

# Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice

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*Miranda Fricker maintains that testimonial injustice is a matter of credibility deficit, not excess. In this article, I argue that this restricted characterization of testimonial injustice is too narrow. I introduce a type of identity-prejudicial credibility excess that harms its targets qua knowers and transmitters of knowledge. I show how positive stereotyping and prejudicially inflated credibility assessments contribute to the continued epistemic oppression of marginalized knowers. In particular, I examine harms such as typecasting, compulsory representation, and epistemic exploitation and consider what hearers are obligated to do in response to these injustices. I argue that because epistemic harms to marginalized knowers also arise from prejudicially inflated assessments of their credibility, the virtue of testimonial justice must be revised to remedy them.*

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Prejudice can cause a hearer to inflate or deflate the amount of credibility afforded a speaker, but Miranda Fricker maintains that a special kind of injustice occurs when a hearer gives a speaker *less* credibility owing to prejudicial attributions of insincerity, irrationality, and incompetence (Fricker 2007; 2010). Fricker aptly calls this infraction “testimonial injustice” and argues that a speaker is a victim of a central case of testimonial injustice “if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer” (Fricker 2007, 28). Fricker briefly considers the relevance of credibility excess, but her account dismisses the idea that inflated credibility assessments can cause the ethical and epistemic harms characteristic of testimonial injustice. First, insofar as credibility is a good necessary for social well-being, Fricker maintains that credibility excess is generally advantageous for speakers, whereas credibility deficits are generally disadvantageous (18). Second, Fricker argues that credibility excess is not a central case of testimonial injustice in that the person who is overly esteemed with respect to some bit of knowledge is not *harmed* in her capacity as a knower. Credibility excess, says Fricker, “does not undermine, insult, or otherwise

withhold a proper respect for the speaker qua subject of knowledge” (20). For Fricker, then, testimonial injustice is a matter of deficit, not excess.

Whether credibility excess constitutes a central case of testimonial injustice depends on the answer to this question: can a speaker who is overly esteemed in her capacity as a knower be harmed qua subject and transmitter of knowledge in virtue of the inflated estimation?<sup>1</sup> In this article, I argue that the answer to this question is yes.<sup>2</sup> Fricker’s discussion of credibility excess overlooks entirely the ways in which marginalized speakers (as opposed to privileged speakers) are subjected to prejudicially inflated assessments of their credibility. I aim to rectify this omission. First, I introduce a type of identity-prejudicial credibility excess that harms marginalized individuals in their capacities as knowers and transmitters of knowledge. Next, I discuss the epistemic and practical harms associated with prejudicial credibility excess, utilizing Fricker’s framework of primary and secondary harms. Finally, I explore how the virtue of testimonial justice might be expanded to remedy these harms.

#### POSITIVE STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICIAL CREDIBILITY EXCESS

According to Fricker, central cases of testimonial injustice are motivated by prejudicial stereotypes that track subjects qua social type across a variety of social contexts. Fricker defines negative identity prejudice as:

a widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment. (Fricker 2007, 35)

Though Fricker acknowledges that prejudicial stereotypes can “come in positive or negative form,” she restricts her discussion to negative prejudice, “since [her] interest is cases of credibility deficit rather than excess” (27–28). Yet since our interest here is in cases of credibility excess, a discussion of positive stereotypes is warranted. As I will show, stereotypical associations need not be disparaging, nor credibility assessments deflated to cause genuine epistemic harm to marginalized knowers.

Positive stereotypes—sometimes known in the social-psychology literature on race and gender stereotypes as “benevolent” prejudices (Glick and Fiske 1996, 491)—are commonly perceived by dominant groups to be benign or even complimentary (Lambert et al. 1997; Mae and Carlston 2005; Kay et al. 2013). Familiar examples of so-called positive stereotypes include characterizations of Asians and Asian-Americans as exceptional mathematicians, women as nurturing and adept at household tasks, gay men as impressively fashionable, African Americans as possessing surpassing athletic and rhythmic abilities, third-world persons as “exotic” and culturally rich, persons with disabilities as inspirational, and so on. These stereotypes are considered “positive” in that they attribute traits or skills that are generally evaluated favorably by the attributer. Important to note is that positive stereotyping is primarily prescriptive (suggesting how group members *ought to act*) rather than descriptive (suggesting

how group members act) (Fiske and Stevens 1993; Heilman 2001). Thus, though prescriptive stereotyping need not be inherently disparaging, research suggests that such associations can negatively affect the attention received by members of stereotyped groups. For example, positively stereotyped individuals are often discouraged by mentors and peers from pursuing interests that diverge from group stereotypes (Czopp 2008); they may be punished more harshly than nonstereotyped individuals for not succeeding at stereotyped activities (Ho, Driscoll, and Loosbrock 1998); and their performances in stereotyped areas may be compromised due to increased anxiety about failure (Baumeister, Hamilton, and Tice 1985; Cheryan and Bodenhausen 2000). Moreover, because members of stereotyped groups are often sensitive to the erasure of their individuality, they tend to perceive persons who use positive stereotypes less favorably than those who refrain from expressing any stereotypes (Czopp 2010).

In addition to these more general disadvantages, positive prejudice generates unique epistemic harms when it influences assessments of a speaker's credibility. Consider:

DRYER SHEETS: A male shopper walks up to another shopper in a discount retailer and asks where he can find dryer sheets. "I don't know . . . I don't work here," the shopper responds. Somewhat baffled, the man replies, "I know you don't work here, but *you're a woman!*"

MATH HELP: A group of American high-school students struggle to complete a difficult algebra question during their lunch period. After several failed attempts to solve the problem among themselves, the students decide to seek outside help. The students have heard that Asian-Americans are particularly good at math, so they ask an Asian-American student seated nearby for help with the problem.

These examples illustrate what I call identity-prejudicial credibility excess. An identity-prejudicial credibility excess (hereafter, PCE) occurs when a speaker is assessed to be credible with respect to some bit of knowledge on the basis of prejudicial stereotypes associated with the speaker's social identity. Before characterizing the harm of PCE, it is helpful first to see what PCE has in common with prejudicial credibility deficit. On Fricker's account, a credibility judgment is *epistemically* flawed when the generalization on the basis of which it is formed lacks proper regard for the evidence or displays resistance to counter-evidence.<sup>3</sup> Such judgments are *ethically* flawed insofar as the underlying epistemic negligence is attributable to a bad affective investment. In cases of PCE, hearers assume that features of their target's social identity—as indicated by a target's racialized, gendered, and so on, appearance—are reliable indicators of what sort of knowledge the target possesses. Because the underlying prejudicial stereotypes are epistemically unreliable, resulting credibility assessments are often unmerited.

Moreover, PCE is motivated by an ethically flawed affective investment—namely, an inability or unwillingness to recognize the individuality (intellectual, experiential,

and so on) of members of the same social group. That is, we might say that a victim of PCE is treated as if he or she were fungible or interchangeable with others who share the same social identity. When a speaker is treated as fungible, the hearer perceives no salient differences between this speaker and another of the speaker's same "type."<sup>4</sup> The presumption that marginalized knowers possess knowledge regarding topics stereotypically associated with their social group is sometimes referred to as "typecasting syndrome" (Reyes and Halcon 1988, 304–05). Uma Narayan observes that targets of typecasting are "often expected to be virtual encyclopedias of information" (Narayan 1997, 132). Indeed, targets of PCE are perceived to be exceedingly knowledgeable—experts even. Recounting her own experience as an Indian professor in a Western academic space, she says:

I have, in my fairly short span of time as an academic, been consulted by students working on Indian novels in English, the role of women in popular Hindi films, and Goddess-worship rituals in South India, none of which remotely fall into my realm of academic expertise and about all of which I know only a little . . . . After several such episodes [of being asked about Tibetan Buddhism by white Westerners seeking spiritual enlightenment], I now have a stock answer, which is to point out that I, quite understandably, know as little about it as they probably know about Mexican Catholicism. (132–33)

As Narayan's narrative indicates, prejudicial associations may become so prevalent that they begin to define for dominant others a target's position in a given epistemic community. But unlike testimonial injustice of the sort caused by credibility deficit, PCE harms speakers via *inflated* assessments of their competence. But exactly what kind of harm is this? In what follows, I argue that such assessments interfere with the transmission of knowledge and signify a disregard for the speaker as an epistemic subject.

#### EPISTEMIC OBJECT, EPISTEMIC OTHER: THE INTRINSIC HARM OF PCE

In order to better see how PCE constitutes an epistemic injustice, let's turn to examine the primary and secondary harms associated with the vice. According to Fricker, the primary (or intrinsic) harm of epistemic injustice consists in the dehumanization that occurs when a person is wronged in her capacity as a knower (Fricker 2007, 44). Through the process of "epistemic objectification," targets are "demoted from subject to object, relegated from the role of active epistemic agent, and confined to the role of passive state of affairs from which knowledge might be gleaned" (132). In such instances, the speaker is treated as a *mere* source of information rather than as an active epistemic informant. Epistemic objectification might manifest itself in epistemic exclusion, say, through a tendency of dominant speakers not to ask members of marginalized groups for information or through other means of silencing, such as preemptively devaluing a speaker's word in a given testimonial exchange. By denying a

speaker the status of a full epistemic participant, a hearer deprives the speaker of basic respect. Given this characterization, one might object that it is incorrect to claim that targets of PCE are treated as *mere* sources of information, at least not in the sense espoused by Fricker. After all, the targets of PCE are not regarded simply as passive states of affairs or inert objects from which information might be gleaned nor are they excluded from epistemic participation. Thus, it is not clear that PCE qualifies as an epistemic injustice on Fricker's account of the intrinsic harm. But rather than discounting PCE as a genuine epistemic vice, we might consider an alternative account of the intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice.

Gaile Pohlhaus has argued that Fricker's notion of objectification misdiagnoses what is wrong with treating persons in the way we do when we assess their credibility in unjust ways (Pohlhaus 2014). Insofar as victims of testimonial injustice (as credibility deficit) are deemed insufficiently credible, they are assessed according to a set of epistemic rules and practices that we think uniquely apply to epistemic subjects. An object such as a thermometer might mislead us, but we would not, in such an instance, judge the thermometer to lack sincerity. Indeed, Pohlhaus suggests that the targets of prejudicial credibility deficit are perceived and assessed not as objects, but *as subjects*—albeit unreliable ones. Thus, it is not right to say that a victim of testimonial injustice is treated as an object in full; yet neither is it right to say of the speaker that she is a full subject, in that her capacities are shaped and co-opted to meet the needs of the dominant. Rather, the speaker assumes a sort of “truncated” or “circumscribed” subjectivity (Pohlhaus 2014, 105), what Beauvoir calls the status of the “other” (Beauvoir 1952). Pohlhaus concludes that the primary harm of testimonial injustice is not that one is relegated to the status of object, but that one is “relegated to the role of epistemic other, being treated as though the range of one's subject capacities is merely derivative” (107). Following Ann Cahill (2011), Pohlhaus describes the epistemic “derivatization” of a subject in this way:

the other's capacities as a subject are reduced to attending only to that which stems from the perpetrator's subjectivity, so that anything the victim might try to express that exceeds the range of the perpetrator's subjectivity is actively prohibited and/or left unrecognized by the perpetrator, even while he recognizes the victim as capable of having experiences, interests, and desires. (106)

So far, the account of derivatization not only captures what is wrong with credibility deficit but with prejudicial credibility excess as well; in both cases, the speaker's epistemic subjectivity is externally constricted by dominantly situated hearers and inquirers.

Perhaps, then, Pohlhaus's subject/other relation better characterizes the intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice than does Fricker's subject/object relation. Still, a closer examination of Pohlhaus's analysis reveals that her account must be revised slightly so as to fully capture the epistemic harm unique to PCE. According to Pohlhaus, what's wrong with treating a subject as an epistemic other is that she is not seen as “capable of contributing to epistemic practices uniquely, that is, from her own

distinct lived experiences ... she is not permitted to contribute in ways that extend beyond or trouble the veracity of the dominantly experienced world" (107). In other words, a marginalized speaker is likely to be discredited and/or silenced when the information she contributes "moves beyond the scope of the world experienced from dominant subject positions" (110). Yet in cases of PCE, it is only because a marginalized speaker possesses what dominant others perceive to be socially and epistemically *distinct* experiences that she is acknowledged at all.<sup>5</sup> The problem with PCE is not that one is *not* permitted to contribute in ways that are perceived to extend beyond dominant experiences; rather, the problem is that one is *only* permitted (and expected to) contribute in ways that are considered "unique" and "distinct." That is, it is not that one's epistemic capabilities are exclusively confined to what is seen as derivative of the dominant; rather, one's epistemic capabilities are exclusively confined to what the dominant perceives to be essentially *nonderivable*. Call this the harm of *compulsory representation*.

To claim that compulsory representation constitutes an epistemic harm is not to deny that many marginalized knowers do, in fact, experience the world differently from their dominant counterparts in ways that uniquely inform their epistemic lives.<sup>6</sup> Harm arises, however, when a marginalized speaker's acceptance in an epistemic community or inclusion in a testimonial exchange is conditional upon the speaker adopting a—the—voice of distinction. Thus, we might characterize the primary, or intrinsic, harm of epistemic injustice as a form of epistemic othering, through which the capacities of a speaker are prejudicially assessed in such a way that bypasses or circumscribes the speaker's subjectivity. In cases of PCE, this harm is uniquely manifested through compulsory representation, whereby a speaker's epistemic subjectivity is recognized only insofar as the speaker might provide some informational service, where the information in question is perceived by dominant hearers to be inaccessible from their own epistemic position.<sup>7</sup> In nearly all cases of PCE, the hearer or inquirer presumes some social entitlement to the information.

Compulsory representation introduces a unique form of epistemic exclusion. Although marginalized knowers are invited to participate in epistemic exchanges, the invitation is extended to the individual only insofar as the individual satisfies a certain description (woman, person of color, sexual minority, and so on). We might refer to this kind of inclusion as *de dicto* inclusion. By granting a speaker *de dicto* inclusion, hearers do not offer her full participation in the relevant epistemic community. One might say that she—the particular speaker in question—is not really invited to participate anyone who looks like her would do. She—the person—is still epistemically excluded, even as she—the woman, the person of color, the sexual minority—is asked to perform a specific act of epistemic labor. That is, she lacks *de re* epistemic inclusion. When a speaker is merely *de dicto* included, the subject is still marginalized—for the subject herself is not really included.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of "tokenism" offers a fruitful conceptual framework within which to unpack the primary harm of compulsory representation, for PCE occurs most frequently in environments where tokenism is practiced. Tokenism refers to an "intergroup context in which the boundaries between the advantaged and the

disadvantaged groups are not entirely closed, but where there are severe restrictions on access to advantaged positions on the basis of group membership” (Wright 2001, 224). The socially disadvantaged are systematically denied opportunities for advancement, but small numbers from these groups—tokens—are granted positions in spaces primarily occupied by the advantaged. Tokens represent a deviation from the norm, both numerically and prescriptively; consequently, their presence is met with behaviors that—individually or collectively, consciously or unconsciously—aim to eliminate discomfort and potential threat experienced (or anticipated) on the part of the advantaged (Kanter 1977; Yoder 1991). Psychologists have observed two different responses to the presence of tokens: first, the competence of a token is undermined to reduce competitive threat or to encourage perceptions that the token confirms negative stereotypes associated with his or her group; second, the abilities of a token are amplified or exaggerated (often in accordance with positive stereotypes) to draw attention to the token’s difference and the value of diversity he or she represents (Hirshfield and Joseph 1995; Jackson, Thoits, and Taylor 1995). Indeed, as Leonard Harris has aptly observed “anyone [who] does not fit America’s racial cultural code is usually seen as either lacking worth or representative of an exotic abnormal culture” (Harris 1995, 136). Whereas treating-as-worthless aligns with the phenomenon of credibility deficit characterized by Fricker, treating-as-exotic-representative aligns with the phenomenon of PCE I have been outlining here.

#### SECONDARY HARMS: TOKENS, SPOKESPERSONS, AND THE BURDEN OF EDUCATION

In addition to the primary harm of epistemic othering through compulsory representation, targets of PCE are vulnerable to further epistemic and practical harms. These secondary harms are not, as Fricker suggests, a “proper part” of epistemic injustice; rather, these harms are consequences of it, or, as Fricker puts it, “follow-on disadvantages” (Fricker 2007, 46). Because tokens are, by definition, the only—or one of very few—members of their social group in a given setting, tokens may be perceived to be equally (and interchangeably) suited to speak with authority on behalf of one another or “the group.” Consequently, they may be called upon to act as spokespersons for their own (and sometimes other) nonmajority constituencies. To illustrate, imagine that you are an African American, female college student. You are the only person of color in the seminar room and your class is discussing an article entitled “Black Males, Social Imagery, and the Disruption of Pathological Identities: Implications for Research and Teaching.”<sup>9</sup> It is not long before discussion lulls and the professor turns directly to you and says, “So \_\_\_\_\_, what would your experience with this be?” Upon hearing your name, you bristle. Experience with what? Does the professor think you are a black male? Or that you suffer from a pathological identity? Perhaps you didn’t even get a chance to read the article in its entirety since you were up all night studying for the biology exam you will take in your next class. At any

rate, none of that matters. You must now think quickly of something to say, as the rest of the class eagerly awaits your testimony.

The harms stemming from this practice are abundant. First, tagging marginalized individuals as spokespersons perpetuates the myth that the members of nondominant social groups share one monolithic experience. Second, targets are placed under tremendous pressure to deliver on behalf of their entire constituency. Indeed, targets may experience anxiety, embarrassment, or even anger at having their social identity made into a public spectacle. Alternatively, the target may fear public shaming or ridicule if she does not possess (and transfer) the knowledge prejudicially attributed. Although provoking such feelings in a speaker may not in itself constitute an epistemic harm, it can cause undesirable epistemic consequences. For example, increased anxiety can prevent a speaker from transmitting knowledge, either by jumbling the speaker's thoughts or by otherwise hindering her ability to speak intelligibly or with confidence. Similarly, feelings of embarrassment or anger may prompt a speaker to withhold knowledge from an inquirer, out of a sense that this person does not deserve the knowledge one might have imparted or that the person ought to be punished for his or her insensitivity. Finally, PCE can harm a subject's sense of self-worth. Targets of PCE are valued by members of dominant groups insofar as their bodies indicate evidence of diversity or because they can serve as spokespersons. These practices implicitly communicate to the subject that she herself lacks value. Someone who has internalized this message may develop a diminished sense of self-worth, causing her to react in potentially harmful ways—including (but not limited to) self-imposed silencing or distancing herself from epistemic engagements.<sup>10</sup>

In virtue of their sheer underrepresentation, marginalized individuals are at increased risk of becoming overburdened by requests to “educate” others. When extra epistemic responsibilities are routinely allocated to members of underrepresented communities, these individuals find themselves confronted with higher volumes of epistemic labor than their dominant peers. Often, this labor is not compensated (or is inadequately compensated); sometimes the labor is not even recognized *as* labor. Call this the harm of *epistemic exploitation*.<sup>11</sup> A laborer can be exploited if she gives too much and/or receives too little for her services. Moreover, one may be exploited if one consents to perform labor from a position of unequal bargaining power or under unjust conditions. For marginalized persons in dominant institutions, unjust conditions and unequal bargaining power are the rule, not the exception. Consider the following comment of an African American assistant professor at a predominantly white university:

During Martin Luther King, Jr. week, I was asked to join two other senior colleagues in a campus forum on reparations. While reparations do fall under the much broader topic of my primary research, Black Politics, it is by no means an area for which I possess expertise. However, despite advice from many colleagues to not get bogged down into (too many) service activities, I found it impossible to turn down a request made by a senior colleague (and former chair) (quoted in Stanley 2006, 719–20).



As this professor's account demonstrates, targets of PCE are often placed in a double bind. On the one hand, targets may feel motivated (or compelled) to become knowledgeable regarding topics about which they are stereotyped to be credible. On the other hand, assuming the role of representative may impose significant costs on the individual's time, energy, and ability to advance professionally in a given institution.<sup>12</sup> This catch-22 may introduce special hardships for multiple marginalized persons who may be expected to "represent" more than one constituency. These hardships threaten even when the demand for representation stems from a genuine desire to diversify a given epistemic community or to privilege nondominant ways of knowing in contexts in which these perspectives have historically been erased.

As the reader may by now be aware, it is no accident that academic settings feature prominently in my examples. Marginalized individuals are notably underrepresented in academic institutions, and within these institutions, the demand to inform or educate dominant others is particularly prevalent. Through PCE, dominant groups and institutions acknowledge the existence of marginalized individuals, even offering them "a sort of diplomat status" (Harley 2008, 23) in stereotyped niches. Indeed, representative roles are sometimes willfully undertaken—even sought out—by marginalized speakers, as these roles may introduce otherwise unavailable platforms.<sup>13</sup> But although marginalized individuals may receive a spike in credibility (and capital) within contexts in which they are stereotyped to be knowledgeable, these individuals are often considered incompetent in contexts not pertaining to their difference. Consider, for example, the situation of a Latina professor who states that she "was always singled out when we needed to present research about underserved communities or make statements about the Latino population. Otherwise, my research was ignored" (Turner 2002, 81). Thus PCE does not operate in isolation; credibility excess often operates alongside credibility deficit to define the social, epistemic, and professional realities of marginalized individuals. As one African assistant professor laments, "From the expectation that you don't have a voice, you now become a celebrity voice, a celebrity of color, to be sure, but a celebrity no less . . . your opinion is sought on all matters of difference without ever acknowledging yours" (quoted in Stanley 2006, 720). Through PCE, a speaker's testimony is purposefully isolated: targets are expected to "speak out," but they are denied the opportunity to be "spoken to" (Narayan 1997, 148). This practice does not make the testimony of underrepresented individuals less marginal, rather, marginalized voices simply become *more visible*. All too often, the visibility associated with PCE serves as a distraction from the ways in which marginalized knowers are more generally discredited in dominant institutions. Even worse, this visibility may be (mis)interpreted as a sign that the disparities between the advantaged and disadvantaged have largely disappeared.

#### THE VIRTUE OF TESTIMONIAL JUSTICE REVISITED

According to Fricker, the virtue of testimonial justice is achieved through the development of what she calls a "reflexive critical social awareness" (Fricker 2007, 91), a

sensibility through which a hearer acknowledges the impact of her own social identity in relation to a speaker's in a given exchange. The overarching aim of the virtue is to compensate for, or at least defuse, the effects of prejudice on one's perception of a speaker's credibility. Because Fricker's characterization of testimonial injustice is restricted to credibility deficit, Fricker suggests that hearers can correct for the effects of prejudice by *inflating* their judgments in a calculated manner whenever the influence of prejudice is suspected. But the practice of upward compensation will be unsuitable for reducing the harms of PCE; in fact, it may even perpetuate such harms. Perhaps this difficulty might be avoided if the virtue of testimonial justice were recast, instead, as a mean between *two* vicious extremes—one of deficiency and one of excess. That is, perhaps hearers who develop the virtue of testimonial justice must become sensitive to the fact that injustice affects marginalized speakers such that their voices are prejudicially ignored *and* prejudicially importuned. I think there is still a problem with this suggestion. Namely, it ought not to be the case that hearers thereby *deflate* the amount of credibility afforded marginalized speakers as a corrective to PCE, for downward compensation will likely render these speakers vulnerable to the harms of credibility deficit. Moreover, Fricker's powerful book provides reason to think that the harms associated with credibility deficit are, all things considered, worse than the harms of credibility excess I have outlined. This admission need not disqualify PCE as a genuine epistemic vice. Rather, such an admission simply acknowledges that two vicious extremes need not be equally objectionable.

Perhaps then, in light of this worry, we should abandon the idea that the sole (or even primary) aim of a virtue of testimonial justice is to equip individual hearers with some mechanism for shaping their cognitive apparatus to deliver perfected credibility assessments. There are good reasons to be skeptical of the virtue so characterized. First, as many in the literature have noted, we should not be overly confident in our ability to recognize when prejudice infects our credibility judgments.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, many prejudices operate in flagrant opposition to our professed beliefs (Greenwald and Krieger 2006; Jost et al. 2009). This worry is especially germane to positive stereotyping, as positive stereotypes are often mistakenly believed to be harmless and are thus much less likely to arouse suspicion (Lambert et al. 1997; Kay et al. 2013). Second, even if we can recognize and successfully remove prejudice from our judgments, it is likely that the social power associated with certain identities and not others will still affect our epistemic environments so as to disadvantage marginalized knowers. Consider, for example, stereotype-threat environments, where the mere thought of confirming a negative stereotype or not living up to a positive one produces a psychological response of fear and anxiety (Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999; Steele 2010). Stereotype-threat environments may undermine marginalized speakers and interfere with the transmission of knowledge even in the absence of any prejudiced hearer (see, for example, McKinnon 2014).

I suggest that rather than requiring hearers to attend exclusively to improving their own epistemic and ethical characters, the virtue also requires that hearers improve their epistemic environments—in which marginalized knowers are all too often either conspicuously present or (in)conspicuously absent. This shift in attention

demands that hearers and inquirers not only consider their own social identity in relation to that of their interlocutors but also consider other salient elements of the interaction. These elements may include the social identities of proximate epistemic participants and bystanders, the comparative underrepresentation of the speaker in group settings, the type of information discussed, the purpose of the testimonial exchange, the institutional hierarchies within which the interaction occurs, other exchanges alongside which *this* exchange might constitute a pattern, and so on. Dominant hearers must recognize that epistemic environments in which marginalized individuals are notably few and dispersed may constitute substandard spaces for these individuals to be heard. Sometimes, the environment may be so defective that marginalized individuals may not even want to or be able to speak.<sup>15</sup> In these cases, the virtue of testimonial justice requires changing features of the environment.

If epistemic justice is to be achieved (or even approximated), speakers and hearers must be able to “engage in inquiry together on terms of equality” (Anderson 2012, 171). Because both the marginalized and the dominant must participate in the creation of truly just epistemic spaces, unique interpersonal responsibilities emerge for both. The responsibilities of the marginalized consist in a challenging balance. Marginalized knowers must remain receptive to dominant others who *do* strive to develop testimonial justice; at the same time, they must fight to preserve their sense of self in the face of constant and painful attacks on their worth and individuality.<sup>16</sup> Among the responsibilities of the powerful is the requirement to acknowledge—and eschew—the ease with which their epistemic privilege enables them to occupy the center of an epistemic exchange. The dominant must come to know when and how to use (and relinquish) their epistemic power. In many instances, the dominant must deliberately step back so that others may step forward. (One might start by simply holding one’s tongue in situations where one’s voice has a tendency to crowd out others.) Sometimes, however, stepping back would be a misuse of one’s power, and instead one ought to use one’s power to advocate more vocally for those whose status as knowers has been distorted as a result of systematic prejudice. The duty to advocate on behalf of others, however, must not be confused with the oppressive tendency to speak for them or to determine how they should speak (see Alcoff 1991). As a matter of principle, then, the dominant ought not to presume to know in what ways marginalized individuals are best suited to contribute in an epistemic exchange.

As I have argued, the spaces in which marginalized individuals will be most able to participate as epistemic equals will be spaces in which their experiences are neither obscured nor expropriated. These are spaces in which prejudicial stereotypes—negative and positive—are explicitly displaced. Eradicating testimonial injustice will not, then, simply be a matter of individual epistemic self-improvement; nor will discreet attempts to neutralize the effects of prejudicial stereotypes on our credibility assessments be enough. Rather, testimonial justice demands that marginalized individuals self-identify in opposition to the demands of the powerful, so that such individuals (we) may determine for themselves (ourselves) their (our) position within an epistemic community. Our goal should be to uproot the existing epistemic landscape.

## OPENING OUR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is precisely because the harms of epistemic injustice are many and varied that the marginalized status of some knowers is maintained, even amidst genuine (yet perhaps misguided) efforts to eradicate epistemic inequalities. In what may strike some as a sobering proposal, Kristie Dotson suggests that responsible epistemic conduct requires acknowledging the deeply pervasive nature of epistemic injustice (Dotson 2012); one can avoid some forms of epistemic injustice—even actively combat them—and, at the same time, perpetuate others. Indeed, although total elimination of epistemic injustice may, in fact, be impossible, a more reasonable goal aims to limit its occurrence by cultivating sensitivity to its multiplicity. As Dotson argues, theorizing epistemic injustice from within a closed conceptual framework (in which a primary theoretical concern is that epistemic injustice not be too easy to commit) is antithetical to achieving this goal. A closed conceptual framework can lead us to focus too narrowly on one kind of harm and ignore others or to overlook the ways these harms work together to shape the epistemic realities of marginalized individuals. Insofar as our theoretical conceptions of epistemic injustice shape the hermeneutical resources with which our experiences are, in part, understood, due diligence is required to ensure that we do not delimit the concept too rigidly. If we are not diligent, we risk contributing to epistemic injustice by obscuring some of the ways in which marginalized individuals are undermined as knowers and transmitters of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Dotson urges us to instead adopt open conceptual structures that “signify without absolute foreclosure” (Dotson 2012, 25). It is my hope that this article articulates a way in which the conceptual framework of epistemic injustice might be further opened. Specifically, our theories must consider the role that prejudicial credibility excess plays alongside credibility deficit in sustaining the epistemic oppression of marginalized individuals.

## NOTES

This article has benefited from conversations at meetings of the Indiana Philosophical Association and the North American Society for Social Philosophy, as well as the Mid-south Philosophy Conference and the Syracuse Graduate Student Conference. I am also grateful to Allen Wood, Noralyn Masselink, and Marcia Baron for helpful feedback on earlier drafts of the article. Finally, I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for *Hypatia*, whose insightful suggestions greatly improved the manuscript.

1. Fricker considers one possible case, namely that of a member of the social elite whose intellectual capabilities are consistently praised by others (in virtue of his social status) to the point that he has become impervious to critique (Fricker 2007, 20–21). Fricker admits that the resulting malformation of the speaker’s character does, in a sense, constitute an injustice, but concludes that “while the example does indicate that some people in a consistently privileged position of social power might be subject to a variant strain of testimonial injustice: namely, testimonial injustice in its strictly cumulative form;

none-the-less it does not show that any token cases of credibility excess constitutes a testimonial injustice” (21).

2. José Medina has argued that we must reconsider the role of credibility excess in testimonial injustice (Medina 2011; 2013). In particular, he suggests we must attend to the ways that credibility excesses afforded the socially privileged indirectly and cumulatively disadvantage the socially marginalized. That is, in an epistemic context where dominant voices are systematically afforded credibility excesses, marginalized speakers are comparatively undermined. I agree with Medina that (1) our accounts of epistemic injustice are incomplete so long as they fail to acknowledge the broader context within which testimonial exchanges occur and that (2) credibility excess (and its indirect harm) warrants careful consideration. My account diverges from Medina’s in that I consider cases in which marginalized speakers are themselves the targets of prejudicial credibility excess.

3. Ishani Maitra points out that in Fricker’s “official” characterization of identity prejudice, Fricker claims that a prejudicial stereotype displays “resistance to counter-evidence”; yet elsewhere in Fricker’s book (specifically, 33), Fricker acknowledges more broadly that prejudices are maintained “without proper regard to the evidence” (Maitra 2010, 206). As Maitra argues, there are many ways a hearer’s assessment might lack proper regard for the evidence. For example, a hearer might generalize too quickly from a small sample or fail to gather counter-evidence that could be easily acquired (206). I agree with Maitra that there is no reason to disregard these forms of epistemic negligence, and so I incorporate them into my account.

4. See Nussbaum 1995, in which she characterizes “treating-as-fungible” as a form of objectification.

5. For critical discussions featuring specific examples of such epistemic inclusions, see Dotson 2008 and Tuvel 2015.

6. That epistemic position can serve as a genuine epistemic resource is a fundamental tenet of standpoint theory. See Harding 1986; Alcoff 2001; and Harding 2004.

7. Medina suggests that epistemic justice cannot occur within a given epistemic exchange when the roles of informant and inquirer are not reciprocal and potentially reversible (Medina 2013, 93).

8. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this use of the *de dicto/de re* distinction.

9. This incident was reported to me by the African American undergraduate to whom it happened. For the academic text mentioned, see Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry 2012.

10. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to these self-imposed harms.

11. Gayatri Spivak uses this term in discussing the way non-Western voices are utilized in development programs (Spivak 1999, 370).

12. See Padilla 1994; Baez 2000; Turner 2002; and Joseph and Hirshfield 2011 on how these practices affect marginalized individuals.

13. Motivations to seize such platforms might include personal gain (for example, a chance to increase one’s status), social change (for example, an opportunity to “dispel stereotypes, myths, and educate others about the value and richness of diversity” [Stanley 2006, 730]), or professional duty (for example, a desire to “show good citizenship towards the institution by serving its needs”) (Padilla 1994, 26).

14. Alcoff 2010; Langton 2010; and Anderson 2012 raise empirical questions about our ability to recognize when prejudice has infected our credibility judgments. Maitra 2010 highlights situations in which hearers may lack—because unavailable—the appropriate cues to distinguish between contexts in which the application of a stereotype is harmful or benign.

15. See Dotson 2011 for an account of testimonial silencing and testimonial smothering. See also Hornsby and Langton 1998.

16. Fricker suggests that the marginalized can resist the harmful effects of testimonial injustice on their own character by cultivating the virtues of intellectual and epistemic “courage,” or a confidence in one’s own abilities and ideas (Fricker 2007, 49). See Narayan 1988 on the extensive epistemic challenges confronting those who must frequently interact with the dominant from marginalized positions.

17. Dotson calls this “contributory injustice.”

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