to there being a collective conceptual gap that arises because of the agent's social marginalization; willful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012), where dominant agents refuse to adopt new concepts that would help them understand the experiences of marginalized individuals; and testimonial smothering (Dotson 2011), where marginalized agents silence themselves to varying degrees and only give testimony that they are sure will be understood by dominant agents.

The very general assumption behind all of this is that it is wrong or bad in some sense to prevent people from producing or sharing knowledge. Hermeneutical injustice is particularly striking, because (according to Fricker) it often involves marginalized individuals being prevented from knowing things not just about the world around them but from knowing things about themselves; they are not given the resources necessary to understand their own experiences. Denying someone the ability to form self-knowledge, I think, strikes most of us as intuitively extremely bad. The line of thought might go something like this: ignorance is undesirable, but ignorance about yourself is even worse. Epistemically, self-ignorance makes it more difficult to assess one's beliefs and be rational; practically, self-ignorance makes it more difficult to effectively carry out plans and satisfy your own desires. Some might even go so far as to argue that self-knowledge is valuable even in cases when it comes with psychological or physical harms. This thought, perhaps, stems from familiar maxims like "Know thyself" and "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."

This basic and common assumption about the value of self-knowledge arises in the literature on stereotype threat in ways that do not always square with empirical findings on how best to prevent stereotype threat from happening. Study after study has found that we can effectively eliminate stereotype threat through two main approaches: doing whatever possible to make sure that individuals will not think about stereotypes during the task or in the domain being studied, and by making individuals think that the domain or task in question is not one in which the stereotype is relevant at all. In their 1995 study, Steele and Aronson describe that even simply asking students to fill out a demographic survey before a test is enough to open up Black students to stereotype threat and the underperformance effect. Having students complete the demographic survey *after* the test is a simple way to avoid this problem. Similarly, researchers have found that stereotype threat is reduced in women and their math test performances improve when they are told beforehand that the math test they are taking is gender-fair (Schmader 2002) and by telling test-takers that the test is not meant to be a diagnostic measure of mathematical ability (Gonzales et al. 2002). Essentially, "the *knowledge* of cultural stereotypes changes the testing situation for women such that their performance is depressed" (Quinn and Spencer 2001, my emphasis). In other words, *knowing* that a stereotype about a group to which you belong is relevant to the domain in which you are acting can have negative impacts on your performance in that domain and on your well-being more broadly.

Despite these findings, there are some who still argue that more knowledge is better. Johns et al. (2005) administered a math test to three groups in three different ways: the first group was told that the test was a non-diagnostic problem solving exercise, the second group was told that the test measured mathematical aptitude and the results would be used to compare women to men (thus priming the women for stereotype threat), and the third group was told the same as the second and was additionally taught about stereotype threat as a possible source of testing anxiety. In the problem-solving group, men and women performed equally well; in the stereotype-primed group, women performed significantly worse than men; and in the teaching-intervention group, women and men performed equally well. The researchers concluded that, because the women in the teaching intervention group did well, teaching women about stereotype threat would be a good way to counteract the effects of stereotype threat. This is an example, I think, of researchers being swayed by the underlying assumption that having more knowledge, especially self-knowledge, is preferable even if the individuals in question might end up worse off in other ways. First, they fail to highlight the fact that the women in the problem-solving group performed slightly better on the test than both the men in their group *and* the women in the teaching-intervention group. More studies comparing the effects of anti-diagnostic descriptions of tests and pre-test teaching-interventions would have to be done to confirm that this is a replicable effect, but Johns et al. did not even identify this as an issue needing more research. Second, they are recommending a strategy for counteracting stereotype threat that involves having to explicitly tell students about negative gender stereotypes. If executed poorly, that is, if the instructor doesn't explain the details about testing anxiety very well, this method could very well prime women with negative stereotypes and hurt their test performances. Third, Johns et al. acknowledge that other researchers have observed a similar improvement in testing performance when test subjects are given a situational explanation for testing anxiety, arousal, and potential poor performance (Brown and Josephs 1999; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, and Darley 1999). What this means is that there is another available strategy for combating stereotype threat: teach students to attribute their feelings of nervousness about a test to something *other* than stereotype threat. In so doing, we could help to improve their performance without the dangers that come with priming them to explicitly think about negative stereotypes. Importantly, even if their anxiety really is due to stereotype threat, it is not clear that their knowing this about themselves is any more helpful than being able to (falsely) attribute their anxiety to some other environmental stressor. What is psychologically important is simply that they have something external to blame for their anxiety. So again, self-knowledge is not beneficial in this case and comes with more psychological and performance risks than having, say, the fast self-belief that you're nervous because you didn't get enough sleep. Finally, although this study showed that teaching students about stereotype threat can offset the underperformance effect in certain cases, we cannot take this finding to indicate that such teaching interventions will also combat other effects of stereotype threat, namely, domain avoidance and disengagement.

We find this push towards explicitly teaching students about both stereotypes and stereotype threat in philosophical work on stereotype threat as well. Alfano (2014), for instance, argues that there is a "psycho-social dimension of intelligence" that is responsible for recognizing the possibility of being affected by stereotype threat, and that this is "a crucial mediating variable in the expression and development of the other intellectual virtues." In other words, being intelligent is not simply a matter of having certain first-order dispositions; you must also have second-order dispositions that guard against your first-order dispositions being masked by something like stereotype threat. Alfano's ultimate advice in light of this picture of intellectual virtue, though, is troubling: "'Know thyself' needs to be expanded to, 'Know thyself and thy society.' Self-knowledge and knowledge of relevant stereotypes are a necessary condition for optimal development and expression of the other intellectual virtues." On Alfano's view, then, marginalized individuals who manage to avoid stereotype threat by avoiding learning about negative stereotypes that pertain to them are not as intelligent (i.e. intellectually virtuous) as those who learn about stereotypes and then overcome stereotype threat. In other words, if being intellectually virtuous is in fact something that everyone should strive for, then better to seek out information about stereotypes and how stereotype threat affects you than to avoid the influence of stereotypes altogether, according to Alfano.

I do not bring up Alfano's view in order to object to his theory of intellectual virtue or to offer one of my own. Rather, I see his view as representative of a larger trend that is most obvious in the epistemic injustice literature as I described it above. Quite simply, it is the trend of presenting knowledge as a panacea for all the wrongs marginalized people face. What this trend ignores, and what I have attempted to highlight in the case of Alex, is that self-knowledge in and of itself is not always desirable, nor are false self-beliefs harmful simply due to their being false. More broadly, prioritizing solutions to social problems that put epistemic burdens – such as learning about stereotypes and stereotype threat – on already burdened individuals can put them more at risk of incurring psychological harms and moral injuries.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude by thinking once again about the case of Alex and her negative stereotype-informed beliefs about her comparative physical strength. I described two alternative scenarios: one in which Alex's responses to stereotype threat prevent her from developing physical strength, leaving her with true self-beliefs; and another in which Alex acts against her negative self-beliefs, develops physical strength, and makes those beliefs false. We could certainly try to explain what is unjust about this situation in epistemic terms, emphasizing how Alex is prevented from having certain kinds of knowledge in both scenarios (self-knowledge about her physical abilities in the second scenario, and perhaps knowledge that girls are not always weaker than boys in both scenarios). We might, then, suggest an *epistemic* solution: teach Alex about stereotypes and stereotype threat.

But to analyze this case purely in epistemic terms is unsatisfying because the central harm that Alex suffers is not epistemic but moral. She consistently thinks poorly of herself, underestimates her own abilities, and generally undervalues herself compared to her male peers. This is a case of ontic injustice, despite involving stereotype threat, false beliefs, and irrationality. If we were to think of this as an epistemic issue and place an emphasis on the supposed need for education and self-knowledge in particular, this would be especially concerning, as it would encourage a very individualistic approach to addressing the problem. It would put the onus on Alex, rather than on, say, her parents and teachers who have some control over how often Alex is reminded of negative stereotypes and over some situations in which those stereotypes might become salient.

In general, if you characterize every problem you can find as an epistemic problem, it is no surprise that you will only have epistemic solutions to offer, and when it comes to systemic oppression, it should also come as no surprise that merely knowing more about yourself and about the world in which you live is an inadequate response if the ultimate is to improve your social circumstances and your overall well-being. In certain cases, it is not just that these proposed epistemic solutions are inadequate; they might even further harm the people they are meant to help.

III. Self-Knowledge, Epistemic Work, and Injustice

Abstract

In this paper, I am concerned with two main issues: how positions in the epistemic injustice literature can be used to justify the assumption that marginalized individuals lack self-knowledge, and why we have very good reason to think that such assumptions are false. I explain how these sorts of assumptions operate using real-world examples and connect this to popular theorizing about what is usually called “hermeneutical injustice.” I argue that we should shift to thinking about this issue in terms of “epistemic work” – this makes it clearer that rather than being prevented from producing self-knowledge, marginalized agents, due to their marginalization, are required to put in more epistemic work than socially dominant individuals. I distinguish my view from others that would have us treat marginalized agents as if they have self-knowledge as an ethical matter, regardless of whether they are in fact self-knowledgeable.

Introduction

People who are socially marginalized are often treated as if they lack self-knowledge and, relatedly, that they are incapable of making good decisions about their own lives. We see this on a daily basis, for instance, when financially privileged people refuse to give cash to people in need for fear that they will spend it on the "wrong" things. At the level of national politics, this same attitude is seen in certain groups' opposition to social safety net measures like COVID relief payments. The examples that I am most interested in involve LGBTQ+ individuals being treated in extremely paternalistic ways, treatment which is based on the assumption that these individuals suffer from profound self-misunderstanding. We can find examples of this sort of treatment both at the level of government action via legislation and at the level of direct interpersonal interactions.

In this paper, I will first give a more thorough picture of the sorts of cases I have in mind and an (admittedly partial) explanation of why this sort of paternalism occurs. I'll do this in order to explain how certain approaches to theorizing about epistemic injustice actually reinforce the assumption that marginalized individuals are self-ignorant. More specifically, I'll go into detail about how overinflating the prevalence of hermeneutical injustice invites us to mistakenly think that marginalized individuals are in need of epistemic (and even practical) help from those who are not subject to hermeneutical injustice. This theoretical mistake is reflected in the real-world examples I will raise.

I'll then move on to offer an alternative way of approaching concerns about epistemic injustice altogether, arguing that for certain kinds of situations, the focus needs to be on who is or is not doing what I will call "epistemic work," rather than on who is being prevented from producing knowledge or wronged as an epistemic agent. In this section, I'll give an overview of how epistemologists have thought about what is often called "epistemic labor," and I'll adapt this notion to make it useful both for my concerns here and for theorists working on epistemic injustice more broadly.

Once I have established my conception of epistemic work, I'll use it to explain why certain individuals should be assumed to be self-knowledgeable despite being epistemically marginalized. Here, I'll explain in more detail what sort of self-knowledge I am concerned with and why having this sort of self-knowledge depends almost entirely on an individual's willingness to do epistemic work rather than on the hermeneutical resources that that individual might have at their disposal prior to doing any work.

I will also address how my view is related to but importantly different from an ethical – rather than epistemic – approach to this issue. In particular, I'll focus on Talia Bettcher's arguments in favor of thinking of first-personal authority as an ethical matter. Due to vast differences in social expectations and constraints on different individuals that result in different epistemic work requirements, I think we do in fact have good reasons to believe that marginalized people will have comparatively more self-knowledge than socially privileged people. Keeping in mind the immense personal risks that marginalized people take in making certain avowals about themselves public, we should assume that they would not take such risks if they doubted their own self-beliefs. These considerations are enough, I think, to establish an epistemic basis for first-person authority.

Finally, I'll say more about the implications my work has not only for interpersonal and political concerns but also for theorizing about epistemic injustice. I'll conclude that thinking about these issues purely in terms of epistemic injustice is inadequate if we want to properly address them in real situations and that this should make us question the usefulness of continuing to add to the ever-growing typology of epistemic injustices.

I. Who Knows, Who Cares

I'd like to start by giving an extremely specific example of the social phenomenon I have in mind. The state of Arkansas recently banned gender-affirming care for minors. Despite the state governor calling the bill a "vast government overreach" and vetoing it, the House and Senate voted to pass the bill, paving the way for other states to pass similar bills (Popat 2021). This will mean that young people who are transgender (or even those who simply think they might be transgender) will not be able to receive appropriate medical care as they go through puberty. This medical care, often involving the use of FDA approved drugs to delay the onset of puberty, can significantly improve the mental health and overall well-being of young transgender and non-binary people (Mayo 2019, Rafferty 2018). Republican politicians who support these kinds of bills usually claim that they are worried that these young people will later regret the decision to take puberty blockers or other medications. Ironically, taking puberty blockers can actually help some people avoid having to get surgeries later on, which these politicians presumably also oppose for similar reasons of irreversibility and potential regret. More importantly, these medications merely delay bodily changes, giving these young people more time to make major decisions about their gender identities and their bodies without suffering the potentially life-threatening mental health difficulties that come with puberty. This is not an exaggeration; in a national 2020 survey of over 40,000 LGBTQ+ people between the ages of 13 and 24, the Trevor Project found that over 60% of transgender and nonbinary youth surveyed engaged in self-harm in the twelve months prior to the survey. More than half reported that they had seriously considered suicide (Trevor Project 2020).

This is clearly a case in which those who have political and social power are incorrectly assuming that certain marginalized individuals lack the self-knowledge required for making decisions. These Arkansas politicians are jumping to the conclusion that transgender young people don't know enough about their own gender identities to be able to know whether taking certain kinds of medications will be a good decision. In short, these politicians are taking themselves to be in a better position to make decisions for transgender people than those trans people themselves.

There are many possible factors that can contribute to someone treating transgender people (and other LGBTQ people) this way, and I will not presume to give an exhaustive list of those factors here. For example, there are surely instances involving people in positions of power actually believing that trans people know what is best for themselves but still treating trans people poorly entirely due to transphobia. But I'm going to focus on explaining what I think is probably more common: cisgender people (i.e. people who are not trans or non-binary) being extremely confused by people who are not cis and mistaking their own confusion as a legitimate reason to discount the testimony of trans and non-binary people.

Described in this way, this example would seem to clearly fall at once into two related categories of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007) and willful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012). Trans and non-binary people's testimony about their own lives – even about their own desires and bodies – is in some instances disregarded or not even heard due to their being socially marginalized and is in other instances heard but wildly misunderstood. As Fricker would have us understand it, testimonial injustice occurs when someone's testimony is not trusted, not taken seriously, or completely ignored due to the person's social identity, not due to any legitimate epistemic concerns about the person's credibility. Willful hermeneutical ignorance is a similar phenomenon that occurs, Pohlhaus (2012) explains, when "dominantly situated knowers...continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world", despite the epistemic efforts of those who are developing new and better ways of understanding the world and themselves.

It is tempting to try to explain such cases as also involving hermeneutical injustice, that is, as an injustice that involves "having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resources" (Fricker 2007, 155). "Hermeneutical resources," to be clear, are concepts and methods necessary for knowledge production, "such as language to formulate propositions, concepts to make sense of experience, procedures to approach the world and standards to judge particular accounts of experience" (Pohlhaus 2012). If we were to go down the hermeneutical injustice route in interpreting these cases, the danger is that we would be led to the conclusion (or at least troublingly close to it) that trans people don't actually have self-knowledge. Practically, describing these cases in terms of hermeneutical injustice makes it seem as if the fundamental problem is that the individuals in question have not yet developed the language they need to adequately explain their own experiences. In the case of the Arkansas anti-trans healthcare bill, it is straightforwardly not true that trans people have failed to adequately explain their experiences, needs, and preferences with respect to healthcare during adolescence. To place the epistemic blame for the situation on the people being harmed by the bill would add insult to injury. This is not a situation where the introduction of a new bit of terminology to describe a particular kind of experience can lift a "hermeneutical darkness" and allow LGBTQ people to explain themselves to others more clearly, as Fricker describes being the case when certain women coined the term "sexual harassment": "The primary epistemic harm done to her was that a patch of her social experience which it was very much in her interests to understand was not collectively understood and so remained barely intelligible, *even to her*" (Fricker 162, my emphasis). To be clear, I am not suggesting that feminists working on epistemic injustice would try to argue that the Arkansas bill case is an example of hermeneutical injustice. Rather, I think that the reasoning that lies behind linking a lack of self-knowledge (as in the quote above) with a lack of collective hermeneutical resources relevant to one's experience can provide us with insights into why it is so easy to assume that marginalized people must lack self-knowledge due to very fact that they are marginalized.

II. You better work

My concern is not only that certain assumptions and implicit reasoning behind hermeneutical injustice theorizing are at play in the misattribution of self-ignorance to marginalized individuals but that it is also at work in misattributions of self-knowledge to socially *privileged* individuals. How might this happen? Consider the following argument, that I think must be working in the background in order for Fricker's description of hermeneutical injustice to make sense:

1. Marginalized people lack mainstream hermeneutical resources that are directly relevant to the aspects of their lives that are related to their marginalization.
2. Social phenomena that are outside the scope of mainstream hermeneutical resources are difficult to understand.
3. Therefore, marginalized people will have difficulty understanding the aspects of their lives that are related to their marginalization.

Obviously, there are many ways to object to this argument that I can't go into here (Dotson 2012, for example, goes into detail about why we should reject premise 2). Rather than laying out this argument in order to object to it, I am interested in showing how premise 2 goes hand-in-hand with the following claim, premise 5: social phenomena that are *inside* the scope of mainstream hermeneutical resources are *easy* to understand. Of course, premise 2 does not entail premise 5, but it is not hard to see why premise 5 might be inadvertently assumed once someone accepts premise 2. And so we are led to another troubling background argument:

4. Socially privileged people have mainstream hermeneutical resources that are directly relevant to the aspects of their lives that contribute to their privilege.
5. Social phenomena that are inside the scope of mainstream hermeneutical resources are easy to understand.
6. Therefore, privileged people will easily understand the aspects of their lives that contribute to their privilege.

What this amounts to is an argument for the conclusion that privileged people are knowledgeable about the aspects of their lives that make them privileged. Privileged people have self-knowledge, in short, *because* they are privileged, or so this argument would have us conclude.

There are many ways we could object to one or both of these arguments, and I won't be able to address them all here. To better explain why I think we should find these arguments unsatisfying, I will introduce some economics-inspired terminology that should be simple to incorporate into theorizing about epistemic injustice, given the fact that it already common for epistemologists to use terms like "knowledge production" and "hermeneutical resources." First, we can understand hermeneutical resources as being part of a broader category: epistemic means of production. "Means of production" in the material sense is made up of any tools, machinery, and resources needed to produce a good. In Marxist theory, this category is usually divided into instruments of labor (tools, machinery) and subjects of labor (raw materials, resources). Hermeneutical resources, as described by Pohlhaus above, are very straightforwardly the epistemic equivalent of instruments of labor. Things like evidence, testimony, and experiences, which are also required for knowledge production, would be what we can call the epistemic subjects of labor – that which is, in some sense, "turned into" knowledge.

Of course, without labor power, the means of production would be useless. Labor is the driving force that gets us from raw materials to the final product. Unfortunately, epistemic "labor" is precisely what is not accounted for in the arguments I gave above. They assume that the mere having of epistemic means of production will automatically result in knowledge for certain people.

What we need is to robustly incorporate a notion of epistemic labor – what I will call "epistemic work" – into our theorizing about epistemic injustice matters.

I should briefly explain why I'll be using "work" rather than "labor" going forward. The precedent for this comes from Arlie Hochschild's 1983 book on emotional labor, *The Managed Heart*. Hochschild carefully limits her use of "emotional labor" to pick out the emotional regulation that employees are required to perform for their jobs; in other words, "emotional labor" refers only to emotional regulation for which one is *paid*. Hochschild's central example involves flight attendants being expected and even explicitly trained to be friendly to all customers, but any service industry job will have an emotional labor component. Emotional labor understood in this specific way is importantly different from what Hochschild calls "emotion work," which is unpaid and not limited to what one is expected to do for one's job. Because the cases I am interested in do not solely involve epistemic activity people do for a wage, nor does the epistemic injustice literature as a whole have such an exclusive focus on paid epistemic activity, "epistemic work" is more appropriate for my purposes than "epistemic labor."

"Epistemic labor" is already used in certain areas of epistemology, usually when discussing the division of epistemic "labor" that occurs when we rely on others' testimony and expertise. Sandy Goldberg (2011), for instance, explains that epistemic labor can be divided because "of the cognitively distributed nature of the work that underwrites the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge." Sinan Dogramaci (2015), in his epistemic communist theory of our epistemically evaluative practices, also relies a notion of epistemic labor, stating that the "epistemic benefit gained from coordination of epistemic rules" is "the efficient division of labor among members of a group aiming to discover and share interesting results with a minimum of cost." Christopher Gauker (1991) similarly explains that "a division of epistemic labour...is a social arrangement in which people benefit from the expertise that others possess regarding subjects of which they themselves do not possess an expert understanding." And Joshua Habgood-Coote (2020) describes how it is through the division of epistemic labor that "a group deals with a complex body of information": they divide that information up, "assigning those parts to different members." This is just a representative sampling from the large number of papers on this topic. In general, the focus in this literature is on how the division of epistemic labor makes certain complex epistemic tasks and epistemic collaboration possible, but a straightforward explanation of what epistemic labor is (or rather, epistemic *work* is, as I'm calling it), separate from its use in collaborative projects, has been lacking.

In her recent paper, "The Dual Erasure of Domestic Epistemic Labour," Emilia Wilson offers just such an explanation. She states, "to the extent that some labour requires epistemic competence to be performed successfully, then that labour is, to that extent, epistemic." (Wilson 2021). Epistemic capacities are those capacities you must have in order to "possess knowledge and participate in knowledge production." Wilson admits that she is not aiming to give a precise definition of "epistemic labor," but this helpfully brings us back to my loosely Marxist way of describing the epistemic realm. Put in those terms, epistemic work is work that requires the exercise of whatever capacities are required to take us from merely having the epistemic tools and subjects of that work to actually producing and possessing knowledge. In other words, it is not enough to simply have hermeneutical tools and evidence at one's disposal to possess knowledge; work is required to get from having the necessary epistemic means of production to actually producing the end good. Whatever that work is that gets us from the epistemic means of production to epistemic goods is epistemic work.

This might seem like an obvious point, but it is essential to understanding why merely having ample hermeneutical resources is not itself sufficient for producing knowledge. When the importance of performing epistemic work is overlooked, and this is coupled with a misunderstanding of how self-knowledge is produced (which I'll discuss below), we end up with the naive view that self-knowledge production merely requires having the right sorts of concepts and language at one's disposal. In other words, we get the view expressed in premises 5 and 6 above. Epistemic work is what bridges the gap between resources and knowledge, and in fact, because epistemic work is also what is needed to produce new hermeneutical resources in the first place, it is completely possible for someone to have few relevant epistemic tools but still put in enough epistemic work to overcome this disadvantage. And on the flip side, someone could have epistemic tools handed to them but not end up with knowledge out of a failure to put in the necessary work.

III. Self-Knowledge and Social Difference

This notion of epistemic work, together with my earlier description of the epistemic means of production, gives us a better picture of what is involved in knowledge production; on this picture, it is clear why someone's lack of hermeneutical resources alone should not lead us to the conclusion that they lack self-knowledge compared to those who have more hermeneutical resources. Relatedly, being hermeneutically privileged is not a guarantee that one will have self-knowledge, and more importantly, having this sort of privilege might actually impede the formation of substantive self-knowledge rather than facilitate it, as I will argue later.

A. Kinds of Self-Knowledge

Going forward, we need a better understanding of what self-knowledge is and how it is produced. The focus within analytic theorizing about self-knowledge is usually on our knowledge of our own beliefs and of our conscious mental states more generally. The common starting assumption is that this self-knowledge is somehow epistemically privileged and peculiar, that is, that it is especially secure and that it is obtained via uniquely first-personal methods. These "peculiar" methods are not ones that you could use to gain knowledge about me, and at the very least, it seems safe to assume that such methods, whatever they might be, are what allow us to report on our own phenomenology (Horgan and Kriegel 2007). Our way of obtaining this self-knowledge is also often taken to be non-observational and non-inferential, due to the fact that we seem to be able to have this self-knowledge automatically or directly, without really trying. The peculiarity of self-knowledge formation methods is directly related to self-knowledge's supposed epistemic privilege – there is simply less room for error compared to knowledge that is formed indirectly through reasoning or observation (Gertler 2001). Some have even argued that certain kinds of second-order thoughts are simply self-verifying and thus epistemically special compared to our thoughts about the world (Burge 1988). These features of self-knowledge and self-knowledge formation, taken all together, are also supposed to help explain why it is that an individual's avowals about their own mental states should be understood to have first-personal authority. If I tell you, "I'm currently thinking about a red tomato," it would be strange, and we might even say it is somehow wrong, for you to respond by asking, "how do you know that you're thinking about a tomato?" The strangeness of your response makes sense if there is no way you could come to know what I am thinking and I am extremely unlikely to be wrong about what I am thinking.

The problem with this basic approach to thinking about self-knowledge is that, even if it is correct, it only applies to what we might call "trivial" self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is trivial in the sense that it is cheap to get and not particularly interesting. Of course, my *ability* to know that I am currently thinking about a tomato is not trivial; indeed, it might be the case that our ability to have this kind of self-knowledge is essential to having any knowledge at all. But the mere fact that I am thinking about a tomato is uninteresting. It is easy to see why we cannot jump to the conclusion that all self-knowledge is epistemically privileged or the result of a peculiar (i.e. first-personal) method. Consider what happens when I can't remember something that happened to me ten years ago but my parent remembers it very clearly and explains it to me; I have gained some self-knowledge via testimony in that exchange. In other situations, I might have to observe my own behavior or get a therapist's help in order to uncover what some might call "unconscious" beliefs or desires.

In short, what I'll call "substantive" self-knowledge poses a challenge. This is self-knowledge that is harder to get, because it often involves knowledge of your dispositional beliefs and desires that are not directly accessible as conscious thoughts (Crane 2013). When it comes to this sort of self-knowledge, we cannot take for granted the same basic assumptions that I discussed above. In general, when you introduce this non-trivial self-knowledge into the picture, pluralism about self-knowledge formation seems like the only reasonable approach to take (for more elaborate defenses of pluralism, see Coliva 2016 and Schwitzgebel 2012). The basic idea here is that we gain self-knowledge in a wide variety of ways, some of which might be epistemically special and some of which might simply be garden-variety observational or inferential methods. This variety of methods is due to the extremely wide variety of states that we self-attribute, as I've already suggested. Sometimes we make assertions about our conscious thoughts, sometimes about bodily feelings, sometimes about unconscious dispositional attitudes, and most importantly for my concerns in this paper, we also make assertions about our social identities and experiences. It is highly implausible that we come to know about all of these different facts about ourselves in the same way. These background points about self-knowledge are meant to be clarificatory, not controversial; in order to better understand the influence of social privilege on individuals' abilities to produce certain kinds of self-knowledge, it is important to keep the distinctions I've made above in mind.

B. Trivial Self-Knowledge and Social Difference

Let's first consider the impact of social identity and privilege at the level of trivial self-knowledge. It is extremely tempting to try to argue that because the methods of coming to have this kind of knowledge are in some sense automatic or direct, then there is no room for any social factors to get between the first-order state and the second-order thought about it. In other words, if you can know that you have a certain conscious thought or experience as soon as you have it, and perhaps even simply in virtue of having it, then surely nothing can interfere with that.

Unfortunately, the formation of trivial self-knowledge is not as insulated from social influence as the background assumptions in the literature would have us believe. In the case of individuals who face social marginalization, there are two major factors that can interfere with their ability to know even the content of their conscious thoughts: gaslighting and trauma. Gaslighting, by definition, involves someone being forced to question their own soundness of mind; through subtle manipulation over time, the gaslighter causes their victim to question their own beliefs, desires, memories, etc. For example, in *Gas Light*, the play which led to the coining of the contemporary term, Bella's husband Jack insists that Bella is imagining things like the gas lights dimming in their home. This leads Bella to think that she is going "insane" and cannot trust her own experiences. In these kinds of scenarios, it is not only that the victim loses their ability to know about the world around them due to their being inundated with misleading evidence, but their abuser must also make them doubt that they can even properly access the contents of their own thoughts.

Trauma can also bring serious psychological and cognitive effects with it. When traumatic experiences are severe enough or prolonged enough, cognitive resources are allocated to the threat-response systems at the expense of other cognitive capacities. An "elaborated fear structure" can impede an individual's capacity for processing non-threat-related information (Chemtob et al. 1988). Researchers have also observed distortions in memories of subjects with PTSD, including "autobiographical" memories about past experiences. These distortions can result in memories being vague or "overgeneral," lacking detail and contextual information (McNally et al. 1994; Williams et al., 2007). PTSD can also involve dissociation or depersonalization, which can be roughly described as the feeling of being disconnected from one's body or one's sensory experiences. The epistemic impact of trauma, then, is not only that individuals with PTSD will struggle to form true beliefs about the world when they feel threatened but that these individuals will also come to distrust their ability to know about their own thoughts and experiences.

Despite the fact that it is far more likely that socially marginalized people are dealing with the cognitive harms of trauma and gaslighting, we should not imagine that this means that marginalized individuals are comparatively worse-off because of this. People who enjoy the seeming epistemic benefits of social privilege have their own cognitive hurdles, and I think these make it hard to say anything definitive about which sorts of individuals have the epistemic high ground with respect to trivial self-knowledge. Put very broadly, socially privileged people have extremely strong social incentives to be self-ignorant, even at the level of trivial self-knowledge.

It is not difficult to see how self-ignorance is encouraged and rewarded, although this is, of course, not done explicitly. A certain basic level of denial and wishful thinking about one's own intentions, beliefs, and even one's actions is necessary to maintain the overarching belief that one's social privilege is actually *merited*. In other words, the privilege that an individual enjoys thanks to being white, for example, is much more difficult to personally grapple with if one fully accepts that that privilege is gained at the expense of others' oppression. It is emotionally and ethically easier to think that you got a job, for instance, because of your stellar résumé, not because you looked and spoke like the person who interviewed you. It is also easier to think that people who aren't socially privileged deserve to be in the positions they are in if, say, you believe that you saw them pull a weapon from their coat rather than a wallet (Siegel 2012).

What this means is that at the level of basic or trivial self-knowledge, it is likely that almost *everyone* has some issue or other that interferes with the formation of true self-beliefs about many of their conscious mental states, regardless of whether mainstream hermeneutical resources are working in their favor. So now we have to consider what reasons there might be for thinking that social differences impact one's comparative ability to produce substantive self-knowledge. As I've already suggested, this is where epistemic work comes into play, because this is the sort of self-knowledge that definitely cannot be achieved through any sort of automatic or subpersonal methods.

C. Substantive Self-Knowledge and Epistemic Work

The main question, then, is why marginalized individuals would be motivated to put in more epistemic work. First and most obviously, when it comes to knowledge of and making assertions about things as socially important as one's sexual orientation or gender, an incredible amount of personal risk is involved if you suspect that you are not cisgender or straight. This risk can range from being quite minimal – maybe your distant uncle who you rarely see will treat you differently if you were to come out – to life threatening depending on your social situation. You could face intimate partner violence, street harassment, unemployment, or being denied medical care (as in the Arkansas example). So if you suspect that you are not straight or not cis, it is extremely unlikely that you would flippantly or carelessly jump to the conclusion that you are LGBTQ. In other words, it is not a conclusion that many people will accept without putting in incredible amounts of self-analysis. To take such a risk for the sake of believing something about yourself that might turn out to be false is simply not worth it.

This point about risk is articulated wonderfully in Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. She explains: "give as much credence as one finds it conceivable to give to self-reports of sexual difference – weighting one's credence, when it is necessary to weight it at all, in favor of the less normative and therefore riskier, costlier self-reports" (26). In short, the more someone is risking by coming out, the more reason we have to assume that they have put in a significant amount of epistemic work to determine how they want to identify and what is best for themselves. Importantly, I think these considerations about risk serving to motivate individuals to do epistemic work generalizes beyond LGBTQ cases. When a person with a disability, for example, wants to express concerns about accessibility in their workplace or reveal something about their experiences as someone with a disability to other people, they face significant potential risks. And so they will be highly motivated to carefully assess their experiences to determine whether it is worth taking the risk at all.

In contrast, people whose experiences and identities are considered "normal" are rarely if ever faced with a similar reason to put in so much epistemic work. For instance, a cisgender man who has only ever dated cisgender women will rarely, if ever, face any sort of risk in revealing to others that he only dates cis women. Because of this, he will not be motivated to deeply and carefully assess how sure he is of his dating preferences before discussing them with coworkers, friends, family, etc.

Furthermore, because most people raised by straight parents are conditioned to assume that they themselves are also straight, and mainstream hermeneutical resources related to sexuality are generally heteronormative, this hypothetical man will have little reason to question whether he himself is straight. So, not only does a lack of social risk disincentivize careful epistemic work about oneself, but being epistemically centered – that is, being in a social position around which the dominant epistemic resources have been built – makes it even less likely that one will put in the epistemic work required for substantive self-knowledge. In other words, socially privileged individuals are pushed towards the cultivation of substantive self-ignorance precisely because they occupy privileged positions.

Again, this generalizes to other sorts of cases, especially those involving race. Of course, you can't question that you are a white person in the same way that you can question whether you are straight. But there are features of white people's lives related to being racially privileged on which we have little incentive to reflect. Whether or not you have implicit biases that affect the way you treat people of color, for instance, is likely a question about yourself that would be incredibly difficult to fully confront. It is far easier for you, emotionally, epistemically, and socially, to simply assume that you are a good person who treats everyone fairly. As a white person, forming this belief about yourself – that you do not treat people differently due to their race – might allow you to more easily justify your privileged position in society. Good people, after all, deserve good things. And again, the shallowness of "mainstream" (i.e. white) hermeneutical resources discourages self-reflection among those people for whom and by whom those resources were created. You're either a "racist" – someone who openly hates people of color – or you're not.

To be clear, descriptions of and theories about the ignorance of white people in particular are not new. In his 1912 book, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, James Weldon Johnson's main character remarks, "I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people understand them" (20). Almost 100 years later, Charles Mills elaborates on this point in his work on white ignorance, explaining that "often for their very survival, blacks in this country have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the 'white tribe' that has such frightening power over them" (17). What I hope I have succeeded in arguing for in my discussion so far is that this white ignorance should not be understood only as an ignorance about group- or society-level facts but as, perhaps first and foremost, an ignorance about one's own beliefs, attitudes, and even one's perceptual experiences having to do with race. And of course, I think it is once again important to note that this sort of socially-motivated self-ignorance generalizes to all individuals with certain kinds of social privilege. You are more likely to have false self-beliefs about those complex dispositions that contribute to your justifying and maintaining your social privilege.

IV. First-Person Authority: Epistemic or Ethical?

What I've argued for so far is the view that when it comes to self-knowledge that is relevant to one's social marginalization or privilege, we have good reason to believe that marginalized people are self-knowledgeable, and so they should be treated accordingly. Similarly, we have good reason to believe that privileged people will get things wrong about themselves when those things involve or are relevant to the very fact that they are privileged, and this too should impact how we respond to what such people tell us about themselves. But whether or not one is in fact self-knowledgeable is arguably independent from whether one is (or should be) treated as having first-person authority. Talia Bettcher (2009), in her work on transgender identities and first-person authority, argues that first-person authority is an ethical rather than epistemic matter. She argues that this must be the case, in part, because we are so frequently wrong about our own mental states and attitudes that there cannot be any epistemic basis for treating people as self-authoritative. I have effectively argued against this view, insofar as I have pointed out that we have strong *epistemic* reasons for treating certain people as having first-person authority in certain situations. I'd like to briefly say more about why I think we should be open to thinking of first-person authority as a sort of epistemic authority, at least in certain cases.

First, there are many examples we can give involving one person "violating" another's first-personal authority (FPA from now on) in ways that seem morally permissible. My partner, for instance, might misremember something that they said last week in telling a story, and it is socially acceptable for me to correct them (politely, of course). A therapist, too, might see fit to question a patient's assessment of their own attitudes. Indeed, most close friends who know each other well enough to see trends in each others' behaviors will be able to push back on avowals ("Do you *really* want to date the guy?"). These sorts of "failures" of FPA are quite common and seem to occur in situations when another person knows enough about someone else to be able to judge when they have a false self-belief. Second, it is not clear that first-personal authority requires that we be experts about ourselves or that we are anywhere close to infallible or omniscient about ourselves. I will not try to give a watertight explanation of epistemic authority here, but when it comes to self-knowledge, it seems quite plausible that we treat others as having first-person authority because they are in a far better epistemic position with respect to their own mental states and their life in general than anyone else. Roughly, the idea here is that an authority on a particular subject need not be right all the time; depending on the domain of inquiry in question, an authority might simply be whoever knows the most about that domain, even if they are still quite ignorant or wrong about much of it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I want to make sure that we do not endorse a view of FPA that would require us to accept the claims of socially privileged people about themselves despite having good epistemic reasons for rejecting them.

V. Another Kind of Epistemic Injustice?

In emphasizing the importance of coming up with an adequate notion of epistemic work to fully understanding how it is that certain individuals come to have self-knowledge while others don't, I do not want to suggest that we should think of the erasure of or disregard for this epistemic work in certain situations as a kind of epistemic injustice itself. To conclude, I'd like to point the way towards a new approach to categorizing instances of injustice which focuses on the kinds of changes that will be required to adequately redress the harms occurring in the situation and prevent them from occurring in the future, rather than focusing on the primary mechanisms through which the injustice is created.

For example, consider Wilson's previously mentioned work on domestic epistemic labor. She argues that the type of feminized domestic work that is often colloquially referred to as "emotional labor" – keeping track of family birthdays, monitoring the household for chores to be done, scheduling appointments, etc. – is better understood primarily as a kind of epistemic labor. Given her characterization of epistemic labor – labor that fundamentally requires the use of the capacities necessary for possessing knowledge and participating in its production – it is easy to see why the sorts of tasks involved in domestic "emotional" work should actually be understood as epistemic rather than emotional labor. Wilson thinks that this erasure of the epistemic quality of much of the domestic work that women (as partners and parents) are expected to do can be thought of as a kind of epistemic injustice. Women are not being recognized appropriately for all of the epistemic work that they have to perform in order to fully manage a household. Characterizing this work as merely "emotional" misrepresents the sorts of skills and effort that go into such work. This mischaracterization also furthers the damaging "passion versus reason" dichotomy that is so pervasive in our culture's thinking not just about the nature of emotions but about the respective skills of women and men. In other words, describing the household tasks that fall to women as "emotional" tasks contributes to the stereotype that women are better at tasks that don't require being rational compared to men.

Why shouldn't this erasure of women's domestic epistemic labor be lumped into the category of epistemic injustice? Of course, it seems to be a fundamentally epistemic issue at first glance. The labor involved is primarily epistemic, and that labor is either being misunderstood or completely ignored. Someone is failing to recognize the woman as a genuine epistemic agent while nonetheless exploiting her as a source of information. As Wilson points out, this is precisely the sort of scenario that Fricker (2007) has in mind when describing epistemic injustice as fundamentally involving an agent being harmed as a knower.

But what I'm concerned about is practical: how do we appropriately respond to these situations such that the harms being done are adequately redressed and prevented from occurring again? Putting the "epistemic injustice" label on such situations seems inadequate when we approach this issue with the redress-and-prevent concern in mind. This concern requires that we ask ourselves what would be involved in making sure that women's domestic labor is not underappreciated, ignored, or mischaracterized in the future and what the fundamental harm really is in these situations. The women who do prefer to label the kind of labor being disregarded as "emotional" labor do so for a reason: its performance and the way that it is undervalued by others takes a profound *psychological* toll. And the reason that this labor is undervalued or misunderstood as non-epistemic by others is because women are undervalued and misunderstood in general. But to argue that we should think of this as an epistemic injustice is to argue that the harm is an epistemic one, that these women are being harmed as knowers. While this might be true, it is very far from the full picture. Characterizing the harm being done in this way suggests that we should address it by getting husbands (for instance) to see that the household work their wives do is largely epistemic in nature. Perhaps for some women this would be enough, but I suspect it would leave many still wanting more to be done to make things right.

Let's return to the example I started with: Arkansas legislatures treating transgender people as if they lack self-knowledge. What do we have to gain by calling this an epistemic injustice or coming up with a new category of epistemic injustice to try to fully capture what is going wrong? As I said earlier, we could call this a case of testimonial injustice and leave it at that. But the most troubling harms the politicians are causing are psychological and even physical, and if we want to formulate strategies to prevent this sort of situation from happening in the future, it again seems inadequate to describe it as a primarily epistemic issue. This is not to suggest that this case has no epistemic features, but at the end of the day, transphobia is not a solely or even primarily epistemic issue.

So given everything that I've said, where are we left? I hope that I've convinced you that when it comes to claims about individuals' socially-relevant mental states and experiences, we actually have *more* reason to trust the self-reports of marginalized individuals than we do the self-reports of socially privileged people. This is because, despite everyone having barriers to achieving basic or trivial self-knowledge, socially marginalized individuals are more motivated to get things right about themselves. They put in the epistemic work that privileged people are often encouraged not to do. But despite this seeming like a sort of epistemic injustice, it is not clear that labeling situations involving the erasure of marginalized people's epistemic work as a kind of epistemic injustice will achieve the social goals that, I hope, we are all aiming for.

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