

Epistemic Injustice, Ignorance, and Trans Experiences

Miranda Fricker and Katharine Jenkins

What is the relation between ignorance and one or another kind of epistemic injustice? First, let us set out the core concepts of epistemic injustice that we shall be using: ‘testimonial injustice’; ‘hermeneutical injustice’, and its precondition ‘hermeneutical marginalization’ (Fricker 2007). Testimonial injustice is the injustice of receiving a degree of credibility that has been reduced by some kind of prejudice. This kind of epistemic injustice consists in *an unjust deficit of credibility*. If a female politician’s policy proposal receives a reduced level of credibility from the electorate owing to gender prejudice, for instance, then she has been subject to a testimonial injustice. (Testimonial injustices need not strictly be in respect of *testimonial* speech acts, but rather any speech act whose acceptance depends on its receiving sufficient credibility; see Fricker 2007: 60.)

Hermeneutical injustice is the injustice of being frustrated in an attempt to render a significant social experience intelligible (to oneself and/or to others) where hermeneutical marginalization is a significant causal factor in that failure. Someone counts as hermeneutically marginalized insofar as they belong to a social group that under-contributes to the common pool of concepts and social meanings. And where this under-contribution results in an experience being less than fully intelligible, either to oneself or to another in a failed attempt to communicate it, a hermeneutical injustice thereby occurs. Hermeneutical injustice therefore consists in *an unjust deficit of intelligibility*. Imagine, for example, someone with a disability the experience of which is well understood by him, by his family and friends, and also by some other social groups to which he belongs (perhaps, for instance, those who have themselves had relevantly similar life experiences) but not by members of

other groups to whom he may on occasion need to communicate his distinctive experience, such as his employer or his neighbor. Such a person is frustrated in his attempts to render his experiences intelligible to those significant others owing to the requisite concepts not being sufficiently widely shared, and where a significant part of the explanation why they are not sufficiently widely shared is his hermeneutical marginalization. When this happens, his communicative frustration exemplifies hermeneutical injustice.

In the original elaboration of these concepts (Fricker 2007) testimonial injustices always have a perpetrator (a hearer, individual or collective, who makes a credibility judgment that is negatively affected by prejudice); but hermeneutical injustices do not—they are purely structural. Hermeneutical injustices are moments of unmet needs of understanding where the explanation is an underlying poverty of intelligibility for which (on Fricker's definition) no individual agent is at fault. But it is instructive to see how far testimonial injustice might be developed into a purely structural phenomenon, and conversely how far hermeneutical injustice might be augmented to become a kind of injustice that can sometimes involve individual culpability.

Taking testimonial injustice first, Elizabeth Anderson has offered the helpful distinction *within* testimonial injustice between “transactional” and “structural,” which helps us imagine cases of testimonial injustice where there is no particular perpetrator but, owing to a purely structural mechanism, some voice or voices fail to be heard, and in a context that renders their silencing unjust (Anderson 2012). Perhaps a real-life example of such a structural testimonial injustice might be the infamous all-white Oscar nominations in 2016, inasmuch as this was the direct result of the Academy's being overwhelmingly composed of white voters.

The white-majority Academy structurally silenced the voices of potential black Academy members, who can therefore be considered the subject of a structural testimonial injustice. (And, as is typical, this epistemic injustice then causes a secondary injustice: the reasonable presumption in this case being that some black actors missed out on nominations they would have received were it not for the structural epistemic injustice in the Academy.)

From the other direction, and now considering the augmentation of hermeneutical injustice, José Medina has challenged Fricker's characterization of it as "purely structural," arguing that we should see hermeneutical injustices as having *perpetrators* (at least sometimes) inasmuch as members of the epistemic community may have colluded in the structural ignorances that sustain the hermeneutical marginalization fueling the injustice (Medina 2012 and 2013). Individuals may be colluding in this way any time they fail to be sufficiently open to the unfamiliar or alien concepts being used by others, whether this is due to sheer laziness or to forms of motivated resistance—such as when a socially privileged person resists social meanings that state or imply unsettling challenges to their social standing. Both Fricker and Medina regard this as a failure of epistemic virtue (specifically the virtue of hermeneutical justice), but Medina presses the idea that such failure of virtue reveals an important sense in which hermeneutical injustices can have perpetrators, and so are not always purely structural.

Epistemic Injustice and Ignorance

Let us, then, try to explore the relation of the phenomena of epistemic injustice as described above to ignorance. It might be tempting to say that all prejudice is a kind of ignorance, but that would be a stretch. Prejudice is better conceived as a determinant of what one knows and ignores; and if we take prejudice always to involve some motivated maladjustment to the

evidence (see Fricker 2007 and 2016; Maitra 2010: 206-7), then its tendency will be to produce ignorance, for maladjustment to the evidence tends to produce epistemic error and distorted social perception. Someone who perceives social others according to an array of prejudicial stereotypes will get many things wrong, thereby ignoring at least as many potential items of knowledge. In a case of testimonial injustice the hearer whose judgment of credibility is affected by a prejudice that consists, for instance, in a jingoistic mistrust of foreigners may well fail to acquire knowledge from a foreigner-interlocutor, and that failure—that blockage in the interpersonal flow of knowledge—*preserves* ignorance. The hearer had something to learn from the speaker, but prejudice got in the way, and so the ignorance remains. Moreover, any further epistemic import that the missed item of propositional knowledge might have had, for instance its inferential, justifying or defeating significance for other beliefs in the hearer’s psychology, are blocked along with the primary content of the testimony. So the preservation of ignorance that p , where p is the propositional content of what was said, may often entail further missed epistemic opportunity to better shape or inferentially enrich one’s belief system (see Fricker 2016). We might express this by saying that testimonial injustice tends to preserve not only immediate ignorance but also inferentially ramified ignorance. Imagine, for instance, a patient who has a jingoistic mistrust of foreigners being told by his doctor of Pakistani origin that he needs to lose weight or risk cardiovascular disease. Now if the patient’s jingoistic mistrust of foreigners depresses the level of credibility given to the doctor, then the patient may not only miss out on this knowledge of the health risk he is running (already a significant epistemic loss) but moreover when he later experiences chest pain combined with shortness of breath he is likely to be in a worse position to infer that he is experiencing symptoms of cardiac arrest. This latter, life-

threatening, epistemic disadvantage is a secondary one, occurring further down the inferential chain from the original testimonial injustice.

The relationship between epistemic injustice and ignorance is not only a matter of *preservation*, however. Prejudice that blocks the flow of knowledge in the epistemic system also *produces* ignorance—not propositional ignorance this time but rather what we might usefully think of as a special sort of practical ignorance: *lack of conceptual know-how*. Some social patterns of testimonial injustice will produce similar patterns of hermeneutical marginalization. This is because a sustained susceptibility to testimonial injustice in one's attempts to put one's point across concerning social phenomena will tend to contribute to, and ultimately constitute some sphere of, hermeneutical marginalization: persistent testimonial injustice prevents the subject from achieving normal levels of participation in the generation of commonly held concepts and social meanings. Thus there is a causal and, at the limit, constitutive relation between persistent testimonial injustice and hermeneutical marginalization. If a social group is hermeneutically marginalized in this way, then their would-be contributions to the common store of social meanings (the collective hermeneutical resource) will remain private. Such local or in-group meanings might be actively corralled or kettled by resistant out-groups who are resistant to knowing; or again they may be more passively ignored by out-groups' simply not making the effort to step outside their default ways of viewing the world and their place in it. (Sometimes this will be a dereliction of epistemic and ethical duty; though it need not be. There is no standing epistemic obligation to make efforts to know how the world looks from absolutely all social points of view—an impossible task—but there *is* such an obligation to make relevant efforts to do so in relation to many social groups other than one's own.)

Where an in-group's concepts and social meanings are actively kettled by resistant out-groups, the result in the out-group is what Gaile Pohlhaus has labeled "willful ignorance," and José Medina "active ignorance" (Pohlhaus 2012; Medina 2013; see also Mason 2011, Dotson 2012, and Mills 2007 and 2015). Whether willful or inadvertent, active or passive, the upshot from the point of view of ignorance is that members of out-groups do not gain the conceptual know-how embodied in the in-group's would-be hermeneutical contributions. And, in turn, nor do they gain the social understanding those concepts would have furnished. Thus sustained testimonial injustice regarding some patch of the social world and the sphere of hermeneutical marginalization to which it leads, can *produce* a patch of ignorance—namely, an area of *practical conceptual ignorance* or lack of conceptual know-how. When this happens, members of the relevant out-groups fail to acquire a range of conceptual competences requisite for understanding a sphere of social experience had by the in-group. Furthermore, when this happens, the conditions are in place for members of the in-group to experience hermeneutical injustice as regards the intelligibility of their experiences to out-groups—the speakers who possess the requisite conceptual competencies suffer an unjust deficit of communicative intelligibility at the hands of those who lack such competencies (see Medina 2013: 108).

As an illustration, imagine once again the man who has a disability that is not properly understood by certain people to whom he needs to render it intelligible. Let's imagine he has a specific post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for which there is a specific trigger that tends to come up in his work context. If his boss is un-versed in issues of PTSD, and/or resistant to their significance for her as an employer, then our employee may suffer a hermeneutical

injustice when he requests exemption from the work-related activity that contains the trigger. Insofar as his boss continues to resist, remaining closed to the new meanings being used by the employee (notions of specific triggers, for instance), then not only does she actively facilitate the hermeneutical injustice experienced by the employee, but she herself misses out on new conceptual competences she might otherwise have gained, and so a certain lack of conceptual know-how on her part is maintained. This scenario exemplifies what Medina has termed “active ignorance” that is motivated (perhaps unconsciously) by interests, or other biases on the part of the resisting hearer (Medina 2013: ch.1). Similarly, Kristie Dotson has identified a phenomenon she names “contributory injustice,” where a hearer is willfully insensible to what a (conceptually well-resourced) speaker is attempting to get her resistant interlocutor to understand (Dotson 2012).

Such hermeneutical injustices preserve the out-group’s ignorance, just as straightforward cases of testimonial injustice do. And so we see that hermeneutical marginalization produces *practical conceptual ignorance*; and testimonial and hermeneutical injustice both preserve *propositional ignorance* on the part of the interlocutor. Despite the fact that, in general, knowledge is an enabling asset in life and ignorance a liability, in cases of epistemic injustice, where the unwholesome catalyst is either prejudice or hermeneutical marginalization, it is overwhelmingly likely that the reverse is true: in such cases it is rather the *knower* who will suffer from the effects of the various ignorances that are produced or preserved in their interlocutors. (This generalization is compatible with the point, emphasized by both Mills and Medina, that sometimes oppressed groups can successfully exploit their oppressors’ ignorance of them, turning it in strategic ways to their own advantage (Mills 2007: 18; Medina 2013: 116).)

Trans Experiences and Testimonial Injustice

We now have a characterization in place that presents us with a rough and ready causal flow chart of broadly categorized moments of epistemic injustice: (1) socially patterned testimonial injustice tends to produce (2) hermeneutical marginalization in relation to one or more areas of social experience; which in turn tends to produce (3) hermeneutical injustice in relation to the intelligibility of those areas of experience. We would like to explore and illustrate these phenomena of epistemic injustice and their relation to ignorance by reference to the current and fast-changing issue of trans experience and identity. By ‘trans’ we mean to refer, without distinction, to all people who identify as transgender, as transsexual, as trans*, or as trans (*simpliciter*). The movement for trans rights is not only a particularly pressing strand of social and legislative change, it is also one with special relevance to questions of ignorance, for there has long been (and continues to be—ourselves being no exception) widespread ignorance of trans perspectives, experiences, and the shared social meanings they call for. We believe the overcoming of ignorances that attend epistemic injustice in the manner set out above is an important part of the wider social project of overcoming ignorance in relation to trans experiences and identities. For our conception of trans experiences we shall rely almost entirely on the written testimony of people who are trans. It goes without saying that our bringing these experiences under this or that category of epistemic injustice is done tentatively, and in an exploratory spirit that welcomes multiple corrective responses on these complex and fast-evolving issues.

Trans people report experiences that are surely ones of testimonial injustice. One context in which this can occur is the clinical setting. Historically, at gender clinics in the sixties,

seventies, and eighties, trans people who presented with requests for hormones and surgery to facilitate gender transition were required to fit a very narrow set of criteria in order to access these things. Trans people were expected to have a gender presentation and a sexual orientation that were normative for their identified gender—so a trans woman, for example, would need to present a traditionally feminine appearance and to report sexual attraction to men. Trans people were also required to report a strong sense of loathing towards their bodies and to say that these experiences dated from their early childhood (Serano 2007: ch. 7; Green 2004: 46). A trans person who did not meet these criteria would often be judged not to really need to transition, and would be denied access to transition-related medical procedures. Such a person would suffer a testimonial injustice: their testimony concerning their conviction that they were trans and had a genuine need to access transition-related medical procedures was subject to an unjustified credibility deficit stemming from identity prejudice concerning trans identities. This kind of testimonial injustice was supported by the interaction of anti-trans prejudice with mental health stigma: the positioning of trans people as by definition experiencing a psychiatric disorder—‘gender identity disorder’—made them vulnerable to having their reports of their own experience dismissed on the spurious grounds that mental health problems made them unreliable or even deceptive (Serano 2007: ch. 7; Green 2004: 93). The immediate upshot as regards ignorance is that the healthcare worker learned very little of trans experience from the ‘patient,’ because the prejudicial pathologization blocked crucial aspects of the informational flow. Jamison Green relates a particularly pronounced expression of such ignorance: “As recently as 1999,” he writes, “I heard a physician declare, ‘All *my* FTMs [i.e., trans men] want tattoos,’ as if this proved ‘his’ FTMs were typical men, or that FTMs who didn’t want tattoos were somehow less authentic than ‘his’ FTMs” (2004: 46).

Moreover, trans people are also susceptible to the specifically “pre-emptive” form of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007: 130-1 and *passim*). Pre-emptive testimonial injustice is effectively an advance credibility deficit sufficient to ensure that your word is not even solicited. All too often for trans authors this kind of epistemic injustice threatens when attempts are made to address a wider audience. The media, including publishing and the film industry, has for some time seemed most willing to publish work by trans people that is autobiographical, and that focuses on the process of transition, often in a sensationalizing way (Serano 2007: 2). For example, in some cases, trans people report being invited to participate in news articles or documentaries only to be dropped when it becomes clear that they will not pander to a preconceived narrative, often one that includes normative gender presentation and detailed discussion of genital surgery (Serano 2007: 44-5). Such pre-emptive testimonial injustice functions to maintain ignorance regarding trans experiences and identities by ensuring that only a narrow subset of those experiences and identities reach a wider audience.

In some cases, an author may compromise in order to at least get some version of her message across: recognizing that the media industries simply do not want to hear about a certain range of trans life experiences, she may decide to curtail and adjust her message in order at least to succeed in conveying some approximation of what she originally intended. Such cases constitute what Dotson has identified as “testimonial smothering” (Dotson 2011)—a partial kind of silencing. Juliet Jacques, a writer and journalist, reports an experience of testimonial smothering in relation to her autobiography, *Trans: A Memoir*:

“Initially, I wanted to write a wider history of trans people in Britain, as well as short stories, but all I could get publishers to consider was a personal story” (Jacques 2015: 299).

Testimonial smothering also contributes to ignorance, because the audience receives only the compromised (and in some cases possibly even misleading) version, and so learns less than they might have done had the speaker been able to communicate in accordance with their original intentions.

Trans Experiences, Hermeneutical Marginalization, and Hermeneutical Injustice

The testimonial injustices of various kinds suffered by trans people offer a particularly stark illustration of the connection between testimonial injustice and hermeneutical marginalization. Discourses surrounding trans experiences and identities have tended to develop out of clinical settings within which trans people held the status of patients or research subjects, and cis (that is, non-trans) clinicians wielded considerable institutional power, including the power to control access to transition-related medical services. Since trans people were not able to contribute to this discourse on a footing of equality, rather than being seen as experts on their own lives their voices were effectively overridden by those of cis people with medical training but no first-hand experience of being a trans person. Not only did trans people in these contexts suffer testimonial injustice, as described above, but the pattern of silencing and dismissal has also constituted a serious case of hermeneutical marginalization.

Hermeneutical marginalization, in turn, is the key condition for hermeneutical injustice, which will occur with any failed or frustrated attempt at intelligibility that is significantly due to the marginalization. This may involve an attempt to communicate with another person, or

it may simply involve the subject's attempt to understand their own situation. In the case under consideration, the concepts and terms that arose from medicalized discourses were not shaped by trans people themselves, and so were often ill-suited to describing the experiences of trans people. Moreover, testimonial injustice in other contexts, such as the media, has hindered the development and circulation of better concepts and terms. For example, the mistaken idea that the desire for genital surgery is a necessary condition of being trans is a product of the problematic medicalized discourse just described, and is also maintained and reinforced by the mainstream media's often prurient emphasis on genital surgery in depictions of trans experiences (Serano 2007: 44-45). Hermeneutical injustice may also take more specific forms in particular contexts. For example, B Lee Aultman (2016) argues that trans people suffer hermeneutical injustice in the US legal system because their claims of discrimination are handled according to a model that takes cis people with non-normative gender expression as the paradigm, rather than engaging with trans people on their own terms.

The various ways in which hermeneutical resources can fall short of what is required to accurately describe trans experiences are illustrated in Jacques' description of the dissatisfaction she felt regarding the concepts and terms that, as a teenager, she took to be available to describe her experience of gender:

I wasn't sure if [wearing women's clothing] made me a "cross-dresser", which seemed the least loaded term, or "transvestite", or "transsexual". I didn't much like any of those labels.... The word [transvestite]... felt sexual in a seedy, lonely way – the kind of thing featured on *Suburbia Uncovered* shows on late-night television. It was not a word I wanted to apply to myself.

“Transsexual” wasn’t accurate either. You needed to be someone who’d been through some medical process to alter your body, right? I hadn’t, and didn’t plan to: *they’re not like me either*, I thought (Jacques 2015: 14).

Jacques is looking for the social meanings she needs in order to render her experience fully intelligible, both to herself and to others. There are many misfit concepts in the vicinity, but that merely exacerbates the problem. In the case of ‘transvestite,’ the word is loaded with negative connotations that do not fit with her understanding of herself, whilst in the case of ‘transsexual,’ the word implies criteria that are too narrow to include her, at least at that point in time (Jacques 2015: see also Mock 2014: chs. 6 and 8).

The primary harm of hermeneutical injustice is the intrinsic one—the unjust deficit of intelligibility. But such injustices also have practical consequence that constitute secondary harms. For example, difficulty in rendering their identities intelligible to medical practitioners has meant that trans people have found it hard to access medical care related to transition. More generally, the fact that trans people have faced an uphill struggle merely to explain how they identify and what that means has facilitated the stigmatization of trans people, resulting in worsened access to basic social goods such as employment and housing, and in their being victims of physical violence (Levitt and Ippolito 2014).

Besides these negative practical consequences of hermeneutical injustice, there can be further, and perhaps deeper, harm caused by the intrinsic injustice—identity related harm (Fricker 2007: ch. 7, esp 163-166). Trans people can all too often experience such identity-related harm, either in relation to what they socially “count” as, and/or in relation to how they

thereby come even to see themselves. Although the stigmatization of trans identities is surely diminishing in some contexts, trans people in many other contexts may still come to “count socially” as a particular “type” in a way that is objectionable. Most notably, trans people are often misgendered, being socially counted as members of the gender to which they were assigned at birth. Such misgendering can become a matter of life and death, as it did in the tragic case of Vicky Thompson, a trans woman sent to a men’s prison who killed herself in custody, just as she had publically declared she would if sent to the prison (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-34869620>). Trans people may also be interpreted through negative interpretive tropes or stereotypes, such as the “deceptive transsexual” who tries to trick people into sexual relations under false pretences, or the “pathetic transsexual,” whose gender presentation is tragi-comically unsuccessful (Bettcher 2007). In such cases they would “count” as deceptive/pathetic even if this is not how they see themselves.

Trans people may also suffer the second kind of identity-related harm, in which a person’s very sense of their own identity comes to be shaped by the negative meanings structuring the social space. Serano eloquently describes such an experience:

And maybe I was born transgender – my brain preprogrammed to see myself as female despite the male body I was given at birth – but like every child, I turned to the rest of the world to figure out who I was and what I was worth. And like a good little boy, I picked up on all of the not-so-subliminal messages that surrounded me. TV shows where Father knows best and a woman’s place is in the home; fairy tales where helpless girls await their handsome princes; cartoon supermen who always save the damsel in distress; plus schoolyard taunts like “sissy” and “fairy” and “pussy” all taught me to

see “feminine” as a synonym for “weakness.” And nobody needed to tell me that I should hate myself for wanting to be what was so obviously the lesser sex (Serano 2007: 273-274).

Serano describes this self-directed hatred in relation to gender as having a deep impact on the development of her identity, resulting in a sexual “submissive streak” which she describes as a “scar” left by an abusive culture (2007: 273-277). Serano’s experience seems to us like a clear case of the second type of identity-related harm that can result from hermeneutical injustice. Other cases that fall under this category of harm include cases where a person experiences a delay in coming to realize that they are trans, a delay which could have been avoided had relevant concepts been more readily to hand. As Green puts it, “It is so easy to dismiss what we know to be true about ourselves because the only words we have can so easily sound preposterous” (2004: 64).

It seems, then, that trans people may suffer the full range of harms associated with hermeneutical injustice: unjust intelligibility deficit (the intrinsic, primary harm), its negative practical consequences (secondary harms), and moreover those extended and specifically identity-related secondary harms concerning both social perceptions (what one “counts” as) and one’s actual self-identity. In such cases of hermeneutical injustice, ignorance is preserved not only on the part of out-groups, but in some cases on the part of the subject, too, for she is hindered in the process of gaining self-knowledge. Moreover, ignorance on the part of out-groups, in this case cis people, is a key component in the kind of negative identity prejudices that lead in turn to further cases of testimonial injustice. Thus, here we see a complex interweaving of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical marginalization and hermeneutical injustice that functions to produce and maintain ignorance with regard to trans experiences.

Combatting Epistemic Injustice by Overcoming Conceptual Practical Ignorance

These reflections on the various epistemic injustices suffered by trans people also serve to highlight some of the complexities involved in combatting epistemic injustice. We propose that part of an effort to combat epistemic injustice can usefully be conceived in terms of overcoming ignorance in conceptual know-how. We turn to Sally Haslanger's invaluable distinction between "manifest concepts" and "operative concepts" to help us substantiate this idea (Haslanger 2012). She illustrates this distinction by reference to the concept of being "tardy," or late to school. Tardiness might be officially defined by the school rules as "arriving after 8.50"; but if no one is ever marked "tardy" unless they miss the ten-minute registration period entirely, then in practice students will only count as being tardy if they arrive after 9.00. If different teachers have different practices for taking the register, with some marking a student as tardy if she is not present when her name is called and others taking a more lenient approach, then what counts as tardy will vary from classroom to classroom. The manifest concept of tardiness in this case would be the one given the by the school rules, and the practice followed by each teacher would constitute a distinct operative concept.

Remedying hermeneutical injustice often begins by developing an operative concept that is used by a particular community (an in-group, as we have been putting it) to fill the hermeneutical lacuna. This means remedying a particular kind of ignorance: practical ignorance in relation to a certain set of concepts. What must be learned or acquired is not any body of propositional knowledge in the first instance, but rather a patch of conceptual know-how. In the Carmita Wood case discussed in Fricker 2007 (ch. 7), it takes her participation in

a consciousness-raising group to generate the concept she needs to make proper sense of her experience—an experience we would now easily identify as one of sexual harassment. In the case of trans people, this might mean that a trans community adopts a practice of relating to everyone as members of their identified gender, using the word ‘woman,’ for example, to mean anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of birth-assigned gender or genital status (see, for example, Bettcher 2009). Often, then, operative concepts are more progressive than manifest concepts. Consequently, a common focus of activism is trying to encourage people to use the operative concept instead of the existing manifest concept: lobbying for laws and policies on sexual harassment to be drawn up, or for legal recognition of trans people as members of their identified genders. Insofar as the activist effort is successful, practical ignorance of how to use the operative concept will have been overcome. That concept will have started out as local to the in-group, but spread outwards to other groups, perhaps ultimately forming part of the universally shared collective hermeneutical resource, so that anyone could use the concept and expect to be understood by just about anyone else.

We should, however, be alert to the fact that where activism is successful, we may end up with a situation in which the manifest or official concept is better than the operative concept actually used by most people (Jenkins 2016). In such circumstances, what is needed is to make good the practical ignorance in the other direction by acquiring more know-how vis-à-vis our manifest concept and its cognates. It seems that we may be in such a situation in the UK at present. The Gender Recognition Act of 2004 allows for trans people to have their identified gender legally recognized without requiring them to have undergone genital surgery. However, many people wrongly understand transition as being defined by genital surgery, and will not consider trans people to be members of their identified gender unless

they have had genital surgery. This shows that although fixing manifest concepts is a crucial part of combatting hermeneutical injustice, it is not the end of the story. Besides continued work to improve manifest concepts, ongoing efforts are needed to make sure that operative concepts are brought into line with the improved manifest concepts.

Quite how we might learn a new concept and its cognates in any given case is far from straightforward. It may not be possible to simply *add* a given operative concept and make it manifest in a conceptual practice into which it does not easily fit. Sometimes we need stepping-stone concepts, which might ultimately be found seriously wanting by the community whose intelligibility they are meant to assist. Take the idea of being a “woman trapped in the body of a man”:

[This] has become so popular and widespread that it’s safe to say these days that it’s far more often parodied by cissexuals than used by transsexuals to describe their own experiences. In fact, the regularity with which cissexuals use this saying to mock trans women has always struck me as rather odd, since it was so clearly coined not to encapsulate all of the intricacies and nuances of the trans female experience, but rather as a way of dumbing down our experiences into a sound bite that cissexuals might be better able to comprehend (Serano 2007, 215; see also Bettcher 2014).

The use of this phrase to belittle trans people does not, however, indicate that it was always without value. Sometimes, as Serano suggests, a concept or interpretive trope plays a useful transitional or stepping-stone role for those outside the core community (and perhaps sometimes for those inside it too), and it can be thought of as destined to be discarded after it

has served its enabling purpose (see also Green 2004: 83). Perhaps the final point to be made here, then, is that when it comes to the social evolution of our shared hermeneutical resource (principally by way of an increasing contribution from more localized hermeneutical resources) our collective hermeneutical progress may sometimes be two steps forward, one step back; but it will be no less progress for that.

See also Testimony, trust and trustworthiness (Chapter 21); Speech and silencing (Chapter 23); Feminist philosophy of social science (Chapter 27); Through the looking glass: trans theory meets feminist philosophy (Chapter 32); Moral justification in an unjust world (Chapter 40).

References

- Anderson, Elizabeth (2012) "Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions," *Social Epistemology* 26(2): 163-173.
- Aultman, B Lee (2016) "Epistemic Injustice and the Construction of Transgender Legal Subjects," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* 15 (Summer): 11-34.
- Bettcher, Talia Mae (2007) "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion," *Hypatia* 22(3): 43-65.
- (2009) "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," in Laurie J. Shrage (ed.) "*You've Changed*": *Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 98-120.

- (2014) “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance,”
Signs 39(2): 383-406.
- Dotson, Kristie (2011) “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,”
Hypatia 26(2): 236-257.
- (2012) “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” *Frontiers* 33(1): 24-
 47.
- Fricker, Miranda (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford:
 Oxford University Press.
- (2016) “Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance,” in Martijn Blaauw and
 Rik Peels (eds.) *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, Cambridge: Cambridge
 University Press.
- Green, Jamison (2004) *Becoming a Visible Man*, Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University
 Press.
- Jacques, Juliet (2015) *Trans: A Memoir*, London: Verso.
- Jenkins, Katharine (2016) “Rape Myths and Domestic Abuse Myths as Hermeneutical
 Injustices,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*.
- Levitt, Heidi M. and Ippolito, Maria R. (2014) “Being Transgender: Navigating Minority
 Stressors and Developing Authentic Self-Presentation,” *Psychology of Women
 Quarterly* 38(2): 46-64.
- Maitra, Ishani (2010) “The Nature of Epistemic Injustice,” *Philosophical Books* 51: 195-211.
- Mason, Rebecca (2011) “Two Kinds of Unknowing,” *Hypatia* 26(2): 294-307.
- Medina, José (2012) “Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism: Social
 Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities,” *Social Epistemology* 26(2):

201-220.

----- (2013) *Epistemologies of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mills, Charles (2007) “White Ignorance,” in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 11-38.

----- (2015) “Global White Ignorance,” in Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey (eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, London/NY: Routledge, 217-227.

Mock, Janet (2014) *Redefining Realness*, New York: Atria Books.

Pohlhaus Jr., Gaile (2012) “Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance,” *Hypatia* 27(4): 715–735.

----- (2014) “Discerning the Primary Epistemic Harm in Cases of Testimonial Injustice,” *Social Epistemology* 28(2): 99–114.

Raymond, Janice (1979) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Serano, Julia (2007) *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Feminism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Further reading

Bettcher, Talia (2014) “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance,” *Signs* 39(2): 383-406, is a good entry point to philosophical work on trans experiences.

Fricker, Miranda (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, is the primary source for the notion of “epistemic injustice.”

Kidd, Ian James, Medina, Jose, and Pohlhaus Jr., Gaile (eds.) (2017) *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, Routledge, for a wide-ranging collection of new essays.

Medina, José (2013) *Epistemologies of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, develops interweaving themes of epistemic injustice, “white ignorance,” and associated epistemic vices and virtues.

Sullivan, Shannon and Tuana, Nancy (eds.) (2007) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Albany, NY: SUNY University Press, for more on the epistemology of ignorance.