NOEMI PACISCOPI
Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele
n.paciscopi@studenti.unisr.it

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND STANDPOINT THEORY: A PROPOSAL FOR UNDERSTANDING EPISTEMIC HARM[1]

abstract

In this paper, I argue that silencing testimonies causes an epistemic harm that is particularly severe when those silenced possess the epistemic resources to articulate specific phenomena or are inclined to develop these resources. Marginalized groups possess a unique privilege in understanding phenomena that directly affect them. When their testimonies are systematically dismissed through forms of epistemic injustice, society loses valuable insights. To grasp the nature of this privilege, I refer to a recent distinction in the literature on standpoint theory between two types of privilege: advantage and standpoint (Toole, 2023). This distinction illustrates that while one need not be marginalized to develop certain epistemic resources, marginalization provides a distinct advantage. Understanding the extent of the epistemic harm caused by epistemic oppression toward marginalized groups underscores the necessity of challenging these injustices, and addressing them would also yield ethical benefits for those who suffer from them.

keywords

epistemic injustice, standpoint theory, epistemic privilege, epistemic harm

1 I would like to express my gratitude to the guest editors, Federica Liveriero and Ingrid Salvatore, for their availability and valuable feedback on the paper. I also thank the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments. I am especially grateful to Pieranna Garavaso for the support and for their precise and thorough comments, which greatly contributed to the refinement of this work. Finally, I wish to thank my supervisors at University Vita-Salute San Raffaele for their ongoing guidance during my research.

Phenomenology and Mind, n. 27 - 2024, pp. 70-82
DOI: 10.17454/pam-2707
https://www.rosenbergesellier.it/eng/journals/phenomenology-and-mind

ISSN 2280-7853 (print) - ISSN 2239-4028 (on line)

1. Introduction

In recent decades, some epistemological approaches, notably feminist social epistemologies, have emphasized the close interconnections between epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy. These approaches argue that the study of knowledge should consider epistemic agents within their social contexts. They underscore how social factors—such as gender, race, and class—significantly shape individuals' epistemic perspectives and, consequently, the knowledge they acquire. Some authors investigate the mechanisms by which individuals experience epistemic injustice, where their knowledge or credibility is unjustly undermined (Dotson, 2012; 2014; Fricker, 2007). Others argue that individuals may hold an epistemic privilege due to their social positioning (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Tanesini, 2019). In this paper, I argue that since epistemic injustices systematically affect members of marginalized groups, and since these individuals are uniquely positioned to understand certain social phenomena and experiences, hindering their contributions to the creation and transmission of knowledge is particularly harmful from an epistemic perspective. Once one becomes aware of the extent of the epistemic harm caused in these instances, the urgency of addressing these injustices appears clear. By tackling these injustices, both ethical and epistemic benefits can be achieved.

The concept of epistemic injustice has been introduced by Miranda Fricker (2007) to describe a form of injustice that harms individuals in their capacity as knowers. She distinguishes between two types: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. The first one occurs "when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word"; while hermeneutical injustice "occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences" (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). These two forms of epistemic injustice operate systematically, causing not only many and varied harms (Davis, 2016, p. 49) to the agent who suffers from them—on ethical, practical, and epistemic levels—but also to the collective body, affecting the production and transmission of knowledge. These injustices, in fact, obstruct the attainment of knowledge that conforms to epistemic values such as accuracy and factual relevance, as well as with non-epistemic values like inclusion and collective understanding.

Since Fricker's introduction of the concept of epistemic injustice, the literature on the subject has expanded significantly, with several new concepts being introduced. Some of the new concepts address the need to distinguish types of epistemic injustice that are not distinctly differentiated in Fricker's 2007 account (Dotson, 2012; Mason, 2011; Medina, 2013). In particular, Fricker's formulation of hermeneutical injustice does not differentiate between an

agent's inability to cognitively interpret some of their experiences due to a deficit in collective interpretative resources and the inability to communicate those experiences to others, who may be hostile to the introduction of new tools for interpreting social experiences (Pohlhaus, 2012).

Standpoint perspectives in epistemology have stressed the role of social positioning in gaining access to certain epistemic resources. In different ways, they have defined which social positions favor access to privileged epistemic perspectives and what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for achieving this "standpoint". From materialist standpoint approaches—such as those based on the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2001) or George Lukàcs (1971)—to more recent social approaches[1], the extensive standpoint literature in epistemology presents a variety of theses, sometimes at odds with one another. Of particular interest for the purposes of this paper is the recent distinction by Briana Toole (2023, p. 2) between "the epistemic advantage thesis" and "the standpoint thesis"; as well as the distinction between "intercommunaly shared epistemic resources" and "intracommunaly shared epistemic resources" (Toole, 2019, p. 609).

Some authors (Crasnow, 2009; 2024; Pohlhaus, 2012; Rolin, 2009; Toole, 2019) have already highlighted interconnections between the literature on standpoint theory and the literature on epistemic injustice; however, there is still room to explain how the conceptual resources provided by the standpoint theory literature can shed lights on some aspects of epistemic injustices. In particular, I intend to use the distinction between epistemic advantage and standpoint to emphasize the epistemic importance of listening to the testimonies of marginalized individuals.

In the second section, I illustrate the main forms of systematic epistemic injustice and how they are interconnected. I will also mention notions like hermeneutical dissent and willful hermeneutical ignorance—concepts developed within the frameworks of epistemology of ignorance and epistemology of resistance. In the next one, I expound standpoint theory and introduce the distinction between epistemic "advantage" and "standpoint" (Toole, 2023). In the fourth section, I argue that having defined what it means to have an epistemically advantaged position and what it means to have achieved a standpoint helps to clarify the value of marginalized perspectives for assessing the extent of testimonial injustices' epistemic harm.

2. Epistemic Forms of Injustice

Epistemic injustices are both a product of and a reinforcing factor within the same system of oppression and domination that underpins other forms of social injustice (Pohlhaus, 2017, p. 16). Societies are inherently stratified, with dominant groups wielding social power—defined by Fricker (2007) as the "capacity social agents have to influence how things go in the social world" (p. 9)—while marginalized groups[2] are deprived of such power. Fricker (2007) focuses on systematic epistemic injustices, which mostly impact individuals belonging to marginalized groups, contrasting them with incidental epistemic injustices that arise from isolated incidents, such as momentary lapses in judgment or attention. Members of marginalized

1 Toole (2019, pp. 601-604) clarifies the distinction between these two approaches. On the one hand, the historical-material account connects a society's mode of production with knowledge, focusing on how labor relations impact epistemic perspectives, while the feminist-material account builds on this by specifically examining the intersection of knowledge and gender within capitalist patriarchal societies. On the other hand, social approaches consider the broader social conditions and experiences shared by marginalized knowers, highlighting the need to explore how these broader social dynamics influence epistemic perspectives. In this paper, when discussing standpoint theory, I will mainly refer to the latter account.

2 While in this paper I use these simplified ontological categories of "dominant" and "marginalized" groups, it is relevant to acknowledge the diversity within these groups and the varied perspectives they encompass.

groups are systematically vulnerable to epistemic injustices because they are described in a stereotypical manner through negative identity prejudices. This form of bias involves a persistent and unwarranted association of a social group with unfavorable characteristics, which remains resistant even to contrary evidence (Fricker, 2007, p. 35). Fricker distinguishes between two primary forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes the listener to assign an incorrect level of credibility to the person who is expressing themselves or trying to do so (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Due to biases related to factors such as gender, race, or social class, the contributions of marginalized group members are often ignored or taken less seriously. There is also a form of "pre-emptive" testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 130), where the speaker is denied the opportunity to speak in the first place, or what Dotson (2011) calls "testimonial smothering", namely "the truncating of one's own testimony in order to insure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (p. 130), that occurs due to perceived risks, lack of audience understanding, or internalized biases. Fricker centers her discussion on cases where a speaker's credibility is unjustly diminished[3], leading to several kinds of harms, such as a loss of self-confidence in their own knowledge or abilities (Fricker, 2007, pp. 46-47). A genuine ethical harm comes about as well: being undermined in one's capacity as a knower implies that one's ability to reason may end up being undermined as well, which is one of the fundamental capacities of human beings.

On a more foundational level, there is hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when someone is unjustly disadvantaged in making sense of their social experiences due to a gap in collective hermeneutical resources. In other words, it occurs when there is a "structural identity prejudice" (Fricker, 2007, p. 155) in the tools, frameworks, or interpretative methods used to understand and make sense of social experiences or phenomena. Fricker's pivotal example is that of sexual harassment: before the introduction of the concept, it was difficult to recognize and speak publicly about the phenomenon. This gap in hermeneutical resources is due to hermeneutical marginalization, i.e. "unequal hermeneutical participation with respect to some significant area(s) of social experience" (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). The unequal distribution of social power leads to an alteration of shared hermeneutical resources: members of dominant groups possess the necessary hermeneutical tools to articulate their social experiences, whereas members of marginalized groups do not. Fricker (2007) writes that those who are "powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible" (p. 148). Hermeneutical injustices are not detectable until the hermeneutical gap has been filled; this is why the detection of these lack of hermeneutical resources is more difficult than the identification of instances of testimonial injustice. Like testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice leads to several kinds of harm. The primary harm of hermeneutical injustice involves not only placing individuals at a disadvantage because of gaps in collective understanding but also endangering the fundamental construction of their self-identity. There are also secondary epistemic and practical harms. An example of the latter is the case

3 It is important to highlight that according to some authors credibility excess can be equally, if not more, harmful: members of privileged groups who are attributed an excess of credibility can become incapable of recognizing their own limitations (Medina, 2013), while members of marginalized groups who are given undue credibility solely because of their identity may face typecasting, compulsory representation, and exploitation (Davis, 2016, p. 485). Typecasting refers to the presumption that marginalized individuals possess knowledge related to topics stereotypically associated with their social group, compulsory representation involves the pressure for marginalized groups to represent their entire community, and epistemic exploitation occurs when these individuals are used to provide knowledge or insights based on their social group without proper recognition or benefit (Berenstain, 2016).

of Carmita Wood (Fricker, 2007, pp. 162-163), who developed psychosomatic symptoms and was unable to obtain legal protection for what was not recognized as a clear instance of sexual harassment, given the shared hermeneutical resources of that time. This lack of recognition prevented her from receiving the benefits to which she was entitled. The epistemic secondary harm is the loss of confidence that arises from experiencing dissonance when an individual is the only one who perceives a gap between the shared understanding and their own intimate sense of a particular experience (Fricker, 2007, p. 163). Moreover, some epistemic harms resulting from both types of injustice include hindering the production of new knowledge and obstructing the development and cultivation of epistemic virtues, such as intellectual courage.

Fricker (2017, p. 164) also highlights how these two injustices feed on each other: testimonial injustice prevents the elaboration of hermeneutical resources whose gaps are responsible for hermeneutical injustice; on the other hand, gaps in these interpretative resources make testimonies more difficult. However, she (2007, p. 168) states that unlike testimonial injustice, which involves direct individual interactions and raises questions of individual culpability, hermeneutical injustice stems from shortcomings in the collective interpretative framework, therefore direct responsibility by a single individual is not a key issue.

This characterization of hermeneutical injustice has been questioned by several authors, including José Medina (2017), Gaile Pohlhaus (2012) or Kristie Dotson (2012). Dotson (2012, p. 31) coins a term to refer to an additional type of epistemic injustice: contributory injustice. This form of injustice is described as the result of what Pohlhaus (2012, p. 722) calls willful hermeneutical ignorance: the intentional and deliberate refusal by dominant groups to recognize the interpretative resources of marginalized groups. In doing so, dominant groups undermine the epistemic agency—namely the ability to contribute to and shape knowledge—of marginalized groups, effectively blocking their participation in developing shared epistemic resources, such as collective understanding and interpretative frameworks.

What is questioned by Dotson (2012), as well as by Medina (2017) or Rebecca Mason (2011), is also the unclear distinction in the formulation of hermeneutical injustice by Fricker (2007) between a deficit of intelligibility, which prevents the subject from making sense of their social experience, and a deficit of communicability, where the individual has developed the interpretative resources to describe their social experience, but members of dominant groups do not recognize them, leading to failure in communication. In other words, Fricker's account (2007) does not distinguish between epistemic oppression—defined as the persistent and unwarranted exclusion of certain knowers from the domain of knowledge (Dotson, 2014, p. 116)—suffered by individuals who have developed hermeneutical resources to account for social phenomena and experiences relevant to them, and instances of injustice suffered by those who have not developed such resources. In later works, Fricker (2016; 2017) argues that her concept of hermeneutical injustice already acknowledges "the existence of localized interpretative practices that may perfectly capture a given range of experiences but whose meanings are not sufficiently shared across wider social space" (2016, p. 167). She (2016, p. 165) further clarifies that it is possible to distinguish instances of hermeneutical injustice in "maximal", "midway" and "minimal" senses as follows: "maximal" cases, where individuals lack the epistemic resources to even understand their own experiences; "minimal" cases, where individuals possess the necessary resources but struggle to communicate their experiences due to their audience's lack of understanding; and "midway" cases, which encompass various intermediate situations. Trystan S. Goetze (2018) offers a more detailed classification, identifying six types of hermeneutical injustice based on who holds the relevant interpretative tools—whether it is the broader collective, social groups outside the subject's own, the subject's own group, or the subject themselves.

In short, although the interpretive resources developed by dominant groups tend to be those used by everyone, these are not the only resources that exist. Marginalized groups can produce their own resources by engaging in what Goetze (2018) refers to as "hermeneutical dissent" (p. 73), which occurs when marginalized groups create their own interpretive tools to make sense of their experiences. We could distinguish, as Toole (2019, p. 609) does, between shared resources within and outside of a group—"intercommunaly shared"—and those shared only within a community of interlocutors—"intracommunally shared".

It remains to be clarified how the relevant epistemic resources for understanding certain phenomena or social experiences can be obtained and how social position favors the achievement of these resources. I argue that this can be better understood using the conceptual tools offered by standpoint theory.

3. The Conceptual Resources of Standpoint Theory

According to Harding's well-known tripartition (1986, p. 24), standpoint theory is one of the three feminist perspectives in epistemology, alongside feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism[4]. Feminist empiricism and standpoint theory have garnered more attention in analytic philosophy, and in recent decades, the two approaches have become so intertwined that many contemporary feminist perspectives in epistemology can be viewed as hybrids of the two. Broadly speaking, a standpoint theory supports three theses: the situated knowledge thesis, the epistemic privilege thesis, and the achievement thesis (Crasnow, 2024). The situated knowledge thesis holds that non-epistemic[5] factors related to social positioning impact the epistemic capacities of the epistemic agents. Therefore, there are different epistemic perspectives, some of which—according to the epistemic privilege thesis—are privileged. The achievement thesis, on the other hand, posits the necessity of explaining the modes and conditions of access to this standpoint. Standpoint approaches in epistemology differ in how they characterize these key theses, but they generally agree on the following aspects:

(a) subordinate social groups possess a privileged epistemic perspective relative to that of dominant groups;
(b) the scope of this epistemic privilege concerns the understanding of their own subordinated experiences and social phenomena that affect them.

However, different approaches differ as to which characteristics of the social position may favor access to a privileged standpoint and whether they are necessary and sufficient features to achieve it. While some perspectives emphasize the different cognitive style of members

4 Harding (1986) describes feminist empiricism as the approach that argues that sexism and androcentrism are social prejudices that can be corrected by a closer adherence to existing scientific methodological norms. However, she herself acknowledges (1992 b, p. 439) that this is not the position advocated by the empiricist feminists of the 1990s such as Helen Longino's contextual empiricism or Lynn Hankinson Nelson's naturalised empiricism, which argue—in line with standpoint positions—for the unavoidable influence of context, values, social interests in the production of scientific knowledge, overcoming the traditional separation between epistemology and science. On the other hand, postmodern feminist contributions, drawing on continental postmodern thinkers like Foucault or Habermas, challenge concepts such as sex and gender. They question the thesis that there is something common to all women and express concerns about defining what it means to be a woman. By arguing that there is no single "feminine thought" or "women's standpoint", these approaches have prompted standpoint theories to reconsider and modify some of their underlying assumptions. In my view, a particularly interesting insight for standpoint theories comes from the postmodern thesis that argues that it is possible to "transcend" one's location, and thus one's standpoint, although this activity requires commitment and responsibility (Anderson, 2024).

5 There is considerable debate regarding the possibility of distinguishing between epistemic and non-epistemic factors or values. Generally, epistemic values are understood as those that contribute to the acquisition of knowledge, such as accuracy, consistency, and explanatory power. On the other hand, non-epistemic values are those that relate to social, ethical, or political considerations, which Helen Longino (1990, p. 4) defines as contextual values.

of one group as opposed to members of another, other approaches see marginalization—and the centrality given by it—as the source of epistemic privilege. Almost all approaches also distinguish the concept of epistemic perspective from that of standpoint: one has an epistemic perspective simply because of occupying a certain social position, whereas the standpoint is the result of a process of emancipation. It is an achievement, the result of collective analysis and political struggle with the aim of a subversion of the social order (Anderson, 2024; Potter, 2006, pp. 131-132). When discussing the concept of standpoint in terms of epistemic resources, we can assert that those who hold such a privileged perspective are individuals who have cultivated the necessary epistemic tools to explain and understand certain social phenomena and experiences. More precisely, to achieve an epistemic privilege or standpoint, it is not sufficient to merely possess the conceptual resources to gather better and more extensive evidence; it also requires the ability to draw meaningful inferences from that evidence, recognizing patterns, nuances, and insights that might remain inaccessible to others (Toole, 2023, p. 11).

If the literature on standpoint theory reveals many ambiguities about the relationship between socially occupied positions and standpoint achievements, explaining this connection is essential for justifying the thesis that members of marginalized groups possess an epistemic privilege compared to members of dominant groups. In my view, the recent distinction by Toole (2023) between two versions of "privilege" clarifies how social position facilitates access to a privileged epistemic perspective (the standpoint) and how this perspective can be attained even by those who are not socially situated in a marginalized position. Toole (2023) differentiates between "advantage" and "standpoint". According to her, marginalization constitutes an advantage for "evidential superiority", allowing marginalized individuals to gather more comprehensive evidence, and for "cognitive superiority", aiding in the development of epistemic virtues and habits that enable them to analyze recognized evidence. This means that marginalized perspectives often offer a more comprehensive understanding of social dynamics. Experiencing marginalization in fact sharpens an individual's ability to recognize the underlying structures and dynamics of society. These experiences cultivate a keen awareness of systemic patterns and injustices, enabling marginalized individuals to see and critically assess social frameworks that may go unnoticed by those in dominant positions. The concept frequently employed to illustrate the unique insights that marginalized perspectives offer compared to dominant ones is "double consciousness", a term first introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903). Du Bois describes double consciousness as the feeling of looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist society. This concept suggests that marginalized individuals can perceive the world from both the oppressed and the oppressor's viewpoints, while the reverse is less likely.

However, although marginalized individuals may be advantaged in reaching a privileged perspective—namely the standpoint—it is not guaranteed that they will necessarily attain it. Toole (2023), citing Catharine Saint-Croix (2020, p. 492), notes that "while being oppressed is a necessary condition for having some of the experiences that are epistemically advantageous [...], it is not a sufficient condition for occupying an epistemically privileged standpoint, any more than 'being employed as an oncologist' is a sufficient condition for expert status". Toole (2023, p. 9) argues that a privileged standpoint is reached through a process of "consciousness-raising", which is the necessary and sufficient condition, and which she compares to the training that makes someone an expert in a specific field. She (2023) states that:

> Just as specialized training in a subject can lead one to gather more and better evidence, or provide one with tools that allow one to reason more efficiently with the evidence they have, the same can be said of consciousness-raising. The process of consciousness raising, and the political struggle it involves, leads to the development of alternative

> conceptual frameworks and epistemic resources – the tools that help us to attend and interpret aspects of the world – that are sensitive to the experiences of those at the margins (p. 11).

By sharing and identifying common experiences, and developing a critical perspective on these experiences, consciousness-raising enables the development of new epistemic resources and enhances the reasoning regarding the available evidence. Moreover, it is not precluded that non-marginalized individuals can achieve this privileged standpoint, even without the epistemic advantage provided by marginalization: as Toole (2023) states, "thought the non-marginalized may never have the phenomenal experience of oppression, for instance, they can acquire evidence of oppression via testimony or observation" (p. 423). Building on this, it is possible to argue, as Harding (1992 a, p. 580) does, that beginning the process of knowledge from the experiences of marginalized individuals leads to a more objective understanding. This form of objectivity does not mean being neutral or free from a specific perspective; instead, it involves critically acknowledging and integrating a range of perspectives. By incorporating diverse viewpoints, starting with those typically overlooked, we can achieve a more comprehensive and informed understanding of the world.

Fricker (2007) explains how the women's movement used collective discussions to overcome hermeneutical injustice: by sharing their unclear and barely articulated experiences, women were able to develop new understandings and meanings that were not previously recognized in society. She (2007) states:

> If we look at the history of the women's movement, we see that the method of consciousness raising through 'speak-outs' and the sharing of scantly understood, barely articulate experiences was a direct response to the fact that so much of women's experience was obscure, even unspeakable, for the isolated individual, whereas the process of sharing these half-formed understandings awakened hitherto dormant resources for social meaning that brought clarity, cognitive confidence, and increased communicative facility. [...] We can say that women were collectively able to overcome extant routine social interpretive habits and arrive at exceptional interpretations of some of their formerly occluded experiences; together they were able to realize resources for meaning that were as yet only implicit in the social interpretive practices of the time (p. 148).

The practice described is a form of consciousness-raising. Through this collective process, women have developed some epistemic resources needed to articulate and understand their own experiences—resources that, at least in the early stages, were shared intra-communally rather than inter-communally. As Medina (2013) would argue, this process exemplifies hermeneutical resistance, where this resistance involves challenging dominant interpretive frameworks that marginalize or silence certain groups' experiences and fostering the creation of alternative interpretations that more faithfully reflect those experiences. This broadening of epistemic resources leads to a "more truthful, or less distorted, account of the social world or a deeper understanding of some of its features" (Tanesini, 2019, p. 337).

4. The Epistemic Advantage of Epistemic Injustice's Victims

Amandine Catala (2015, p. 433) states that although Fricker's characterization of testimonial injustice as an unfair denial of equal epistemic status or credibility is appropriate, she does not consider the possibility that "special credibility" should be recognized, beyond equal credibility. She argues (Catala, 2015) that "if minorities tend to have epistemically privileged insights due to their social position and experience, the testimonial injustice is doubly

problematic, because it does not recognize the equal, let alone special, value or credibility of minorities' testimonies" (p. 433). Catala (2015, p. 433) adds that not recognizing this "special credibility" fuels hermeneutical marginalization and hermeneutical domination, which occurs when "the minority is subjected to a public discourse on that social practice or experience that is shaped by putatively collective understandings that are in fact wholly formulated and imposed by the majority" (p. 428). In my view, standpoint theory gives us the tools to understand the special epistemic value of the testimony of members of marginalized groups, and this awareness further press us to address epistemic injustices.

As I argued in the third section, standpoint approaches generally agree in distinguishing the privileged standpoint from the epistemic perspective resulting from occupying a certain (marginalized) social position: the latter occurs automatically, while the former results from collective analysis and political struggle (Anderson, 2024; Potter, 2006). There is also frequent agreement among standpoint perspectives that the privileged standpoint can also be achieved by those who are not socially situated on the margins and do not lack social power. As I have previously discussed, Toole (2023) explains that the "necessary and sufficient condition" (p. 419), both for members of marginalized and non-marginalized groups, is consciousness-raising, which functions as the training that qualifies someone as an expert. This version of the achievement thesis, suggesting that a privileged standpoint can be achieved irrespective of one's social position, seems to overlook the "special" (Catala, 2015, p. 433) value embedded in the perspectives of marginalized individuals. This special value, in fact, appears to be more characteristic of perspectives developed through a process of consciousness-raising, and this can be undertaken by both members of marginalized groups and members of dominant groups. However, Toole's (2023) distinction between advantage and standpoint clarifies the instrumental role of social position in reaching the privileged standpoint. In fact, although the standpoint is attainable by both the dominant and the marginalized, the latter possess an epistemic advantage and are thus facilitated in reaching the standpoint. This advantage is derived from the ability to perceive and understand social realities from both the perspective of the dominant group and that of one's own marginalized position, along with the ingrained habit of recognizing certain patterns shaped by one's experiences in a marginalized position. Dominants, on the other hand, can only start their consciousness-raising process from the testimony of marginalized people or from observation (Toole, 2023, p. 423).

I argue that the distinction between epistemic advantage and standpoint enables us to identify two epistemic perspectives and better understand the epistemic harm caused by obstructing each. When the perspective of those who have reached a standpoint—having collectively developed the necessary epistemic resources to describe social phenomena and experiences relevant to marginalized groups—is hindered, it results in significant epistemic harm. This obstruction, in fact, prevents the dissemination of new resources and hinders the possibility that these resources become inter-communally shared. In this scenario, a "minimal" hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2016, p. 165) occurs, as the resources have been developed but communication is stifled. As Toole's analogy suggests (2023, p. 11), this situation parallels the overlooking of experts' contributions in their specific field, ultimately diminishing the overall collective knowledge. Although this privileged perspective is reachable by both marginalized and dominant individuals, marginalized individuals are inherently advantaged in achieving it. In other words, the standpoint theory literature shows that the likelihood of reaching a standpoint is greater among individuals from marginalized social groups. Therefore, hindering the perspective of the marginalized means obstructing those perspectives that are more likely to be well-resourced. However, members of marginalized groups may also not have reached the

privileged standpoint[6]. When they have not yet developed the necessary epistemic resources to articulate their social experiences, obstructing their perspective causes relevant epistemic harms as well. In fact, it prevents the collective critical listening and analysis that could help not only them but also those who do not directly experience that marginalization to develop these resources and achieve a less distorted understanding of their social condition[7]. This obstruction denies marginalized individuals the opportunity to share their experiences, and impedes the broader community from developing a process that fosters understanding of the reported evidence and the construction of the necessary epistemic resources to critically engage with those experiences. Because marginalized individuals occupy a socially disadvantaged position, they possess a unique advantage in understanding the social phenomena and experiences that are relevant to them, and it is through their testimony that the process of creating new epistemic resources can begin.

To sum up, disregarding the testimonies of members of marginalized groups means either (a) ignoring the perspectives of those that—similarly to experts in a specific field—have developed the necessary resources and skills to analyze certain social phenomena or experiences, or (b) dismissing the testimony of people in advantageous positions, which could serve as a starting point for the consciousness-raising process that is essential for reaching a standpoint. In both cases obstructing members of marginalized groups' testimonies leads to severe epistemic harm.

Reaching a greater awareness of the epistemic harm caused by epistemic oppression calls the attention to the importance of starting from the account of the marginalized as advocated by standpoint theory (Harding, 1991). Therefore, it also reinforces the thesis that epistemic injustice should be challenged, which in turn leads to practical and ethical benefits, alongside with epistemic ones.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider an objection to the thesis that raising awareness of the extent of epistemic harm caused by not listening to the testimonies of marginalized individuals may help counter the occurrence of epistemic injustices. The objection hits at the fact that epistemic oppression can be indeed intentional, as dominant groups tend to rely on body of knowledge that serves their own interest and confirm their epistemic perspectives. Therefore, one might question the actual efficacy of raising awareness about the epistemic harm caused by their action, if these groups are not motivated to pursue a more accurate and inclusive understanding body of knowledge. However, even if this observation merits consideration, it should also be noted that, first, epistemic oppression is not always intentional; it can also emerge from unconscious biases. In such cases, raising awareness among members of dominant groups about the resulting epistemic harm can play a crucial role in motivating them to address epistemic injustices. Second, when epistemic oppression is deliberate, awareness of the extent of the epistemic harm—both among marginalized individuals and the broader community—can help expose the deliberate ignorance at its core. Fostering awareness of epistemic harm could help build alliances between marginalized groups who, despite facing different issues, experience similar patterns of exclusion. Thus, recognizing that marginalized perspectives contribute to more accurate and comprehensive knowledge could motivate collective action towards a more inclusive epistemic framework.

As a final point, when we rely collectively on resources provided by marginalized people's experiences, two significant dangers must be carefully navigated and prevented. The first is

6 In this case maximal hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2016, p. 165) occurs.

7 Additionally, both the silencing of those who have reached a privileged standpoint and those who have not result in the epistemic harms outlined in Section 2, as well as in the ethical and practical harms discussed in the same section.

"epistemic exploitation" (Berenstain, 2016), which occurs when privileged individuals compel marginalized people to educate them about the nature of their oppression. This dynamic can place an undue burden on marginalized individuals, turning their lived experiences into a resource for others' enlightenment rather than a basis for genuine understanding. The second danger is typecasting, as discussed by Davis (2016), where marginalized individuals are assumed to possess knowledge solely on topics stereotypically associated with their social group. This assumption not only limits the perceived breadth of their expertise but also reinforces harmful stereotypes, undermining the diversity and complexity of their perspectives.

5. Conclusion

Those in marginalized positions, who lack social power, are often confined to interpretative resources shaped by the dominant class. These resources may fail to address or even acknowledge the existence of certain social phenomena that the dominant groups either overlook or deem irrelevant. This limitation arises from hermeneutical marginalization, which Fricker (2007, p.153) defines as the exclusion of marginalized groups' experiences and perspectives from the collective interpretative framework, that can also be intentional. In turn, this leads to hermeneutical injustice, where marginalized individuals lack the language to express their experiences, further exacerbating testimonial injustice, where their accounts are undervalued due to negative stereotypes. In this vicious cycle, the credibility deficit experienced by marginalized groups impedes their ability to contribute to the development of interpretative resources, leaving public discourse shaped mainly by the ones that have social power. However, marginalized communities can still develop the epistemic resources necessary to address the social phenomena and experiences that are significant to them. Access to these new epistemic resources is not, by default, denied to some groups or automatically available to others; nevertheless, social position does influence access to certain resources. While social position does not inherently lead to different understanding, it does shape knowledge by exposing individuals to specific challenges common within their social group (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 717) and, over time, repeatedly facing these challenges can sharpen one's ability to recognize certain patterns. Consequently, people in marginalized groups are often more acutely aware of the injustices they endure and the flaws in social systems that fail to serve their interests. It can be said that they are inclined to develop a "double vision" as they are not only able to interpret the world using the dominant group's hermeneutical resources, but are also more likely to create new ones that better suit their needs. Their epistemic perspective is thus more likely to be objective (Harding, 1991). In other words, while it is not automatic that the perspective of people from marginalized groups is intrinsically "privileged" in understanding social phenomena or experiences, it is more likely to be so—or at the very least, it is through their testimony and/or a deep look at their experiences that a fuller understanding can be reached also by member of dominant groups.

The value of the epistemic perspective of marginalized groups has been acutely highlighted by standpoint theory. In particular, recent contributions to the standpoint literature (Toole, 2023) distinguishing between epistemic "advantage", which members of marginalized groups have, and "privileged epistemic perspective" or "standpoint", which can be reached by all through a consciousness-raising process, have clarified the role of social position in achieving the latter. The conceptual tools offered by standpoint theory thus allow us to infer that hindering the epistemic contributions of people belonging to marginalized groups by devaluing them because of certain identity biases associated with lack of social power, means not taking into consideration those contributions that either (a) are the contributions of "experts" with regard to the interpretation of certain phenomena or experiences, or (b) can initiate the process of consciousness-raising necessary to reach an epistemic perspective

capable of pointing at certain troubling evidence and reasoning about it. It follows that the nearer one's perspective is to that of privileged standpoint, the more epistemically harmful it is not to listen to their testimony.

REFERENCES

Anderson, E. (2024). Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Fall 2024 Edition). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/feminism-epistemology/;

Berenstain, N. (2016). Epistemic exploitation. *Ergo*, 3(22), 569-590;

Catala, A. (2015). Democracy, trust, and epistemic justice. *The Monist*, 98(4), 424-440;

Crasnow, S. (2009). Is standpoint theory a resource for feminist epistemology? An introduction. *Hypatia*, 24(4), 189-192;

Crasnow, S. (2024). Feminist perspectives on science. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/feminist-science/;

Davis, E. (2016). Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons: A case for credibility excess as testimonial injustice. *Hypatia*, 31(3), 485-501;

Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia*, 26(2), 236-257;

Dotson, K. (2012). A cautionary tale: On limiting epistemic oppression. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33(1), 24-47;

Dotson, K. (2014). Conceptualizing epistemic oppression. *Social Epistemology*, 28(2), 115-138;

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk.* Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co;

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing.* Oxford University Press;

Fricker, M. (2016). Epistemic injustice and the preservation of ignorance. In R. Peels & M. Blaaum (Eds.), *The epistemic dimension of ignorance* (pp. 160-177). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Fricker, M. (2017). Evolving concepts of epistemic injustice. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus Jr. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 53-60). Abingdon, UK: Routledge;

Goetze, T. S. (2018). Hermeneutical dissent and the species of hermeneutical injustice. *Hypatia*, 33(1), 73-90;

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599;

Harding, S. (1986). *The science question in feminism*. Cornell University Press;

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press;

Harding, S. (1992 a). After the neutrality ideal: Science, politics, and "strong objectivity". *Social Research*, 59(3), 567-587;

Harding, S. (1992 b). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity"? *The Centennial Review,* 36(3), 437-470;

Longino, H. E. (1990). *Science as social knowledge: Values and objectivity in scientific inquiry*. Princeton University Press;

Lukács, G. (1971). *History and class consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics* (R. Livingstone, Trans.). London: Merlin Press. (Original work published 1923);

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2001). From economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. In V. B. Leitch (Ed.), *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1932);

Mason, R. (2011). Two kinds of unknowing. *Hypatia*, 26(2), 294-307;

Medina, J. (2013). *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and the social imagination*. Oxford University Press;
Medina, J. (2017). Varieties of hermeneutical injustice. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus Jr. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 41-52). Abingdon, UK: Routledge;
Pohlhaus Jr, G. (2012). Relational knowing and epistemic injustice: Toward a theory of willful hermeneutical ignorance. *Hypatia*, 27(4), 715-735;
Pohlhaus Jr., G. (2017). Varieties of epistemic injustice. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus Jr. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 13-26). Abingdon, UK: Routledge;
Potter, E. (2006). *Feminism and philosophy of science: An introduction*. Routledge;
Rolin, K. (2009). Standpoint theory as a methodology for the study of power relations. *Hypatia*, 24(4), 218-226;
Saint-Croix, C. (2020). Privilege and position: Formal tools for standpoint epistemology. *Res Philosophica*, 97, 489-524;
Tanesini, A. (2019). Standpoint then and now. In *The Routledge handbook of social epistemology* (pp. 335-343). Routledge;
Toole, B. (2019). From standpoint epistemology to epistemic oppression. *Hypatia*, 34(4), 598-618;
Toole, B. (2023). Standpoint epistemology and epistemic peerhood: A defense of epistemic privilege. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association,* 1-18.