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Hermeneutical Injustice: Distortion and Conceptual Aptness

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Abstract

This article develops a new approach for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice. According to a dominant view, hermeneutical injustice results from a hermeneutical *gap*: one lacks the conceptual tools needed to make sense of, or to communicate, important social experiences, where this lack is a result of an injustice in the background social methods used to determine hermeneutical resources. I argue that this approach is incomplete. It fails to capture an important species of hermeneutical injustice which doesn't result from a lack of hermeneutical resources, but from the *overabundance* of distorting and oppressive concepts which function to crowd-out, defeat, or pre-empt the application of a more accurate hermeneutical resource. I propose a broader analysis that better respects the dynamic relationship between hermeneutical resources and the social and political contexts in which they are implemented.

1. Introduction

Scholarship on epistemic injustice has highlighted the importance of hermeneutical resources in facilitating the intelligibility of socially significant experiences.¹ Notably, Miranda Fricker has defended a species of epistemic harm that she calls *hermeneutical injustice*. On her analysis, hermeneutical injustice arises when one attempts to make a socially significant experience intelligible, but can't because one lacks the required hermeneutical tools (Fricker 2007, 1). There is a gap in the inventory of hermeneutical resources that are used to render important social experiences intelligible, where this gap is the result of an injustice in the background social methods used to determine hermeneutical resources (Fricker 2006; 2007; 2016; 2017).

Despite various points of disagreement and further developments concerning Fricker's analysis, one key assumption appears to have gained widespread acceptance in the literature. This is that hermeneutical injustice requires a *lacuna* in the stock of hermeneutical resources used to interpret socially significant experiences.² The lacuna requirement imposes a necessary condition on the occurrence of a hermeneutical

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injustice. A hermeneutical resource is absent from the hermeneutical repertoire, and had the needed concept been available—had this lacuna been filled—the injustice would no longer persist.³

In what follows, I argue that a lacuna-centered approach to hermeneutical injustice is incomplete. The lacuna requirement entails an overly narrow analysis of hermeneutical injustice and, as a result, it fails to capture an important species of hermeneutical injustice that merits more careful investigation. In particular, this approach fails to recognize a species of hermeneutical injustice that doesn't result from a dearth of hermeneutical resources, but from the *overabundance* of distorting and oppressive concepts that function to crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept. Focusing on cases of hermeneutical injustice without hermeneutical lacunae helps to make salient important social dimensions of this epistemic injustice. It highlights the need for not only for novel hermeneutical resources—that is, the need to fill in hermeneutical gaps—but also the importance of acknowledging how those same resources are integrated into extant conceptual frameworks within an overarching social milieu.

In the next section, I develop the lacuna-centered approach in more detail. Following, in section III, I argue that, in addition to facilitating intelligibility, hermeneutical resources also serve crucial *productive* functions—they organize and coordinate individuals within a social milieu. In light of this, in section IV, I defend cases of hermeneutical injustice that don't arise from a conceptual lack. In section V, I develop a broader framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice and highlight its advantages. This framework recognizes two distinct species of hermeneutical injustice: what I call *positive* and *negative* hermeneutical injustice.⁴ I end by sketching an approach to hermeneutical justice that naturally flows out of this more expansive framework.

II. The Lacuna-Centered Analysis

Fricker draws our attention to the emergence of the concept *sexual harassment* in the early 1970s. She details the case of Carmita Wood, who quit her job at Cornell University's Nuclear Physics Department after experiencing persistent and unwanted sexual advances from her boss. He would “jiggle his crotch” while passing her desk and would “deliberately brush against her breasts while reaching for some papers” (Fricker 2007, 150).⁵ When applying for unemployment insurance, Wood was required to explain why she had quit, but she found herself at a loss for words. It wasn't shameless flirting or mere office humor that caused her to leave; what she experienced was flat-out sexual harassment. But, since this concept had yet to make its way into collective understanding—let alone onto unemployment insurance forms—Wood couldn't articulate her experience as such. She reported that she had quit for “personal reasons” and was subsequently denied insurance.

Fricker describes Wood's case as a paradigmatic instance of hermeneutical injustice. She says: “Here is a story about how extant collective hermeneutical resources can have a lacuna where the name of a distinctive social experience should be” (150–51). Accordingly, the hermeneutical injustice Wood faced resulted from a gap in the available stock of hermeneutical resources; there was a lacuna where the concept *sexual harassment* should have been. Moreover, this lacuna is a consequence of an injustice in the background social methods that are used to determine hermeneutical resources. In Fricker's terminology, women like Wood faced *hermeneutical marginalization*: they were not equitably included in the political and legal contexts that serve to define the conditions for unemployment.

According to this approach, the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice concerns a lack of *intelligibility* resulting from one's hermeneutical marginalization. Fricker says: "the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in his or her interests to be able to render intelligible" (162). The secondary harms of hermeneutical injustice, Fricker argues, concern the downstream negative consequences that result from this unintelligibility. In Wood's case, this includes, among other things, her being denied unemployment insurance as well as her increased levels of stress and anxiety.

The case of Carmita Wood and the emergence of the concept *sexual harassment* has now become the stock example of hermeneutical injustice in the literature, but it's important to highlight that this injustice, as it's understood on a lacuna-centered model, can be illustrated using many other examples. Consider the recent emergence of the concept *genderqueer* as a hermeneutical resource for understanding and giving recognition to the identities of nonbinary people. Robin Dembroff argues that:

without the resources for understanding nonbinary gender identities, we sustain a *conceptual lacuna* surrounding nonbinary persons. This lacuna does not only reflect a gap in philosophical understanding; it contributes to a hermeneutical injustice that arises from the failure to spread and charitably analyze the concepts and practices underlying nonbinary classifications. (Dembroff 2020, 2, italics added)

Another example is the concept of *disability pride* as it emerged in the disability rights movement in the 1960s. Elizabeth Barnes has discussed the importance of this concept in challenging dominant associations of disability with tragedy, inferiority, and shame. Barnes says: "As disabled people, we are forever being told that there is something about our bodies that is lacking, that is *less than*. Disability pride says it doesn't have to be that way. Disability pride says that we may have *minority* bodies, but we don't have—we refuse to have—tragic bodies" (Barnes 2016, 186). For disabled and nondisabled people alike, Barnes argues that the concept of *disability pride* has helped to make intelligible that disability can be the subject of genuine pride.

Recent scholarship has also highlighted significant limitations of Fricker's analysis and has further expanded upon it. Gaile Pohlhaus develops the valuable notion of *willful hermeneutical ignorance*, which occurs when dominantly situated individuals refuse to adopt the hermeneutical resources of marginalized groups (Pohlhaus 2012). Willful hermeneutical ignorance functions to maintain hermeneutical gaps at the *intercommunal* level—that is, though such resources may be utilized, even widely, among members of one's own community or social group (that is, they are *intra*communally available), lacunae nevertheless persist at the level of the dominant or collective hermeneutical repertoire, which is used to interpret and communicate one's experiences across social groups more broadly.⁶

Building upon the work of Pohlhaus and others, Kristie Dotson has developed an analysis of *contributory injustice*. This is an epistemic injustice resulting from willful hermeneutical ignorance, which occurs when dominantly situated individuals choose to employ prejudiced hermeneutical resources when they could have used more accurate resources that have *already* been developed by those in marginalized communities (Dotson 2012). Contributory injustice concerns the refusal among those in dominant positions to allow marginalized individuals to exercise their epistemic agency by

contributing to the dominant hermeneutical repertoire. As a result, hermeneutical gaps persist within the dominant (or intercommunal) hermeneutical inventory.

Relatedly, Luvell Anderson has analyzed how hermeneutical gaps may be actively cultivated through the suppression of extant hermeneutical resources. Anderson gives the example of postracial movements aimed at eradicating and “moving beyond race” (Anderson 2017). Attempts to promote color-blind politics, he argues, function to erase the concept *race* and the indispensable role it plays in understanding the experiences of people of color (145–46). Anderson thus enriches the lacuna-centered approach to hermeneutical injustice by illustrating how some lacunae are actively created by the removal of available hermeneutical resources.

A common thread that unites these otherwise distinct analyses is an adherence to a lacuna-centered framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice. Although Anderson highlights a different way for hermeneutical gaps to emerge, lacunae feature prominently in his analysis. And though Dotson and Pohlhaus articulate how needed hermeneutical resources may be available and utilized within marginalized communities, they highlight how lacunae may persist more broadly, within the stock of dominant or collective conceptual resources used to communicate across social groups. Hence, here too we find a similar background assumption, namely, the lacuna requirement.

A lacuna-centered approach has also influenced prominent conceptions of *hermeneutical justice*. Fricker discusses the overcoming of hermeneutical injustice in the case of Wendy Sanford, a woman who suffered from postnatal depression after the birth of her child in the 1960s, prior to the emergence of the concept *postnatal depression*. She describes Sanford’s experience during a consciousness-raising session:

Wendy Sanford’s moment of truth seems to be not simply a hermeneutical breakthrough for her and for the other women present, but also a moment in which some kind of *epistemic injustice is overcome*. . . . If we can substantiate this intuition, then we shall see that the area of hermeneutical gloom with which she had lived up until that life-changing forty-five minutes constituted a wrong done to her in her capacity as a knower, and was thus a specific sort of epistemic injustice—a *hermeneutical injustice*. (Fricker 2007, 149, italics added)

Influenced by a lacuna-centered model, great importance is routinely placed upon the initial naming and subsequent intelligibility that hermeneutical resources help to facilitate (cf. McKinnon 2016, 441; Davis 2018, 720). If hermeneutical injustice results from lacunae, the thought goes, then hermeneutical justice naturally calls for hermeneutical “plugs”, as it were, concepts that function to fill in the gaps.

To summarize: a lacuna-centered framework proposes that hermeneutical injustice stems from one’s inability to make a significant social experience intelligible (to oneself or to others) owing to a gap in the stock of hermeneutical resources, where this gap is a result of hermeneutical marginalization. According to this approach, hermeneutical injustice is perpetuated by the persistence and/or cultivation of hermeneutical lacunae—had such lacunae been filled (intra and intercommunally), hermeneutical injustice would be overcome.

Although a lacuna-centered framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice has been widely adopted and endorsed across much of the recent literature, I will now argue that it’s incomplete and that a more expansive framework is needed. The lacuna-centered model is overly narrow and, as a result, it fails to capture an important species of hermeneutical injustice that doesn’t arise from a hermeneutical gap.

III. The Productive Function of Hermeneutical Resources

In order to motivate a more expansive framework, and to explain a species of hermeneutical injustice without lacunae, it is important to first acknowledge the productive function and power of hermeneutical resources. This idea is prominent in the pioneering work of Patricia Hill Collins, in particular, her notion of a *controlling image* (Collins 1986; 1990).⁷ According to Collins's analysis, controlling images function to distort social reality by perpetuating oppressive stereotypes and by fueling the normalization of unjust social arrangements. Collins says, "[C]ontrolling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 1990, 76–77). Collins analyzes a number of controlling images that have been used to distort the experiences of Black women, thereby contributing to their oppression. These include concepts such as the *welfare queen*, *matriarch*, *Jezebel*, and *mammy*. Collins discusses the *mammy* controlling image as follows:

[T]he faithful, obedient domestic servant. *Created to justify* the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents *the normative yardstick* used to evaluate all Black women's behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolized the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. Even though she may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her White "family," the mammy still knows her "place" as an obedient servant. (Collins 1990, 72–73, italics added)

The controlling image of the *mammy* functions to limit Black women's participation in the hermeneutical practices of influential meaning-making by relegating them to domestic household roles.⁸ The mammy controlling image supports the construction and normalization of Black women as complacent domestic workers, and functions to place them into submissive roles with expected behaviors. Crucially, Collins argues that controlling images function as "normative yardsticks"—they help to set the terms for what counts as an appropriate allocation of praise or blame. Accordingly, Black women who transgress and seek work outside of the domestic roles associated with the mammy image are prone to be interpreted as violating the prescriptions and roles imposed upon them via this social categorization.

The productive potential of hermeneutical resources is also salient in Lynne Tirrell's work on epithets. Tirrell examines the use of "inyenzi" (cockroach) and "inzoka" (snake) by Hutu soldiers to describe Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide. She describes these epithets as exhibiting the following key features: they mark insider/outsider relations, they attribute negative properties to their target (which are presumed to be essential to them), they are embedded in social networks of subordination and oppression, they set boundaries for what constitutes permissible behavior toward the target, and they are action-engendering insofar as they facilitate and purport to justify nonlinguistic behaviors. The widespread use of these epithets, Tirrell argues, contributed greatly to the dehumanization of Tutsis and the legitimization of horrific acts of violence against them (Tirrell 2012, 192–93).⁹

Additionally, Katharine Jenkins has recently developed an analysis of *ontic injustice*, a kind of injustice that concerns a wrong done to one in virtue of being constructed as a

member of a particular social kind. Jenkins defines *ontic injustice*: “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” (Jenkins 2020, 191, italics added). The notion of *ontic injustice* helps to shed further light upon the productive function and power that conceptual resources can have. Jenkins considers the example of being socially constructed as belonging to the category *wife* in England before 1991, prior to the emergence of marital rape laws. As such, under the law, wives in England were denied full control over who had sexual access to their bodies. Jenkins argues that those who were socially constructed as belonging to the category *wife* during this time were morally wronged, given the constraints and enablements that this social categorization imposed upon them—they faced a kind of ontic injustice.

Prevailing analyses of hermeneutical injustice have understood the function and value of hermeneutical resources as primarily *interpretive*—hermeneutical resources help to facilitate the *intelligibility* of socially significant experiences. However, hermeneutical resources can do so much more than render social experiences intelligible. They often serve crucial *productive* functions as well: they organize members of society and cast them into certain roles and relations with expected behaviors. Collins’s discussion of controlling images, Tirrell’s work on epithets, and Jenkins’s discussion of ontic injustice help to reveal an overly narrow focus across much of the literature on hermeneutical injustice by highlighting the productive dimensions of conceptual resources.

In addition to intelligibility, we ought to also recognize the productive function of hermeneutical resources, namely, the significant value and potential they have in helping to support the equitable coordination and organization of members of society (cf. Haslanger 2020a, 14–15). Thus, an analysis of hermeneutical injustice must acknowledge that some concepts have serious productive power—that they can serve to sustain, normalize, and justify oppressive social practices and unjust social arrangements. Once the productive function of hermeneutical resources is salient, this opens the door to theorizing about hermeneutical injustice in a more comprehensive and more deeply social way; it draws our attention to the complex relationship between hermeneutical resources and the broader social and political environments in which they are embedded and implemented.

A lacuna-centered approach toward hermeneutical injustice fails to appreciate the potential for hermeneutical injustice to manifest not just from a dearth in conceptual resources, but also from the way in which concepts interact with one another given pervasive cultural assumptions and social conventions. In other words, it is not just that we need to fill in hermeneutical gaps, but we also need to consider how newly introduced concepts are *operationalized* and how they cohere (or fail to cohere) with other extant concepts when situated within a social milieu. Hermeneutical resources are not introduced to collective understanding in a vacuum, but against the backdrop of longstanding and often deeply rooted conceptual schemes—schemes that too often include distorting concepts and oppressive controlling images. Zooming out and taking a broader perspective on hermeneutical injustice, namely, a perspective that acknowledges the interpretive as well as the productive value of hermeneutical resources, is vital not only to understand the myriad ways in which hermeneutical injustice can manifest, but also to gain a deeper understanding of what hermeneutical justice demands.

IV. Hermeneutical Clash

Consider the following case of what we might call a *hermeneutical clash*. First, consider the concept *golden boy*. What—or who—comes to mind? Most likely the following: this person is probably white, cis, heterosexual, nondisabled, hyper-privileged, athletic, popular, educated (perhaps at an elite institution), some might describe him as “all-American,” and so on. Next, consider the concept *rapist*. This concept has been operative in collective understanding for decades. In mainstream media, rapists are typically construed as creeps, loners, strangers, deviants, monsters, or savage animals (Gray 2016; O’Hara 2012; Murphy 2017; and Schwark 2017).¹⁰

Now ask yourself: what happens when the so-called “golden boy”—in all his glory and esteem—is accused of rape? That is, what happens when we attempt to apply the concept *rapist* to someone who seamlessly fits the profile of a golden boy? This is precisely what happened in the case of Brock Turner, a former student-athlete at Stanford University who was discovered raping an unconscious woman, who we now know to be Chanel Miller, behind a dumpster.¹¹ Turner is your quintessential golden boy. This is more than apparent in his father’s letter to Judge Persky, the judge who presided over his case. In the letter, Turner’s father writes: “Brock has an inner strength and fortitude that is beyond anything I have ever seen. This was no doubt honed over the many years of competitive swimming. . . . Brock has always been an extremely dedicated person whether it was academics, sports, or developing and maintaining friendships and relationships. . . . Brock was equally talented in athletics, participating in baseball, basketball, and swimming” (Xu 2016). The majority of the letter discusses Turner’s athletic and academic achievements. But one might ask, why in the world would this ever be relevant to Turner’s acquittal? Here’s why. Turner’s father is attempting to probe a distorting image of Brock as a *golden boy*: the kind of kid who could do no wrong and, hence, who clearly couldn’t be guilty of the felony sexual assault charges against him. Furthermore, in this case the *golden boy* image is contrasted with the distorting, yet all too common, portrayal of a rapist as a creepy stranger, loner, monster, or animal.

In another letter to Judge Persky, Turner’s childhood friend, Leslie Rasmussen, writes: “Brock is *not a monster*. He’s the furthest thing from anything like that” (Paiella 2016, italics added). Judge Persky seems to have sympathized. He sentenced Turner to a meager six months in jail, out of a possible fourteen. Turner was released on probation after serving just three months.

This is not a one-off case. In 2017, a sixteen-year-old boy was charged with raping a heavily intoxicated girl who had been noticeably slurring her words. The boy had filmed himself having sex with her and afterwards sent the video to his friends along with a text that read: “When your first time having sex is rape” (Ferré-Sadurní 2019). Judge Troiano denied the prosecutor’s motion to have the boy tried as an adult. He had justified this decision by citing the fact that the boy “comes from a good family,” that he is “clearly a candidate for not just college but probably for a good college,” and that he was an Eagle Scout—the highest rank achievable in the Boy Scouts of America (Mosbergen 2019). As before, we find that the *golden boy* image directly clashes with the stereotypical image of a *rapist* as a deviant and debased monster, stranger, creep, or loner.

Kate Manne discusses the common inference pattern made in such cases:

1. Golden boys are not rapists.
2. So-and-so is a golden boy.
3. Therefore, so-and-so is not a rapist.

Similarly:

1. Rapists are monsters.
2. So-and-so is not a monster.
3. Therefore, so-and-so is not a rapist. (Manne 2017, 198)

Manne argues that exonerating narratives—such as the “golden boy” narrative—function to excessively inflate the credibility of men who commit violent, misogynistic acts against women, and thereby deflates the credibility of women who speak out against them. In cases of he said/she said testimony, there is only a fixed amount of credibility to go around, and believing *him* directly discredits *her* as either lying or confused (and vice versa) (cf. 294).¹²

In her recent memoir, Miller, the survivor from the Turner case, describes how the media commonly depicted Turner as having been “misconstrued as a criminal.” She discusses how even well after his conviction, many refused to admit the fact that Turner had sexually assaulted her. She says:

The stories about Brock running from police with a backpack full of Coors, rubbing up on girls, smoking weed, tripping on acid, photographing tits, were all absent from the image his loved ones and the media projected. *The Washington Post* called him *squeaky clean* and *baby-faced*, a rosy-cheeked cherub. The letter writers insisted *he was misconstrued as a criminal*. They called him *an innocent man, fighting for his freedom. . . . Gracious, caring, talented. Humble, responsible, trustworthy. Wouldn't hurt a fly*. Even after the conviction, they believed he remained entitled to impunity. Their support was unwavering, they refused to call it assault, only called it *the horrible mess, this unfortunate situation*. (Miller 2019, 463)¹³

The hermeneutical clash between the concept *rapist* and the concept *golden boy* is also salient in the seemingly paradoxical statements in a letter from Leslie Rasmussen, Turner's friend:

[R]ape on campuses isn't always *because people are rapists. . . .* This is completely different from a woman getting kidnapped and raped as she is walking to her car in a parking lot. That is a rapist. These are *not rapists*. These are idiot boys and girls having too much to drink and not being aware of their surroundings and having clouded judgment. (Paiella 2016, italics added)

When privileged men (typically, cis, white, heterosexual, upper-class, and so on) commit acts of violence against women, there is a persistent tendency to explain away their behavior as an aberration or deviation from one's “normal” or “true” character—Turner might have done this, but he isn't a *rapist*.¹⁴

Reflecting upon these cases helps to uncover an important, yet underexplored, species of hermeneutical injustice. The case of Carmita Wood is strikingly different from the case of Chanel Miller. In the former case, the concept *sexual harassment* was wholly absent from the collective hermeneutical repertoire—it wasn't available for use within social, political, or legal settings in general. In the latter case, the concept *rapist* was widely available and, importantly, was present within legal settings. However, there is a crucial difference between a concept being sufficiently acquired and broadly

disseminated such that it occupies a place in the collective stock of hermeneutical resources, and its actually being effectively operationalized such that it is utilized and accurately applied in high-stakes cases where it genuinely describes social reality, for example, the concept *rapist* being readily applied to actual perpetrators of rape in a legal setting, especially in the face of overwhelming evidence.

Conceptual Acquisition and Conceptual Aptness

A needed concept might exist in the hermeneutical inventory at large (as the concept *rapist* did in the previous example), but in particular social contexts, a concept's application might be severely limited. And, as a result, its productive function and power is thwarted—it is restricted in its ability to robustly latch onto the social world in a way that is conducive to stimulating social and political change. Such cases call our attention to the complex ways in which concepts are integrated into extant conceptual frameworks and the dynamic relationship between hermeneutical resources and the broader social milieu in which they are embedded.

The introduction and sheer presence of a concept within the dominant hermeneutical repertoire, and more specifically, one's being competent with some concept, is not enough to ensure that the concept will be accurately deployed in socially significant contexts. There is thus a need to sharply distinguish between the initial processing or *acquisition* conditions of a hermeneutical resource, on the one hand, and its proper *application* conditions, on the other. When a concept is initially grasped, one thereby becomes (more or less) competent with the concept. However, conceptual competence does not always, and more often does not, translate into a perfect ability to identify all instances where the concept accurately applies.

Consider the following example. One might be competent with the concept *fruit* yet fail to accurately identify an avocado as a fruit. Common associations of fruit with sweetness, and avocados with savory cooking, may hinder one's ability to properly classify an avocado as a fruit. Yet it's clear that one can still retain their conceptual competence, even to a very high degree, despite failing to accurately apply the concept in all cases. We could imagine someone saying: "*Of course* I know what fruit is. . . I just didn't know *that* was a fruit." If conceptual competence demands the ability to accurately apply a concept in each and every instance, then there would be very few concepts that one was genuinely competent with.¹⁵

Jack Balkin discusses how certain concepts, while falling short of being outright logically contradictory, can nonetheless be rendered opposites when embedded into certain social contexts; he calls such cases *nested oppositions* and gives the following examples:

If we say that red and green are opposite colors in a traffic light, we are not saying that they logically contradict each other. Rather, they are opposed with respect to the meanings these colors are given in traffic signals. The context of conventions concerning traffic signals makes them opposites. In another context, they may be seen as similar to each other. For example, red and green are both colors of the natural spectrum, or colors associated with Christmas, while lavender and brown are not. Thus red and green are seen as different in some contexts, and are seen as having similar properties in others. (Balkin 1990, 6–7)

We can apply Balkin's insights to cases of hermeneutical injustice without lacunae. For example, in a social milieu where patriarchal ideology and its attendant conventions

and social practices, along with other overlapping systems of oppression, are prevalent, the *golden boy* concept is prone to be interpreted as clashing or as in opposition to the *bad boy*, or the *scoundrel*. Furthermore, in such social settings rapists are readily characterized as creepy strangers, reclusive outsiders, deviant monsters, or savage animals. Accordingly, those who fit the profile of *golden boy* are commonly taken to be the kind of people who could do no wrong, for the very meaning—what it is to be a golden boy in this social context—precludes this. It's creepy strangers and deviant monsters who rape women; golden boys are “good guys”; they're Eagle Scouts and are awarded swimming scholarships. These two concepts—*golden boy* and *rapist*—when embedded into certain social environments, are susceptible to being construed as opposites or as clashing.

Hermeneutical Defeat and Preemption

A hermeneutical resource can be collectively available yet fail to be applied in socially significant contexts where it matters the most. Other distorting concepts may defeat or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept.¹⁶ To develop this idea further, let's return to the Turner case. Because the concept *golden boy* readily applied to Turner, it functioned for some as a strong defeater of, or may have altogether preempted, his classification as a *rapist*. This partly because the concept *golden boy* is distorting. It purports to justify and supports the legitimization of oppressive social practices, namely, practices that sustain and reinforce elite, white, male dominance by portraying such men as incapable of wrongdoing, and hence, as incapable of rape.¹⁷ Couple this with the misguided, yet all too common, depiction of rapists as strangers, creeps, savage animals, and unhinged monsters, and you get the perfect hermeneutical storm: golden boys simply couldn't be rapists. Hence, even if one were (more or less) competent with the concept *rapist*, one may still fail to identify actual rapists as such in particular instances owing to hermeneutical defeat or preemption.

Thus we need to be attentive not only to the initial conceptual dissemination and acquisition of a hermeneutical resource, but also to the broader social environments in which a concept is operationalized and implemented. We need to consider how hermeneutical resources interact with one another when embedded into certain social contexts with entrenched social conventions and background ideologies (for example, sexism, racism, classism, xenophobia, ableism, transphobia, heteronormativity, capitalism, and so on), especially when such background social environments are partly constituted and reinforced by the widespread use of oppressive distorting concepts and controlling images.

In a social context where distorting images like the *golden boy* are widespread and reinforced by dominant narratives and social scripts, it becomes increasingly hard to meaningfully apply the concept *rapist* to individuals, like Turner, who fit the mold of a golden boy. So, although the needed concept *rapist* may exist in the dominant hermeneutical inventory, it is prone to unwarranted defeat and preemption. What's more, those who attempt to apply this concept to an individual like Turner, as Miller did, are far less likely to be believed, and thus are less able to share their crucially important knowledge. This, in turn, will limit the concept's productive function and influence in society—the concept is unable to robustly latch onto the social world in a way that can stimulate and support social and political progress.

Contrary to what a lacuna-centered framework suggests, filling in hermeneutical gaps and garnering collective conceptual competence—though undeniably important

—is not enough to overcome hermeneutical injustice. Conceptual competence does not ensure the accurate application of a concept, especially in high-stakes social contexts where privileged groups stand to gain from conceptual distortion and oppressive ideological practices. The application of the needed concept may be defeated or preempted when pernicious background ideologies and social practices dictate that some other opposing and distorting concept is more applicable. Hence, even if the concept is available and widely used across social groups and communities, this is not enough to secure its accurate application, and importantly, not enough to reap the productive value of the concept in important social contexts.

Let's take stock. So far, I have outlined the productive function and power of hermeneutical resources—how they serve to organize members of society and how some distorting concepts or controlling images purport to justify and normalize unjust social arrangements. This drew our attention to an important, yet often overlooked, value of hermeneutical resources, namely, their productive value and potential to support social and political change. Thus, the value of hermeneutical resources is at least two-fold: they have *productive* as well as *interpretive* value. Recognizing this, in turn, helped to uncover a species of hermeneutical injustice that does not result from a hermeneutical lack. Reflecting upon concrete examples of hermeneutical injustice without lacunae made highlighted a critical need to consider how concepts are operationalized within a given social milieu—how they combine with other extant concepts and how they are integrated into preexisting hermeneutical frameworks. The need for this is especially pressing when extant hermeneutical frameworks contain negative controlling images and oppressive distorting concepts. Such concepts have the potential to crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate hermeneutical resource.

In the next section, I begin to develop a more expansive and more socially situated framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice. This approach aims to accommodate cases of hermeneutical injustice both with and without hermeneutical gaps.

V. A More Expansive Framework: Positive and Negative Hermeneutical Injustice

Why do the cases described thus far capture a distinct species of hermeneutical injustice? Recall that according to Fricker the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice “consists in a *situated hermeneutical inequality*: the concrete situation is such that the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in his or her interests to be able to render intelligible” (Fricker 2007, 162). We can break down Fricker's analysis more precisely as requiring the following necessary conditions. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when: (i) one's experience fails to be intelligible (either to oneself or to others), (ii) the hermeneutical tools needed to make one's experience intelligible are not collectively shared by those in the relevant social context, and (iii) this is due to a lacuna in the collective hermeneutical repertoire resulting from one's hermeneutical marginalization.

Consider the perspective of Chanel Miller, the survivor in the Turner case. Miller was clearly in a position to render her experience intelligible—she wasn't hindered in her ability to understand that she was a victim of rape. This was unmistakably and painfully obvious to her. Others, however, were reluctant, or altogether failed, to apply the concept *rapist* to Turner. This, of course, is not to say that such individuals lacked the concept *rapist*; this concept was available and intelligible to them. Instead, others failed to accurately apply this concept to Turner because he exemplified many of the

hallmarks of a golden boy. So, though others could render intelligible the fact that Miller and her defense team were accusing Turner of rape, they failed to apply the concept *rapist* to Turner because of the presence of distorting and oppressive concepts.

Let's return to the three conditions needed to establish a hermeneutical injustice on Fricker's lacuna-centered analysis. Given that the concept *rapist* was intelligible to Miller and those in the relevant social context, and moreover, given that the concept *rapist* was broadly available in the hermeneutical repertoire at large (there was no lacuna), this case does not satisfy any of the three conditions. So, according to the lacuna-centered framework, it follows that Miller isn't a victim of hermeneutical injustice. Is this the right result? I think it would be a serious mistake to draw this conclusion. Instead, cases like these highlight a need to revise and expand upon the analysis of hermeneutical injustice and the range of harms that it may give rise to.

Defenders of a lacuna-centered framework are right to note that across a range of cases, the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice concerns an inability to make an important social experience intelligible (either to oneself or to others). However, this is not the sole way in which hermeneutical injustice can manifest. The hermeneutical injustice that Miller faced didn't involve a lack of intelligibility, but instead resulted from a failure of conceptual application or conceptual aptness. Others were reluctant to apply the concept *rapist* to Turner because they didn't view this concept as fitting or appropriate for a man like him. Furthermore, this failure of application doesn't trace back to any hermeneutical gap. It's the very opposite: it was the positive presence of distorting and oppressive concepts that served to prop up Turner's innocence and to prevent the concept *rapist* from applying to him. Taken in this way, we can explain Miller as having suffered a kind of hermeneutical injustice, not because of a lack of intelligibility, but because others in her social context were unable to accurately apply the concept *rapist* to Turner owing to the presence of oppressive concepts. This, in turn, resulted in the denial of Miller's credibility and thus diminished her status as a knower—specifically as a contributor of important and socially significant knowledge—in the given social context.

Reflecting upon these features of Miller's situation suggests a more expansive framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice. This framework encompasses the explanatory successes of the lacuna-centered analysis, while also capturing an important species of hermeneutical injustice that doesn't result from lacunae. According to this broader approach, hermeneutical injustice can manifest in at least two distinct ways, what we might call *positive* hermeneutical injustice and *negative* hermeneutical injustice. Negative hermeneutical injustice is the more familiar kind of injustice that is captured by the lacuna-centered account. It's *negative* because at its core it results from a lack of hermeneutical resources. A paradigm example is the much-discussed case of Carmita Wood and the absence of the concept *sexual harassment*. In cases of negative hermeneutical injustice, the primary harm consists in an inability to render important social experiences intelligible (either to oneself or to others).¹⁸

On the other hand, *positive* hermeneutical injustice results from the presence of oppressive and distorting concepts that crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept. Positive hermeneutical injustice is the kind of injustice exhibited in Miller's case and the failure to apply the concept *rapist* to Turner, given that he fits the profile of a golden boy. Because of the hermeneutical marginalization of certain groups—specifically, the unequal authority and power concerning not just the initial creation and dissemination of conceptual resources, but also their revision, reinforcement, and overall influence and applicability in high-stakes

social contexts—oppressive concepts remain operative within one’s social milieu. In cases of positive hermeneutical injustice, the primary harm concerns a failure of conceptual aptness or applicability that results from oppressive concepts limiting or altogether blocking the accurate application of a concept. This can result in one’s diminished status as a knower in the relevant context, and more specifically, as a giver of knowledge.

It is important to emphasize the epistemic dimensions of positive hermeneutical injustice. This injustice is epistemic insofar as it involves an unwarranted infringement and limitation upon one’s capacity to contribute knowledge in a socially significant context. In Miller’s case, the presence of distorting and oppressive concepts functioned to significantly undermine her credibility with respect to a crucially important subject. Everyone could understand her accusation against Turner, but many nonetheless failed to gain knowledge as a result of her testimony. Distorting and oppressive concepts functioned as defeaters of, or altogether preempted, the uptake of her testimony and undercut her attempt to classify Turner as a rapist.

This broader framework for theorizing about hermeneutical injustice gives rise to a host of new and interesting questions concerning the relationship between hermeneutical and testimonial injustice. Fricker discusses the connection between (negative) hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice on the lacuna-centered model: “testimonial injustice becomes not simply likely but almost inescapable when the persistence of hermeneutical gaps renders certain voices less intelligible (and hence less credible) than others on certain matters, and their attempts to articulate certain meanings are systematically regarded as nonsensical (and hence incredible)” (Fricker 2007, 159; cf. also Medina 2012, 96). Relatedly, we can begin to understand how positive hermeneutical injustice impinges upon the credibility of testifiers. When speakers offer testimony that is incongruent with the oppressive concepts operative within their social milieu, their testimony is more easily prone to defeat and preemption. As a result, one’s testimony is less likely to gain uptake and to be believed.

It is also important to acknowledge a further series of secondary and more practical harms that Miller confronted as a result of positive hermeneutical injustice. We can understand the failure to apply the concept *rapist* to Turner as symptomatic of an overall failure of operationalization—a failure to effectively integrate a hermeneutical resource into a broader social milieu owing, in part, to the presence of oppressive concepts in the dominant hermeneutical repertoire. As a result, the productive function and value of this concept—its potential to support meaningful social and political change—is significantly diminished across a range of important sociopolitical contexts, as is evidenced by the lenient jail sentence given to Turner.

Introducing a concept into collective understanding facilitates intelligibility in the form of conceptual competence (that is, a lacuna no longer persists), but, as I’ve argued, this does not guarantee that the concept will actually be used and applied in important and socially significant scenarios. In particular, it does not guarantee that the needed concept is immune to unwarranted defeat or preemption by an oppressive controlling image or distorting concept that is operative in one’s social milieu. Overcoming negative forms of hermeneutical injustice—by filling in hermeneutical lacunae—does not entail that *positive* forms of hermeneutical injustice will be guarded against and rectified as well. Hermeneutical injustice isn’t overcome unless hermeneutical resources that accurately depict social reality robustly gain an influential and authoritative grip on the social world—a grip that positively influences and improves the lives of those in marginalized communities. Only then can hermeneutical resources support meaningful

change in helping to reform our social and political landscapes for the better. The sheer existence of a concept, even if it has been disseminated both intra and intercommunally, though vitally important, is not enough to ensure this.

Theorizing about hermeneutical injustice using this more expansive framework helps us to reveal significant limits of a lacuna-centered model by illustrating how hermeneutical injustice may persist well after lacunae are filled. Additionally, an expansive framework supports a characterization of hermeneutical injustice as an appropriately *social* phenomenon by highlighting the overarching social environments in which hermeneutical resources are embedded and implemented. A more expansive framework—one that recognizes both positive and negative forms of hermeneutical injustice—is more complete and possesses more explanatory depth to the extent that it acknowledges the aptness or applicability of socially significant concepts within specific social contexts, and relative to their operationalization within a given social milieu.

This expansive framework also has important connections to Pohlhaus's analysis of *willful hermeneutical ignorance*, as well as Dotson's account of *contributory injustice*. Recall that willful hermeneutical ignorance occurs when dominantly situated knowers refuse to acquire the hermeneutical tools of those from marginalized groups, and, as a result, sustain hermeneutical lacunae at the level of the dominant (or intercommunal) hermeneutical repertoire. On a more expansive approach, we can begin to describe a phenomenon adjacent to willful hermeneutical ignorance. Even after a concept is collectively available, that is, even after the dominantly situated have acquired the concepts needed to make the experiences of marginalized members of society intelligible, they may still willfully refuse to adopt the proper *application conditions* for such concepts. This will directly affect the overall productive function and value of such concepts within one's social milieu. In such cases, those in dominant positions may acknowledge, acquire, and even widely utilize a concept—yet they may refuse to apply it in particular situations because of their continued use of controlling images and oppressive distorting concepts.

In a related vein, recall Dotson's notion of *contributory injustice* that occurs when, because of willful hermeneutical ignorance, the dominantly situated refuse to adopt the hermeneutical resources of those from marginalized groups and instead use other, often prejudiced, resources instead. When this happens, the epistemic agency of marginalized individuals is frustrated and undermined; they are unable to positively contribute to the dominant hermeneutical repertoire. In light of the more expansive framework, we can begin to explain a related way in which the epistemic agency of marginalized groups may be compromised. This happens when the dominantly situated fail to properly apply and utilize a socially significant concept accurately and for its intended productive purposes. Systematic failures of conceptual application, particularly when this is the result of endorsing and maintaining the use of oppressive concepts or controlling images, can serve to undermine the epistemic agency of marginalized individuals insofar as it limits their capacity to influence how hermeneutical resources are *implemented* and *utilized* within a social milieu. When this happens, marginalized individuals are unjustly undermined in their ability to contribute hermeneutical resources with robust productive value and influence, that is, resources that are able to effectively support social and political change.

Ofentimes, when disadvantaged communities develop hermeneutical resources, they do so not only because they are valuable interpretive tools needed to understand and communicate their experiences, but also because they are vital productive resources that are needed to help improve their material circumstances. The hope is that these

resources will be accurately and effectively deployed in society to improve the lives of individuals within these communities (for example, to help survivors of sexual violence). However, if members of society continue to engage in oppressive social practices, specifically, those that make use of and reinforce the influence of oppressive controlling images and distorting concepts, then these hermeneutical contributions will be significantly diminished.

VI. Hermeneutical Justice

What might it take to overcome hermeneutical injustice? Here I will begin to sketch a path forward. A more expansive framework suggests that hermeneutical justice requires more than filling in hermeneutical lacunae. More plausibly, combating hermeneutical injustice demands collective social movements aimed at disrupting and reforming dominant conceptual frameworks and social scripts. Hence, it's not only important to develop and widely disseminate novel concepts needed to understand socially significant experiences. But equally (if not more) important is unlearning and dislodging the distorting ideological grip of controlling images and oppressive concepts that are operative within one's social milieu.

This is unlikely to be effective if done piecemeal, individual by individual, concept by concept. Instead, hermeneutical justice is more likely to be achieved with collective social action—movements that center the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals and that aim to disrupt and expose systemic patterns of oppression and exploitation.¹⁹ We can look to the gay rights movement and the fight for marriage equality in North America as an illustrative example. The concept *marriage* is now (to a great extent) routinely applied to gay couples in social and legal contexts. This movement helped to support the intelligibility of gay marriage, but additionally, it enabled gay couples to enjoy benefits and privileges afforded by legal unions (for example, health insurance benefits, immigration and residency benefits, Social Security programs, and so on). Having *marriage* readily apply to gay couples was productively powerful—it helped to improve the material conditions of many gay couples across North America.

Another example is the #BodyPositivity movement, which has gained a global online following over the past decade (Baker 2015; Crabbe 2017; Taylor 2018). The overarching mission of this movement is to combat mainstream narratives that promote unhealthy and downright unattainable standards of beauty, body image, and health, targeting primarily young women and girls. By centering bodies that are marginalized in mainstream media—disabled bodies, fat bodies, and bodies of color—and with slogans like “‘Fat’ is not a bad word” (Shackelford 2019) and artists like Cinta Tort Cartró who embraces the beauty of stretch marks by painting them vibrant colors (Park 2017), this movement aims to problematize dominant social assumptions and narratives that deem fatness and other marginalized body features to be a cause for embarrassment, shame, or inferiority.²⁰

Combating hermeneutical injustice is thus not simply a matter of filling in hermeneutical gaps. Hermeneutical justice demands something much more radical and far-reaching. More plausibly, it demands large-scale social movements aimed at dismantling oppressive ideologies and social practices. Without question, part of this will involve cultivating and propagating novel conceptual resources—for example, concepts like *genderqueer*, *disability pride*, *body positivity*, and *sexual harassment*—that is, it will require filling in hermeneutical lacunae. But, as we've seen, much more is needed beyond this to sufficiently guard against and overcome the harms of hermeneutical injustice.

So, where does this leave us? In closing, I want to emphasize what I take to be the best way forward in theorizing about hermeneutical injustice and epistemic injustice more broadly. The main thrust is this: we need to broaden our horizons and engage in a more *socially* embedded way.²¹ Contrasting cases of positive and negative hermeneutical injustice serves to illustrate how concepts don't exist and operate independently from each other, but are deeply interconnected. The productive value of hermeneutical tools is both constrained and enabled by their place alongside other concepts within an overarching social milieu. Moreover, the sheer fact that many concepts were and still are needed to make sense of the socially significant experiences of marginalized communities should be extremely suggestive of the current state of collective hermeneutical frameworks and the strong influence of unjust social practices and oppressive concepts and controlling images therein.

It is thus imperative that we pay close attention to how concepts can function to sustain and promote pernicious background ideologies and unjust social arrangements, and how this in turn can restrict the productive function and power of liberatory concepts, both old and new. The intelligibility gained from the introduction and widespread dissemination of a hermeneutical resource is undeniably important. However, this is just one dimension of hermeneutical progress that ought not distract us from others. We must also recognize the productive function and value of hermeneutical resources and how they come to be deemed applicable and utilized, or more important, *not* applicable and *not* utilized, across diverse social environments.

Successfully overcoming hermeneutical injustice likely requires full-fledged social movements—it requires organization, mobilization, and activism. It requires challenging and disrupting the status quo narrative and dislodging ingrained assumptions and ideologies that normalize and purport to justify oppressive social arrangements. Introducing into the collective hermeneutical repertoire a hermeneutical resource that is needed to understand the experiences of disadvantaged groups is clearly a move in the right direction—it is progress toward hermeneutical justice. However, if prevailing social conditions aren't conducive to the concept's gaining a meaningful grip on the world—that is, to its being broadly applied in important social contexts where it accurately describes social reality and where it stands to do productive work to help improve the material conditions of those in marginalized communities—the concept's potential to combat hermeneutical injustice will be undermined. Contrary to what a lacuna-centered analysis suggests, filling in hermeneutical gaps is not enough to ensure hermeneutical justice; it is just one part of a much broader, comprehensive, and socially embedded process.

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Notes

1 Hermeneutical resources include interpretive tools such as tropes, narratives, stories, scripts, and concepts. For simplicity, and following much of the literature, I will talk mostly in terms of conceptual resources.

2 This requirement is argued for in Fricker 2006; 2007; 2016; and 2017. Although much of Fricker’s original 2007 discussion frames hermeneutical injustice as centrally involving hermeneutical lacunae, it’s notable that she includes the example of Edmund White’s *A Boy’s Own Story* (White 1983). This is a semi-autobiographical novel that describe White’s experiences in the 1950s as a gay young man battling dominant stereotypes of homosexuality as unnatural or as a sickness. Thus, Fricker’s discussion of hermeneutical injustice is sensitive to how oppressive stereotypes—and not just conceptual gaps—can influence hermeneutical injustice, yet she remains focused largely upon lacunae throughout her discussion (see, especially, Fricker 2007, 161–62, as well as the initial definition of hermeneutical injustice given at the start of her book: “hermeneutical injustice occurs . . . when a gap in collective resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” [1]).

3 This requirement for hermeneutical injustice is adopted widely across recent literature. See, for example, Beeby 2011; Medina 2011, 2012; Dotson 2012; Dotson 2014; Anderson 2017; Goetze 2017; Medina 2017; Toole 2019; Vasilyeva and Ayala-López 2019; Beverley 2020; Dembroff 2020; Dembroff and Whitcomb forthcoming.

4 Thank you to an anonymous referee for suggesting this terminology.

5 Fricker draws from Susan Brownmiller’s memoir of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s when discussing the case of Carmita Wood (Brownmiller 1990). For other early uses of the concept *sexual harassment*, see Rowe 1974; Nemy 1975.

6 Criticisms of Fricker’s analysis of hermeneutical injustice have pointed out a failure to distinguish between *intra* and *intercommunal* dissemination of hermeneutical resources. See, for example, Mason 2011; Medina 2012; 2013. It is worth noting that even the inter/intracommunal dissemination distinction is fairly idealized. The boundaries here are likely not as crisp as this distinction might suggest. For a related discussion, also see Ashley Atkins’s distinction between resistant understanding and dominant or collective understanding (Atkins 2018).

7 In developing her analysis of controlling images, Collins cites the work of Mae King and Cheryl Gilkes (King 1973; Gilkes 1981). In discussing the work of these two scholars, Collins notes:

King suggests that stereotypes represent externally-defined, controlling images of Afro-American womanhood that have been central to the dehumanization of Black women and the exploitation of Black women’s labor. Gilkes points out that Black women’s assertiveness in resisting the multifaceted oppression they experience has been a consistent threat to the status quo. As punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of externally-defined negative images designed to control assertive Black female behavior. The value of King’s and Gilkes’ analyses lies in their emphasis on the *function of stereotypes in controlling dominated groups*. (Collins 1986, 17, italics added)

8 Note: as was mentioned previously, this does not necessarily mean that Black women are unable to develop and use hermeneutic resources *intracommunally*.

9 We can also compare similar influential rhetoric during World War II that described Jewish people as “vermin.” For example, this language is prevalent in *The Eternal Jew*, a 1940 Nazi propaganda film. For further discussions on the productive function of pernicious social concepts see, for example, Young 1990, chapter 2, on cultural imperialism, Kukla 2018 on the relationship between slurs and ideology, and Neufeld 2019 on slurs and essentialization.

10 It is also important to note that “monstrosity” and “animality” are also deeply racialized notions in a United States context, associated primarily with Black people and people of color. Consider, for example, the rhetoric surrounding the 1989 “Central Park Five” case where five Black teenagers were wrongfully accused of raping a white woman who was jogging in Central Park. These boys were described as a “wolf pack,” “animals,” “bloodthirsty,” “savages,” and “wilding” (Hinton 2019).

11 At the time of the trial, the victim’s name was kept anonymous and listed under “Emily Doe.” However, Chanel Miller has recently shared her story with the broader public in a memoir: *Know My Name* (Miller 2019).

12 Manne’s discussion of the Brock Turner case engages primarily with Fricker’s account of *testimonial* injustice, a kind of epistemic injustice wherein a testifier’s report fails to gain uptake owing to an identity prejudice that the testimonial recipient has against the testifier. It’s noteworthy that Fricker focuses primarily upon *credibility deficits* when developing her analysis of testimonial injustice (that is, giving *too little*

credit to a testifier because of an identity prejudice that one has against them) (Fricker 2007). However, recent scholarship has persuasively argued that credibility *surpluses*—giving a testifier too much credit owing to some prejudice—can also perpetuate testimonial injustice. See Medina 2012; Davis 2016; Yap 2017; and Lackey 2018; 2020 for further defenses of this point.

13 Parts of this passage are quoted and discussed in Manne 2020, 38. See Manne 2020, chapter 3, for an insightful further discussion of this case.

14 Another telling example concerns how Muslim men who commit violent acts against civilians are routinely labeled *terrorists* across United States media channels. But, when non-Muslim, white men commit nearly identical acts, their behavior is routinely attributed to nonessential features of their psychology (for example, mental illness) or exogenous features of their environment (for example, poor childhood upbringing or a bad neighborhood). White terrorists are typically interpreted as hapless victims of circumstance and as not acting in accordance with their “real” selves. Across many cases, in a North American context, being a white man can, and often does, undermine one’s classification as a terrorist—even when one has committed blatant terrorist acts. See Kunst, Myhren, and Onyeodor 2018 for further discussion. This relates to what psychologists have called the “fundamental attribution error.” For further discussion see, for example, Sarah-Jane Leslie’s work on generics and essentialization (Leslie 2017).

15 Cf. Haslanger 2020b, who draws upon Yalcin 2016, when defending the view that the content of a concept is a partition of logical space. To possess a concept, in her view, is to have a disposition that responds to that partition in certain ways. However, one’s ability to attend to the partition correctly (that is, to separate the X’s from the non-X’s) may vary depending upon a number of factors. Haslanger provides the following illustrative case:

For example, we may have the same concept of *cat*—the informational content of the concept *cat* is the same for each of us—but our possession of it occurs in somewhat different ways so that certain inferences are more direct for me than they are for you, or that I am more ready to apply the concept than you. Or it may be that because you know more about cats, you have a sensitivity to different kinds of cat, so your partition of logical space is more fine-grained. (Haslanger 2020b, 240)

This analysis helps to capture the idea that merely possessing or being competent with a concept is not, and usually isn’t, an indication that the individual can accurately apply the concept across all cases (that is, that they have a perfect ability to sort the X’s from the non-X’s).

16 Cf. Endre Begby’s analysis of *evidential preemption* in the context of testimonial exchange, especially what he calls “epistemic grooming” (Begby 2020).

17 Ishani Maitra outlines different ways in which concepts might be distorting using the concepts *statutory rape* and *sexual harassment* as case studies (Maitra 2018). I hope to remain neutral on the ways in which concepts might be distorting; I believe that the phenomena in question are diverse and complex. Offering a taxonomy of the various ways in which concepts distort social reality is beyond the scope of this article; however, Maitra’s work is helpful in outlining two potential ways this happens: through eliciting inappropriate inferences or eliciting inappropriate analogies. Also see Jenkins 2017 for a related and illuminating discussion of the relationship between rape myths and hermeneutical injustice. Jenkins considers cases where a victim of rape is unable to understand her experience *as* rape owing to operative and distorting rape myths.

18 It is important to note that in some cases of negative hermeneutical injustice, the presence of negative controlling images might very well serve to sustain and reinforce hermeneutical lacunae. In classifying this species of hermeneutical injustice as *negative*, I don’t want to in any way to rule out this possibility. Cf. Dotson’s related discussion of contributory injustice (Dotson’s 2012). These two categories—negative and positive—are somewhat idealized, and in practice the lines between them might be fuzzy and imprecise. Moreover, once we consider the broader relationship and interaction among hermeneutical resources within a social context, we might find cases that involve combinations of both positive and negative forms of hermeneutical injustice. I don’t mean to rule out this potential either. Teasing apart the details here is an important project that merits further careful investigation, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

19 Fricker acknowledges the important role of social movements and political change in challenging the conditions that give rise to hermeneutical injustice, namely, in challenging hermeneutical marginalization, but she doesn’t wholly embrace this as a necessary component of combating hermeneutical injustice itself. She says:

Shifting the unequal relations of power that create the conditions of hermeneutical injustice (namely, hermeneutical marginalization) takes more than virtuous individual conduct of any kind; *it takes group political action for social change*. The primary ethical role for the virtue of hermeneutical justice, then, remains one of mitigating the negative impact of hermeneutical injustice on the speaker. *From the point of view of social change, this may be but a drop in the ocean*; still, from the point of view of the individual hearer's virtue, not to mention the individual speaker's experience of their exchange, it is *justice enough*. (Fricker 2007 174–75, italics added)

However, once the productive function of hermeneutical resources is brought to the fore, I hope we can begin to marshal persuasive reasons that individual-level interventions focusing on intelligibility are unlikely to be “justice enough” when it comes to combating hermeneutical injustice.

20 A few major beauty brands have slowly begun to take notice and have shown some signs of change for the better, but there is without question a long way to go. See, for example, Dove's Self-Esteem Project: <https://www.dove.com/us/en/dove-self-esteem-project/our-mission.html>.

21 Elizabeth Anderson, Kristie Dotson, Sally Haslanger, and Nadya Vasilyeva and Saray Ayala-López, among others, have also emphasized the importance of thinking about whole social systems and institutional-level phenomena when theorizing about epistemic injustice (Anderson 2012; Dotson 2012; 2014; Haslanger 2016; Vasilyeva and Ayala-López 2019; Haslanger 2020a; 2020b).

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