

# Non-Ideal Epistemology in a Social World

by

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For my parents, who supported me at every step; and my brothers,  
who I still hope to be like when I grow up.

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On a different note. As we know them, there are nine Muses in Greek mythology. They guide and guard the creation of comedy and tragedy, dance and song, history and astronomy, and not one, not two, but *three* distinct forms of poetry. However, stretching back to the first century BCE, there is some debate about their number. Before Hesiod and Homer — *poets*, conveniently enough — declared a tripling proliferation among them, I'm told that the Muses numbered only three in some traditions. But no three entities, be they goddess, nymph, woman, whathaveyou, are enough to contain the vicissitudes and eccentricities and of creative work. In their wisdom and, no doubt, torment, these poets un-

derstood that each creative form requires of its supplicants particular attentions and devotions. Since there were no dissertations in their time, no conference papers, and no graduate seminars, I take the absence of such Muses to be a simple omission. Having had no opportunity to make their acquaintance, how could Homer have known them, much less named them? So, I want to acknowledge these under-appreciated Muses, whose favorite devotions seem to be daily writing sessions, careful planning, and joy taken in the creative success, however large or small, of one's friends. Since I cannot know their names, however, I address my gratitude in this matter to my friends Robin Dembroff, Zoë Johnson King, and Elise Woodard, whose persistent belief in the power of steady routine over deadline-inspired binge-writing has surely brought me into the good graces of these unnamed Muses. At the very least, their examples, encouragement, and kindness have helped me become a better writer, a better philosopher, and a better human.

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it's been difficult. On the assumption that you made seven cups of coffee for me per week (which seems low) and three cups of tea, that works out to something like 4,000 fluid ounces of support. But, that's not quite accurate. For one thing, it doesn't factor in the times you left the coffee set up for me in the morning after leaving early for work. It also misses the comforting hot chocolate, the strange and delightful shrub-based concoctions, and the well-timed whiskey. It's also insufficiently differentiated. For example, the support value (S-value) of the coffee with which you'd bribe me out of bed in the morning obviously dwarfs that of the third coffee of the day. And the coffee that miraculously arrived just as I was sure I couldn't possibly read another page *clearly* has an S-value that's off the charts. So does the warm encouragement that came with it. To make matters worse, the 4,000 fluid ounces don't account for foodstuffs at all! While I think I can estimate the number of meals we made together and the total tonnage of terrible Chinese food we ordered, I don't know where to begin with relative S-values for these things. Even if I could settle on the S-values (and then do the requisite conversions), none of this even begins to address the hours you spent planning our time away from work, your reassurance that it really is okay to do something other than write for a day, or your unquestioning certainty in the value of my work. I can count up the hours we spent on road trips, at drag shows, and in aquariums... But I just don't know how to convert all of these units into kindness and care and love. So, in lieu of all that: thank you for love and support beyond measure.

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## ABSTRACT

Idealization is a necessity. Stripping away levels of complexity makes questions tractable, focuses our attention, and lets us develop comprehensible, testable models. Applying such models, however, requires care and attention to how the idealizations incorporated into their development affect their predictions. In epistemology, we tend to focus on idealizations concerning individual agents' capacities, such as memory, mathematical ability, and so on, when addressing this concern. By contrast, this dissertation focuses on social idealizations, particularly those pertaining to salient social categories like race, sex, and gender.

In Chapter II, *Privilege and Superiority*, we begin with standpoint epistemology, one of the earliest efforts to grapple with the ways that social structures affect our epistemic lives. I argue that, if we interpret standpoint epistemologists' claims as hypotheses about the ways that our social positions affect access to evidence, we can fruitfully employ recent developments in evidence logic to study the consequences. I lay the groundwork for this project, developing a model based on neighborhood semantics for modal logic. Adapting this framework to standpoint epistemology helps to clarify the meaning of terms like "epistemic privilege" and "superior knowledge" and to elucidate the differences between various accounts of standpoint epistemology. I also address

a longstanding criticism of these views: *Longino's* (1990) bias paradox, which suggests that there is no objective position from which to judge the goodness of a particular standpoint.

Chapter III, *Evidence in a Non-Ideal World*, turns to the broader social context, looking at how ideology affects the availability of evidence. Throughout the chapter, I take the formation, justification, and maintenance of racist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive beliefs as a central case. I argue that these beliefs are, at least sometimes, formed as a result of evidential distortion, a structural feature of our epistemic contexts that skews readily available evidence in favor of dominant ideologies. Because they are formed this way, such beliefs will appear justified on prominent accounts of justification, both internalist and externalist. As a result, epistemic norms that fail to account for such non-ideal conditions will deliver verdicts that are not only counter-intuitive, but also morally unpalatable. This, I argue, reveals a kind of structural epistemic injustice, especially where oppressive ideology is involved and suggests the need for epistemic norms that are sensitive to agents' social contexts.

Much of the discussion in Chapters II and III depends on social categories like race and gender, arguing that they have a distinctive influence on our epistemic lives. In Chapter IV, *I Know You Are, But What Am I?*, my co-author and I focus on social categories themselves, distinguishing between *self-identity*, *social identity*, and *social role*.<sup>1</sup> We self-identify as gay or straight, men or women, couch-potatoes or gym rats. Sometimes, these identities affect our social roles — the way we are perceived and treated by others — and sometimes they do not. This relationship be-

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<sup>1</sup>Co-authored with Dr. Robin Dembroff.

tween our internal identities and our preferred public perceptions begs for explanation. On our account, this relationship is captured by what we refer to as ‘social identity’ — roughly, internal identities made available to others. We argue that this account of social identity plays an illuminating role in structural explanation of discrimination and individual behavior, dissolves puzzles surrounding the phenomenon of ‘passing’, and explains certain moral and political obligations toward individuals.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Idealization is a necessity. Stripping away levels of complexity makes questions tractable, focuses our attention, and lets us develop comprehensible, testable models. Applying such models, however, requires care and attention to how the idealizations incorporated into their development affect their predictions. In epistemology, we tend to focus on idealizations concerning individual agents' capacities, such as memory, mathematical ability, and so on, when addressing this concern. By contrast, this dissertation focuses on the effect of social idealizations, particularly those pertaining to salient social categories like race, sex, and gender.

**Chapter II. Privilege and Superiority** We begin with standpoint epistemology, one of the earliest efforts to grapple with the ways that social structures affect our epistemic lives. Standpoint epistemology is a cornerstone of feminist philosophy. Proponents of this view argue that (1) inhabiting a social position provides one with a distinct epistemic standpoint, (2) in virtue of occupying that standpoint, an individual has epis-



temic privilege with respect to certain relevant propositions (eg: only women can know what it's like to be a woman), and (3) because of that epistemic privilege, individuals occupying those standpoints are likely to have superior knowledge about topics relevant to their standpoint (eg: individuals occupying oppressed or marginalized standpoints have superior knowledge about oppression and how it works in society). These ideas are an essential starting point for both epistemic and moral defenses of inclusivity, explanations of testimonial injustice, and so on. Surprisingly, however, relatively little work has been done on the *logic* of standpoint epistemology. In part, this is because defenses of standpoint epistemology have often been so deeply entrenched in their political aims that conventional epistemology has struggled to see what else standpoint theorists' observations can offer.

Chapter II argues that, if we interpret standpoint epistemologists' claims as hypotheses about the ways that our social positions affect our access to evidence, we can fruitfully employ recent developments in evidence logic to study the consequences. I then lay the groundwork for this project, developing a model based on neighborhood semantics for modal logic. Recently, *van Benthem and Pacuit* (2011b) have demonstrated that neighborhood semantics provides a way to capture the richness of individual agents' evidence, especially where that evidence arises from different sources and, as a result, supports different conclusions.

Adapting this framework to standpoint epistemology helps to demonstrate the broader significance of the view, clarify the meaning of terms like "epistemic privilege" and "superior knowledge" and to elucidate the differences between various accounts of standpoint epistemology, in

particular those offered by *Collins* (2002) and *Hartsock* (1983b). I also address a longstanding criticism of these views: *Longino's* (1990) bias paradox, which suggests that there is no objective epistemic position from which to judge the quality of privilege or superiority of a particular standpoint.

**Chapter III. Evidence in a Non-Ideal World** Where Chapter II focuses on the view from the margins, Chapter III turns to the broader social context, looking at how ideology affects the availability of evidence. I take the formation, justification, and maintenance of racist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive beliefs as a central case throughout the chapter. I argue that these beliefs are, at least sometimes, formed as a result of evidential distortion, a structural feature of our epistemic contexts that skews readily available evidence in favor of dominant ideologies. Because they are formed this way, such beliefs will appear justified on prominent accounts of justification, both internalist and externalist. As a result, epistemic norms that fail to account for such non-ideal conditions will deliver verdicts that are not only counter-intuitive, but also morally unpalatable. This, I argue, reveals a kind of structural epistemic injustice, especially where oppressive ideology is involved and suggests the need for epistemic norms that are sensitive to agents' social contexts.

**Chapter IV. I Know You Are, But What Am I?**<sup>1</sup> Much of the discussion in Chapters II and III depends on social categories like race and gender, arguing that they have a distinctive influence on our epistemic

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<sup>1</sup>Co-authored with Dr. Robin Dembroff.

lives. In Chapter IV, my co-author and I focus on social categories themselves, distinguishing between *self-identity*, *social identity*, and *social role*. We self-identify as gay or straight, men or women, couch-potatoes or gym rats. Sometimes, these identities affect our social roles — the way we are perceived and treated by others — and sometimes they fail to do so. This relationship between our internal identities and our preferred public perceptions begs for explanation. On our account, this relationship is captured by what we refer to as ‘social identity’ — roughly, internal identities made available to others. We argue that this account of social identity plays an illuminating role in structural explanation of discrimination and individual behavior, dissolves puzzles surrounding the phenomenon of ‘passing’, and explains certain moral and political obligations toward individuals.

## CHAPTER II

# Privilege and Superiority: Formal Tools for Standpoint Epistemology

How does being a woman affect one's epistemic life? What about being black? Or queer? Standpoint theorists argue that such social positions can give rise to a form of epistemic privilege. Through that privilege, those who occupy standpoints gain access to evidence, group knowledge, *sui generis* ways of knowing, or some other distinctive epistemic good. Whatever form this privilege takes, the resulting epistemic superiority has far-reaching implications for our epistemic communities, especially where their inquiries concern the social groups associated with standpoints. In particular, standpoint theorists argue, we have an obligation — epistemic, moral, or both — to include occupants of these standpoints in such inquiries.

“Privilege” and “superiority” are murky concepts, however. Critics of standpoint theory argue that they are offered without a clear explanation of how standpoints confer their benefits, what those benefits are, or why social positions are particularly apt to produce them. The view, ar-

gue *Longino* (1993) and *Hekman* (1997), risks conflating justice with truth or indulging in relativism. Others worry that the view is trivial, merely overstating the observation that what we know is shaped by the lives we live. Either way, these concepts are left in need of clarification. Absent such clarification, the central questions of standpoint epistemology are difficult to formulate precisely, much less answer. As a result, standpoint theory has had little uptake in conventional epistemology.

But this need not be so. This goal of this paper is to articulate and defend a version of standpoint epistemology that avoids these criticisms, coheres with conventional epistemology, and supports the normative goals of its feminist forerunners. In the first part of the paper, I draw on the work of *Collins* (2002) and *Harding* (1992), arguing that we ought to characterize the privilege gained by occupying a standpoint in terms of expert evidential support relations rather than knowledge. As I'll show, we can account for the force of standpoint theorists' normative conclusions in purely epistemic terms on this view, thereby evading conventional epistemology's discomfort with assigning normative significance to political, moral, and other non-epistemic forms of value.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this shift in focus to expert evidential support relations opens the door to modeling techniques that track the influence of standpoints (and standpoint-based testimony) on an agent's beliefs. The second half of this paper develops such a model and demonstrates how it can be used

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that such political and moral justifications are any less compelling. Rather, the goal is to provide an adequate, purely epistemic basis for the normative force of standpoint epistemology's central normative observations and render important aspects of the notion of a standpoint tractable within a conventional framework. Happily, this is a case in which our epistemic, moral, and political obligations go hand-in-hand.

to precisify and begin exploring some of standpoint epistemology's core questions: What does occupying a standpoint involve? How does it affect an agent's other doxastic states? How should non-occupants interact with standpoints?

We'll proceed as follows. §2.1 takes a closer look at standpoint epistemology and its critics. Standpoint epistemology has a rich history full of many different approaches, so the goal of this section is to narrow our sights, clarifying the assumptions we'll adopt and focusing our attention on a particular subset of standpoint epistemologies. §2.2 explains the goal of inclusivity and introduces a worry about whether standpoint epistemology can support a convincingly feminist version of that goal. As we'll see, this seems to depend, at least in part, on the kind of privilege with which standpoints supply their occupants. We turn to the task of characterizing that privilege in §2.3, where I argue that expert evidential support relations are a natural, plausible candidate. Building on this account, §2.4 develops our model, drawing on *van Benthem and Pacuit's* (2011b) dynamic logic for evidence-based belief. §2.5 and §2.6 focus agents' interactions with standpoints, demonstrating how we can apply this model to the questions of what it means to *occupy* a standpoint and how non-occupants ought to interact with occupants' testimony, respectively. Finally, §2.7 returns to the political and empirical claims that ground standpoint theory in actual social hierarchies, illustrating their circumstantial role in deriving the content of the epistemic norms this account delivers.

## 2.1 Standpoint Epistemology

Standpoint epistemology begins from the observation that our social situations shape our interactions with evidence, belief, and knowledge. To an extent, this idea is uncontroversial. An auto mechanic, for example, may take the evidence gained from listening to an engine to support very different conclusions from those at which someone without the same training and experience would arrive. An oncologist will take their observation of a CAT scan to support different conclusions than you or I might gather from the same observation. And, given that their training and experience make both experts more likely to be right, these facts have clear normative implications: if you want to know more about that lump or that strange rattling, you should talk to a professional. Or, more generally, good epistemic agents should defer to experts.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only auto mechanics, oncologists, and other obvious experts to whom we owe epistemic deference, however. Standpoint theorists argue that occupants of social positions like gender, race, and other socially salient categories can — under certain circumstances — demand a similar kind of recognition. We owe deference to those who occupy the standpoint of women on matters with for which occupying that standpoint makes them more likely to be right, such as how sexism manifests in the workplace and whether certain behaviors are threatening or offensive to women.

Being an expert and occupying a standpoint are also similar in that inhabiting the social position associated with them — being employed

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<sup>2</sup>cf. *Lewis* (1981); *Pettigrew and Titelbaum* (2014)

as an oncologist, being a woman — is not a sufficient condition for either status. The former requires education and training, while the latter, standpoint theorists argue, requires attending to the prevailing, hierarchical social conditions. While some early variants of standpoint epistemology, such as *Rose* (1983), appear to advocate automatic privilege in virtue of social location, we will adopt the more robust, more common approach taken by *Collins* (2002), *Harding* (1992), *Smith* (1997) and others, which requires that standpoints be achieved rather than given.<sup>3</sup> A key advantage of this kind of view is that it suggests a distinctive kind of content for the epistemic privilege conferred by occupying a standpoint and, in doing so, grounds our analogy with expertise. According to *Wylie* (2013), achieved standpoints “put the critically conscious knower in a position to grasp the effects of power relations on their own understanding and that of others,” (p. 5). As we’ll see, this kind of restriction is essential to the goal of providing epistemically-motivated inclusivity norms. Without it, the vast variation among those within particular social groups — think Janet Mock and Ann Coulter — makes it difficult to see what kind of unified epistemic incentive could possibly justify group-specific inclusivity norms.

For this reason, it will be useful to make explicit the distinction between *inhabiting a social position* (or *location, role, group, etc.*) and *occupying the standpoint* associated with such a position. The former merely describes the social situation of the agent, whereas the latter involves (at

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<sup>3</sup> *Wylie* (2013) points out that both *Harding* (1992) and *Smith* (1997) explicitly reject characterizations of their early work on which standpoints are reduced to social location.



least) a claim about her attitudes toward that social situation.<sup>4</sup>

This notion — that social categories can generate standpoints that provide their occupants with legitimate, distinctive epistemic goods — is one of three key claims to which standpoint theorists generally adhere. The second is that the social hierarchies in which these categories are embedded incentivize dominant groups to devalue or ignore testimony arising from subordinate standpoints.<sup>5</sup> Whether through outright prejudice, motivated reasoning, or some other epistemic shortcoming, dominant social positions (and the standpoints associated with them) come with negative evaluations of the epistemic products of subordinate standpoints, unduly discounting the unfamiliar epistemic practices of those groups. Together, the first two commitments provide context for the last: obligations of inclusion and deference. Standpoint theorists argue that epistemic (and moral) normativity requires inquirers to include occupants of relevant standpoints in their epistemic communities and treat their contributions with deference. Excluding them, they argue, ensures a less objective, less successful inquiry. As to why, however, views diverge.

For early standpoint theorists, this claim was based on the idea that the standpoints of the oppressed reflect reality, whereas ideology clouds the epistemic practice of those in dominant social positions. At first glance, this may seem like a natural extension of the previous point, with the thought being something like this: in virtue of experiencing

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<sup>4</sup> There's a question in the background here about whether those in relatively dominant social positions can occupy a standpoint in the relevant sense. I will not take a stance one way or another. For reasons that will become clear below, both views are compatible with the relatively minimal account described herein.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Mills* (2005).

oppression through the lens of an understanding of oppressive social relations, one comes to an otherwise difficult to obtain understanding of how that position shapes one's experiences and outcomes. We will take up a view along these lines below, but the early standpoint theorists, such as (*Hartsock, 1983a*), paint a rather different picture. On this view, certain social locations *themselves* foster more accurate beliefs, not only concerning one's own social position, but also the social and natural world more broadly. Against a Marxist background, for example, *Hartsock (1983a)* argues that,

...there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible. (p. 285)

On Hartsock's view, the standpoint of women is a product of sexual division of labor, by which she means both the institutionalized expectations about women's work and the fact that (currently) only those who are assigned female at birth are capable of child-bearing. These factors generate epistemic privilege because they focus women's attention on

...a world in which the emphasis is on change rather than stasis, a world characterized by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of mind and body is inherent in the activities performed. (p. 290)

These features form an epistemic practice that allows women to cut

through the ideological fog, leading them to better overall beliefs. So, the way women's lives are lived is responsible for the very broad form of epistemic privilege Hartsock's account suggests. The reason that inquiries lacking women inquirers are less successful, therefore, is simply that they are composed entirely of sub-par inquirers.

There is a fundamental tension in this version of the project, however. As *Longino* (1993, p. 106-7) points out, if the claim is that epistemic success *in general* depends on the correctness of the standpoint from which one engages with the world, then this must be true of our judgments about standpoints, too. On this view, however, such judgments are the product of a particular social theory. Since knowledge of such theories *also* requires that one approach the question from a correct standpoint, we need a way to identify that correct standpoint, which will also need to be identified by a correct social theory, and so on. So, the prospects for finding a neutral position from which to judge the relative truth-aptness of one standpoint against another seem grim. Moreover, if we assume that the justifying theory is the same one that justified our initial judgment, we're in a worryingly circular situation. One could well imagine that the very different standpoints (such as socially dominant ones) would provide similarly circular structures, leaving no way to discriminate between the two. Even if there is a unique correct standpoint (or collection thereof), a convincing means of identification is elusive.

For Longino, this suggests the stronger claim that standpoint theorists cannot be committed to the existence of objectively privileged standpoints. Those who occupy standpoints may indeed gain knowledge, she argues, but this does not imply that their standpoint is better than

any other. Without intrinsic superiority, however, a dilemma emerges. Since standpoints generate conflicting doxastic commitments, we must either adopt a kind of relativism, so that the beliefs and knowledge arising from a particular standpoint are judged according to the standards thereof, or we need a way of integrating them (*ibid.*).

Relativism is difficult to square with the epistemic and political projects at hand, however. If knowledge is relative, then those occupying dominant standpoints are simply *correct* — the fact that someone has knowledge to the contrary becomes irrelevant. On this horn of the dilemma, there is no clear route to an epistemic incentive for inclusivity. So, this paper will set relativist approaches aside. There may be other reasons to adopt such approaches, but it is neither essential to standpoint epistemology nor conducive to our goals.

For Longino, the fact that both horns of this dilemma require “the abandonment or the supplementation of standpoint as an epistemic criterion” is a significant problem for standpoint epistemology (*ibid.*). However, as we pursue the second option — finding a way to integrate the conflicting epistemic products of different standpoints — we’ll see that supplementation is a feature, not a bug. We’ll take an approach closer to those of *Harding* (1992) and *Collins* (2002), both of which provide a more modest rendering of standpoints’ epistemic privilege. These accounts suggest that privilege is product of a particular way of understanding experiences that are unavailable to those who do not inhabit the relevant social location. So, standpoints are not a universal epistemic criterion with the power to determine the nature of ideal epistemic agents on this kind of view. The role of a social theory changes

here, too. Instead of explaining which standpoint is the most correct, the main role of social theory (as we'll see) is to explain why the epistemic resources that certain standpoints can offer their epistemic communities are so easily ignored. As a result, Longino's original worry about the well-foundedness of standpoint epistemology doesn't get off the ground. Nevertheless, because this picture abandons the idea that standpoints are a universal epistemic criterion, it implies that there is no unique "correct" standpoint. So, we remain saddled with the task required by the second horn: integration.

Returning to the question with which we began this digression, views along these lines also provide a clear, if very different, explanation of when and how the concept of superiority relates to the privilege standpoints provide. On these less universalist views, an inquiry excluding standpoint occupants will be less objective and less successful when those individuals have access to relevant, otherwise unavailable epistemic goods. We return to questions of what those epistemic goods look like and how they support inclusivity in §2.3. For now, we turn to inclusivity itself.

## **2.2 Inclusivity as a Normative Goal**

The goal of standpoint epistemology is to provide an argument for the claim that inquiry in the social sciences, if not beyond, must proceed from and include the perspectives of women, racial minorities, and other subjects of research whose voices are likely to be marginalized as a result of their social location (*Harding*, 1992, Ch. 2). Articulating this goal involves setting out two kinds of norms: individual-level

norms concerning deference to standpoint occupants' testimony, which we'll return to in §2.6, and our present concern, community-level norms about inclusivity. These are norms governing how our epistemic communities ought to be organized. After all, norms about how to interact with standpoint occupants are somewhat inconsequential if our epistemic communities systematically exclude such individuals. So, what does it mean to include someone in an epistemic community?

Generally, including someone in an epistemic community means that they are able to contribute to knowledge production — that their testimony is received by that community and influences its course.<sup>6</sup> While anything fitting this description is better than outright exclusion, it allows for what I'll call the *harvest response* to standpoint theory, a worryingly weak way of fulfilling the goal of inclusivity:

Even if standpoint epistemologists are right about privilege and superiority, communities of inquiry can discharge their epistemic obligations by simply harvesting the knowledge of the relevant communities. All this requires that a community recognize that they require the testimony of standpoint occupants, gather that testimony, and incorporate it into their evidence, then return to its work. Continually involving standpoint occupants is unnecessary.

Should the harvesters realize that standpoint-privileged testimony is once again necessary, they can simply return to the orchard. Anemic as it may be, harvesting testimony like this *does* allow standpoint occupants

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<sup>6</sup> While the nature of epistemic inclusivity appears to be somewhat under-theorized in general, notable references include *Dotson* (2014), *Langton* (2009), and *Fricke* (2007).

to contribute to knowledge formation — harvesting, then, is a form of inclusivity. Let's call it *opportunistic*:

**Opportunistic Inclusivity.** Include occupants of a particular standpoint only when you believe (a) that their testimony is likely to be relevant, and (b) that its content is otherwise inaccessible.

While this consultation-like approach may be appropriate to certain tasks, it is nevertheless inadequate to feminists' aims.<sup>7</sup> For the target cases — stable epistemic communities in the social sciences — rectifying the problem requires a more substantive endpoint. Those who are excluded ought to be *brought in*, be considered part of the inquiry, and be given the opportunity to play an ongoing role:

**Stable Inclusivity.** Include occupants of relevant standpoints throughout the inquiry, regardless of whether (a) or (b) holds.

The relevant form of inclusivity is not achieved by merely taking epistemic goods from those who continue to be excluded.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, the obligation to “study up” from marginalized lives, as *Harding* (2009) puts it, seems under-specified, involving no standing obligation to maintain that standpoint as an ongoing influence. In order to merit

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<sup>7</sup> For example, depending on how one understands the purpose and responsibilities of political representation (cf. *Pitkin* (1967)), it may be the case that a good elected representative ought to consult with their constituency when the conditions of Opportunistic Inclusivity are met and otherwise leave them be, even where that constituency is marginalized.

<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Opportunistic Inclusivity presents a significant risk for the kind of testimonial injustice Miranda Fricker explores in *Epistemic Injustice*. Continuing to exclude marginalized individuals from the epistemic community leaves their status as knowers dubious and, as a result, provides an obvious means by which prejudice might infect the community's response to their testimony.

the name, then, an account of feminist standpoint epistemology ought to support Stable, not merely Opportunistic, Inclusivity.

If the epistemic benefit of a standpoint is encapsulated entirely by the knowledge produced in virtue of occupying it, however, it seems as if those benefits are available to anyone willing to harvest them. As a result, such accounts may be unable to justify the stronger norm, thereby falling short of feminists' moral and political aims. So, our question is two-fold: what kind of epistemic privileges do standpoints create and does an epistemically appropriate response to such privileges involve Stable Inclusivity?

### **2.3 The Nature of Privilege**

Epistemic privilege is at the heart of standpoint theorists' arguments for inclusivity and deference. Exactly what it means to say that standpoints confer privilege is often unclear, however. In the less universalist accounts we're targeting, what kind of privilege do standpoints provide? How do they provide it? What is its scope?

At the very least, standpoints provide access to a certain kind of evidence — the experience of what it's like to occupy the social location associated with that standpoint (henceforth, WIL-evidence). For example, only women can experience being a woman and, therefore, only women have access to that kind of phenomenal evidence. This is the same kind of privilege bats have with respect to phenomenal evidence concerning what it's like to be a bat (*Nagel*, 1974). In this form, the privilege thesis is relatively uncontroversial for conventional epistemologists. Moreover,



access to evidence is widely regarded as a fundamental part of privilege among standpoint theorists. But it can't be the full story.

Our discussion so far has laid out several desiderata for an adequate (and adequately feminist) account of the standpoint-privilege thesis: (1) provide a plausible story about what privileges standpoints confer and how they do so, (2) distinguish inhabiting a social position from occupying a standpoint, (3) explain how privilege provides epistemically-grounded support for Stable Inclusivity, and (4) support exploration of standpoint epistemology's central questions from the perspective of conventional epistemology, in particular questions concerning the nature of occupancy and the content of deference norms. To meet these goals, I'll argue, it will be helpful to characterize the privilege derived from standpoints in terms of otherwise unavailable (or unlikely) expert evidential support relations. By this, I mean to pick out relationships between the evidence one acquires and the propositions they take that evidence to support. For example, someone occupying the standpoint of U.S. Muslim women might learn that *that look* indicates a certain kind of subtle prejudice. This is not to suggest that evidential support relations encapsulate every aspect of what it means to occupy a standpoint, however. Rather, the goal of this section is to locate a plausible, relatively minimal characterization of occupying a standpoint that meets the criteria above and falls within the scope of conventional epistemology.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the weaker accounts of privilege we'll look at — such as the qualia-like account above — will be both plausible and minimal. Being

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<sup>9</sup> While I'll argue that expert evidential support relations fit the bill, it is, of course, possible that nothing does. In that case, the appropriate response would be to revise the desiderata, accept a partial solution, or abandon the project.

unable to meet these desiderata, however, they are inapt candidates for a form of privilege relevant to standpoint theorists' goals.

Given the prominent role of knowledge in the literature on standpoint theory, the absence of knowledge as an explicit element of the target characterization requires some explanation. So, let's begin with knowledge-based accounts.

### 2.3.1 Privilege as Knowledge

Standpoint theorists often discuss privilege in terms of group knowledge shared among those who occupy a standpoint.<sup>10</sup> At the outset, this seems to cohere nicely with the goal of developing a formal model for standpoint epistemology — there are plenty of well-known, well-behaved logics for knowledge, which bodes well for our fourth desideratum. As we'll see, however, knowledge-based accounts of privilege that support Stable Inclusivity not only bear a striking resemblance to accounts that locate privilege in evidential support relations but also bring troubles of their own.

**Phenomenal Knowledge.** As a first pass, a very conservative account of privilege might simply build on the access to evidence thesis, limiting its scope to knowledge directly resulting from that evidence. So, the privilege associated with the standpoint of women would consist of access to WIL-evidence about being a woman and, as a result, WIL-knowledge of the same.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> cf. *Collins* (1998), *Rose* (1983), *Hartsock* (1983a), etc.

<sup>11</sup> Note that this does not need to be identifiable to the agent under the guise of knowledge of what it's like to be a woman.

This account has two major advantages: it provides a fairly clear, uncontroversial account of the content of privilege (though the question of what *the* experience of women might be complicates this) and the privilege involved is a consequence of widely accepted ideas about the conditions under which one can acquire WIL-knowledge. In particular, the idea that one cannot gain this kind of WIL-knowledge without having the relevant experience.<sup>12</sup> In sum, it's an inoffensive view.

Unfortunately, it's also inadequate. The same features make this highly circumscribed account of privilege anodyne undermine its ability to support community-level inclusivity norms. If *the only way* to gain the privileged knowledge to which standpoints provide access is to occupy the standpoint, then testimony cannot be used to share that knowledge.<sup>13</sup> In other words, everything that privilege supplies is confined to occupants of the same standpoint, meaning that desideratum (3) is not met. So, while important and relatively uncontroversial, this kind of first-personal WIL-knowledge isn't enough.

**Phenomenal Knowledge + Closure.** There is an obvious extension of this conservative account, however: closure. On this view, privilege consists not only in the knowledge derived from otherwise unavailable WIL-evidence, but also in access to the consequences of adding that knowledge to what's otherwise knowable. While it might be impos-

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<sup>12</sup> This is one of the common conclusions drawn from *Jackson's* (1982) discussion of what Mary learns when she has the experience of seeing red for the first time. Knowing all of the physical facts about vision, light, and so forth does not provide this kind of knowledge.

<sup>13</sup>See *Cath* (2018) for extended discussion of the relationship between testimony and WIL-knowledge.

sible to convey *exact* phenomenal knowledge directly (as the previous account would require), we *can* analogize that experience and convey important elements of it.

Much of our knowledge about what various experiences are like works this way. For example, one way to gain this kind of knowledge concerning what it's like to eat a ghost pepper is to eat one and, after recovering, develop accurate beliefs about your phenomenal experience by relating it to other experiences you've had — *eating a ghost pepper is more like eating a jabañero than eating a cucumber, eating a ghost pepper is a catastrophically painful experience*. Another way to gain this kind of one-step-removed WIL-knowledge is to accept someone else's testimony.<sup>14</sup> The difference between ghost peppers and standpoints, of course, is that the experience of eating a ghost pepper is available to anyone foolhardy enough to try it. This is also the kind of testimonial exchange at the heart of powerful works like Coates's (2015) *Between the World and Me* and Serano's (2016) *Whipping Girl*. Neither author can directly convey their experience, but the authors' ability to relate their experience makes these important resources for readers outside the authors' social locations.<sup>15</sup>

While this clearly goes a long way toward doing the work standpoints are meant to do, it remains inadequate. As we saw in §2.1, awareness of the role of social location in shaping the lives and experiences of the oppressed is an essential aspect of standpoint theory. Without reason to

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<sup>14</sup> Granted, the quality of the knowledge gained this way may depend on how relatable the hearer's experience is. Without some catastrophically painful experience to relate to, the hearer's understanding of the speaker's testimony may not be particularly vivid.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there are many other reasons such works are important to individuals who share the authors' social locations.

think that such an understanding must permeate all of this type of WIL-knowledge, this account allows one to occupy a standpoint in virtue of having *other* WIL-knowledge concerning that social location. Since (nearly) anyone who inhabits a social location is thereby in a position to gain such knowledge, this account effectively collapse standpoints into social locations. So, desideratum (2) cannot be met.<sup>16</sup>

One might think there's a way out here, however. Perhaps there's a worthwhile distinction to be made between piecemeal knowledge concerning what it's like to be a woman, which might be any bit of knowledge fitting the profile described in this section, and knowledge of what it's like to be a woman *simpliciter*, which is a more holistic enterprise. It is this latter, holistic WIL-knowledge that should be our focus.

While I agree that there is such a distinction, I don't think it's one that standpoint epistemologists ought to hang their hats on. First, this genuine, holistic knowledge of womanhood is exceedingly difficult to acquire, if not entirely non-existent. Setting aside the concern that this presumes there to *be* such a privileged, univocal body of knowledge constituting knowledge of womanhood, this suggestion requires that knowledge of womanhood necessarily involves an understanding of social hierarchies and the like. This implies that such knowledge is only available to those who have the privilege of an education (formal or otherwise) that would provide them with such concepts. This may or may not be appropriate to the notion of occupying a standpoint, but it is certainly inappropriate to the concept of knowing what it's like to be a woman. The same goes for Blackness, or disability, or any other so-

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<sup>16</sup> This worry applies to the previous account as well.

cial group. Second, and relatedly, this seems like an uncharitable way to discount the experiences and testimony of women whose circumstances or political views prevent them from incorporating these concepts into their knowledge of their social position. Even in the case of Phyllis Schlafly, a famously anti-feminist political activist, it seems quite implausible to deny that she had genuine WIL-knowledge concerning womanhood in virtue of having had the experience of living as a woman — and she could share that knowledge, right alongside her misguided beliefs about what’s best for women and why society treats them way it does. Similarly, to claim that someone in the clutches of ex-gay conversion therapy doesn’t know what it’s like to be gay seems straightforwardly incorrect. The fact that one’s knowledge is partial or cast in less-than-maximally-illuminating terms does not prevent it from being knowledge. Most importantly, this very particular notion of what constitutes WIL-knowledge of a social location goes well beyond the specification of *phenomenal knowledge + closure* without giving much of a story about how and why a successful agent’s knowledge of womanhood ends up looking more like Oprah Winfrey’s than Phyllis Schlafly’s. So, this move puts our first desideratum in jeopardy as well. We’ll look at a contentful supplementation of phenomenal knowledge that avoids these issues in the next section, but this isn’t a promising way to save the current account.

Another reason standpoint theorists ought to avoid the *phenomenal knowledge + closure* account of the standpoint-privilege thesis is that it permits Opportunistic Inclusivity. On this view, knowledge of how the standpoint’s phenomenal knowledge relates to other propositions is not

privileged. That knowledge is available to non-occupants — standpoint occupants just fill in the gaps, so to speak. So, at least in principle, non-occupants can know exactly when the testimony of standpoint occupants will be necessary. They can gather the relevant testimony as needed and return to their inquiry, excluding the standpoint occupant. Because of this, this account of privilege does not provide strong support for Stable Inclusivity, thus coming up short with respect to desideratum (3).

There's clearly something amiss about this last argument, however. For the cases we're interested in, non-occupants *don't* tend to know how standpoint occupants will respond to new evidence. There are two noteworthy features of this observation. First, realizing that one needs knowledge that a particular standpoint would be able to provide is *itself* something that might require occupying that standpoint.<sup>17</sup> Consider, for example, taking your car to the mechanic. Sometimes, it's clear that the car needs to be fixed — the Check Engine light goes on, there's a terrible squealing coming from the serpentine belt, etc. This isn't always the case, however. What seems like no problem at all to you — your tire tread looks a bit worn, your brakes are kind of squishy, the sound from the engine changed a little — might be exactly the kind of thing a mechanic would worry about based on their experience and expertise. But, since that evidence doesn't indicate the need to go to your expert from your perspective, you don't. (This, of course, is part of why regu-

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<sup>17</sup> There is a distinct worry nearby: non-occupants are also liable to disregard the knowledge of occupants. See §2.6 and §2.7 for discussion of this point. Our purpose in this section is to identify the epistemic value brought about by Stable Inclusivity. The worry about social hierarchies affecting how (and whether) non-occupants take up their testimony is real, but it is relevant to explaining the need for politically-inflected epistemic norms, which is yet to come.

lar tune-ups exist.) A crucial part of the mechanic's epistemic value to you is the fact that their experience and expertise give them access to these evidential relationships. Those relationships are part of the epistemic privilege that comes with being a mechanic. The same, one might think, goes for occupying a standpoint. Second, even if non-occupants *can* come to understand how occupants outside of their epistemic community will respond to their evidence, they are likely to be less efficient at doing so because they lack the kind of day-to-day experience that provides occupants with opportunities to learn. In other words, non-occupants come up short because they lack expertise.

**Phenomenal Knowledge + Expertise.** On this view, the privilege conferred by standpoints includes the expertise gained from inhabiting one's social location while possessing a certain understanding of that location. Just as the car mechanic's experience and expertise teach him that *that noise* indicates that your serpentine belt needs to be replaced, someone occupying the standpoint of U.S. Muslim women might learn that *that look* indicates a certain kind of subtle prejudice. Without the combinations of experience and expertise each possesses, they might never come to understand that these relationships exist.<sup>18</sup> In other words, when combined with the experience of living with them, phenomenal knowledge and expertise generate new understandings of the relationships between evidence and the world that are unavailable without them (or, at least, difficult to acquire). In keeping with the idea that the epis-

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<sup>18</sup> Independently, *Luntley* (2009) offers an account of the nature of expertise that leans heavily on this kind of fruitfulness as a distinguishing feature.



temic goods privilege provides should be understood as knowledge, we can capture such relationships as a form of knowledge. So, what the Muslim woman gains as a result of occupying her standpoint is knowledge that *that look* indicates prejudice.

This account does well with respect to the desiderata missed by the previous accounts. Since developing the expertise in question requires an understanding of social locations and how they can affect one's experience, occupying a standpoint is not an automatic consequence of inhabiting a social location. So, desideratum (2) is met.

The account meets our third desideratum — providing epistemically-grounded support for Stable Inclusivity — as well, though the route may be less obvious. While the role of social expertise in generating privilege is plausible, one might worry that this account, like the last one, only supports Opportunistic Inclusivity because that privileged knowledge, once acquired by standpoint occupants, can be harvested. Your mechanic can tell you to listen for *that sound* and explain what it means; your friend can point out *that look* and tell you what's going on. This doesn't necessarily undermine the value of Stable Inclusivity, however. On this view, standpoints allow their occupants to discover new relationships between their evidence and the world *continually* — the locus of their privilege is not that they already know all of these relationships, but rather that they are in a better position to learn them than those who do not occupy their standpoint. So, including occupants in inquiries concerning their expertise allows them to discover new, relevant evidential relationships. And, this isn't so strange. That very inquiry might include social scientists for the same reason — someone with expertise

and experience in the area is apt to see new relationships that wouldn't be obvious to someone without the same epistemic advantages. The only difference is one we've seen before: while most anyone can, with time and training, gain expertise and experience with social science, the same cannot be said for occupying a standpoint. This, then, provides a basis for the target community organization norm: Stable Inclusivity.<sup>19</sup> So, (3) is met.

Even so, a knowledge-based account may be less than ideal. The focal point for this account, expertise, need not be cashed out in terms of knowledge. We might characterize expertise as a kind of competence, for example, or a disposition to form a certain kind of belief in response to one's evidence. Since this account pins privilege to expertise as knowledge, however, one of two things must be the case: either the alternative characterizations fall short and expertise *is* simply equivalent to this kind of knowledge or other forms of expertise are somehow insufficient grounds for privilege. The latter is especially pressing for this account, since analyses of knowledge often involve conditions such as sensitivity, safety, relevant alternatives, etc. that seem unnecessarily strong for answering the question of whether someone is an expert.<sup>20</sup> Relatedly, the characterization in terms of knowledge may ask more than is plausible as the consequences of the kind of experience this account picks out. We might expect an agent who occupies a standpoint to have *better* responses to relevant evidence than non-occupants as a result

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<sup>19</sup> While this form of inclusivity will not ensure the affective results one might hope for from inclusivity — a felt sense of inclusion, a sense of being welcome — it nevertheless meets the epistemic goal set out in §2.2.

<sup>20</sup> cf. *Nozick* (1981), *Sosa* (1999), *Dretske* (1981), respectively, for these conditions on knowledge.

of the process described above, but a guarantee that this improvement rises to the level of knowledge implies a much more robust connection between this process and its epistemic consequences. So, even though the analogy with experts provides a plausible story about the kind of privilege standpoints confer, this knowledge-based version of the account is missing a story about how standpoint occupants acquire that privilege. For these reasons, I take it that a less weighty account of expertise is preferable.

Moreover, much of this is more naturally described directly in terms of evidential support relations rather than knowledge thereof. Shifting our attention to evidential support relations will also make way for developing a formal model that not only better captures standpoint theorists' discussions of privilege, but also provides the structure necessary for examining the question of how agents ought to interact with standpoints, thereby allowing us to meet condition (4).

### 2.3.2 Privilege as Expert Evidential Support Relations

Much like the last, this account of privilege rests on the expertise that agents inhabiting particular social locations develop as a result of interpreting their experience through an understanding of the social hierarchy in which they are embedded. We'll shift focus away from the knowledge that process may produce, however, instead taking the locus of privilege to be the package of evidential support relations such expertise provides.

The phrase *evidential support relations* (ESRs) refers to the relation-

ship between a piece of evidence — some testimony, an observation, an experience<sup>21</sup> — and the hypotheses it supports. This is sometimes meant in an objective sense, referring to the hypotheses that the evidence *really does* make more likely. For our purposes, it will also be useful to talk about subjective evidential support relations, which are the relationships agents themselves accept. If Flatley the Flat Earther takes the fact that *the bottoms of clouds appear flat* to support the hypothesis *the Earth is flat*, this is among the ESRs he accepts, regardless of the fact that this evidence does not actually support the hypothesis that *the earth is flat*. At a minimum, an agent's ESRs shape how they will respond to new evidence: upon learning that *the bottoms of clouds appear flat* (or, already knowing this, upon accepting ESRs relating it to *the Earth is flat*), Flatley will become more confident in *the Earth is flat*. His confidence in other propositions will likely change as well. He might reduce his confidence in the hypothesis that *the Earth is round*, while raising his confidence in related propositions such as *the Earth is nearly, but not quite, flat* or *the Earth is a cube*.

These subjective evidential support relations clearly bear on the question of expertise. For example, it seems to follow from the fact that Flatley's ESRs do not resemble the objective ESRs concerning geology that he is not an expert on the subject.<sup>22</sup> Intuitively, the same goes for someone like Ronda, for whom *the bottoms of clouds appear flat* does not support

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<sup>21</sup> For our purposes, we can be fairly agnostic about the nature of evidence. However, see Kelly (2016) for discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Two caveats. First, this assumes not just that we take Flatley's ESRs to be off the mark, but that they *in fact are* off the mark. Second, were Flatley's geological ESRs otherwise impeccable and comprehensive, a more nuanced evaluation of his expertise might be called for.

*the Earth is flat* but who has relatively little else in the way of ESRs, knowledge, or any other epistemic attitude concerning geology. While a full account of expertise is beyond the scope of this paper, I take the point these examples are meant to draw out to be relatively uncontroversial: relative to a particular epistemic community, being an expert about a topic involves having subjective evidential support relations concerning the topic that are both more comprehensive and closer to the objective evidential support relations than those broadly held within that community.<sup>23</sup> Unlike knowledge-based expertise, this more forgiving account offers a plausible, reliable outcome of the situations in which standpoint occupants find themselves.<sup>24</sup> As such, this account does a better job of meeting desideratum (1).

It is also worth noting that this looser picture of expertise still grounds inclusivity. At the very least, experts so described are epistemically valuable in the same way that a thermometer or other measuring device would be. In the absence of a better way of learning the temperature, one should use and rely upon a thermometer for the simple reason that you're likely to do better if you do. In the case of the Muslim woman, the norms we are developing apply because she really is more likely to be right about how to interpret *that look* than you are. Moreover, the feature of expertise that justifies Stable Inclusivity — the greater likelihood of

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<sup>23</sup> I do not mean to suggest that this is the extent of expertise or that there is no general, context-independent concept of expertise. See *Luntley (2009)* for a general discussion of the nature of expertise.

<sup>24</sup> Expertise may involve not only a better understanding of which evidence supports which propositions, but also a better way of interpreting incoming perceptual information. Though I will not focus on this aspect of expertise, the implementation of evidential support relations provided below can accommodate both. See footnote 35.

generating new, more accurate evidential connections as a result of being part of the inquiry — does not depend on expertise being construed as knowledge. So, we retain the ability to meet the third desideratum.

Focusing on evidential support relations also coheres well with the projects many standpoint theorists describe. For example, *Collins's* (2002) central example in “Black Feminist Epistemology” concerns the gulf between the interpretations of single motherhood in the Black community that are offered by conventional social science, on one hand, and those offered by Black women themselves, on the other. Black women, she notes, focus on the social conditions encumbering single mothers, while conventional social science focuses on “welfare queens” and character defects (*Collins*, 2002, p. 273). This, combined with the dominant role of the white male standpoint in the academy, undermines Black women’s participation in and contribution to social research (along with the breadth and accuracy of conventional research):

Black women scholars may know that something is true — at least, by standards widely accepted among African-American women — but be unwilling or unable to legitimate our claims using prevailing scholarly norms. [...] The methods used to validate knowledge claims must also be acceptable to the group controlling the knowledge validation process. [...] Thus, one important issue facing Black women intellectuals is the question of what constitutes adequate justification that a given knowledge claim, such as a theory or fact, is true. (p. 273)

That is, in virtue of sharing the standpoint associated with Black sin-

gle mothers, Black women scholars relate differently to evidence about rates of social assistance, outcomes for their children, and so forth. From their standpoint, this evidence supports hypotheses concerning the damaging consequences of racism, inadequate social support systems, and under-valued labor. Crucially, this relationship between evidence and the world is not shared by dominant standpoints — it does not fit with conventional social science’s view of Black women.<sup>25</sup>

It must be noted that, because this is a general view of the privilege that standpoints provide, the ideas presented here are not meant as a thorough characterization of Collins’ project, which concerns not only standpoint epistemology, but also centering and exploring the epistemic practices of Black women.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, evidential support relations capture crucial elements of the privileges Collins identifies, such as *knowledge validation processes*, *worldviews*, and *ways of knowing*, and do so in a way that provides an epistemic incentive for inclusivity. As we saw in the passage quoted above, knowledge validation processes are a matter of what kind evidence can support a proposition. Evidential support relations contribute to determining which inquiries agents pursue and how they respond to new evidence, both of which are crucial as-

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<sup>25</sup> And, since that white male standpoint does not share the kinds of experiences that generate these support relations, it never will. We’ll return to the socio-epistemic impact of these asymmetries in §2.7.

<sup>26</sup> Out of respect for Collins’ work, this point merits further emphasis. While Collins is engaged in standpoint epistemology, her aims are very different from those of this paper. The project we’re engaged in involves finding an abstraction amenable to the peculiarities of different standpoints and tractable within conventional epistemology. Neither is a concern for Collins. Where the present project involves a broad, minimal account, Collins’ work captures the rich, distinctive epistemic practices of the group she focuses on, Black women. Just as a general account of what it is to be a painting will not do much to illuminate *Guernica*, this paper should not be understood as an effort to capture Collins’ account of Black feminist epistemology. For this, please see *Collins* (2002).

pects of Collins' use of worldviews. They also encapsulate the kind of evidence an agent will take to be relevant to a question, meaning that they provide a structure within which to represent the idea of distinctive ways of knowing. For example, Collins points to the role of emotion as demarcating a distinctive way of knowing, writing that, "connected knowers see personality as adding to an individual's ideas," (ibid., p. 283). This kind of effect influence might be represented as the difference between evidential support relations that interpret testimony univocally and ones that change depending on the agent's evidence about the speaker's personality. This kind of structural view will not supply content — that being the job of more specific accounts like Collins' — but it does demonstrate the applicability and flexibility of evidential support relations.<sup>27</sup>

In *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, Sandra Harding surveys many other ways feminist standpoint theorists explain the idea that standpoints grant their occupants' epistemic privilege. She includes not only Collins, but also *Hartsock's* (1983a) focus on the consequences of gender-segregated labor practices, *Aptheker's* (1989) concern for the ways subordination shapes the meaning and significance women assign to their work, and many others (p. 121-132). Common to all of these, she argues, is the idea that the subordinated experience of women grounds their privilege and "makes strange what had appeared familiar" (p. 150). Beliefs that seem incontrovertibly supported by the evidence according to a dominant standpoint may lose their apparent inevitability when ex-

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<sup>27</sup> None of the foregoing should suggest that evidential support relations can provide a *complete* account of what it means to occupy a standpoint. Rather, they provide a way to characterize many of the important epistemic practices associated with standpoints.



amined from the perspective of a subordinate standpoint. When coupled with the experience, justificatory practices, and worldviews that come with occupying such a standpoint, the same evidence may seem to support very different hypotheses. The standpoint theorist's claim is that, where that difference is the result of occupying a standpoint, the occupant's expertise makes her response more likely to resemble the objective evidential support relations. Different (and better) knowledge may be the result of including standpoints, but the reason for this is the distinctive evidential support relations brought about by the factors that create standpoints. So, in formalizing the dynamics of inquiry, it is access to these expert evidential support relations that should be the focus of our model.

## 2.4 The Model

In developing a model capturing the idea that access to expert evidential support relations is a key epistemic privilege associated with standpoint occupancy, our goal will be to provide enough structure to explore two questions:

- What does it mean for an agent to occupy a standpoint? How does occupying a standpoint interact with existing doxastic states?
- How should the privilege of standpoints impact agents who don't occupy them? How should such agents respond to standpoint-based testimony?

The first is important because it does not follow from the fact that oc-

cupying a standpoint ensures expertise that anyone responsive to those expert evidential support relations thereby *occupies* the standpoint. This further claim — that occupying a standpoint is *equivalent to* being responsive to the relevant evidential support relations — is one that standpoint theorists reject. We'll return to the question of what else occupying a standpoint involve be (and how much a model like this one can capture) in §2.5. As we'll see in §2.6, answering the second question will, to some extent, depend on how we answer the first.<sup>28</sup>

For both of these tasks, we'll be interested in how the evidential support relations provided by a standpoint interact with other evidential support relations. To represent this, our model will build in two idiosyncratic features. First, the ability to identify different viewpoints, be they standpoints, religious faiths, trusted friends, or any other distinct source of evidence interpretation. Second, we'll build in epistemic operators — *belief* and *having support* — that directly (and distinctively) depend on the interactions between the evidential support relations provided by these viewpoints. In §2.5, we'll see how these features can be used to illustrate the effects of coming to occupy a standpoint and coming to trust a standpoint occupant.

In this section, we'll focus on the model itself, building on the work of *van Benthem and Pacuit* (2011b). Like many epistemic logics, van Benthem and Pacuit's is modal a framework. The semantics for belief and

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<sup>28</sup> Questions concerning intersectional standpoints — What does it mean to occupy multiple standpoints? What is the difference, if any, between occupying multiple standpoints and occupying an intersectional standpoint? — are unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. These are important and difficult questions. While I think the model described below has interesting, distinctive things to say about them, they deserve a focused treatment.

evidential support are handled in terms of possible worlds and the truth values of propositions at those worlds. The main difference will be the use of *neighborhoods* to track our agent's epistemic state, rather than binary accessibility relations between worlds.

#### 2.4.1 An Informal Introduction to Neighborhood-Based Models for Modal Logic (and Slugs)

Before diving into neighborhood models, a review of more familiar epistemic logics is in order. In standard modal logics for belief and knowledge, our location in the space of possible worlds is of paramount importance. In such models, the accessibility relation tells us which worlds are indistinguishable from one another, given the evidence we have. To say that  $w$  is accessible from  $v$  is to say that, for all an agent at  $v$  knows (or believes, depending on our idiom), she could be at either one. For example, take the proposition *slugs have four noses*. Let's call it *Slugs*. Since you probably don't know whether *Slugs* is true, the worlds you consider possible will include some *Slugs* worlds and some  $\neg$ *Slugs* world. For each such world, standard epistemic logics will say there is an accessibility relation between the world you occupy, which we'll call  $w$ , and those possibilities. Suppose  $s$ , a *Slugs* world, and  $s'$ , a  $\neg$ *Slugs* world, are among them. Now, we can say that the pairs  $\langle w, s \rangle$  and  $\langle w, s' \rangle$  are included in your accessibility relation.

As it turns out,  $w$  is a *Slugs* world! Slugs do, in fact, have four noses.<sup>29</sup> Having learned this, you can now distinguish between  $w$  and  $s'$  because,

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<sup>29</sup>More accurately, slugs have four olfactory organs, which are closer to tentacles than noses (*Chase*, 2001, p. 180).

as you now know,  $s'$  is not the real world. That's represented in the model by removing the pair  $\langle w, s' \rangle$  (along with any other that linked  $w$  to a  $\neg Slugs$  world) from your accessibility relation. But, your accessibility relation will keep the other pair we looked at,  $\langle w, s \rangle$ . For all you know, you could be in either  $w$  or  $s$ . More importantly, *all* of the worlds you think might be the actual world are *Slugs* worlds now. So, on such models, we can say that you believe (or know) *Slugs*.

Much of this interpretation will change as we develop the neighborhood model. Both in terms of formal constraints and epistemic interpretation, the accessibility relations we've been focusing on are the locus of these changes. Formally speaking, accessibility relations will be sets of pairs such as  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs \rrbracket \rangle$ , where  $\llbracket Slugs \rrbracket$  picks out another set of worlds — the set of worlds at which *Slugs* is true, such as  $w$  and  $s$ . Rather than marking the indistinguishability of two worlds as they do in standard models, accessibility relations in our neighborhood model will mean that an agent at  $w$  has some evidence that supports *Slugs* (along with any other propositions that are true in all of the *Slugs* worlds). For this reason, we'll call them *evidence relations* in our neighborhood model.

After learning *Slugs* in the previous paragraph, you updated your evidence relation to include  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs \rrbracket \rangle$  (unless you don't trust my gastropological testimony). On our neighborhood model, however, this update isn't enough to determine whether you believe *Slugs*. Accepting an interpretation of your evidence (my testimony about slugs) on which it supports *Slugs* (you trust me as a source of slug-related information and you don't think I was speaking in code, trying to deceive you, or what-not) is not the same as learning that *Slugs* is true. Instead, we'll need to

see how that interpretation meshes with the rest of your evidence. If it's consistent with the rest of your evidence, then we'll be able to say that you believe *Slugs*. But what if it's not? What if there's a clash?

Four paragraphs back, you probably had no views whatsoever about *Slugs*. Suppose you had. Suppose, for example, that you remember reading a *National Geographic* article several years ago, according to which slugs have *six* noses. Then, when I suggested *Slugs*, you had a conflict: by your lights, you had support for the old proposition, let's call it *Slugs*<sub>6</sub>, and support for *Slugs*. But, there are no worlds that are part of both propositions. Supposing that all of your other views about the world are consistent and independent of olfactory facts about slugs, you now have two different "theories", so to speak, about the world: a *Slugs* theory and a *Slugs*<sub>6</sub> theory. In our neighborhood model, what you believe is determined by what's true across all such internally consistent theories.<sup>30</sup> This suggests a fairly strong notion of belief: you don't need to think that every possible world is a  $\phi$ -world in order to believe  $\phi$ , but you do need to think that every consistent theory your evidence supports requires that  $\phi$ .<sup>31</sup> If you decide that you no longer trust your memory of the article (or me), the pair  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs_6 \rrbracket \rangle$  (or  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs \rrbracket \rangle$ ) will drop out of your evidence relation and you'll once again have a belief about the exact number of noses that slugs possess.

The logic we'll develop for viewpoint models will also contain lan-

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<sup>30</sup> These will also be maximally complete, meaning that they use as much of your evidence as possible. We'll come back to this point below.

<sup>31</sup> Note, however, that the strength of this belief operator depends somewhat on what it means to trust or accept an interpretation of your evidence. I've left this quasi-technical term loose intentionally. Additionally, while we won't delve into conditional belief here, it is straightforward to define a notion of conditional belief on this model and, in doing so, get at weaker conceptions of belief.

guage for talking about having direct support for a proposition. In standard epistemic logics, we have a possibility operator (there's *some* accessible world, some candidate for the actual world, in which *Slugs* is true) but we don't make any distinction between having direct-but-inconclusive evidence for *Slugs* and just regarding *Slugs* as a possibility. Here, we will. In the scenario above, for example, we'll be able to say (1) that you have support for *Slugs* and *Slugs*<sub>6</sub>, (2) that you *don't* have support for other slug-related hypotheses, say *Slugs*<sub>3</sub> or *Slugs*<sub>5</sub>, even if you regard them as possible, and (3) that even though you don't have *direct* support for the claim that slugs have between four and six noses (*Slugs*<sub>4-6</sub>), you believe it because *Slugs*<sub>4-6</sub> is true on every consistent theory you can put together.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, as has been suggested throughout this section, the viewpoints that agents trust — friends, religious and political affiliations, standpoints, their own intuitions, and so on — will play an explicit role in our model. Those viewpoints' interpretations of the agent's evidence (that is, the evidential support relations they provide) are the basic building blocks of her evidence relation. In the scenario above, you trust both me and *National Geographic* when it comes to slugs. In the parlance we'll develop below, this means that you take my viewpoint to include *Slugs* and *National Geographic's* to include *Slugs*<sub>6</sub>. Even though you're wrong about what *National Geographic* would have to say about slugs in this instance — in actuality, there's no old issue stating that slugs have six noses —

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<sup>32</sup> In their closely related framework, *van Benthem and Pacuit* (2011b) define operations of evidence re-organization on which the reflective agent can observe facts like this about her evidence and, from them, gain direct support for a proposition like *Slugs*<sub>4-6</sub>. We won't review these operations here, but they can be straightforwardly translated into the framework developed below.

we'll nevertheless say that you *trust National Geographic*. Cases like this, in which agents trust a viewpoint but misunderstand what it supports, will be important to our discussion of deference in §2.6. Additionally, the ability to identify collections of evidential support relations by the viewpoint that supplies them will allow us to articulate several distinctive, robust conceptions of what it means to occupy a standpoint. It's also worth pointing out that, while this was a case in which you had two distinct pieces of evidence (my testimony and your memory) that led you to your understanding of the viewpoints in question and what they claim, viewpoints can offer different interpretations of the same piece of evidence. You, your dad, and your uncle might have very different views about how to interpret the evidence your uncle provided when telling the tale of how he caught a 900-pound marlin last summer.

With this background in place, we can set marlins and slugs aside for a moment and turn to the formal details. In §2.4.2, we'll look at the model itself. §2.4.3 adds a language we'll use to interpret that model and §2.4.4 concerns how we can represent standpoints in this framework.

## 2.4.2 Viewpoint Models

For the sake of simplicity, we'll stick to finite models.<sup>33</sup> With the notable exception of evidence itself, each of the pieces discussed in the last section shows up in the definition of our model:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> While much of what's said here extends straightforwardly to infinite models, details of the logic defined below, such as maximal consistent theories, will need more careful attention.

<sup>34</sup>The viewpoint model presented in this section builds on *van Benthem and Pacuit's* (2011b) model for evidence-based belief. See also *Pacuit* (2017) for a general introduction to neighborhood models.

**Viewpoint Model.** Given a set of atomic propositions  $P$ , a viewpoint model consists of a tuple  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{I} \rangle$  with a non-empty set of worlds  $W$ , a family  $\mathbb{V}$  of sets, each consisting of ordered pairs  $\langle w, \phi \rangle$ , which map worlds to formulas in  $\mathcal{L}_0$ , an evidence relation  $\mathbb{E} = \{ \langle w, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \rangle \mid \langle w, \phi \rangle \in V \text{ for some } V \in A \text{ and } \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \neq \emptyset \}$ , and an interpretation function  $\mathcal{I}: P \rightarrow \wp(W)$ .

Several features of this model, in particular  $W$ ,  $P$ , and  $\mathcal{I}$ , play essentially the same role here as they do in more familiar modal frameworks.  $W$  is just the set of worlds in our model, where each possible world is a way the world could be, as far as our agent is concerned.  $P$  is just the set of atomic sentences in the model, from which the logical expressions we'll evaluate will be built (along with the logical operators we'll define in the next section).  $\mathcal{I}$  is an interpretation function mapping each atomic sentence in our language to the set of worlds at which it is true.

On to the peculiarities. Suppressing direct representation of the agent's evidence is largely a matter of convenience. Since the changes we'll look at in §2.5 concern changes to the sources an agent trusts rather than to her evidence, directly representing the evidence is unnecessary — this version does the same work as a model directly representing evidence, but in a simpler fashion.

Instead, we have the evidence relation. As we saw above, the evidence relation is similar to the accessibility relation found in standard modal logics, though it will play a very different semantic role. Instead of mapping worlds to worlds,  $\mathbb{E}$  maps worlds to sets of worlds, which are the propositions supported by the agent's evidence. Those mappings are



drawn from the viewpoints in  $A$ , the set of viewpoints the agent trusts.

$A$  is a subset of  $\mathbb{V}$ , the set of all viewpoints represented in the model. Each element of  $\mathbb{V}$  represents a *particular* viewpoint — a standpoint, political affiliation, or whatnot — to which an agent might be responsive. For the sake of simplicity, this model assumes that the support viewpoints provide is binary rather than degreed. So, a viewpoint either supports a proposition or it does not. Given this assumption, we represent each proposition a viewpoint supports at a particular world as a pair  $\langle w, \phi \rangle$ .<sup>35</sup> We'll make use of this broad set of viewpoints in §2.5, where we will look at changes in which viewpoints an agent trusts. In constructing the evidence relation, however, we'll focus on the viewpoints the agent already trusts.

The viewpoint model constructs  $\mathbb{E}$  by amalgamating the viewpoints in  $A$ . To do this, we take each pair in each viewpoint in  $A$  and add the associated *interpreted pair* to  $\mathbb{E}$ , provided that the interpreted pair's extension is non-empty.<sup>36</sup> The interpreted pair is just the pair that links  $w$  to the set of possible worlds at which the sentence is true rather than the sentence itself. To return to our slugs, if  $\langle w, Slugs_{\epsilon} \rangle$  is a pair coming from the viewpoint associated with *National Geographic*, its interpreted pair is  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs_{\epsilon} \rrbracket \rangle$ . So, if the viewpoint associated with *National Geographic* is in  $A$ , we'll add  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs_{\epsilon} \rrbracket \rangle$ , to  $\mathbb{E}$  (as long as  $\llbracket Slugs_{\epsilon} \rrbracket$  isn't empty). In order to determine which worlds go into  $\llbracket Slugs_{\epsilon} \rrbracket$  we'll need a semantics, which we'll look at in the next section.

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<sup>35</sup> To accommodate the broader notion of expertise mentioned in footnote 24, viewpoints can be taken to act on perceptual information rather than bodies of evidence.

<sup>36</sup> By way of explanation, an empty extension doesn't provide positive support for any possible world, so plays no role in helping the agent figure out which world might be the actual world.

For convenience, we'll define two more pieces of notation:  $v_i(w)$  and  $\mathbb{E}(w)$ . Let  $v_i(w)$  pick out the formulas associated with  $w$  according to  $v_i$ , so that  $v_i(w) = \{\phi \mid \langle w, \phi \rangle \in v_i\}$ . Similarly, let  $\mathbb{E}(w)$  pick out the set of all sets of worlds associated with  $w$  according to  $\mathbb{E}$ , so that  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{X \mid \langle w, X \rangle \in \mathbb{E}\}$ .

We'll also impose some constraints on viewpoints and the evidence relation. First, the agents' own viewpoint,  $v_A$ , must be included in  $A$ . Second, agents know the space of possible worlds. Since viewpoints map worlds to formulas rather than sets of worlds, we use a trivially true proposition,  $p \vee \neg p$ , to model this constraint:<sup>37</sup>

**Triviality.** For each  $w \in W$ , there is some  $p \in P$  such that  $p \vee \neg p \in v_A(w)$ .

It follows from the first and second constraints that  $W \in \mathbb{E}(w)$  for all  $w \in W$  in any viewpoint model.

Third, individual viewpoints are consistent. So, the intersection of all sets of worlds supported by a particular viewpoint at a world must be non-empty:

**Consistency.** For each  $v_i \in \mathbb{V}$  and each  $w \in W$ ,  $\bigcap \{\llbracket \phi \rrbracket \mid \phi \in v_i(w)\} \neq \emptyset$ .

This is not to suggest that agents can't think that there are inconsistent ways of seeing the world in a broader sense of the term 'viewpoint'. In order for her to trust it, however, a viewpoint must be consistent. So, our model restricts attention to these plausible viewpoints.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> It's worth noting that this constraint also implies that this framework does not avoid the problem of logical omniscience.

<sup>38</sup> Note that this does not require viewpoints to be consistent across worlds. What a viewpoint supports at  $w$  might be inconsistent with what it supports at  $w'$ . Since we'll restrict our attention to uniform models, however, these situations will not arise.

In addition, we'll restrict our attention to *uniform* models:

**Uniformity.** For all  $w, w' \in W$ ,  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \mathbb{E}(w')$ .

Less formally, uniform models are those in which each viewpoint evaluates the agent's evidence (which, recall, we are holding fixed) the same way across all possible worlds. So, what our agent ought to believe according to viewpoint  $v$  will be the same no matter which world she inhabits. The changes we'll be interested in are those arising from changes to the viewpoints our agent trusts. As with the choice to avoid directly representing evidence, it is possible to set this constraint aside, but adopting it greatly simplifies our discussion.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the *absence* of a common constraint: veracity. Veracity fails because, while viewpoints must be internally consistent, they need not be reliable. So, the actual world may not be among the worlds picked out by a particular viewpoint. Moreover, since consistency does not extend to other viewpoints, an agent can trust viewpoints that conflict with one another, as was the case in the olfactory dispute discussed above. This will be critical to the semantics for viewpoint models, to which we now turn.

### 2.4.3 A Basic, Static Logic

Our language, drawn from *van Benthem and Pacuit* (2011b), will remain relatively close to the standard operators for doxastic logic:

**Evidence and Belief Language.** Let  $P$  be a set of atomic propositions. Where  $p \in P$ ,  $\mathcal{L}$  is the smallest set of formulas generated

by the grammar

$$p \mid \neg\phi \mid \phi \wedge \psi \mid B\phi \mid \Box\phi \mid L\phi$$

Additional propositional connectives ( $\vee, \rightarrow, \leftrightarrow$ ) are defined as usual and the existential modality  $M\phi$  is defined as  $\neg L\neg\phi$ .

So, if we have  $p$  and  $q$  as atomic propositions,  $\mathcal{L}$  includes  $\neg p$ ,  $\neg p \wedge q$ ,  $B(\neg p \wedge q)$ ,  $\neg B(\neg p \wedge q)$ , and so forth. This set of formulas,  $\mathcal{L}$ , is the set of sentences our logic will be able to interpret.

While the propositional connectives are no doubt familiar, the modal operators  $B$ ,  $\Box$ , and  $L$  require some explanation. Their intended interpretations are as follows. For any proposition  $\phi$ ,

- $B\phi$  means “the agent believes  $\phi$ ”,
- $\Box\phi$  means “the agent has evidence that directly supports  $\phi$ ”, and
- $L\phi$  means “the agent knows that  $\phi$ ”.<sup>39</sup>

With the language defined, we can now give a semantics that will tie it into the viewpoint models described above.

The definition that follows describes what needs to be true about a model in order for a formula in this language to be true at a particular world in that model.

**Truth.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, \mathcal{A}, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{F} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model. Truth of a formula  $\phi \in \mathcal{L}$  is defined inductively as follows:

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<sup>39</sup>While *knows* is a natural interpretation for  $L$ , this operator can also be interpreted in alethic terms as necessity (and its counterpart  $M$  as possibility). These operators are provided mostly as a convenience; our focus will be on  $B$  and  $\Box$ .

$\mathcal{M}, w \models p$  *iff*  $w \in \mathcal{I}(p)$  (for all  $p \in P$ )

$\mathcal{M}, w \models \neg\phi$  *iff*  $\mathcal{M}, w \not\models \phi$

$\mathcal{M}, w \models \phi \wedge \psi$  *iff*  $\mathcal{M}, w \models \phi$  and  $\mathcal{M}, w \models \psi$

$\mathcal{M}, w \models \Box\phi$  *iff* there exists an  $X \in \mathbb{E}(w)$  such that for all  $u \in X$ ,  $\mathcal{M}, u \models \phi$

$\mathcal{M}, w \models B\phi$  *iff* for all maximal consistent theories<sup>40</sup>  $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{E}(w)$  and all  $u \in \bigcap \mathcal{X}$ ,  $\mathcal{M}, u \models \phi$

$\mathcal{M}, w \models L\phi$  *iff*  $u \models \phi$  for all  $u \in W$

The truth set of  $\phi$  is the set of worlds  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} = \{w \mid \mathcal{M}, w \models \phi\}$ . Standard logical notions of satisfiability and validity are defined as usual.

This deserves a bit of explanation. Let's begin by taking a familiar example,  $\neg q$ , as a warm-up. To determine whether  $\neg q$  is true at a world  $u$ , the condition for negation states that we need to determine whether the negated formula is true at the world in question. Since this is just  $q$ , an atomic proposition, we look to the condition for atomic propositions. There, we find that any atomic formula  $p$  is true at some world  $w$  just in case  $w$  is in the interpretation of  $p$ ,  $\mathcal{I}(p)$ . So, if  $u \in \mathcal{I}(q)$ , then  $\mathcal{M}, u \models q$  and, therefore,  $q$  is true at  $u$ . Given this, it can't be the case that  $\mathcal{M}, u \not\models q$ . So, we can conclude that  $\neg q$  is false at  $u$ . (If  $u$  is not in  $\mathcal{I}(q)$ , on the other hand, then the same process tells us that  $\neg q$  is true at  $u$ .)

Now let's look at  $\Box$ . Recall that  $\Box\phi$  is meant to be true just in case

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<sup>40</sup>Defined below.

the agent has evidence that directly supports  $\phi$ . The truth condition for support states that  $\Box\phi$  is true at a world just in case there is some set in  $\mathbb{E}(w)$  such that all of the worlds in that set are  $\phi$  worlds. Since viewpoint models define the value of  $\mathbb{E}(w)$  as the set of propositions supported at  $w$  by at least one viewpoints the agent trusts, this means  $\Box\phi$  will be true at  $w$  whenever the truth set for some proposition supported at  $w$  by a viewpoint the agent trusts entails  $\phi$ . So, if you trust *National Geographic* and, therefore, add  $\langle w, \llbracket Slugs_6 \rrbracket \rangle$  to  $\mathbb{E}$ , then  $\Box(Slugs_6)$  will be true at  $w$  because  $\llbracket Slugs_6 \rrbracket$  will be in  $\mathbb{E}(w)$  and  $Slugs_6$  will, of course, be true at every world in  $\llbracket Slugs_6 \rrbracket$ . You'll have direct support for many other propositions, too. For example, since every world in  $\llbracket Slugs_6 \rrbracket$  is a world at which  $Slugs_6 \vee Slugs_5$  is true,  $\Box(Slugs_6 \vee Slugs_5)$  will be true at  $w$  as well.

The condition for B is less straightforward. The truth condition for belief requires that a propositions is true across all of the different maximal consistent theories an agent can piece together according to the viewpoints she trusts. Suppose, for example, that we have an agent who isn't sure about whether the atheists or the Catholics are right about the existence of God. Even so, both viewpoints support evolution. So, despite the fact that she can't put all of her evidence together consistently (there's no world in which God both exists and doesn't exist), all of the ways she *can* put her evidence together consistently are theories on which evolution is true. Absent any trusted anti-evolution viewpoints, then, she'll believe that evolution is true. With that in mind, here's the formal definition for maximal consistent theories:

**(Relative) Maximal Consistent Theory.** Given a viewpoint model

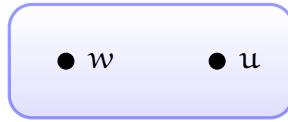
$\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{I} \rangle$  and a world  $w \in W$ , a family of sets  $X$  is a maximal consistent theory relative to  $w$  just in case

1. (Relative)  $X$  is a finite subset of  $\mathbb{E}(w)$ ,
2. (Consistent) The members of  $X$  have a non-empty intersection, and
3. (Maximal) For any  $x \in \mathbb{E}(w)$  such that  $x \notin X$ ,  $\{x\} \cup X$  violates (2).

So, if  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{X_1, X_2, X_3\}$  and  $X_1 \cap X_2 \neq \emptyset$ , then  $\{X_1, X_2\}$  satisfies (2) — there is at least one world that both  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  regard as possible. If the intersection of  $X_3$  with  $X_1 \cap X_2$  is empty, then  $\{X_1, X_2\}$  satisfies (3) relative to  $\mathbb{E}(w)$  — it's a maximal consistent theory relative to  $\mathbb{E}(w)$ . (For all we've said, however, one of  $\{X_3, X_2\}$  or  $\{X_1, X_3\}$  might *also* be a maximal consistent theory!)

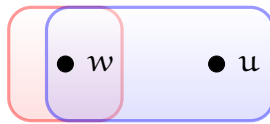
A few more examples will help to clarify how  $\mathbb{B}$  and  $\square$  work. Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{I} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model, let  $W = \{w, u\}$ , and let  $\mathcal{I}(\phi) = \{w\}$  so that  $\phi$  is true only at  $w$ . Our viewpoints will be  $\mathbb{V} = \{v_1, v_2, v_\lambda\}$ . Since we're working with uniform models, I'll describe  $\mathbb{V}$  and  $\mathbb{E}$  only in terms of the formulas and sets of worlds supported rather than in terms of the pairs linking worlds to those elements, as doing so simplifies the presentation. Let  $v_1(w) = \{\phi\}$ , and  $v_2(w) = \{\neg\phi\}$ . In keeping with the Triviality constraint, the agent's viewpoint,  $v_\lambda$ , contains a pair  $\langle w, \phi \vee \neg\phi \rangle$  for each  $w \in W$ , ensuring that each evidence relation contains the set of all worlds in our model. The rest of the elements of  $\mathbb{E}$  will be constructed from  $A$ , per the viewpoint model definition above. Here are a few situations that might obtain.

The agent in Figure 2.1 lacks direct support for  $\phi$  because the only



**Figure 2.1:**  $A = \{v_A\}$ ,  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{W\}$   
 This is the naive agent. She neither has evidence for  $\phi$  nor believes it and the same goes for  $\neg\phi$ .

viewpoint she trusts,  $\{w, u\}$ , includes  $u$  and  $\mathcal{M}, u \not\models \phi$ . So,  $\mathcal{M}, u \not\models \Box\phi$ . The same goes for  $\neg\phi$ , *mutatis mutandis*. So,  $\mathcal{M} \not\models \Box\neg\phi$ . In addition, she believes neither  $\phi$  or  $\neg\phi$  because her only maximal consistent theory is  $\{w, u\}$  and it don't settle whether  $\phi$  is true.

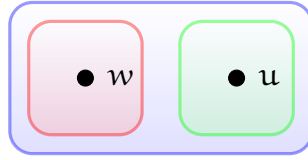


**Figure 2.2:**  $A = \{v_1, v_A\}$ ,  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{\{w\}, W\}$   
 Adding  $v_1$ , our agent now has evidence for  $\phi$  and believes  $\phi$ .

The agent depicted in Figure 2.2, on the other hand, does have support for  $\phi$ . In trusting  $v_1$ , she adds  $\llbracket\phi\rrbracket$ , the set of worlds in which  $\phi$  is true, to her evidence relation. Additionally, she believes  $\phi$ . She still has exactly one maximal consistent theory, but this time there's just one world in the intersection of the support relations in that theory:  $w$ . Since  $\phi$  is true at  $w$ , this means  $\mathcal{M}, w \models B\phi$ .

The case for  $\mathcal{M} \models \Box\phi$  in Figure 2.3 is the same as it is for Figure 2.2. This time, however, she has a second maximal consistent theory – the one consisting of  $\{u\}$  and  $W$ . So, what goes for  $\phi$  goes for  $\neg\phi$ , *mutatis mutandis*. Looking at the relationships between her evidence, it's clear why our agent doesn't believe either proposition. She trusts two distinct

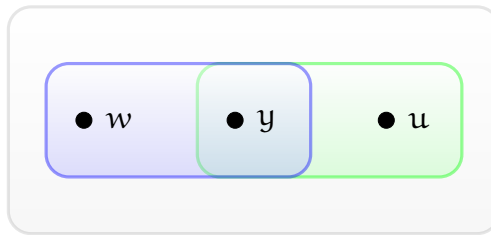




**Figure 2.3:**  $A = \{v_1, v_2, v_A\}$ ,  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{\{w\}, \{u\}, W\}$   
 Since  $v_1$  and  $v_2$  disagree about whether the evidence supports  $\phi$ , the evidence relation depicted here contains conflicting support relations. So, the agent has evidence for  $\phi$  and  $\neg\phi$ , but believes neither.

theories about the way the world could be,  $\{\{w\}, \{w, u\}\}$  and  $\{\{u\}, \{w, u\}\}$ , and they disagree about  $\phi$ . So,  $\mathcal{M} \not\models B\phi$ . This demonstrates the fact that having evidence for  $\phi$  does not imply believing  $\phi$  on viewpoint models.

Belief also doesn't require that an agent have evidence *for*  $\phi$  in the sense defined here. Consider a model on which  $W = \{w, y, u\}$ ,  $\mathcal{I}(\phi) = \{y\}$ , and  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{\{w, y\}, \{y, u\}, \{w, y, u\}\}$ , such as Figure 2.4. Since none of these



**Figure 2.4:**  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{\{w, y\}, \{y, u\}, W\}$   
 A case in which an agent believes  $\phi$  but has no direct support for  $\phi$ .

sets is one on which  $\phi$  is true at each world,  $\mathcal{M} \not\models \Box\neg\phi$ . However, since there is just one maximal consistent theory,  $\{\{w, u\}, \{w, y\}, \{w, u, y\}\}$ , and  $\phi$  is true at the one world in the intersection of those sets,  $\mathcal{M} \models B\phi$ . So, even though no individual piece of evidence supports  $\phi$  *directly*, taken together, her evidence gives her reason to believe  $\phi$ .<sup>41</sup> To make this more

<sup>41</sup>For an axiomatization, completeness results, and other logical details, see *van Ben-*

concrete, suppose you're trying to decide whether to start reading *The Hobbit*, *1984*, or *Jurassic Park*. You have two friends who've read all three, both of whom you trust to know your tastes. However, when you ask which of the three novels you'll like best, your friends give you different answers: Damian tells you it'll be either *The Hobbit* or *1984* and Boris tells you it'll be *1984* or *Jurassic Park*. According to our model, you should believe you'll like *1984* best, given this state of affairs, even though neither friend gave you direct support for this.

#### 2.4.4 Viewpoints & Standpoints

So far, viewpoints haven't played a direct role in the logic we've developed. This will change as we turn to the dynamics of standpoints — coming to occupy a standpoint and interacting with occupants — in the next section. These dynamics depend on identifying standpoints with particular viewpoints in  $\mathbb{V}$ . The Latina standpoint, for example, might be a particular  $L \in \mathbb{V}$ . Occupying the Latina standpoint, then, will be a matter of bearing a particular relationship to  $L$ . Before looking at that relationship, however, a few points about this are worth noting.

First, a bit more about what standpoints look like from the perspective of the model. I'll make no effort to dictate the content of the propositions standpoints support. The goal here is merely to capture the structure of standpoints in a way that makes them tractable from the perspective of conventional epistemology. In addition, while standpoints will support particular propositions on this model, this does not imply that agents who trust standpoints will necessarily *believe* those propositions and Pacuit (2011b).

tions. Someone who trusts a standpoint may be in the kind of situation depicted in Figure 2.3, in which they are best described as trusting two viewpoints that contradict one another regarding the propositions the standpoint supports. This possibility will be critical to our discussion of what it means to occupy a standpoint.

Second, as we've seen before the notion of *the* standpoint of a particular group is misleading. So, it will be more accurate to characterize the Latina standpoint as a set  $\mathbb{L}$  of closely related viewpoints. Occupying this standpoint, then, will be bearing the relevant relationship to some  $L \in \mathbb{L}$ . For the most part, this is a technical detail for our purposes, but it's worth bearing in mind.

Finally, agents may not be able to assess whether they occupy a given standpoint accurately. That is, an agent may be mistaken about what a particular standpoint says about her evidence. The same goes for any other source that has agent-independent standards for evidential support relations. Someone who takes the Catholic faith to provide support for the proposition *Jesus never rose from the dead* is simply mistaken about the tenets of the Catholic faith. This distinction between evidential support relations from an agent's perspective and from an agent-independent perspective will be important to keep in mind as we look at agents' interactions with standpoints in the next sections.

With our model in place, we can now turn to the core questions: What does it mean to occupy a standpoint? How should agents interact with standpoints? Along the way, we'll need to add some dynamic operators to our model. As we'll see, there are many ways to characterize these changes, often marking points of contention within standpoint

theory. So, deciding between them will mean settling on a particular kind of standpoint theory. Some of these decisions will turn out to be irreducibly political, rather than epistemic, as they ought to be for this hybrid theory. By looking at candidate characterizations of these dynamics in logical terms, however, we'll get a clearer sense of their normative consequences and the nature of the political commitments necessary to support them.

## 2.5 Occupying a Standpoint

What does it mean for an agent to occupy a standpoint? How does coming to occupy a standpoint affect one's other doxastic states? At first blush, it might seem as if there's a simple answer here. Why not treat coming to occupy a standpoint in the same way that one would treat coming to trust any other viewpoint?

**Adoptive Occupancy.** Occupying a standpoint means trusting a viewpoint associated with that standpoint. In terms of our model, an agent occupies a standpoint  $\mathbb{L}$  just in case there is some  $L \in \mathbb{L}$  such that  $L \in A$ .

If that's right, coming to occupy a standpoint would involve a straightforward change: upon adding a viewpoint associated with a standpoint to the set of viewpoints she trusts, an agent could be said to occupy a standpoint. We can model this change as an instance of a more general update.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Viewpoint Addition and  $[+v]\phi$  closely resemble *van Benthem and Pacuit's* (2011b, p. 9) Evidence Addition and  $[+\phi]\psi$ , which define a similar process for a single proposition.

**Viewpoint Addition.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{F} \rangle$  be a sourced evidence model and  $v$  a viewpoint in  $\mathbb{V}$ . The model  $\mathcal{M}^{+v} = \langle W^{+v}, \mathbb{V}^{+v}, A^{+v}, \mathbb{E}^{+v}, \mathcal{F}^{+v} \rangle$  has  $W^{+v} = W$ ,  $\mathbb{V}^{+v} = \mathbb{V}$ ,  $\mathcal{F}^{+v} = \mathcal{F}$ ,

$$A^{+v} = A \cup \{v\}, \text{ and}$$

$$\mathbb{E}^{+v}(w) = \mathbb{E}(w) \cup \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \text{ for all } w \in W \text{ and all } \phi \text{ s.t. } \langle w, \phi \rangle \in v$$

and  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \neq \emptyset$

Here, the only changes from  $\mathcal{M}$  to  $\mathcal{M}^{+v}$ , the updated model, are to the list of viewpoints the agent trusts,  $A$ , and, correspondingly, to the evidence relation,  $\mathbb{E}$ . We can then define the modality  $[+v]\psi$ , meaning “ $\psi$  is true after the agent comes to trust viewpoint  $v$ ” to describe this change:

$$\text{(VA)} \quad \mathcal{M}, w \models [+v]\psi \text{ iff for each } \phi \in v, \mathcal{M}, w \models \phi \text{ implies } \mathcal{M}^{+v}, w \models \psi$$

The condition on VA — for each  $\phi \in \mathbb{V}$ ,  $\mathcal{M}, w \models \phi$  — requires that each proposition be true at some world in the model, meaning that an agent must take the propositions a viewpoint supports to be at least *possible* if she’s going to add it to the viewpoints she trusts.<sup>43</sup>

On this proposal, a college freshman who starts to take the feminist analysis she’s learned seriously — trusting the viewpoint and adding it to  $A$  — counts as occupying a feminist standpoint. As a result of this update to her evidence relation, everything she believes will be consistent with the propositions supported by that viewpoint. This is because the belief operator requires anything she believes to be true on every maximal consistent theory. Once she’s added the feminist standpoint to the

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<sup>43</sup> Recursion axioms for  $[+v]\psi$  and the other operators discussed in this section to be included in an appendix.

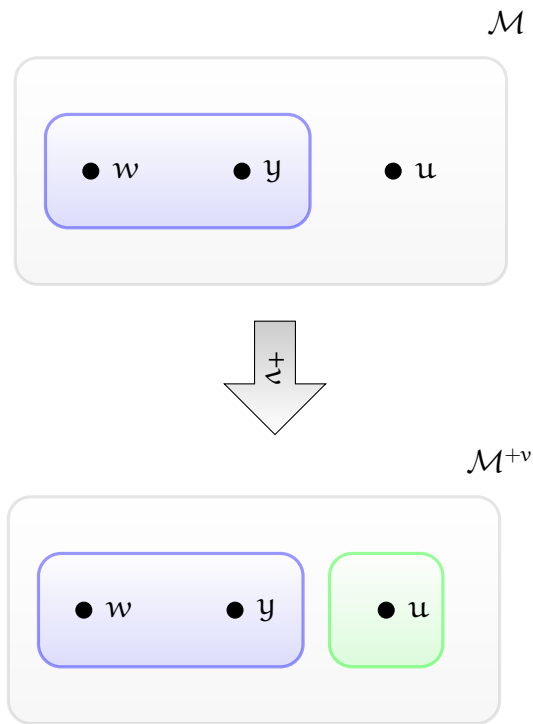
viewpoints she trusts, any proposition that cannot be true according to that standpoint can no longer be true on every maximal consistent theory of hers (even if its true on many of them). This is a positive feature of the proposal. Nevertheless, it is too weak to serve as a model of standpoint occupancy for at least two reasons.

First, it leaves propositions inconsistent with the standpoint exactly as well-supported as they were before she came to occupy the standpoint. To see this, recall our definition for the support operator:

$$\mathcal{M}, w \models \Box\phi \text{ iff there is some } X \in \mathbb{E}(w) \text{ such that for all } u \in X, \mathcal{M}, u \models \phi$$

If a standpoint supports  $\phi = \textit{sexism affects women's employment prospects in the United States}$  at every world, the agent who believes  $\neg\phi$  to begin with will not adopt the belief  $\phi$  as a result of trusting the standpoint. As described, she'll lose the belief  $\neg\phi$ , but she won't come to believe the opposite. And, since support only requires that there be *some* set of worlds in the agent's evidence relation that are all  $\neg\phi$ -worlds, she'll still have support for  $\neg\phi$ . Figure 2.5 depicts this kind of situation. While this is appropriate for coming to trust a viewpoint in general, the notion of occupying a standpoint seems to require a more robust response.

Second, this result also implies that the proposal would allow agents who come to occupy a standpoint to hold *none* of the beliefs central to it. Given the claim that the privilege associated with occupying a standpoint involves developing genuine expertise with respect to the effects of social hierarchy on one's lived experience, this seems like the wrong result. In §2.3, I argued that that expertise should be understood in



**Figure 2.5:** Adding a source  $v$  to  $\mathcal{M}$ .

Suppose  $\phi$  is true only at world  $u$  and that the viewpoint being added,  $v$ , contains support for  $\phi$ . In this case, the belief  $\neg\phi$  is lost at  $\mathcal{M}^{+v}$ , but the agent does not believe  $\phi$  because there are two maximal consistent theories and they disagree about  $\phi$ .

terms of evidential support relations — as a way of responding to evidence. The model we constructed in §2.4 construes those ESRs as one among many viewpoints to which an agent might be responsive. As this kind of example illustrates, however, having expert ESRs among those with which you form your beliefs may not be enough to count as an expert (even setting aside other issues, such as the kind of access you have to those ESRs). For example, under Adoptive Occupancy, our college freshman might still trust her conservative upbringing, according to which housekeeping is a woman’s most important duty. So, when

asked about this, she would respond with the uncertainty befitting having contradictory ESRs on the matter. Despite knowing how the feminist standpoint would interpret her evidence, her inability to distinguish between a good interpretation and a bad one suggests that she is not, in fact, an expert with respect to understanding how social structures affect her life as a woman. Being an expert requires knowing what to discard as well as what to keep.

Nevertheless, this is an important epistemic state. We often consider only those who occupy standpoints and those who do not. But, this kind of relationship with a standpoint — mere understanding, perhaps — marks an important distinction between ways *not* to occupy a standpoint. This agent is quite different from the anti-feminist, for example. While she might still be “on the fence”, she is taking the views she would have were she to occupy the standpoint seriously. In virtue of including it among the viewpoints she trusts, she is neither against it nor is she unaware or ignorant of it. This kind of case will play an important role when we turn to non-occupants’ interaction with occupants’ testimony in the next section.

Since merely being responsive to the concerns of a group or understanding how they are likely to respond to a situation is not sufficient for occupying that group’s standpoint, we’ll need a stronger alternative. Since contradictory viewpoints were a problem for Adoptive Occupancy, we might try to avoid the problem by requiring standpoint occupants to eliminate such viewpoints:

**Consistent Viewpoint Occupancy.** Occupying a standpoint



means not only trusting a viewpoint associated with that standpoint, but also ceasing to trust viewpoints inconsistent with the standpoint. In terms of our model, this requires adopting some  $L \in \mathbb{L}$  for a standpoint  $\mathbb{L}$  and removing viewpoints inconsistent with  $L$ .

The idea here is that occupying a standpoint requires taking a position *against* contradictory viewpoints. To be more specific, we'll say that two viewpoints are contradictory when there is no maximal consistent theory to be built from both (that is, when there is no possible world that's true across all of the propositions each viewpoint supports). To model this, we'll need another dynamic operation. This time, our focus will be eliminating the evidential support relations arising from viewpoints inconsistent with the standpoint.

**Viewpoint Homogenization.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{I} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model and  $v$  a viewpoint in  $\mathbb{V}$ . The model

$\mathcal{M}^{\text{ov}} = \langle W^{\text{ov}}, \mathbb{V}^{\text{ov}}, A^{\text{ov}}, \mathbb{E}^{\text{ov}}, \mathcal{I}^{\text{ov}} \rangle$  has  $W^{\text{ov}} = W$ ,  $\mathbb{V}^{\text{ov}} = \mathbb{V}$ ,  $\mathcal{I}^{\text{ov}} = \mathcal{I}$ ,

$$A^{\text{ov}} = \{v\} \cup \{v_i \mid v_i \in A \text{ and } \bigcap_{\langle w, \phi \rangle \in v_i \text{ or } v} \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \neq \emptyset\}$$

$$\mathbb{E}^{\text{ov}} = \{\langle w, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \rangle \mid \langle w, \phi \rangle \in v_i \text{ for some } v_i \in A^{\text{ov}}\}$$

The major changes to this model involve an update to the agent definition  $A$ , which we then use to reconstruct  $\mathbb{E}$ , the evidence relation. The agent adds the target viewpoint — the standpoint — and eliminates all of the viewpoints that have no overlap with the standpoint. After this kind of update, then, the agent will no longer accept such sources' interpretations of her evidence. On this model of occupancy, our college freshman not only comes to trust the feminist analysis she's learned, but also

*rejects* viewpoints that are inconsistent with it, such as, say, the conservative worldview she learned at home. Coming to occupy a standpoint means coming to distrust viewpoints that contradict it.

This characterization resolves the first worry for Adoptive Occupancy: because any viewpoint that would have added support for such a proposition has been eliminated from the collection of viewpoints she trusts, she no longer has support for those propositions.

Removing all of the viewpoints that contradict the standpoint is quite drastic, however. This requires agents who adopt standpoints to disavow all of their contradicting viewpoints *completely*, regardless of whatever else they might support. To take up Collins' central example again, the fact that conventional social science supports a worldview on which it is the character flaws of black women, rather than systemic racism, that is to blame for their circumstances suggests that this version of occupancy will require an agent to remove conventional social science as a lens through which to interpret her evidence.<sup>44</sup> This, one might think, overstates the epistemic commitments that go along with occupying a standpoint.<sup>45</sup>

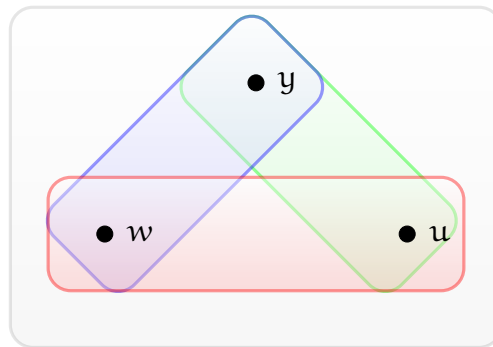
Additionally, a weaker version of our second worry for Adoptive Occupancy persists. Removing inconsistent viewpoints does not imply

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<sup>44</sup> In a case like this, it may not even be *possible* to simply drop something like the viewpoint of conventional social science.

<sup>45</sup> A more nuanced model might manage this worry by changing the way our agent specification works, substituting the set of viewpoints the agent accepts for a priority relation among viewpoints. This would allow us to construct  $\mathbb{E}$  by adopting what's supported by higher priority viewpoints and adding in just what's consistent with the already adopted viewpoints for each lower-priority viewpoint. Occupying a standpoint, then, would involve giving it high priority. For the sake of brevity, I won't elaborate on this iteration of our model here — the point is that this particular worry is better understood as an artifact of simplicity. cf. (*van Benthem and Pacuit, 2011a, §4*), which elaborates on how neighborhood semantics can be used in plausibility models.

that our agent comes to believe the propositions the standpoint supports. This is because of the gap between support for a proposition and belief in our model. To be eliminated by this operation, a viewpoint must support, say,  $\neg\phi$  where the standpoint in question supports  $\phi$ . But, a viewpoint that passes this test may still support propositions consistent with  $\neg\phi$ , so that  $\neg\phi$  worlds are included in its evidence sets. For example, if two viewpoints each including the same  $\neg\phi$  world but different  $\phi$  worlds,  $\neg\phi$  will be true on the maximal consistent theory consisting of those two viewpoints, as in Figure 2.6.



**Figure 2.6:**  $\mathbb{E}(w) = \{\{w, y\}, \{y, u\}, \{w, u\}, W\}$

Suppose  $\phi$  is true only at  $w$  and  $u$ . The viewpoints providing  $\{w, y\}$  and  $\{y, u\}$  could survive viewpoint homogenization with a viewpoint supporting  $\phi$  (in red here), allowing the agent to end up in a state like this one, in which she has a maximal consistent theory between  $\{w, y\}$  and  $\{y, u\}$  on which  $\neg\phi$  is true.

As a result, it won't be the case that  $\phi$  is true on all maximal consistent theories. Since  $B\phi$  depends on having only  $\phi$  worlds in all of the maximal consistent theories the agent can put together, this means that we can't guarantee that the agent will believe  $\phi$ .

This raises an important question: just how much of what a stand-

point supports must an occupant believe? Should standpoint occupants believe *everything* supported by those standpoints? If so, we'll need a different kind of condition altogether.

**Strict Occupancy.** Occupying a standpoint requires rejecting possibilities inconsistent with that standpoint.

We can model this with the following update:<sup>46</sup>

**Viewpoint Scrubbing.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, \mathcal{A}, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{I} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model and  $v$  a viewpoint in  $\mathbb{V}$ . The model  $\mathcal{M}^{!v} = \langle W^{!v}, \mathbb{V}^{!v}, \mathcal{A}^{!v}, \mathbb{E}^{!v}, \mathcal{I}^{!v} \rangle$  has  $\mathbb{V}^{!v} = \mathbb{V}$ ,

$$W^{!v} = \bigcap_{\langle w, \phi \rangle \in v} \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}}$$

$$\mathcal{A}^{!v} = \{v\} \cup \mathcal{A},$$

$\mathbb{E}^{!v}(w) = \{X \mid \emptyset \neq X = \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \cap W^{!v} \text{ for all } \phi \text{ s.t. } \langle x, \phi \rangle \in v_i \text{ for some } v_i \in \mathcal{A}^{!v}\}$ , and

$$\mathcal{I}^{!v} = \mathbb{V}(p) \cap W^{!v}$$

The change to  $W$  reduces the set of possible worlds to those within the intersection of the propositions supported by the standpoint, while the updates to  $\mathbb{E}$  and  $\mathcal{I}$  render the model consistent with that change. On this characterization, occupying a standpoint means taking it as a kind of fundamental worldview that defines the boundaries of any other epistemic endeavor. Rather than removing inconsistent viewpoints entirely, this operation just scrubs away the possibilities that allow those viewpoints to be inconsistent with the standpoint in the first place. This

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<sup>46</sup>  $\mathcal{M}^{!v}$  is closely modeled on *van Benthem and Pacuit's* (2011a)'s  $\mathcal{M}^{!p}$  for public announcement in evidence models.

solves both of the potential problems for Adoptive Occupancy: agents who occupy a standpoint accept no evidence directly supporting propositions that contradict the standpoint and they believe all of the propositions it supports. So, our college freshman can keep her conservative viewpoint around. The only difference is that many of the propositions it supports will have an empty truth set because there's just no way for them to turn out to be true by her lights. As a result, those propositions won't make it into her evidence relation. Looking back at Figure 2.6, this situation cannot arise because  $y$ , the  $\neg\phi$  world that caused the problem, will be removed by scrubbing for the standpoint that provides  $\{w, u\}$ .

This may seem too strong, however, because Strict Occupancy comes at the cost of preventing agents from so much as entertaining the *possibility* that a proposition supported by the standpoint is false. Standpoints are *infallible* on this view. On the knowledge-based conceptions of standpoint privilege discussed in §2.3, this may be appropriate. Given the worries with which we ended that discussion, this may seem like an unwelcome outcome.

There is a great deal of space between the Strict and Consistent Viewpoint versions of occupancy, however. We might, for example, take a more targeted approach on which occupants view their standpoint as fundamental, but do not foreclose other possibilities:

**Promoted Occupancy.** Occupying a standpoint requires rejecting direct, but not indirect, support for propositions inconsistent with that standpoint.

To model this, we'll define an operation that removes direct support

for propositions inconsistent with those supported by the standpoint, leaving everything else intact:

**Viewpoint Promotion.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{F} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model and  $v$  a viewpoint in  $\mathbb{V}$ . The model  $\mathcal{M}^{*v} = \langle W^{*v}, \mathbb{V}^{*v}, A^{*v}, \mathbb{E}^{*v}, \mathcal{F}^{*v} \rangle$  has  $\mathbb{V}^{*v} = \mathbb{V}$ ,  $W^{*v} = W$ ,  $\mathcal{F}^{*v} = \mathcal{F}$ ,

$$A^{*v} = \{v\} \cup A, \text{ and}$$

$$\mathbb{E}^{*v}(w) = \{ \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}^{*v}} \mid \langle w, \phi \rangle \in v_i \text{ for some } v_i \in A^{*v} \text{ and } \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \cap \bigcap_{\langle w, \psi \rangle \in v} \llbracket \psi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \neq \emptyset \}$$

The condition on  $\mathbb{E}$  removes the individual evidential support relations inconsistent with the standpoint.<sup>47</sup> That is, rather than removing inconsistent viewpoints entirely, this operation promotes the possibilities supported by the standpoint by removing direct support for propositions inconsistent with them. In doing so, it leaves in place support for propositions that are neutral with respect to her standpoint, in the sense that they can be true regardless of whether everything the standpoint supports is true. So, this is another case in which our college freshman need not entirely forego her conservative upbringing, instead just ignoring the parts that support propositions like *women ought to raise families rather than joining the workforce*. The difference between this and Strict Occupancy is that she can still consider the possibilities outside of the standpoint. As a result, the situation illustrated in Figure 2.6 can arise here as well. When one of her maximal consistent theories converges on possibilities outside those delineated by her standpoint, our agent

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<sup>47</sup>This amounts to a one-step version of the prioritization discussed in footnote 45.

may no longer believe all of the propositions supported by the standpoint. So, this option answers our earlier question — must standpoint occupants believe everything the standpoint supports? — in the negative. This may be warranted, however. The agent in this situation has support for mutually incompatible propositions, all of which are compatible with the standpoint she occupies. Upon realizing that she has incompatible maximal consistent theories, questioning the troublesome proposition supported by that standpoint ( $\phi$  in Figure 2.6) seems only reasonable. Whether this realization calls for modifying her views about the standpoint, investigating the viewpoints providing support for the now-uncertain propositions, or simply being content with that uncertainty, merely acknowledging that her evidence lacks a clear, univocal interpretation on the viewpoints she trusts need not constitute a betrayal of her standpoint.

Between Strict Occupancy and Promotion, I take the latter to be the more plausible characterization of how occupying a standpoint affects an agent's epistemic state, at least for the kind of standpoint epistemology I've argued for in this paper. While both involve elevating an expert viewpoint, Strict Occupancy appears to be a form of dogmatism. This goes beyond what's necessary of an expert — an expert need not be incapable of considering the possibility that her views are false. In fact, one might worry that such dogmatism renders the agent *less* of an expert than a counterpart who hasn't scrubbed the incompatible possibilities. The dogmatic agent cannot meaningfully abandon, let alone question, her standpoint because scrubbing the incompatible possibilities means that she'll continue to believe those propositions even if she eliminates

all direct support for them. This hardly seems to support the kind of deliberate adjudication an expert should be able to engage in.

By contrast, the Promoter's choice to bring the standpoint's evidential support relations to the fore *can* be reversed. She does prioritize the standpoint's verdict about her evidence, but nevertheless remains engaged with the possibility that some of the propositions the standpoint supports may be false. Moreover, Promotion is far more responsive to the possibility of changing one's views. As we've seen, there are many distinct sets of evidential support relations that "count" as part of any standpoint. Plausibly, an agent who occupies a standpoint can (and will) shift among these as she gains experience. Promotion just requires making the same change, this time with the new version of the standpoint. Under Strict Occupancy, however, any proposition that contradicts a proposition supported by the initial standpoint will have an empty truth set, regardless of its being supported by a different instantiation of that same standpoint. So, support such propositions cannot make it into her revised evidence relation. This, too, is a reason to worry about whether Strict Occupancy can reasonably be said to let the privilege of being a standpoint occupant — access to these expert evidential support relations — support treating the occupant herself as an expert.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Strict Occupancy does leave room for a stridently political understanding of what it means to occupy a standpoint. The version of occupancy I've argued for is largely a matter of employing the expertise developed as a result of being in a position to occupy a stand-

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<sup>48</sup>The more detailed approach to prioritization discussed in footnote 45 may provide an even better account of how expertise works in a framework like this one.



point. To motivate a more politically charged conception, however, consider a case in which most of the viewpoints an agent might trust undermine belief in her own capacity to participate in that epistemic community. Here, Strict Occupancy might be necessary — being uncertain of whether you are fit to participate can be silencing even when you are invited to do so.<sup>49</sup> So motivated, concerns about Strict Occupancy being dogmatic or otherwise epistemically suspect may seem less immediately pressing. Even if occupancy is purely a matter of politically-motivated adherence to these ESRs, however, the resulting norms must still pass epistemic muster. In terms of both organizational and individual norms, the fact that Strict Occupancy makes individuals poorer candidates for expertise is worrisome. With this in mind, we turn to the normative implications of occupancy.

## 2.6 Inclusivity and Deference

Standpoint epistemology's norms must operate at two levels: the organizational norms governing communities of inquiry and the deference norms governing individuals' interaction with occupants' testimony. Without the former there may be no occupant testimony on which the latter can act and, without the latter, the effects of the former may be fruitless. This section aims to ground these norms and address two concerns about putting them into practice.

In §2.2, I argued that Stable Inclusivity is the appropriate target for

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<sup>49</sup> This is particularly common in the history of racialized belief about intellectual capacity. See *Mills* (2007).

these organizing norms. §2.3 argued that standpoint theorists ought to focus on occupants' expertise, in terms of how they respond to their evidence, in order to explain what epistemic advantage provides grounds for them. If we take Promotion to be the appropriate account of standpoint occupancy, then the initial explanation of why an epistemic community ought to include occupants stands — with respect to inquiries that concern their standpoints, occupants are more likely to get it right than non-occupants. So, Stable Inclusivity is grounded in the value of including experts. But, if Strict Occupancy is the appropriate account, the argument for Stable Inclusivity is somewhat less obvious. As we saw, Strict Occupancy is sufficiently rigid to draw into question the extent to which standpoint occupants ought to be treated as experts as an inquiry progresses. Even if strict occupants are not experts, however, they nevertheless provide relevant and otherwise unavailable evidence. Moreover, insofar as the central problem with treating Strict occupants as experts has to do with their being, in a sense, unresponsive to much of the other evidence they trust, this is not necessarily a reason to disregard the expert value of their testimony. Had such agents *not* acquired the evidence they are ignoring, Scrubbing for the standpoint would not present this particular problem for their claim to expertise. That is, it is possible for similar agents to have the same attitudes and same claim to expertise (via their standpoint) *without* this undermining concern. This suggests that the inadequacy of their response is importantly contingent. Whether this is enough to justify treating their testimony as expert remains opaque, but there is at least room for further defense of Stable Inclusivity under Strict Occupancy.

This leaves us with deference, the individual-level counterpart to inclusivity. Because the epistemic good we've identified as common to standpoint occupants is a form of expertise, we'll take more general norms governing deference to experts as a starting point. In the case of objective chances, those norms look something like *Lewis's* (1981) *Principal Principle*, which, roughly speaking, states that you should set your degree of belief in a proposition to your expectation of the objective chance that it is true, given your evidence.<sup>50</sup> Similar principles apply to your future credences, other rational agents, and so on. In general, these principles state that, conditional upon your expert having a certain attitude once they've been brought up to speed with what you know that they don't, you should have that attitude as well. So, if you take Judge Judy to be an expert on domestic disputes and you learn that she believes that Jenna is guilty, you should also believe that Jenna is guilty.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, standpoint deference principles will require interlocutors to adopt occupants' attitudes where those attitudes concern occupants' expertise. What might such an update look like on the kind of framework developed here? To sketch this process, we'll begin with testimony. Testimony, in general, serves to inform the hearer about what propositions particular viewpoints support on this framework. Where that testimony concerns a standpoint occupied by the speaker, it is relevant not only to the speaker's viewpoint, but also their standpoint.<sup>52</sup> With

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<sup>50</sup>There are numerous issues with Lewis' formulation, but this simple version will suffice for present purposes.

<sup>51</sup> This assumes that you don't have any additional relevant information and that there's no other expert you defer to who disagrees with Judge Judy.

<sup>52</sup> Though I will not delve into this question at present, this does assume that hearers can identify testimony that counts as coming from a speaker's standpoint. This kind of "marked testimony", I take it, plays a significant role in many discussions of testimonial

the relevant viewpoints updated appropriately,<sup>53</sup> the question becomes how the hearer ought to relate the standpoint to the rest of those she trusts. Given the role of Promotion in allowing the standpoint occupant to act as an expert using the viewpoint associated with her standpoint, we might take Promotion to be the appropriate response here as well. While Promotion does leave room for using the agent’s current evidence, it falls short of the general principles defined above because it allows for only one candidate expert. To remedy this, we might generalize Promotion by allowing a set of promoted viewpoints:

**Multi-Viewpoint Promotion.** Let  $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathbb{V}, A, \mathbb{E}, \mathcal{G} \rangle$  be a viewpoint model and let  $V$  be a subset of  $\mathbb{V}$ . The model

$$\mathcal{M}^{*V} = \langle W^{*V}, \mathbb{V}^{*V}, A^{*V}, \mathbb{E}^{*V}, \mathcal{G}^{*V} \rangle \text{ has } \mathbb{V}^{*V} = \mathbb{V}, W^{*V} = W, \mathcal{G}^{*V} = \mathcal{G},$$

$$A^{*V} = V \cup A, \text{ and}$$

$$\mathbb{E}^{*V}(w) = \{ \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}^{*V}} \mid \langle w, \phi \rangle \in v_i \text{ for some } v_i \in A^{*V} \text{ and,} \\ \text{for some } v \in V, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \cap \bigcap_{\langle w, \psi \rangle \in v} \llbracket \psi \rrbracket_{\mathcal{M}} \neq \emptyset \}$$

This behaves exactly as the earlier version of Promotion, with the exception that a proposition will make it into the agent’s evidence relation in virtue of being consistent with any of the promoted experts. Even so, Multi-Viewpoint Promotion leaves much to be desired. For example, it requires that all experts are treated identically, which captures relatively few cases. I leave it to future work to determine how best to design expert principles for viewpoint models (and neighborhood semantics for

injustice and gaslighting (cf. *Fricker* (2007), *McKinnon* (2017)). With these examples in mind, I will assume that hearers can distinguish the relevant testimony sufficiently well for present purposes, though this does bear further discussion.

<sup>53</sup> This can be handled either as direct changes to elements of  $\mathbb{V}$  or as the agent replacing elements of  $A$  that represented the viewpoints before receiving new testimony with elements of  $\mathbb{V}$  that match their new understanding of the viewpoints.

evidence logic in general).<sup>54</sup> Whatever form such principles take, standpoint occupants' testimony ought to be treated as expert testimony.

Again, however, this story is less convincing under Strict Occupancy. If the justification for taking on occupants' testimony has more to do with the fact that they provide an otherwise unavailable interpretation of your evidence than it does with their being experts, an update like this one seems far too strong. A weaker response, such as Viewpoint Addition, may still be warranted, however. Even if they do not provide expertise, standpoint occupants still provide a well-grounded interpretation of the evidence, which an interlocutor would be unwise to ignore. As we saw in §2.5, coming to trust a viewpoint this way still has the effect of undermining beliefs that contradict it, but it lacks the inquiry-defining force of the alternatives. This suggests that there is a trade-off to be had between the strength of our notion of occupancy, on one hand, and the strength of the epistemically grounded norms it can support on the other. At both the individual and organizational levels, an account of occupancy that preserves the parallel with expertise, such as Promotional Occupancy, provides a clearer route to epistemically-justifiable norms. Either way, however, implementing these norms presents a significant challenge.

For both Strict and Promotional Occupancy, the norms just sketched focus on standpoint occupants. Understood as “third-party” devices explaining how we, as theorists, ought to measure how well non-occupants are doing, this isn't too worrisome. Employing them requires that we

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<sup>54</sup> Again, I suspect that a more nuanced model, such as the one suggested in footnote 45, would provide resources for a more viable account of deference.

have a way of identifying standpoint occupants and their viewpoints, but this, too, is within the scope of our theoretical position. Standpoint theorists have broader aims than this, however. Insofar as the goal is to actually improve research communities, norms with some capacity to *guide* those communities are far more valuable than norms that merely characterize their shortcomings. For an agent to respond to norms like these, however, she must be able to correctly identify standpoint occupants. Without this ability, her shortcomings will remain opaque to her. There is a similar worry, of course, for the more general counterpart of these norms: it doesn't help to tell someone to defer to experts if they can't tell who the experts are.<sup>55</sup> A particularly common response to this issue is to track how accurate purported experts are over time. Even if you can't understand how they got their answers, you can determine whether they answered correctly and, using that information, update your views about their expertise.<sup>56</sup> One might worry that this solution is particularly ill-suited to the case of standpoint occupants, however. If the evidence to which occupants are responding is privileged, and therefore inaccessible to non-occupants, how can a non-occupant verify that those who appear to be standpoint occupants are, in fact, occupants?

The situation here is not so grim, however. Part of the point of standpoint epistemology is to highlight a systemic problem that inhibits the quality and accuracy of research programs, especially in the social sciences. If that is, indeed, a consequence of the exclusion standpoint epistemologists' norms are meant to address, then following these norms

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<sup>55</sup> See *Goldman* (2001) for further discussion of this problem.

<sup>56</sup> The accuracy measures used in Bayesian epistemology do exactly this.

will impact the course of the research in question. Such impacts thereby provide testable predictions that provide non-occupants with evidence concerning the expertise of the supposed occupants to whom they defer. Such consequences may not be as clear or direct as, say, predictions of tomorrow's weather, but they provide relevant data nonetheless.

## 2.7 The Role of the Political

So far, we have an account on which the privilege standpoint provide is closely tied the notion of expertise, characterized in terms of evidential support relations, and a model that lets us use this account to explore variations of the theory, all of which are intended to be tractable from the perspective of conventional epistemology. Lest this be understood as an attempt to “trim off [standpoint epistemology's] unwieldy or discomfiting elements so as to incorporate it into more conservative philosophies or methodologies,” (*Harding*, 2009, p. 194), it is worth taking care to emphasize that this is only part of the story. Standpoint epistemology is incomplete without the political moorings that situate these structures in the real world. These political commitments play at least three particularly important roles in the version of standpoint epistemology developed here.

**An Argument for Occupancy.** In §2.5, we looked at ways to characterize what it is means to occupy a standpoint. The repercussions of choosing between these characterizations go well beyond determining who occupies a standpoint and who does not. One of the clearest benefits of

the account developed here is that it situates standpoints within conventional epistemology, treating those who occupy standpoints as experts within a particular domain. So, whatever epistemic norms apply to expert testimony apply to standpoint occupant testimony. If, however, we choose a characterization of what it means to occupy a standpoint that picks out a narrower group than the relevant experts, we strain that continuity. And, as we saw, there are some considerations in favor of requiring significantly more of standpoint occupants than just expertise and experience. So, whether occupying a standpoint looks like acting as an expert (at least enough so that the model can treat them the same way) remains an open question that cannot be resolved on the epistemic side alone.

**Demonstrating the Generative Capacity of Expertise + Social Location.** In §2.3, I argued that we can explain the privilege associated with occupying a standpoint in terms of the combination of one's lived experience and a kind of expertise concerning the social location providing that experience. While we can make space for this in the model, however, it is not something that can be accounted for in purely epistemic terms. The model developed here is merely a framework — filling out the details of how particular standpoints provide these evidential support relations and what they look like is the work of political and social philosophy. With this piece in place, our general epistemic obligation to defer to experts applies to the case of standpoint occupants.

This does not yet explain the politically salient specificity of standpoint theorists' epistemic norms, however.



**Incentive and Ignorance.** The specificity of these norms arises from the demonstration that social hierarchies incentivize those who occupy dominant locations to ignore or discount testimony ‘marked’ as the product of a standpoint. Here, again, the epistemic and political go hand-in-hand. Demonstrating that social location creates such incentives is exactly the kind of work done by *Mills’s* (2007) “White Ignorance”, among many others. If that’s right, then politically neutral epistemic norms — deference to experts, for example — will not suffice. At the very least, it suggests the need for explicitly social norms in the organization and governance of epistemic communities concerned with standpoint-relevant research. Since the expertise of those occupying subordinated standpoints is obfuscated for agents in dominant social positions, it also suggests that it may be epistemically valuable to have socially-inflected internalist epistemic norms.

At the outset, I suggested that our epistemic and moral obligations bolster one another. Each of the roles we’ve considered here is a case in point — the political works in concert with the epistemic, allowing us to recover standpoint theory’s politically-infused epistemic norms.

## **Conclusions**

We began with the goal of finding an account of standpoint epistemology that could not only avoid common pitfalls and support sufficiently robust normative conclusions, but also provide enough structure to explore clear, precise theses about how agents ought to interact with standpoints. The account we’ve developed, on which agents’ dis-

tinctive ways of relating to their evidence constitute the epistemic privilege that standpoints provide, meets these criteria. Moreover, we can arrive at this kind of view without arguing that oppression or social location automatically endows anyone with epistemic superiority. While this account (and the formal model associated with it) leaves out many important aspects of what it is to occupy a standpoint — affect, practical consequences, etc. — it captures much of the central epistemic phenomenon, doing so in a way that preserves individuals' distinctive experiences. In providing an account of the theory's epistemic backbone that is largely continuous with conventional epistemology, it allows us to apply familiar formal modeling techniques and understand how we can integrate standpoints into such systems. This continuity allows us to employ conventional epistemic norms — regarding deference to experts, in particular — alongside largely independent political observations to recover standpoint theorists' hybrid normative commitments. Standpoint epistemology's politically-laden normative commitments do not conflict with conventional epistemology. Rather, they are a consequence of taking seriously the social contexts in which we carry out our epistemic lives.

## CHAPTER III

### Evidence in a Non-Ideal World

More often than we'd like, we encounter people who hold oppressive beliefs — beliefs that lead them to misrepresent and, as a result, mistreat others on the basis of their social groups. Whether such beliefs are racist, sexist, or otherwise morally repugnant, it's tempting to dismiss those who hold them as malicious or irrational, if not both. And many have.<sup>1</sup> Often, these arguments proceed by identifying some respect in which the agent's response to her evidence is deficient. She responded irrationally to her evidence, gathered it poorly, or ran afoul some other aspect of the relationship between evidence and justification. If that's right, we can dismiss these beliefs as unjustified. Where malice motivates such beliefs, we can do the same.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that we can explain away the apparent justification of every oppressive belief by appealing to malice or mishap and call the case closed. First, it is at least possible for one's body of evidence to support such beliefs. Even agents whose evidence-gathering practices are sufficiently varied and careful can be unlucky.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Bolinger* (2018), *Basu* (forthcoming), *Shelby* (2014), *Geuss* (1981), and *Haslanger* (2012b).

On standard accounts, beliefs formed on such a basis can meet the requirements of justified belief. Second, even if those explanations do cover every *actual* case, there is practical value to knowing what it might look like to be in epistemic contexts that would produce confounding cases. Where most responses to the “rational racist” and “justified sexist” point to shortcomings they may be blind to, being able to identify the differences between our actual epistemic contexts and ones that would produce bodies of evidence capable of justifying such beliefs provides a distinct, contrastive response.

There’s more than this practical upshot to be had, however. In this paper, I’ll argue that it is not only possible, but in fact quite common for individual agents in oppressive social contexts to accrue bodies of evidence that support oppressive beliefs. Under such conditions, gaining misleading evidence isn’t merely a matter of bad luck. It is the predictable result of a phenomenon I’ll call *evidential distortion*, a structural feature of our epistemic contexts that skews readily available evidence. More specifically, our focus will be cases in which ideology is to blame for that distortion. As we’ll see, the very common *functionalist* conception of ideology, under which perpetuating and reinforcing unjust social conditions is a defining feature, implies that this kind of ostensibly justifying evidential distortion will occur. This suggests the need for an account of justification that is responsive to agents’ non-ideal epistemic and social conditions. While I will focus on what I take to be the most important cases — the formation of ostensibly justified oppressive beliefs — this phenomenon extends to any case in which this kind of predictable, systemic evidential distortion occurs.

I aim to establish two central claims. First, that beliefs formed as a result of evidential distortion will appear justified on prominent accounts of justification, both internalist and externalist.<sup>2</sup> Second, that these cases reveal a kind of structural epistemic injustice, especially where oppressive ideology is involved. §3.1 explains the notions of evidential and ideological distortion. In §3.2, I draw a line from the background features that give rise to such distortion to its effects on agents' epistemic contexts. We'll focus on the epistemic consequences of evidential distortion in §3.3 and establish the first claim. Finally, in §3.4, we will see how these distortions can bring about a structural form of epistemic injustice, establishing the second claim. I'll also argue that this kind of injustice creates a broad-based ameliorative responsibility toward our epistemic contexts.

### 3.1 Coins, Sharks, and Terrorists

Our epistemic success depends on our evidence. This is because rational agents are bound to respond to the evidence they obtain, regardless of whether doing so constitutes an epistemic improvement. As a result, rational agents are sometimes led astray, ending up with false beliefs or inaccurate credences that are nonetheless justified. Often, this is merely a matter of bad luck. In the cases we'll focus on, however, the role

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, I take justified doxastic attitudes to be the result of creditworthy inquiry. While the notion of creditworthy inquiry leaves space for both internalist and externalist views, it rules out factive interpretations of justification, such as *Littlejohn's* (2012). I set accounts like this aside because I am primarily interested the effects of ideology and other distorting influences on creditworthy inquiry. However, I am not wedded to the term 'justification'. The reader may substitute whatever content-neutral term she pleases for doxastic states formed in a creditworthy manner.

of luck is overshadowed by other, less impartial aspects of our epistemic environments.

Let's begin with a neutral example. In the opening scene of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Rosencrantz catches the glint of a coin in the dirt and stops his horse to pick it up. He tosses the coin and announces "Heads." Tossing it again, he gets the same result. A third toss, "Heads." And a fourth. This continues for another fifteen tosses before Guildenstern catches the coin mid-toss, snatching it away from Rosencrantz, to examine whether it actually *has* a tails side. Finding that it does, he tosses it back to his companion with a look of suspicion. Rosencrantz catches it on the back of his hand and declares, "Heads."<sup>3</sup>

Supposing that the coin is fair, the pair is having remarkably bad epistemic luck when it comes to learning the coin's bias. Were the coin severely biased toward heads, by about .9659, the 20-flip sequence would be as likely as not, but it's vanishingly unlikely with a .5 bias. Absent nigh-unshakable certainty that the coin is fair or dubiously counter-inductive priors,<sup>4</sup> this unfortunate string of evidence will likely lead them away from the truth, lowering their confidence in the actual bias of the coin. Nevertheless, their terrible epistemic luck has no bearing on whether their responses are rational. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, are in a truly bizarre situation.

Not all instances of potentially misleading evidence are so extraordinary. On July 30th, 2001, *Time Magazine* ran a terrifying cover story: "The Summer of the Shark". The story describes several fatal shark at-

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<sup>3</sup>See *Stoppard* (1994).

<sup>4</sup>For the bulk of what follows, I won't presume that rational constraints on credences rule out such priors.

tacks from that summer in horrific detail, while companion articles advise swimmers on how to avoid attacks, recount the heroic rescue of an eight-year-old boy from a bull shark, and explain the science behind the hunting tactics of one of the planet's oldest, most efficient predators (*Time Magazine*, 2017). The *Time* issue came on the heels of dozens of television news broadcasts and print exposés. By the end of the summer, shark attacks were the fourth most discussed item on television news (*Eisman*, 2003, p. 55).

As one might expect, this surge in coverage led many to infer that shark attacks were on the rise, that they posed a significant, immanent threat to swimmers, and so on. This effect was so pervasive, in fact, that legislation aimed at curtailing the scourge of attacks was not only proposed, but passed into law (*Sunstein*, 2002, p. 20). The new law banned shark-feeding excursions in Florida waters, even though the link between these excursions and the attacks was tenuous at best.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, the problem it was meant to address — the increasing danger of shark attacks — turned out to be a fiction. In the summer of 2001, shark attacks actually *decreased* significantly compared with the previous year (*Keen*, 2002). In the years since, the Summer of the Shark has become a symbol of irresponsible news coverage and a go-to example of the “if it bleeds, it leads” trope.<sup>6</sup>

What's important about this example, for our purposes, is that the

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<sup>5</sup> It's worth noting that officials at the time stated that the ban was unrelated to the high-profile attacks and resulting public panic, though there was widespread skepticism about this *Hatcher* (2001). Moreover, public calls for the ban did cite feeding expeditions as a contributory cause.

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, *The Daily Show*, “I Know What You Did Last Summer of the Shark”, July 15, 2002.

relevant inferences — from an increase in coverage over previous years to the belief *shark attacks are a significant danger* or to decreased confidence in *swimming is safe* — seem perfectly rational. While there might be better explanations available, such as a slow summer in the newsroom, there’s nothing obviously irrational about the less cynical inferences. Moreover, just as it seems reasonable to become increasingly confident that traffic is not only bad, but extremely bad with successive complaints from friends, becoming more confident in *shark attacks are a significant danger* with each new report seems far from irrational.<sup>7</sup> While this case differs from Rosencratz and Guildenstern’s coin flipping in that the ‘right’ inferential structure is far less obvious and the data is far more removed from the propositions in question, a common thread connects them: bad epistemic luck. Given their doxastic states at the time, the evidence they collected led them away from the truth.

That summer ended with another drastic change in media coverage. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, news media were understandably inundated with coverage of the event. Even after the initial turmoil died down, however, coverage of terrorism remained dramatically elevated in comparison with the decade preceding the attack (*Pew Research Center, 2006*). As with the Summer of the Shark, the coverage of terrorism dwarfs the risk. While Americans *are* more likely to be killed in a terrorist attack than a shark attack, both are far less likely than death by bathtub, toaster, or texting (*Nye, 2016*). On a broader scale,

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<sup>7</sup> Notice that this need not rely on the so-called *Illusory Truth Effect*, which results from being exposed to mere repetition of a proposition (*Hasher et al., 1977; Unkelbach and Rom, 2017*). Here, agents may be relying on assumptions about proportionality with respect to significance and frequency of coverage. We’ll take a closer look at how to characterize these inferences below, in §3.3.4.



the threat of terrorism in Western countries has dropped significantly since the end of the 20th century, when terrorist organizations like the ETA, a Basque separatist organization, and the IRA, the Irish Republican Army, were active (*DataGraver*, 2016). In contrast with the short-lived Summer of the Shark, however, the distortion in coverage that grew out of September 11th persists, as do its epistemic repercussions. According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2015, 16% of Americans still believed that terrorism was the most important issue facing the United States (*Riffkin*, 2015). Similarly, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that 70% of Americans are ‘very concerned’ or ‘somewhat concerned’ about Islamic extremism in the United States (*Pew Research Center*, 2017, §5).

There are many reasons for the difference between these cases in terms of longevity and impact. Most saliently, they differ dramatically in scale and motive. For our purposes, however, the most important difference between these cases is the role of ideology. September 11th brought about a dramatic shift in Americans’ relationship with terrorism. What was once a distant or isolated problem became an existential threat tied to an unfamiliar religion. In the United States, Islam went from being regarded as a minority faith closely related to the other Abrahamic religions to being feared as a hotbed of fanaticism. The so-called War on Terror, which focused almost exclusively on Islamic terrorism, became a beacon of patriotism (*Eisman*, 2003). These associations have become a background feature of modern American culture — they are part of our ideology.

As a result, the phrase “Islamic terrorism” is virtually redundant today. This is misleading, however. Take, for example, the following claim:

*Quarter*: Islamic terrorism accounts for about a quarter of terrorist incidents in the United States.

Not only is *Quarter* false, it also dramatically overstates the case. According to a study by *The Washington Post*, terrorist attacks carried out by Muslim perpetrators between 2011 and 2015 account for only 12.4% of the total number of attacks in the United States despite constituting 44% of print media's coverage of terrorism (*Kearns et al.*, 2017). In light of this, it is unsurprising that Muslims are regarded with undue suspicion and fear even sixteen years after the events of September 11th. More to the point, given an epistemic context in which the evidence an agent is likely to obtain is so dramatically skewed relative to the facts, a belief like *Quarter* might well be justified with neither malice nor mishap marring the inference.

This kind of biased coverage is a source of *evidential distortion*.

**Evidential Distortion.** For any proposition  $p$ ,  $p$  is subject to evidential distortion in an epistemic context just in case that context skews the readily available evidence so as to increase the likelihood that agents in that context encounter evidence supporting a particular doxastic state with respect to  $p$ .

On this definition, evidential distortion is exceedingly common.<sup>8</sup> We'll take a closer look at the several aspects of this definition below,<sup>9</sup> but the

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<sup>8</sup>While most of the cases we'll focus on concern distortions that support oppressive beliefs, it is worth noting that this definition includes propositions like *the earth is about 5000 years old* as well. In a Creationist epistemic context, for example, the available evidence will be skewed toward supporting belief in this proposition.

<sup>9</sup> See §3.2.1 for the notion of an epistemic context and §3.3.3 for a discussion of what it means for evidence to be skewed in this way.

Summer of the Shark provides an intuitive example. American news media and the epistemic contexts associated with it were causally responsible for the evidential distortion that led to the ensuing panic.

In this sense, the epistemic victims of the Summer of the Shark suffered a very different kind of bad luck than did Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Where their misfortune is, as Guildenstern at one point hypothesizes, nothing more than “a spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually is as likely to come down heads as tails”, the media-consuming public had no such probabilistic principle to rely upon that summer (*Stoppard*, 1994). *Their* misfortune was rationally maintaining their trust media outlets that, because of an unusually dull summer, had too much time to fill, too many pages to print, and too little content.<sup>10</sup> What the media fixated on and when they did so were matters of luck. Not so with respect to Muslims in the years after September 11th. Here, ideology plays a critical role:

**Ideological (Evidential) Distortion.** Ideological distortion occurs when a dominant ideology

1. Is the primary cause of evidential distortion, and
2. The distortion brought about supports doxastic states reinforcing that ideology.

In the years after September 11th, Muslims were subject to evidential distortion as a result of the ideological shift that took place in the im-

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<sup>10</sup> Without a reason to decrease one’s trust in a particular source of testimonial evidence, I assume that it is rational to maintain the one’s trust, even if the testimony seems somewhat implausible.

mediate aftermath of the event.<sup>11</sup> It is not a matter of luck that agents whose epistemic contexts are formed in large part by modern American media are disproportionately likely to accrue bodies of evidence that, for them, will support negative beliefs (or high confidence in such propositions) about Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Rather, given the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim ideology, this is a predictable outcome — so it goes under the influence of ideology.

In the remainder of the paper, I'll substantiate this claim and trace its consequences. Focusing on the belief-forming mechanisms behind the cases discussed in this section, updating on testimonial evidence and generic acquisition, we'll see that such mechanisms are not only common, but generally reliable and, perhaps, unavoidable. Most importantly, relative to content-neutral, asocial epistemic norms governing justification, the use of these mechanisms in epistemic contexts affected by evidential distortion is indistinguishable from their use in unaffected contexts. As a result, such accounts imply that these beliefs may be justified. For those who take ideology to exert significant influence on our social contexts, this is an unwelcome result. But, as I'll argue in §3.3.3, this follows from functionalism about ideology — a very common com-

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<sup>11</sup> I do not intend to give an account of how that ideological shift came about. This is, no doubt, a complex story well beyond the scope of the present discussion. Plausibly, however, the initial coverage itself played a significant role in that shift. Since I have defined ideological distortion as the effect of an *existing* ideology, media coverage during the weeks and months immediately following may not have contributed to an instance of ideological distortion, strictly speaking. For this reason, I restrict my attention to the most recent decade.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to say there's *no* luck involved in their encountering this evidence — one might still think it's a matter of luck that they were born in the relevant time frame, speak a relevant language, have sufficient cognitive capacities to be affected in this way, and so forth. What's important for our purposes is the comparison between counterparts in similar conditions but for the role of ideology.

mitment. Where these ideologically-driven evidential distortions target oppressed social groups, they can bring about structural epistemic injustice where they However, the structural nature of this injustice raises substantive questions about the nature of epistemic blame and responsibility in these cases, which I address in §3.4. For now, we turn to evidential and ideological distortion themselves.

## 3.2 Evidential & Ideological Distortion

Discussions of oppressive beliefs often focus on the cognitive processes of individual agents.<sup>13</sup> Evidential distortion, by contrast, concerns the epistemic contexts in which those agents form their beliefs. Agents' responses to their evidence will, of course, be critical to the impact of evidential distortion, but the phenomenon itself concerns the availability of evidence in an epistemic context. Throughout this section, it is important to keep in mind that the picture presented here is merely descriptive. I discuss the normative upshots of evidential distortion in §3.3. As we'll see, it seems as though standard accounts of epistemic justification are in need of revision if they are to avoid certifying beliefs formed on the basis of these distortions.

### 3.2.1 Distortions in Context

Evidential distortion is a structural feature of our epistemic contexts that arises when the context skews the readily available evidence so as to

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<sup>13</sup> See, in particular, *Shelby* (2003, 2014) and *Mills* (2007).

support a particular doxastic state. To understand this idea, we'll begin by taking a look at the notion of an epistemic context.<sup>14</sup>

As epistemic agents, we must engage in evidence-gathering practices. While the particularities of these practices are idiosyncratic — I read *The Wall Street Journal*, you read *The New York Times*; I use a generic US version of *Google News*, you use a personalized version of it — they are governed, in large part, by our epistemic contexts. These epistemic contexts influence topics about which are likely to seek evidence, the sources we are likely to employ, the methods of dissemination we trust, the degree of trustworthiness we assign to the evidence obtained, the frequency with which we seek it out, and so on. We learn these things from those around us and, while the practices we end up with are by no means monolithic, they are nevertheless heavily influenced by our social contexts' prevailing epistemic practices.

An epistemic context can be understood as consisting of the epistemic practices, habits, and expectations we gather from our social contexts. As social contexts shift, so too do their associated epistemic contexts. Over the last several decades, for example, our increasing reliance on the internet has increased the frequency with which we seek evidence, the availability of evidence concerning topics removed from our everyday lives, and the variety of sources we seek out — not just the nightly news and the daily paper, but also *The Huffington Post*, *Facebook*, *Wikipedia*, *Snopes*, and so forth.

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<sup>14</sup>For the sake of clarity, it's worth noting that the term "epistemic context" is not intended to conjure the view known as epistemic contextualism, according to which knowledge attributions depend on features of the attributor's context. See *Rysiew* (2016).

Social contexts and their epistemic ramifications can be understood at varying levels of specificity. In the examples above, the Summer of the Shark and the aftermath of September 11th, the relevant social context was centered around modern American culture. This is a very broad level of analysis, however. Many aspects of our narrower social contexts can result in differences in our epistemic contexts as well. In particular, our social roles, political and religious affiliations, geographic location, and age (as well as the intersections of these things) play a significant role in shaping our epistemic contexts.<sup>15</sup> The differences in preferred news sources among different political alignments provide a particularly clear example of this (*Mitchell et al.*, 2014). Similarly, religious background often plays a significant role in determining one's epistemic context, particularly with regard to the role of religious testimony and the viability of faith as an epistemic attitude.

For our purposes, the important feature of epistemic contexts is that, while they vary along many dimensions, they are nonetheless predictive of individual agents' epistemic habits, practices, and expectations at a general level. US citizens, for example, are highly likely to engage with news media at both the local and national level. Moreover, they are likely to trust those sources significantly more than they do friends and family (*Bialik and Eva Matsa*, 2017). By structuring our epistemic contexts in this way, our social contexts influence not only *how we gather evidence*, but also *what evidence we gather*. Recall the definition presented earlier:

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<sup>15</sup> This idea is closely tied to feminist standpoint theory. See *Anderson* (2015, §1-2) for further discussion.

**Evidential Distortion.** For any proposition  $p$ ,  $p$  is subject to evidential distortion in an epistemic context just in case that context skews the readily available evidence so as to increase the likelihood that agents in that context encounter evidence supporting a particular doxastic state with respect to  $p$ .

Again, political affiliations provide a clear example of this. According to the Pew Research Center, 47% of American conservatives favor Fox News as their main source of news regarding politics and distrust the majority of alternative news outlets.<sup>16</sup> So, for American conservatives, any topic for which Fox News presents skewed evidence that, in virtue of being skewed in that way, more readily supports a particular doxastic state, is a topic subject to evidential distortion. We'll examine what it takes for the readily available evidence to be skewed in §3.3.3.

For the moment, we focus on the question of whether such *evidential* distortion constitutes *ideological* distortion. For this to be the case, recall that (a) and (b) must apply:

**Ideological (Evidential) Distortion.** Ideological distortion occurs when a dominant ideology

- (a) Is the primary cause of evidential distortion, and
- (b) The distortion brought about supports doxastic states reinforcing that ideology.

While the ideology of American political conservatism is clearly associated with a particular epistemic context given the data cited above, the

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<sup>16</sup> See (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). According to the same data, American liberals are far less unified in their preferences and far more trusting of different outlets. For the sake of simplicity, I focus on the conservative case.



question of whether that association gives rise to ideological distortion is not only a matter of whether that association causes evidential distortion but also, and more importantly, whether that distortion supports the ideology generating it. In other words, we'll need to show that there is some topic with respect to which Fox News presents evidence skewed so as to support American conservative political ideology.

To see what that might look like, we turn to the campaign season leading up to the 2008 presidential election. During that period, 46% of Fox News' coverage of the liberal candidate, President Obama, was negative in tone, compared with 12% of its coverage of the conservative candidate, Governor Romney. By contrast, only 6% of its coverage was positive for the liberal candidate, while 28% was positive for the conservative candidate.<sup>17</sup> Given that these numbers differ dramatically from those of other news outlets over the same period and that the viewership groupings fall along ideological lines identical to the skewing, this suggests that the body of evidence that likely to be gathered by American conservatives concerning the presidential candidates during this period was, indeed, affected by *ideological*, not just evidential, distortion.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2.2 An Objection: Irresponsible Evidence-Gathering

At this point, one might be inclined to object along the following lines: The problem with the conservative viewer isn't that she's being misled, it's that she's doing a poor job of gathering evidence. By re-

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<sup>17</sup> The remaining stories were mixed in tone for both. See *Pew Research Center* (2012).

<sup>18</sup> While this much does not rule out the alternative explanation that it was the other news outlets, skewed in the opposite direction, that contributed to ideological distortion rather than Fox News, a closer look at the data suggests this explanation is unlikely.

stricting her attention to Fox News, she's being epistemically irresponsible and, as a result, her beliefs are unjustified. No further investigation necessary.

While epistemic irresponsibility may well undermine justification, the relevance of this objection to the case at hand depends on the explanation for the agent's self-imposed restriction to Fox News. There are three salient possibilities:

- (1) She is being (or has been) epistemically lazy,<sup>19</sup>
- (2) She does not want evidence that will contradict her beliefs,<sup>20</sup> or
- (3) She is choosing her sources based on the degree to which she trusts them as reliable sources.

Of these, (1) and (2) are clearly vicious. At the very least, they are epistemically vicious — in many of the cases we've looked at, these explanations seem morally vicious as well.<sup>21</sup> So, this objection goes through for agents whose evidence-gathering practices can be explained by (1) or (2) — one cannot form justified beliefs on the basis of such irresponsibly gathered evidence.

Where (3) is the better explanation, however, this objection is less convincing. In fact, it's quite the opposite: gathering evidence in accord with your justified attitudes toward various sources seems to be responsible, epistemically speaking, if not required. While an agent's favored sources might be poor in an objective sense, the question at hand is how

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<sup>19</sup> See *Baier* (2011) and *Cloos* (2015) for extended discussion of this case in relation to evidentialism about justification.

<sup>20</sup> See *Mills* (2007).

<sup>21</sup> Since our focus is epistemic justification, however, I will set aside the latter worry for the moment. See *Smith* (2011) for discussion.

those sources appear *to the agent*. In the case of our conservative consumer, her justified epistemic attitudes with respect to news sources tell her that Fox News is a reliable source of testimonial evidence while other news networks are not.<sup>22</sup> For such an agent, the other networks are no more reliable than her daily horoscope. As far as she's concerned, avoiding those sources is perfectly rational. In order to carry out their epistemic practices, rational agents must be able to trust their own epistemic states and, in doing so, use them to guide their inquiry.<sup>23</sup> She may well be wrong about the quality of her sources, but *this alone* is not enough to render her doxastic states unjustified.

We turn now to the effects of this distortion on agents' epistemic states and the central normative question: Can beliefs formed on the basis of this kind of distortion be justified on standard views?<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3 Epistemic Consequences

The definition of ideological distortion states that such distortions skew the evidence readily available in an epistemic context so as to *more readily support* epistemic attitudes that reinforce the distorting ideology. In this section, I aim to substantiate that claim and argue that common accounts of justification lack any means by which to distinguish beliefs

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<sup>22</sup> *Smith* (1983) explains a number of epistemic missteps that might culpably lead an agent to such a state. I take it to be at least possible for an agent to find herself in this state without tripping over any of these stones.

<sup>23</sup> This line of argument is closely related to *Lewis's* (1971) defense of "immodest" inductive methods.

<sup>24</sup> For the sake of space, I omit discussion of important comparisons between evidential distortion and other topics in social epistemology. In particular, motivated reasoning. See (*Mills*, 2007) and (*McLaughlin*, 1988). Cf also (*Medina*, 2012), (*Dotson*, 2014), and (*Fricker*, 2007).

formed on the basis of distorted evidence from those formed without distortion. We begin with evidence.

### 3.3.1 Bodies of Evidence & Evidential Support

For present purposes, ‘evidence’ is meant in a fairly intuitive sense: having sufficiently strong evidence for  $p$  makes it reasonable to believe  $p$  and gaining evidence for  $p$  makes it reasonable to raise one’s credence in  $p$ .<sup>25</sup> This still leaves us with the question of what it means to say that some evidence *supports* a particular proposition  $p$ . There are two relevant senses of evidential support: incremental and total. Incremental support pertains to the effect that gaining a particular piece of evidence has on the probability of  $p$ . More precisely,

**Incremental Evidential Support.** Under a probability function  $P$ , some evidence  $e$  supports a proposition  $p$  just in case  $P(p|e) > P(p)$ .

Where  $e$  raises the probability of  $p$ ,  $e$  incrementally supports  $p$ . In our discussion of the Summer of the Shark, agents who responded to the evidence they gained,

*(attack)* Tonight’s evening news covered shark attacks.

by increasing their confidence in the proposition

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<sup>25</sup> Two points of order. First, for the sake of simplicity, I’ll assume that the relevant kinds of evidence can be represented propositionally. Second, I won’t make any claims with respect to  $E = K$  — the problem I mean to illustrate is independent of whether one takes evidence to be restricted to the propositions one knows. For further discussion of evidence in general, see (*Kelly*, 2016, 2008). For discussion of the  $E = K$  and the relationship between evidence and knowledge more generally, see (*Williamson*, 2002).

(*danger*) Shark attacks are a significant danger.

took *attack* to provide incremental support for *danger*. By itself, however, this is not enough to see the effects of evidential distortion with respect to *danger*. For that, we'll need the second sense of evidential support: total evidence. Rather than focusing on the effect of a particular piece of evidence, this notion of support concerns which epistemic attitudes are supported by one's total body of evidence.

**Total Evidential Support.** Under a probability function  $P$ , some body of evidence  $E$  supports a proposition  $p$  just in case  $p$  is more likely than  $\neg p$  given  $E$ .<sup>26</sup>

Continuing with shark attacks, then, an agent who takes *attack* to provide incremental support for *danger* might nevertheless have a total body of evidence that does not support *danger*. As argued above, however, the Summer of the Shark is an instance of evidential (though not ideological) distortion. As a result of continually collecting evidence in this distorted context, the affected agent is more likely to gather a body of evidence that supports *danger*, regardless of whether *danger* is true.<sup>27</sup>

This effect on her total evidence brings about two distinct problems for the affected agent. First, she may be *overconfident*, having unduly high credence in *danger*. Where this effect is severe enough that the

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<sup>26</sup>A more fine-grained notion of total evidential support would define support in terms of degrees. For example, so that a body of evidence supports  $p$  degree  $x$  just in case  $P(p) = x$ . For present purposes, the coarse-grained definition above will suffice.

<sup>27</sup> Whether that effect will be strong enough to alter whether her total evidence supports *danger* will be a matter of the degree of evidential distortion, and how much of that evidence she *in fact* encounters. So, there remains an element of luck in the extent to which the agent is affected by the evidential distortion in her epistemic context. Nevertheless, she is likely to be more confident in *danger* than she would be without that distortion.

agent takes herself to know *danger*, she may then regard evidence as misleading and, as a result, dismiss that evidence.<sup>28</sup> The second problem is *rigidity*. Here, the question isn't what particular degree of confidence the agent places in the affected proposition, but how entrenched it is.<sup>29</sup> An agent like the Fox Viewer discussed above might, for example, have a middling credence, say .38, in the proposition *President Obama was born in Kenya* but be extremely confident that this is the right credence to have. In this case, it will be difficult to change that credence significantly, even if she encounters new evidence that incrementally supports the negation of that proposition. After updating on that evidence, her credences will barely register the change and her beliefs won't budge. These effects make evidential distortion a serious problem, even for agents whose epistemic contexts eventually lose this character — the affected propositions have a kind of epistemic inertia that is difficult to overcome.<sup>30</sup> None of this directly speaks to the question of whether these beliefs are justified, however.

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<sup>28</sup> This is instance of Kripke's paradox of dogmatism (*Sorensen*, 2017). Whether dismissing one's evidence this way is rational is a separate, contentious issue. See *Lasonen-Aarnio* (2013) for a discussion suggesting that it may be.

<sup>29</sup> While there may be some kinds of evidence that would radically change the agent's credences in these cases, the worry is that the vast majority of what she is likely to encounter will not. See *Joyce* (2005) for a discussion of these cases.

<sup>30</sup> Here, I have in mind agents whose social conditions change in such a way that they come to learn different, perhaps less distorting epistemic practices. These effects may persist, even through such changes.

### 3.3.2 Justification

Views of justification are often divided into two useful, if somewhat fraught, categories: internalism and externalism.<sup>31</sup> For many internalists, in particular evidentialists and subjective Bayesians, justification is largely a matter of how an agent's doxastic states relate her evidence.<sup>32</sup> For example, evidentialists argue for this account of justification:

**Evidentialism.** Doxastic attitude  $D$  toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits the evidence  $S$  has at  $t$ . (*Conee and Feldman*, 2004, p.310)

Connecting to the probabilistic notions of evidential support discussed in the previous section, 'fit' can be understood as follows:

Under a probability function  $P$ ,  $S$  is justified in believing  $p$  to degree  $x$  just in case  $P(p) = x$ .

On this kind of view, the fact that one's evidential support relations are radically mistaken does not affect whether they can support justified belief formation. So long as they are properly related to the agent's evidence, doxastic attitudes formed under conditions of evidential distortion will be justified regardless of their content.

However, one might worry that this is far too subjective of an understanding of evidential support. On this kind of approach, the only

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<sup>31</sup> For the sake of space, I limit the discussion that follows to what I take to be the most prominent, representative examples of each category. See *Pappas* (2017) and *Kelly* (2016) for more thorough discussions.

<sup>32</sup> Both of these are so-called 'mentalist' internalisms, on which justification is a matter of having the right kind of mental state, regardless of whether the agent is *aware* of that state. Access internalists require, in addition, that an agent be able to point to that justifying mental state. See (*Steup*, 2017, §2.3) for further discussion of this distinction. For present purposes, I continue with a mentalist approach.

constraints on evidential support relations are the formal features that define probability functions. As a result, even extremely racist, sexist, or otherwise oppressive priors could support justified beliefs. Someone who takes anything said by a woman to increase his confidence that women are hysterical, for example, would be justified in those beliefs so long as his priors are probabilistic. These are trivial cases in which subjective Bayesians, Evidentialists, and the like have to bite the bullet with respect to justification. But, they're not our focus. Rather, the cases at issue are ones in which the agent's coming to believe some oppressive proposition is *the result of* evidential distortion. Without the relevant social factors having played a role in distorting the agent's evidence, she would not have come to form the belief. Cases like this can occur even under more constrained understandings of evidential support. So, while I'll continue to use the subjective account suggested above, the arguments that follow are meant to apply to more constrained understandings of evidential support as well. As long as those constraints do not make it nigh-impossible for rational agents to encounter evidence supporting oppressive beliefs, the central cases remain viable.<sup>33</sup>

But, this leaves open a critical question with respect to ideological distortion: *Why think that agents will be particularly likely to take the evidence they encounter as a result of ideological distortion to support propositions that*

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<sup>33</sup> To propose constraints that do rule these out seems to be legislating a matter of moral goodness rather than epistemic goodness. Even if one takes extremely prejudicial priors to be irrational, it seems implausible to restrict rational priors so far as to rule out the *possibility* of evidence rationally supporting oppressive beliefs — to do so would require all rational agents to regard these propositions as nearly impossible, regardless of their experience. Moreover, which propositions turn out to be oppressive is a contingent matter that depends on one's social context, which makes ruling them out *a priori* implausible.



*cohere with that ideology?* We'll focus on this question in the next section.

Even with that answer in hand, however, one might avoid the odious conclusion that these beliefs are justified by adopting an externalist approach. For externalists, justification is sensitive to features beyond the agent herself. Reliabilists such as *Goldman* (1979), for example, argue that the question of whether a doxastic attitude is justified turns on whether the mechanism by which that attitude was formed is a reliable one.<sup>34</sup> On an account like this, one might hope to identify a general feature of inquiry under evidential distortion that falls short of this condition. We turn to this approach in §3.3.4.

I think “rational racists” and their ilk are unjustified. Epistemic practices that are not responsive to the possibility of misleading ideological distortion are deficient tools for forming justified beliefs in epistemic contexts like our own. As we'll see in the next two sections, however, both the externalist and the internalist (at least in the forms discussed above) get this wrong. We begin with the internalist's question.

### 3.3.3 The Role of Ideology

So far, I have been relying on an intuitive understanding of ideology. However, in order to answer the internalist's question — why think that ideology distorts epistemic contexts so as to more readily support beliefs *coherent with that ideology* — we'll need a more definite notion. In brief, I'll take an ideology to be a mutually supporting, self-sustaining network of beliefs, attitudes, values, social meanings, scripts, and so

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<sup>34</sup>See *Goldman and Beddor* (2016) for discussion of this condition.

forth that serves to stabilize certain social practices, institutions, or relations.<sup>35</sup> I do not mean to suggest that this is the only way to understand the notion of ideology, nor even that it is the only one compatible with the present project. Rather, I mean to outline a notion of ideology that is reasonably clear, sufficiently robust for the task at hand, and compatible with both political and apolitical understandings of the concept. This account of ideology is *non-cognitivist*, *non-pejorative*, and *functionalist*.<sup>36</sup>

*Cognitivist* views of ideology, such as *Shelby's* (2003, 2014), limit their scope to widely held beliefs, patterns of reasoning, and the like.<sup>37</sup> *Non-cognitivist* views are more expansive. In addition to the cognitive elements, they include many aspects of the social context in which those beliefs are held, such as attitudes, values, social meanings, and so forth. Next, I'll use 'ideology' in a *non-pejorative*, sense.<sup>38</sup> I want to leave open the possibility that some ideologies are neither epistemically nor morally problematic.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, *functionalist* approaches to ideology require them to play a particular kind of role in their social contexts. Most often, that role

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<sup>35</sup> This is similar to the descriptive notion of ideology offered in *Geuss* (1981).

<sup>36</sup> I borrow this set of distinctions from *Haslanger* (2017), who uses them in relating her view to *Shelby's* (2014).

<sup>37</sup> On this kind of view, the epistemic shortcomings of an ideology — not only falsehood, but also “inconsistency, oversimplification, exaggeration, half-truth, equivocation, circularity, neglect of pertinent facts, false dichotomy, obfuscation, misuse of ‘authoritative’ sources, hasty generalization, and so forth” (*Shelby*, 2003, p. 166) — are the primary target of criticism.

<sup>38</sup> This is *Geuss's* (1981, Ch. 1, §1) ‘descriptive’ sense of ideology.

<sup>39</sup> Certain religious and political ideologies, for example, might be socially beneficial, while scientific ideologies might be epistemically beneficial. If one is ardently inclined to keep the name ‘ideology’ for pejorative uses, I am content to give up the term and target functionalist ‘schmideologies’ instead. If one is then inclined to object that the only networks of belief and so forth that can be functionalist fall under the scope of the pejorative use of ‘ideology’, so that ‘schmideology’ is necessarily without instantiation, while still maintaining that ideology is a useful type with actual tokens, I take the burden of proof to lie with them. I am unaware of any argument to this effect.

is perpetuating, justifying, or stabilizing the ideology itself, along with the social structures with which it coheres. Such approaches are quite common — this self-perpetuating aspect often serves as *the* feature that makes ideology a phenomenon deserving of devoted attention.<sup>40</sup> This project is directed at these self-perpetuating accounts of ideology.

Supposing that functionalism is a characteristic of ideology and supposing that racism, sexism, and other oppressions are supported by such ideologies, we can now answer the internalist's question. Recall the definition of ideological distortion:

**Ideological (Evidential) Distortion.** Ideological distortion occurs when a dominant ideology

- (a) Is the primary cause of some evidential distortion, and
- (b) The distortion brought about supports doxastic states reinforcing that ideology.

Let's begin with (b). Suppose we are in an epistemic context affected by evidential distortion, so that there is some proposition  $p$  such that the context makes it more likely that the evidence we gather will, in total, support a particular doxastic state with respect to  $p$ . For the sake of definiteness, let's suppose that state is believing  $p$ . Further, suppose that this distortion is caused by some dominant ideology,  $i$ .<sup>41</sup> There are three relationships that might obtain between  $p$  and  $i$ : (1)  $p$  undermines  $i$ , (2)  $p$  is neutral with respect to  $i$ , or (3)  $p$  supports  $i$ . Since we've assumed

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<sup>40</sup>See (*Geuss*, 1981, p. 15-19) for a general discussion. *Haslanger* (2017, 2012b) and *Shelby* (2003, 2014), for example, are functionalist views.

<sup>41</sup>Recall that a dominant ideology is one that is actively affecting the social context in a way that coheres with that ideology and is (or is becoming) reflected in the structure of that social context.

that *i* is dominant, we can also assume that its overall effects will not be self-undermining.<sup>42</sup> This includes its effects on epistemic contexts. Moreover, since *i* is functionalist, we can assume that its overall effects will be positively self-preserving.

At first glance, this might seem to allow us to rule out instances of (1) and (2), but this is too quick. Even if the overall effect of an ideology is self-perpetuating, individual elements of that effect might work against it or be irrelevant to it. A homophobic ideology might, for example, make evidence supporting the proposition that gay men are uncontrollably promiscuous pedophiles readily available but also, in the doing so make evidence supporting ideologically neutral propositions more salient. Using evidence about the dangers of HIV/AIDS to support that stereotype, for example, would also make evidence supporting ideologically neutral doxastic states concerning HIV/AIDS — such as true beliefs about the nature of the virus and the auto-immune syndrome — readily available. This would constitute evidential distortion, but not ideological distortion. So, while it is not the case that the influence of an ideology supports *only* reinforcing epistemic attitudes, it will support *enough* reinforcing epistemic attitudes to fulfill (or contribute to) the functionalist role.

What about condition (a)? Since both the cognitivist and non-cognitivist views of ideology take beliefs to be a critical component of an ideology, it is difficult to see how a dominant ideology could be dominant without the functionalist role supporting the formation of those beliefs. Since

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<sup>42</sup> A discredited or waning ideology, on the other hand might well turn out to be self-undermining.

the most direct way to support belief formation is providing evidence, this suggests that condition (a) will be met. So, where there is a dominant (functionalist) ideology, ideological distortion will occur.

Still, a worry lingers. People take the evidence they obtain to support very different propositions. *Why think that there's enough homogeneity among different agents' evidential support relations to make this possible?* As a first pass, it's worth noting that ideological distortion does not require a great deal of homogeneity. All that's required is that the evidence agents encounter in that context is likely to support a particular doxastic state. Where there are many different evidential support relations among the agents, the distortion brought about will be correspondingly varied. This raises a new worry, however. What guarantees that this variation in evidence will not be self-defeating? That is, what prevents the evidence agent *A* takes to be in support of *p* from undermining *p* for agent *B*?

To answer this, recall the discussion of epistemic contexts in §3.2.1. There, we saw that the social contexts our social contexts exercise significant influence on our epistemic habits, practices, and expectations. With respect to this worry, what's important about this is that this process serves to render those evidential support relations somewhat more consistent than they would be across different epistemic contexts. Whatever the common evidential support relations might be, a functionalist account of ideology implies that ideological distortion harnesses them in order to support propositions that cohere with that ideology.<sup>43</sup> This

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<sup>43</sup> On non-cognitivist accounts like the one sketched here, the ideology itself plays a significant role in shaping those inferential patterns — this happens through the social scripts, symbolic meanings, and so forth associated with it (*Haslanger, 2017*). For

does not, however, guarantee that every agent in that context will take the evidence they encounter as a result of ideological distortion to support the relevant doxastic states. Rather, the claim is that, since the general effect of a functionalist ideology is self-preservation and undermining the ideology would run contrary to that effect, the inferential pattern (or combination of patterns) exploited in this way must be sufficiently widespread to inculcate epistemic attitudes that serve this function.<sup>44</sup>

This, then, is the answer to the internalists's question: it is the functionalist aspect of ideology, operating through its effects on agents epistemic contexts and the evidence they obtain therein, that explains how ideological distortion can occur. If one accepts the claim that ideologies are functionalist, ideological distortion follows — ideological distortion is simply the epistemic aspect of functionalism. Moreover, on the internalist account of justification discussed above, beliefs formed within and because of such contexts will nevertheless be justified.

### 3.3.4 The Externalist's Question

Externalists may still avoid such outcomes. For reliabilist externalists like those mentioned above, the question is whether they are the product of reliable belief-forming mechanisms. If we can demonstrate that the belief-forming mechanisms involved in these cases at least *tend* to be unreliable, there's hope for an externalist solution. To ascertain how

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cognitivist accounts, this route is much less clear. Nevertheless, as a consequence of being functionalist, this remains the case.

<sup>44</sup> Where agents' evidential support relations with respect to the ideology in question are sufficiently diverse, ideological distortion will not occur. In such cases, however, it is unclear whether that ideology is a dominant one.

successful this approach might be, we'll look at two paradigmatic cases: testimonial inference and generic acquisition.

**Testimony.** The cases we've focused on so far revolve around evidence drawn from either news broadcasts or print media. Given this, *testimonial inference* is an obvious way to characterize the belief-forming mechanism involved — after watching the news report on a recent shark attack, the viewer updates her doxastic state, taking into account the content of the report and the degree to which she trusts the report. There are two questions to address here.

First, is testimonial inference a reliable belief-forming mechanism? At the outset, the ubiquity of testimonial inference makes it a dangerous choice for the chopping block, at least if justification is to be something with which actual epistemic agents ought to concern themselves. Beyond this, however, testimonial inference *does* seem to be quite reliable. Anytime we manage to form a true belief on the basis of someone else's assertion, we've done so using testimonial inference. While it's true that people sometimes lie and mislead with testimony, testimonial inference is not, in general, an unreliable belief-forming mechanism.

This raises a second question: Is there something about testimonial inference in these cases that would render it sufficiently distinct to be considered a different, unreliable belief-forming mechanism? There are some kinds of testimony, for example eye-witness testimony, that are notoriously unreliable. As a result, one might argue, inference based on that particular kind of testimony constitutes a distinct belief-forming mechanism — one that's incapable of conferring justification. Perhaps

the same can be said for testimony under evidential distortion.

There are several reasons to think that this kind of re-classification doesn't do quite the same work in the cases we've focused on, however. A narrow classification like 'watching Fox News' or simply 'newscasting' won't work as the classifier for two reasons. First, it is particular to the instances of distortion we've been discussing — it is by no means necessary to the phenomenon. Insofar as the phenomenon of evidential distortion is a general one, it would be useful to have a similarly general explanation of the shortcoming in agents' epistemic practices. Second, just as testimony is generally reliable, so too is testimony gathered from these sources. It is only with respect to propositions subject to distortion that the problem arises.

But, perhaps this suggests a better classifier: testimony affected by evidential distortion. This, too, is problematic. Recall that evidential distortion is a structural phenomenon affecting one's total body of evidence. It does not need to be the case that individual reports are unreliable. In fact, none of the instances discussed so far involved fabrication — it is only in combination with the pattern of testimony in a particular, distorting epistemic context that such reports are genuinely misleading for the agent who hears them. So, in an important sense, the testimony itself *is* reliable, even under evidential or ideological distortion.<sup>45</sup> We could, instead, look at forming beliefs on the basis of a body of evidence affected by evidential distortion, but this has the same problem as dismissing testimony altogether. It is very difficult to avoid eviden-

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<sup>45</sup>It's also worth emphasizing that evidential distortion need not *mislead* so long as it *leads* — distortions that make it easier to acquire true beliefs are still instances of evidential distortion.



tial distortion altogether. Moreover, this route risks running afoul the well-known generality problem for reliabilism — even if there are clear descriptions under which the belief-forming mechanism is unreliable, there is no clear way to determine exactly which way of describing the it is relevant for determining whether the resultant belief is justified.<sup>46</sup> So, re-classification doesn't seem particularly promising — testimonial inference remains a reliable belief-forming mechanism.

**Generic Acquisition.** Our second characterization of these inferences describes them as the product of a far more fundamental cognitive process: generic acquisition. Generics are sentences like these:

- (a) 'He walks home from work.'
- (b) 'Birds fly.'
- (c) 'Birds are female.'

Such constructions are quite common in English and many other languages. Each takes some trait, such as walking, flying, or being female, and applies it to a category, such as the way someone gets home or birds. In general, generics have a few noteworthy features. First, we tend to have very clear intuitions about their veracity: (a) and (b) are true, but (c) is clearly false. Second, despite this clarity, nailing down the semantic content of generics in general is notoriously difficult. The literature describing candidate semantics for generics spans from accounts that offer myriad complex and precise semantics, such as *Cohen (2012)*, *Nickel (2008)*, and *Pelletier and Asher (1997)*, to accounts like *Sterken's (2015)*, that give up entirely on the notion that there even *is* a unified semantics to

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<sup>46</sup>See *Conee and Feldman (1998)*.

be had. Third, generic constructions have no explicit quantifiers, despite being generalizations. So, whether the trait in question applies to all, some, or most of instances cannot be read directly off of the surface grammar, as it can for claims like “all lions are intelligent” and “most Lannisters are awful”. Finally, generics tolerate exceptions. Even though penguins do not fly, (b) seems true and, even if he takes the bus one day, you can still say (a).

Of course, generics aren’t limited to mundane facts about locomotion. Oppressive beliefs can take the form of generics, as in the following (repugnant, false) instances:

- (a) ‘Women are hysterically emotional.’
- (b) ‘Black men are dangerous.’
- (c) ‘Immigrants are criminals’

Because each of these takes the form of a generic, agents who believe them need not take the existence of counterexamples — calm and rational women, pleasant and safe black men, law-abiding immigrants — as evidence against them. So, where oppressive beliefs take this form, they may be particularly difficult to eradicate. But how do such beliefs come about?

Despite their semantic complexity, generics are among the first generalizations humans learn, beginning at age two (*Gelman, 2005*). In her work on generic acquisition, *Leslie (2008)* argues that this is evidence for an “innately given default [cognitive] mechanism” geared toward forming generalizations (p. 22). This mechanism is the fundamental cognitive means by which we relate a trait, such as flying, to a domain, such

as birds. In learning to identify new traits or domains, the associations we form between those categories and ones we already know are, by default, structured as generics. On this characterization, differences in the salience of possible categorizations are key to building the associations that give rise to generic inferences — explicit testimony need not be involved.<sup>47</sup> To the purpose at hand, *Rhodes et al.*'s (2017) study of the development of social categorization in children demonstrates that this kind of salience-based generic acquisition appears to play a significant role in shaping beliefs about social groups.

Where this seems to be the appropriate characterization, then, we can pursue the externalist's question: Is generic acquisition a reliable belief-forming mechanism? Since an appropriate semantics for generics is evasive, this is a difficult question to address. The so-called *striking* generics are particularly problematic. For example, the sentence *mosquitoes carry West Nile Virus* is felicitous despite the fact that only a very small percentage of mosquitoes *in fact* carry the virus. More generally, it appears that striking features require only *some* of the group's members to have that feature in order for generics involving it to be true of the group (*Leslie*, 2008, p. 43). So, if being hysterically emotional is a striking feature, a claim like *women are hysterically emotional*, will be extraordinarily difficult to falsify. Insofar as the externalist's question requires us to quantify the proportion of true and false beliefs produced by this process, this kind of imprecision and flexibility does not do the work we might want it to in this case.

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<sup>47</sup> For a demonstration of how the tone of media coverage accords with racial ideology in this way, see (*Ghandnoosh and Lewis*, 2014) and (*Dixon and Linz*, 2000; *Dixon et al.*, 2003).

Moreover, on a broader level, if generic acquisition is as fundamental to our epistemic capacities as *Leslie* (2008) argues — acting as the starting point from which we develop more refined epistemic states — ruling it out as a reliable belief-forming process has ramifications for nearly all of our beliefs. Importantly, this is also a case in which there is no clear distinction to be made between the acquisition of oppressive generic beliefs and neutral ones.<sup>48</sup> In both of these cases, the belief-forming mechanism operates identically, regardless of whether the agent is affected by evidential distortion.

So, on the reliabilist's externalism, there's little room to avoid the conclusion that these beliefs, too, are justified.

### 3.3.5 Where are we now?

On both the internalist and externalist views of justification, epistemic attitudes brought about by the influence of ideological distortion may turn out to be justified, morality and distortion notwithstanding. This seems like the wrong result. In §3.1, we looked at the case of ideological distortion surrounding Muslims after September 11th. While we've seen how ideological distortion can influence agents' beliefs, even agents who are neither malicious nor irrational, it still seems as though something has gone wrong for an agent who comes to believe that Muslims are dangerous on the basis of this kind of evidence. It seems as if there's something more we expect from this agent.

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<sup>48</sup> As *Mills* (2007) points out, ideology can play a significant role in determining the conceptual backdrop against which these acquisitions take place, but this merely determines which associations are likely to be presented — the process itself remains the same.

Recently, *Basu* (forthcoming), *Srinivasan* (2017), and others have tried to resolve cases like this by appending a moral constraint onto justified belief. I think this is misguided for two reasons. First, it is unresponsive to the epistemic problem. The epistemic problem arises from being in an epistemic context that distorts the expected relationship between the evidence you obtain and the world. While the cause of that distortion is sometimes morally repugnant, ideological distortion extends beyond immoral beliefs. A solution narrowly targeting these cases will be necessarily partial. Second, the good relevant to epistemic normativity must be something along the lines of forming true beliefs (or accurate credences). But, it's not at all clear that a moral constraint serves this kind of aim. So, while it's clear that there is a moral shortcoming here, it's unclear how it would be relevant to epistemic normativity. Ideally, a solution for these cases would be content-neutral, provide genuinely guiding norms, and respond to the cause of the problem: ideological distortion.

In both the internalist and externalist analyses above, what goes wrong is that the operative epistemic norms ignore the context. They ignore the fact that the agents in question are carrying out their inquiry within a social context that influences every aspect of their epistemic practice. The problem is neither the agent, nor her evidential support relations, nor the reliability of her belief forming mechanisms, but these things taken together in a particular context. Given her actual epistemic environment — the non-ideal world in which we live — her otherwise unimpeachable epistemic practices betray her in a predictable, systemic way. This is the sense in which there is something squarely epistemic

that's gone awry, quite apart from the very serious moral considerations in play. Epistemic environments like these require different norms — even in epistemology, a non-ideal world requires non-ideal norms.

While characterizing kind of non-ideal epistemic normativity is beyond the scope of the present work, our focus on ideological distortion also illustrates an importantly structural form of epistemic injustice, to which we now turn.

### 3.4 Structural Epistemic Injustice & Responsibility

Ideological distortion's epistemic harm is best captured by Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice:

**Epistemic Injustice.** A wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. *Fricker* (2007, p. 1)

While many harms are intertwined with our epistemic lives in one way or another, epistemic injustice focuses on individuals' capacity to act as epistemic agents — to come to know through their practices of gathering and responding to evidence.<sup>49</sup>

However, much of the discussion around epistemic injustice concerns injustices committed by an individual agent against another individual agent. This focus on specific actors misses the sense in which injustice is often diffuse. It is often part of our social structures in a way that doesn't lend itself to picking out the actors or actions causing it,

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<sup>49</sup> I'll use the term 'epistemic injustice' to refer, specifically, to this kind of epistemic harm, distinguishing it from things like distributive epistemic harm. See *Hookway* (2010) for a discussion of other forms of epistemic injustice.

and its consequences can be subtle things — feeling less safe walking home at night because of your hijab, for example, or feeling ill-at-ease for fear of being stereotyped because of your race. While analyses of oppression are often built around these structural injustices, the structural tends to slip out of focus in discussions of epistemic injustice. As we've seen, however, evidential distortion is just such a structural phenomenon. Correspondingly, the injustices to which it gives rise will be structural as well.

### 3.4.1 Structural Injustice

Where evidential distortion brings about epistemic injustice, it does so by making certain epistemic aims, in particular the formation of true beliefs and accurate credence, unnecessarily difficult to achieve for agents in affected epistemic contexts. Regardless of whether one grounds the importance of truth in the conditions on knowledge, the thought that belief aims at the truth, or something else entirely, truth-directedness is fundamental to our epistemic practices.

Oppressive ideologies tend to involve beliefs that demean the morality, intelligence, and general humanity of those oppressed (*Fricke*, 2007; *Mills*, 2007). As such, they are particularly reliable sources of misleading ideological distortions.<sup>50</sup> While it is not *exclusively* oppressive ideologies that have this detrimental effect, many of them do. When they do, the resulting ideological distortion undermines this truth-directedness, making it far more likely that individuals' bodies of evidence mislead-

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<sup>50</sup> *Haslanger* (2012c) argues that at least some of the claims supported by oppressive ideologies might be true, however.

ingly support propositions reinforcing that ideology. Moreover, because this misleading evidence appears only within the relatively narrow domain of the ideology, ideological distortion is akin to a kind of *gaslighting*. For those affected, the harm — unduly high confidence in false ideological propositions — is both difficult to detect and, because it relies on those otherwise reliable faculties, difficult to overcome.

Where such distortions are tied to one’s social position, we see a kind of structural epistemic injustice: an agent’s social position affects her epistemic context so as to lead her predictably toward false beliefs with little way of recognizing that she is being misled, let alone preventing it.<sup>51</sup> This is particularly evident in “self-subordinating” cases like those discussed by *Nussbaum* (2001) in which, for example, women in patriarchal societies may genuinely take their “rightful place” to be subordinate to a husband. If that’s correct, the injustices of ideological distortion, like any injustice, require redress. But it’s far from clear where to begin.

### 3.4.2 Responsibility, Blame, & Stewardship

Likening it to a birdcage, *Frye* (1983) explains the very similar phenomenon of structural oppression this way:

It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere [...] It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by

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<sup>51</sup> This primary injustice also brings about secondary epistemic injustices, such as those discussed by *Fricker* (2007) and *Dotson* (2014), as a result of making the dehumanizing beliefs associated with oppressive ideologies more prevalent.



a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon. (p.4)

In other words, no individual harm is to blame for the overall oppressive effect of sexism, racism, and the like. Rather, the blame seems to be just as diffuse as the oppression itself. So, too, in the epistemic case: no individual news report, article, etc. is responsible for the misleading overall effect on one's total body of evidence. If that's right, however, how do we address this structural epistemic injustice? Where do we begin without blame?

This felt need to reach for blame comes from the fact that we tend to think about responsibility for injustice in terms of liability.<sup>52</sup> On this model, we look for the individual who is to blame for the injustice and ask that they repay it proportionally. Our accounting is *individualistic* and *retrospective*. But, this won't work well for structural epistemic injustice. As we've seen, the harm is not *caused* by any individual — it is a feature of the epistemic context as a whole. While individual agents contribute to this harm, it's not clear that those individual agents bear the blame for that harm — certainly not all of it. Additionally, even where we can identify relevant individuals, there's little use in retrospective amelioration. We cannot simply supply truths to those who have already formed beliefs on the basis of distorted evidence and demand that they come to believe them. Moreover, given the epistemic

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<sup>52</sup> The discussion that follows is inspired by *Young's* (2011) discussion of structural injustice in social contexts. Independently, *Medina* (2012) uses this discussion to similar, though distinct effect.

consequences of evidential distortion, overconfidence and rigidity (see §3.3.1), even retracting past testimony may not have the desired effect.

Rather, we need a *forward-looking* model of redress. One that enjoins those who are partially responsible for the existence of epistemic contexts that create ideological distortion to alter that context, to recognize and reduce the ways in which those contexts contribute to this kind of structural epistemic injustice — to engage in a kind of stewardship over our epistemic contexts.

But who bears this responsibility? Instead of looking to an ill-suited individualistic account, I suggest a model akin to *Young's* (2011, Ch. 4) social connection model of responsibility. Here, the central observation is that while we may not all contribute to structural injustice, or may do so to significantly greater or lesser extents, we are nonetheless members of that social context and, as a result, cooperative with it. In the epistemic case, that cooperation comes in the form of maintaining, participating in, and even simply failing to criticize the epistemic habits and practices that contribute to the distortion. Because we learn these practices, in part, from those around us, these behaviors contribute to inculcating the same epistemic practices in others. If this is the sense in which we are responsible for the structural epistemic injustice in play, we can turn to the question of what the responsibility of stewardship amounts to.

Just as in *Young's* (2011, p. 102-3) political example, individuals cannot resolve structural epistemic injustices on their own — doing so must be a *collective* effort. Rather than adopting a passive, consumptive stance toward our epistemic contexts, participants in an epistemic community must take an active role in scrutinizing and maintaining the integrity of

their epistemic contexts. On this view, being a good epistemic agent requires more than just responsibly collecting evidence. We must also create and disseminate evidence responsibly and critically observe how our epistemic contexts affect individuals' interpretation of that evidence.

## **Conclusion**

Ideological distortion is common. It has wide-ranging effects on individuals' epistemic states and, in some cases, gives rise to epistemic injustice. Moreover, on standard accounts, it appears that beliefs brought about by such distortions are justified. While the responsibility of stewardship may suggest a way to reduce the effects of ideological distortion over time, this is no reason to let the question of justification slip away. In fact, we have particularly good reason to pay close attention to justification in these cases because of the very plausible connections between justified belief, warranted action, and moral blameworthiness. Justified belief, it is often thought, warrants action in a way that screens off moral blameworthiness. While the action may still be wrong, the agent herself isn't morally blameworthy for performing it in virtue of holding a justified belief that sanctions the action. If that's correct, today's so-called "rational racist" is (implausibly) morally blameless for actions taken on the basis of such beliefs. As we saw in §3.3.5, however, there seems to be a squarely epistemic shortcoming in these cases. If that's right, there's room for an account of justification sensitive to that shortcoming. I leave it to future work to provide a fuller characterization of that epistemic defect and offer a suitably responsive account of justification.

## CHAPTER IV

### I Know You Are, But What Am I?

The social contexts we occupy determine a lot about our lives.<sup>1</sup> These contexts constrain our food choices, career choices, religious and political views, family structures, whether we drive on the left or right side of the road, and whether we think Disneyland is better than Disney World. They familiarize us with persons and things, such as *sous* chefs and sports cars, as well as particular properties, such as popularity and poverty.

Much of social metaphysics is devoted to answering what social kinds like careers and familial structures *are*, and how their existence is explained by their broader ontological context. Our current project follows this same vein, focusing on the phenomenon of social identity.

While we propose and defend a fairly specific understanding of social identities, paradigm cases are easily recognizable. For example, consider the following quotation from Rachel Dolezal — a woman with white parents, who passed as black for many years:

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was co-authored with Dr. Robin Dembroff. We regard our contributions in writing, research, and inspiration to be equal.

I identify as black. [As a five-year-old child] I was drawing self-portraits with the brown crayon instead of peach crayon [with] black curly hair.<sup>2</sup>

What information does this statement convey? Presumably, Dolezal is not saying that she has belonged to a black community since she was five years old or that she has African ancestry — it is widely known that these things are false. Instead, the quotation articulates a certain relationship between Dolezal’s psychology and behaviors on one hand and a particular social group on the other — a relationship that may hold regardless of whether Dolezal is or is taken to be a member of that social group.<sup>3</sup> It articulates a kind of bridge between her self-identification and a social group — what one might call a social-self-identification or *social identity*.

Social identities, while a critical part of the social landscape, are underexplored in comparison with social groups themselves. While a large literature asks what it is to *belong to* particular groups, such as women, blacks, or disabled persons, only a few authors have attempted to answer what it is to *identify as* (e.g.) a woman, black, disabled, and so on.<sup>4</sup> And yet this project is important not only to fill out our picture of social ontology, but also to explain particular social phenomena and pursue political justice. Getting clearer on what social identities are and how they relate to other social categories will elucidate the role that iden-

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<sup>2</sup> Li, David K. “‘I Identify as Black’: Rachel Dolezal Speaks out.” *New York Post*, 17 June 2015. Web. 31 Aug. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Wherever relevant, we assume that Dolezal’s statements can be taken at face value.

<sup>4</sup> Most notably, among philosophers, Anthony Appiah and Sally Haslanger have offered characterizations of social identity. We address their proposals in §4.5.

tities play in explanations of behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions, why persons sometimes are praise- or blameworthy for adopting particular social identities, and why we may have a *prima facie* obligation to allow the formation of and subsequently respect social identities.

This paper aims to provide such clarification. On our proposed account, social identities are the self-identities we make available to others — they act as a bridge between our internal self-identification and our preferred public perception. We begin by stating our theoretical goals, then turn to a discussion of social roles and social practices, which are the foundation of social identity. With these in place, we offer our account of social identity, and close by discussing some of its upshots.

## 4.1 Methodology

This section clarifies our project’s methodology. After describing and contextualizing this methodology, we will turn to constraints guiding our analysis of social identity.

### 4.1.1 Our Approach

We want clarity about social identities. In particular, we want to say what they are and how they relate to nearby social categories. But some preliminary terminological ground-clearing is necessary. The term ‘social identity’ is used in a number of ways. There is (perhaps) an everyday meaning of the term, the meaning of the term in psychology (and particularly, in social identity theory), and the meaning of the term in other philosophical accounts. The difference in usage raises the question of

how our use of the term compares.

We are not interested in the project of spelling out the everyday meaning of the term ‘social identity’ (if there is one), or of entering a dispute about what philosopher (or psychologist) has captured the true meaning of ‘social identity’. But neither is our project simply talking past other usage of ‘social identity’. Our project is to propose a theory of social identity that we think does better work than other theories. That is, while our proposal and the alternatives all describe intelligible, sometimes overlapping notions, we think that our account is more successful in light of the explanatory and normative work we think the concept of social identity can and should do. And we firmly believe that this is a legitimate approach to judging theoretical adequacy — as Elizabeth Anderson puts it, “theories do more than represent facts — they organize them for our use.”<sup>5,6</sup>

By analogy, consider the the concept of persons. The everyday concept of persons is by and large restricted to human beings. But more and more frequently, philosophers (and others) are presenting theories of persons that suggest that this concept should be revised, and should extend to certain intelligent non-human animals such as primates. While it seems that both the restricted and expanded concepts are intelligible, those debating over conflicting theories of persons need not be simply talking past each other. Rather, they may be trying to determine which concept is better suited to do the social, political, and perhaps moral

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<sup>5</sup> *Anderson* (1995, p.30)

<sup>6</sup> This sentiment is also nicely echoed by David Plunkett and Alexi Burgess: “Our conceptual repertoire determines not only what we can think and say but also, as a result, what we can do and who we can be.” (*Burgess and Plunkett*, 2013, p. 1091)

work that we want the concept of persons to do. And the reader is no doubt familiar with similar debates over the concept of marriage, natural citizenship, sexual consent, and countless other concepts.

All this may sound well and good — we hope that it does — but it doesn't get us very far unless we say something about what 'work' we want the concept of social identity to do. We turn now to this.

#### 4.1.2 Criteria for a successful analysis of social identity

We hope our analysis will offer a simpler, more elegant explanation of the target phenomena. More specifically, we adopt the following constraints on a successful analysis of social identity.<sup>7</sup>

*(i) Preserves intuitions regarding paradigm cases of social identity.*

The first constraint is, at bottom, assurance that a successful analysis of social identity doesn't change the subject. Recall that our methodology is centered around the question what concept best serves the work that we want a concept of social identity to do. A concept of social identity cannot serve these purposes by radically changing the subject. Return to the example of the concept of persons — if an analysis of persons is to be successful, it had better deliver the result that you and I are both persons. If the analysis says that only green-eyed brunettes who are 5'6" are persons, something has gone terribly wrong. We wanted the analysis to best serve the explanatory and normative goals we have relative to a particular kind of animal (e.g., animals with moral status). If the analysis

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<sup>7</sup> Constraints (i) and (ii) mirror constraints found in *Barnes* (2016), an analysis of disability.



changes the subject — if it focuses on an entirely different subject — our explanatory and normative goals are confused.

Similarly, when we look for a successful analysis of social identity, we are looking for an analysis that serves explanatory and normative goals relative to a kind of thing that, while likely admitting of vagueness and borderline cases, we can easily point to at the appearance of paradigm cases. The particularly social nature of the target phenomena makes our intuitions about them indispensable data points with respect to both paradigm cases and theoretical aims.

*(ii) Neatly explains the unity of and phenomena surrounding social identities.*

Just by looking at paradigm cases, we see that social identities come in a variety of forms. Social identities might concern socially salient features, such as one's race, gender, or sexual orientation. They might also concern less salient features, such as one's occupation, entertainment choices, family position, or regular activities. What makes each of these an identity? And what, if anything, distinguishes them from non-social identities? A successful analysis of social identity will explain what is uniquely social about these identities as well as distinguish them from features of a person that do not qualify as identities at all. In other words, the analysis must articulate a common basis of social identities. An account that meets this condition will ontologically unify various instances of social identity, while distinguishing them from nearby phenomena. Moreover, it will allow us to disambiguate cases in which (e.g.) an individual's social identity comes apart from social perceptions (as in the Dolezal case), or even comes apart from publicly recognized cate-

gories (as, for example, at the beginning of some social movements).

In addition to explaining the unity of social identities, we expect a successful account to explain phenomena surrounding social identities. For example, what is the relationship between an individual's social behavior and their social identity? How should we characterize situations in which someone is not perceived to be or accepted as a member of the group with which they socially identify? These explanations require a robust understanding of social identities.

*(iii) Allows and provides resources for normative evaluation of social identities.*

We do not think that an analysis of social identity should immediately rule out normative evaluation of social identities. Whether certain social identities are good, bad, or neutral is (we think) open to question.

Granted, we (usually) don't choose to be (e.g.) black, gay, or disabled.<sup>8</sup> But social identification leaves room for something further — something requiring the exercise of agency. Even if certain social identities involve no particular choice or other act of agency, why think agency is not involved in having a social identity? as (e.g.) a Trekkie, a liberal, a philosopher, or a gym rat? (Or, alternatively, why think that these cannot qualify as social identities?) If agency can be involved, it seems that we can make better or worse choices with respect to (at least some of) our social identities. And, if social identities are subject to normative evaluation, an account of social identity should also provide explanatory resources for that task.

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<sup>8</sup> We take it that this determinateness (often) applies to self-identification. See §4.3 for further discussion of the distinction between self- and social-identification.

(iv) Explains our *prima facie* obligation to respect social identities and permit their formation.

The normative evaluation of any particular social identity notwithstanding, there is general agreement that social identities are important (to various degrees) to individuals. Whether an identity is, for a particular individual, extremely important (as many racial or sexual orientation identities are) or less important (as one's identity as a philosopher or gym rat might be), social identities align not only with how an individual sees themselves, but also how they would like to be seen by others. (More on this later.) To the extent that social identity is a matter of agency, our obligation to respect others' autonomy goes hand-in-hand with our obligation to respect the formation of social identities. Sometimes, the expression of identity will be harmful to others, and so should be discouraged or prohibited — e.g., identity as a Klan member or a drug lord. Excepting these extreme cases, however, we seem to have a *prima facie* obligation to respect individuals' expression of their identities.

A successful analysis of social identity should provide a theoretical basis for the intuition behind this obligation. This immediately rules out concepts of social identities that are so broad as to permit (e.g.) mere interests (such as hobbies) to count as social identities. It also rules out concepts that are so narrow as to disacknowledge the social identities of individuals in oppressed or minority groups. Finally, we note that this condition puts pressure on accounts that construe social identities as inevitable features of one's psychology. While we may be obligated to permit the expression of inevitable identities, if an individual exercises

agency in socially identifying with a particular group, it would be a frustration of agency (and not only expression) to prohibit the formation of that social identity.

## 4.2 The Foundation of Social Identity: Social Roles

Before we can understand social identities, we need to understand the nearby social categories that shape and constrain them. In particular, we need to understand *social roles* — roughly, social positions that individuals are sorted into when they are perceived as belonging to a certain social category — and their relation to social identities. In this section, we explore social roles, emphasizing their formation via social practices and their central features.

### 4.2.1 Social Practices as the Basis of Social Roles

Our discussion of social roles begins with their formation. Here, we follow Sally Haslanger’s proposal, on which social roles are social positions occupied by persons on the basis of their engagement in certain *social practices*.<sup>9</sup> These practices, according to Haslanger, are constituted by the interaction between humans and their resources. The key elements of this interaction are broken down into two parts: *shared blueprints* and *resources*.<sup>10</sup> “Shared blueprint” is what we will call a com-

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<sup>9</sup> *Haslanger* (2016, §6). While we have some disagreements with details of Haslanger’s account, we are in overall agreement that social roles are importantly connected to social practices: the conditions for occupying a social role and these roles’ features will depend on practices.

<sup>10</sup> While Haslanger uses the term ‘schemas’, we think that ‘shared blueprints’ is a most descriptively evocative term.

munity's collective interpretive guide for the world. This guide consists of habits, concepts and beliefs that facilitate interpretation of social meaning. Because shared, these blueprints allow us to "interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect," (Haslanger, 2016, p. 126). They are public, they are the basis for behavioral and emotional dispositions, and they are resistant to updating. And, most importantly, they allow us to have a coordinated, mutually intelligible interpretation of and response to resources, which includes anything taken to have (positive or negative) value. On Haslanger's view, and the view we adopt here, our responses to resources — the way we behave (and expect others to behave) regarding them and what we do with them — create social practices. To better understand this mechanism, consider a simple example:

Hillcrest Elementary's schoolyard contains a large slide. Hillcrest students all view the slide as a means of entertainment, and they share a belief that going down the slide is, by far, the best recess activity. As a result, they are willing to wait in long lines to go down the slide, and will frequently trade their spot in line for food or other toys. Moreover, they resent when others cut in line, or take too long at the top of the slide.

Even this toy (sorry!) example describes a number of social practices that might arise out of something so minor as a shared blueprint according to which a playground slide is a desirable resource. From this shared blueprint arises coordinated behavior (waiting in lines), thought (trading resources), and even affect (resenting line-cutters).

In most everyday examples, the variety of blueprints between different groups and cultures, as well as the vast number of ways in which blueprints can direct our responses to resources, makes for a much more complicated picture. As Haslanger points out, this is true of resources as simple as an ear of corn:

An ear of corn can be viewed as something to eat, as a commodity to be sold, or as a religious symbol. In other words, we can apply different [blueprints] to the object, and the [blueprints] frame our consciousness and evaluation of the object. [They] not only offer modes of interpretation, but license different ways of interacting with the corn. Actions based on these different [blueprints] have an effect on the ear of corn qua resource, e.g., it might be cooked for food, or the kernels removed to be shipped, or it might be dried and hung in a prominent place to be worshipped. (ibid.)

The various coordinated actions that we might take with respect to an ear of corn and the shared attitudes or thoughts that we might have in response to it can all constitute social practices.

Because resources can be anything that is viewed as valuable, we need not limit ourselves to examples of toys or corn. For better or worse, people place value on an enormous variety of things: art, literature, skin color, personality traits, accents, stature, table etiquette, criminal records, reproductive capacities, electronic currency, stock shares, and on and on. The social world, on this picture, is a constant swirl of shared blueprints and the entities that — according to those blueprints — are

of value. Out of this mixing, we get habitual, shared, and coordinated behavior, affect, and thought. We get social practices.

#### 4.2.2 From Social Practices to Social Roles

Social practices, on the Haslangerian picture just described, establish a structure of coordinated responses to resources. The fact that practices establish this structure is essential to understanding what social roles are and how they come to be. This is because, within the structure, we find a variety of *social relations* (or *properties*) stemming from practices. Examples include relations between persons (e.g., being a parent/child of, being a friend of, being an employer/employee of) and relations between persons and things (e.g., exercising, eating, studying). These relations need not be pairwise — having black skin is a social relation as is being a triplet.<sup>11</sup> By participating (willingly or unwillingly) in social practices, we enter into these social relations. For example, when someone adopts a child, they enter the relation of being a parent, because they participate in the social practice of taking adoptive adults to be parents of the adopted child. Similarly, to participate in social practices surrounding cocktail parties might mean that one will enter relations like dressing up, drinking, or making small talk. And to participate in the social practices surrounding law and crime might mean that, if one is judged to have performed a particular sort of action, they will lose some relations (such as being a citizen) and gain new ones (such as being a prisoner).

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<sup>11</sup> Often, social relations will be grounded in non-social facts about individuals and their relationships to others, as in the case of skin colors that are read as black and hair colors read as blond. What makes these relations social, on this account, is that they carry social meaning according to our shared social blueprints.

Social roles correspond to social relations in two ways. First, we are assigned social roles when we are perceived to stand in (or regularly engage in) enough of the social relations relevant to that role. That is, it is sufficient for an individual to be perceived as being *saturated by* the set of relations associated with a group.<sup>12</sup>

For example, it is plausible that a number of social relations are associated with persons who are women, such as relations of dress, speech, occupation, and presenting as female. It is not necessary that one is perceived to stand in all of these relations to be perceived as a woman — it is sufficient to be perceived as standing in *enough of* these relations.<sup>13</sup> Second, being assigned a social role can in turn affect what social relations we stand in.<sup>14</sup> To flesh this out, we will begin with some examples.

Being perceived as occupying certain positions in certain social relations can immediately result in a new social role. Our first example picks out just this kind of role: Consider the many practices surrounding American football. Our shared blueprint with respect to football leads to a number of shared behaviors, thoughts, and affects. Millions

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that every group has an associated social role. Rather, being perceived as saturating the conditions for membership in a group will result in occupying a role only where that collection of practices matters (to some degree) to some surrounding social group.

<sup>13</sup> We draw an analogy here with the notion of ‘genericity’ common in linguistics. Generics are fault-tolerant constructions like “birds fly”, for which the existence of individuals that do not meet the description does not falsify the description. We take it that many of the membership criteria for social roles are best understood as being fault tolerant in a similar way.

<sup>14</sup> On this point, we disagree with Haslanger, who requires both regular participation in a social practice to have the corresponding social role, and who does not allow that one can occupy a social role simply by virtue of being perceived to participate in a social practice. This gap between participation and perceived participation will be particularly important in our later discussion of ‘passing’ — that is, occupying a social role without in fact having the corresponding social relation (e.g., a homosexual who is perceived and so treated as a heterosexual, a black person who is perceived and so treated as white). (See §4.5).



of Americans attend football games, purchase team memorabilia, sell and trade tickets, and feel elation and devastation based on game outcomes. Out of these and other practices comes an array of social relations, but central among them is the relation between a professional football player and a professional football team. By signing a contract with a professional football team, an individual (say, Dan Marino) immediately comes to stand in this relation — one that is established by the practices surrounding football.

Occupying this relation carries immense and immediate social force when it is recognized by other persons. Upon signing, Marino became subject to new expectations (such as attending practices and games), gained new rights (such as a right to receive payment from the team), and also gained a new social status as an athletic celebrity. These rights, expectations, and status are all part of the social role of professional football player. By occupying this role, Marino also entered into various social relations, such as being an employee and having fans.<sup>15</sup>

Other social relations result in social roles, but do not do so with the same immediacy — rather, one takes on these roles by being perceived to habitually and regularly stand in the social relations associated with that role. Consider, for example, the social relation of organizing events. In many academic departments, a small number of faculty members regularly volunteer to organize department events. Occasionally entering into this relation may not affect their role in the department. But,

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<sup>15</sup>Similar things can be said of the relations parent of, convicted of, or spouse of — if perceived to occupy these relations, they typically immediately result in being assigned a social role that brings along with it new social relations, expectations and/or rights.

by being perceived to consistently take on this task, a faculty member may find herself assigned a new social role: being *an organizer*. Occupying this social role will, in turn, relate one in new ways to other people and things: it might become expected of those individuals that they will organize events, they may face disproportionate disapprobation if they fail to do so, they might be given access to event funds, and so on. And all of this, we might imagine, will go along with occupying the role of organizer, and will only come about when someone is perceived to regularly participate in practices surrounding the organization of events. Organizing one event, in this sort of scenario, is not enough to be assigned the role of organizer.

Regardless of whether a social role is assigned immediately, or on the basis of regular participation in a social practice, the structural relationship between practices, relations, and roles is similar: participating in practices places one into social relations, and being perceived to occupy (or regularly occupy) certain social relations may lead to being assigned a corresponding social role. (We grant that it is a contingent matter whether a given social group has a corresponding social role, or more than one corresponding social role.) We can express this relationship between social relations and corresponding social roles as follows:

*In general, if the condition for occupying a certain position in a social relation is having (enough of) properties  $P_1 \dots P_n$ , the condition for occupying a corresponding social role is being perceived and treated as having (enough of) properties  $P_1 \dots P_n$ .*

Such assignment to a social role typically brings with it additional norms,

expectations, and rights regarding one's behavior, thought and affect.<sup>16</sup>

For simplicity's sake, we have been speaking as though a unique set of relations is associated with each group throughout this section. This will not always be the case, however. Rather, many groups (perhaps most) will have distinct (though overlapping) sets of relations associated with them. As a result, multiple social roles may be associated with a single social group. And while we understand that this sketch of social roles leave much of this complexity under-explored, we leave a richer examination to future work.

### **4.3 The Dimensions of Social Identity**

With that view of social roles freshly in mind, we turn to the main event: social identity. In this section, we aim to answer a number of questions about social identity: What is a social identity? What does it mean to have one? What is distinctly social about them? We begin by defining criteria for possessing a social identity, then examine the dimensions of the resulting concept.

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that, on our proposed conception, being assigned a social role does not require that the individual members of a social group possess sharply defined concepts or linguistic labels of that role. Our responses to each other, including the expectations and norms we place upon each, can occur wholly or partially unacknowledged or even unnoticed. For this reason (among others), articulation of social phenomena is the goal of inquiry in social philosophy and the social sciences, rather than its object: conceptualization or labeling is often unnecessary for the creation of social roles, creating the project of discovering social roles and articulating their features.

### 4.3.1 Criteria for Possessing Social Identities

Social identities are a relation between individuals, their self-identity, and social roles. They act as a kind of bridge between one's internal identification and their preferred public perception. As discussed in §4.2, social roles are determined by how we are perceived by those around us. But, this does not mean that we have no agency in the matter. Consider, for example, a young man deciding whether to come out to his parents as gay. For all they know, he is straight. So, he currently occupies the social role of being straight, at least at home. But, having realized that he is gay, he comes to self-identify as gay.<sup>17</sup> This internal identification is crucial to social identity, but it is the choice to come out, the choice to make that private identity public, that makes it a social identity. This is the relationship at the core of social identity.

Of course, social identities may not have uptake. If the young man's parents ignore him or tell him that he's merely confused, and then continue to ask after his girlfriend, they do not allow him to enter the social role of being gay. He has the social identity of being gay in virtue of his actions, but lacks the role. Similarly, after being outed as having white parents, Rachel Dolezal was no longer taken as being black, despite asking to be. She ceased to occupy the social role despite still self-identifying as black and still making that identity public — despite still having the social identity.

From these cases, we can see that having a social role is neither nec-

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<sup>17</sup> This should not be taken to suggest that one must be correct about one's social group membership in order to self-identify as a member of the group. One can, for example, self-identify as a Scotsman owing to misinformation about their place of birth.

essary nor sufficient for having the associated social identity. Rather, the following conditions, which we take to be necessary and jointly sufficient, give rise to social identities:

### **Self-identification**

In order to have a social identity, one must self-identify as a member of the group in question.

### **Role-directed Externality**

In order to have a social identity,

- a. (externality) one must, consciously or unconsciously, make their self-identification externally available, whether by engaging in certain behaviors or displaying certain readily perceptible features, where those behaviors or features outwardly conform (or, in certain cases, are merely intended to conform) to the social blueprint for a role associated with a particular group,<sup>18</sup> and
- b. (role-directedness) one must allow, or at least accept, that others take them as occupying that social role as a result of the fulfillment of (a).

The self-identification condition states that, for example, one cannot have the social identity of being gay without actually identifying as gay. The role-directed externality condition adds to this that one cannot have the social identity of, say, being a woman without outwardly engaging

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<sup>18</sup>Note that this condition *does not* require that conforming to the role be intentional. Most conforming behaviors, we take it, will be intentional, but not intentionally directed *at the role*. Rather, they will be the result of internalized identities. In other words, (a) merely requires that the behaviors that *do* conform to the role are non-accidental.

in social practices surrounding the ‘woman’ role (according to her internalized blueprint) and allowing others to take her as a woman as a result. ‘Behaviors’ here includes not only actions, but also expressed attitudes, preferences, physical appearance, etc. Finally, these conditions are cognitivist only to the extent that, in order to have a particular social identity, someone must possess the concept of the social role with which they identify. These require a good deal of unpacking, of course. We say more about each of these in turn.

### **Self-identification**

Bill Clinton self-identifies as a Democrat. Ellen DeGeneres self-identifies as a lesbian. George R. R. Martin self-identifies as a fantasy author (and probably a nerd). Each of these identities shapes the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of those who possess them. Moreover, each of these individuals expresses a sort of affirmation of these identities and solidarity with the associated group. By contrast, while all three of them would identify themselves as over 5’5”, it’s highly doubtful that any of them self-identify with that trait in any meaningful sense.

While a thorough exploration of self-identification is beyond the scope of this paper, we should say at least a few words about what it is to self-identify with a social role. Common-sense notions of self-identification abound, but perhaps the most common is the idea of the ‘true self’, which is taken to be the instinctual source of creativity and authenticity.<sup>19</sup> We take this view to oversimplify our interaction with the shared

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<sup>19</sup>Such views originate with *Winnicott* (1965).

blueprints we encounter. It suggests a process of unconscious development or discovery, as if the self is a fully-formed artifact merely awaiting archaeological introspection. On this view, the obfuscated true self is not subject to development through our choices (social or otherwise). But this is clearly at odds with much of our experience.

Self-identifying with a social role, especially doing so strongly, changes the individual we take ourselves to be. To see this, consider the difference that self-identification can make in the case of ethnic identity. Suppose a pair of twins have some Native American heritage. The first, call her Anya, strongly self-identifies as Native American. As a result, she wishes to learn more about Native history, attends events aimed at Native people, and participates in Native cultural activities. The second twin would identify herself as Native American if asked, and perhaps weakly self-identifies as Native American, but does none of Anya's cultural study. These two women have very different self-identities.

This is difficult to explain on the "true self" view, however. To begin, it is unclear how something like the "true self" could govern traits as nuanced and culturally developed as ethnic identity. Even granting that, it is difficult to see how a true self view would explain the very different self-identities of two people with such similar backgrounds without resorting to the suggestion that one (or both) of them has gone wrong somewhere along the line. On such an account, one of these women should feel that she lacks authenticity and should be hiding her true self. This, however, seems both unlikely and unjustly chastising.

If not the 'true self', however, then what?

The examples used above — e.g., Anya and Ellen — are instances of

the sort of attitude we mean to pick out with the term “self-identity”. In each case, what distinguishes self-identity from merely identifying-as is a sense of kinship and solidarity. Individuals who self-identify with a group see themselves fitting it, as the sort of person who ought to be in it, and they actively see themselves as a part of it (or a would-be part of it, for cases in which public knowledge is necessary for membership and those in which the group is not yet broadly recognized).

Richard Jenkins defines identification as “the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectives, and between individuals and collectives, of relationships of similarity and difference.”<sup>20</sup> Our notion of felt ‘kinship’ picks out a similar process, focusing instead on internally-directed perception of similarity. To feel kinship with a social group is to see oneself as relevantly similar to other members of the group. This feeling of kinship, in the sorts of cases we’re looking at, goes hand-in-hand with solidarity.

More than mere similarity, solidarity brings with it a governing sense of unity. In *Political Solidarity*, Sally Scholz identifies three central characteristics of solidarity: it mediates between the group and the individual, acts as a form of unity, and entails positive moral obligations. These obligations, in the case of *social* solidarity are constituted by the felt obligation to adhere to the customs, social mores, etc. that characterize and unify a group.<sup>21</sup> This is the sort of solidarity we have in mind.<sup>22</sup>

While more political forms of solidarity can (and often do) play a

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<sup>20</sup> *Jenkins* (2004, p. 19)

<sup>21</sup> *Scholz* (2008, Ch. 1).

<sup>22</sup> This solidarity is compatible with critical attitudes toward problematic (even, perhaps, alienating) aspects of the groups with which we identify.



role in our social identities, the vast majority of the obligations we feel, in Scholz' words, "accrue with group membership" and "pertain to day-to-day responsibilities".<sup>23</sup> Together, kinship and solidarity give rise to a sense that we are governed by the prescriptive ideals of our self-identities. As a result, our attitudes and priorities are shaped, in part, by self-identity.

Of course, the ability to see oneself as fitting into a group and to experience solidarity with that group is inextricably bound to its shared blueprint. In §4.2, we described these blueprints as interpretive guides to social meaning, which consist of habits, concepts, and beliefs. Where these blueprints are available, self-identifying with a group is seeing oneself as the sort of person who does (or should) stand in the social relations necessary to be part of that group. Where occupying a social role involves being perceived by others as saturating the set of social relations associated with a group, then, self-identifying with that role's social group involves perceiving oneself as saturating them.<sup>24</sup>

Some features of this explanation of self-identification are worth highlighting. First, as we just saw, group membership is not a necessary condition on self-identity. If African ancestry is necessary for membership in the social group of blacks, then Rachel Dolezal is not a member of that group. Nevertheless, this does not prevent her from self-identifying as black, however erroneous that may be.<sup>25</sup> The question of what the actual conditions for group membership are is distinct from the ques-

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<sup>23</sup> We take Scholz' use of the term "group membership" here to be loose enough to allow our reading. *Scholz* (2008, p. 21)

<sup>24</sup>What it takes to saturate a set of social relations is not the same across groups or individuals. Some relations might seem necessary to one group, but completely unnecessary to another.

<sup>25</sup>We discuss this case further in §4.4.

tion of what it takes to have the corresponding self-identity. Second, identifying-as is distinct from self-identification. We identify as many things — a certain height and weight, a particular gender, a participant in certain athletic activities, a True Fan of certain television shows, a lover of various foods, etc — but very few of these properties are stalwart, persistent, or central enough to become part of our self-identity. Most are merely properties we have. Third, self-identification varies in strength. Both of the central features we've discussed, kinship and solidarity, can be felt to varying degrees. Finally, while feeling kinship and solidarity requires having concepts of the relevant group, it does not require having a label for that group. That is, all one needs is an ability to recognize the group and to recognize one's own similarity with it.<sup>26</sup>

### **Role-directed externality**

This is the feature that makes social identity social. There are two aspects of role-directed externality: one's behavior and one's attitude toward that behavior. We begin with externality.

The externality condition states that one must outwardly conform or intend to conform to the shared blueprint for the target social role, leaving open that many social groups have multiple roles associated with them and, therefore, multiple shared blueprints. Role-directed externality need not target more than one of those roles and need not occur *under the guise* of conforming. We often unconsciously behave in ways that conform to our social identities without any intention to do so.

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<sup>26</sup>In this, we depart from Appiah (2005), who requires that social identity have a basis in socially salient and labelled "kinds of persons". We discuss Appiah further in §4.5.

For example, someone with the social identity of a Trekkie must, in some way, conform or intend to conform to the particular social blueprint she's internalized for Trekkies. That might mean that she attaches a Star Trek logo to her keychain, attends a fan club meeting, or simply talks with others about the series. None of this behavior needs to be undertaken by the agent *under the guise of* conforming to the relevant blueprint. More often than not, these behaviors are merely byproducts of self-identifying with an internalized blueprint. This is clearly the case, for example, for most cisgender women's role-conforming behavior — seldom is wearing a skirt explicitly meant to conform to a blueprint for 'woman'.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes, however, intentions do come into play. There are two ways this might happen. First, someone might attempt to outwardly conform with the relevant social blueprint, but have yet to figure out exactly how to do so.<sup>28</sup> Take, for example, a transgender woman who, though she knows what she wants to do — adopt feminine mannerisms and speech patterns for example — hasn't yet mastered knowledge of how to do it. In these cases, an attempt to conform to a social blueprint may fall short of in fact conforming. Such instances still satisfy the externality condition. Second, intentions to conform may be forward-looking, involving partial planning for the future.<sup>29</sup> This sort of

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<sup>27</sup>Note also that 'woman' is a fairly clear case in which the role one identifies with may come apart from the role they are placed in, though they are associated with the same group. In this case, the blueprint to which a particular woman is conforming is unlikely to be associated with the same role that the editor for, say, *Hustler Magazine* associates with women.

<sup>28</sup> Without getting mired in debates surrounding knowledge how, it suffices to say that, insofar as knowledge-how and knowledge-that are independent, we should expect cases like this to be fairly common. (See *Fantl* (2014) for further discussion.)

<sup>29</sup> *Setiya* (2015)

forward-looking intention is sufficient for social identity so long as the role-directedness condition is met. This condition specifies an attitude one must bear toward their action, namely that they allow and accept others taking them as occupying the relevant social role as a result of that intended behavior. So, in the case just mentioned, the woman in question has a social identity as a woman only if, having expressed her intention, she allows others to take her as a woman on the basis of those intentions. Without this, she may still self-identify as a woman, but she lacks the social identity. She is, colloquially speaking, in the closet.

It is also important to note that simply allowing others to take her as a woman is not sufficient for meeting this condition — she must allow others to take her as a woman as a result of her behavior or her intentions. The connection between action and attitude is critical to the agential nature of social identity, and marks another substantial distinction between social identity and social role. While social roles can be assigned to us without our consent, social identities cannot. Thus, regardless of how often people misgender a feminine-presenting genderqueer person (for example, Ruby Rose), and regardless of whether they do so on the basis of behavior that *does* outwardly conform to a social blueprint for a role associated with the group ‘woman’, Rose’s refusal to accept that gender role means that role-directedness is not met.

Finally, note that this condition does not require uptake. It may be that no one in fact recognizes or accepts the individual’s social identity, either because they do not take them to be a member of the relevant social group, or because they assign to them a social role that, though associated with that group, is not the one the individual identifies with.

In the case of the transgender woman who is trying but failing to actually conform, for example, she satisfies the role-directedness condition, regardless of anyone else taking her to be a member of the social group ‘woman’. Similarly, early feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, who identified with a different role for women than the one assigned by the pervasive cultural blueprint, still satisfied the role-directedness condition, even if they were unsuccessful in achieving their desired role.

Together, self-identification and role-directed externality give rise to social identities. But, this relatively simple picture might belie the complexity of social identity. Social phenomena, we reiterate, are messy. Intention, allowing, and acceptance are attitudes that admit of borderline cases. Someone who is just coming out as transgender, for example, might well be uncomfortable with people taking her as a woman — she might be a borderline case of accepting and allowing. In this case, her social identity with respect to gender will be vague (though her self-identity is not). This, we take it, is the correct result — insofar as these phenomena are messy and that mess must find some place in any adequate theory of the target phenomena, this is an intuitive place for it. Another way social identities are more complex than we’ve suggested so far is that they vary along several dimensions. We discuss these dimensions in the next section.

#### **4.3.2 Independence, stickiness, and context sensitivity**

Social identity is not settled by group membership or assigned social roles. We have already seen cases in which individuals’ social identity

comes apart from both their social group and assigned social roles, but this should not suggest that disparity between role and group needs to be as fraught as these cases might suggest. Take, for example, the case of NPR's Nancy Updike, who sincerely adopted the social identity of being a lesbian despite, in fact, not being sexually attracted to women.<sup>30</sup> Updike's social identity matched her social role and self-identification in this case, but not her social group. Similarly, in a particularly quotidian case, someone who appears very young might have the group membership and social identity of a university student, but lack this social role because no one interprets her as old enough to be in college.

In this way, role, identity, and group are *independent*, to an extent, because social identity depends neither on how others perceive you, as social role does, nor on social group membership. This is not to suggest that these things cannot influence social identity, however. Clearly, we have some privileged, though not infallible, access to facts about ourselves. Insofar as we correctly perceive things like the nature of our sexual attractions, those facts are likely to influence our social identity. In addition, how others perceive us can have an effect on how we perceive ourselves. Someone who has a social role of being straight — someone who is perceived and socialized as straight — might disregard their attraction to members of the same sex, adopting a straight social identity as a result. These influences on the formation of an agent's social identity can pull in opposite directions, mutually reinforce one another, or be completely neutral. Regardless, they do not *determine* the social identities we end up with.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ira Glass* (2004, Prologue)

There is much more to social identities than the degree to which they are influenced by our roles and groups. The social identity of being a Trekkie is dramatically different from that of being black or gay. Satisfying the goal of explaining the unity of social identities (desideratum (ii) from §4.1) while at the same time respecting these differences requires that we recognize the dimensions of social identities: stickiness and context sensitivity.

### **Stickiness**

Social identities are often ‘sticky’, where stickiness is determined by (i) the ease of entering and exiting the identity and (ii) the degree to which the identity directs and constrains the individual’s behaviors, attitudes, and preferences. Sticky social identities are typically those for which the behaviors, attitudes, or practices associated with the identity are extremely salient to the individual, the identity is resistant to updating, or is especially value-laden to the individual.

Condition (i), that sticky social identities are difficult to enter or exit, may obtain for myriad reasons. For example, the practices surrounding some social identities may be particularly burdensome for an agent to undertake. The practices surrounding gender, a social identity we take to be paradigmatically sticky, make it difficult to enter or exit because they are tied to things like developmental conditions and physically obvious sex characteristics. Regardless of whether it ought to, the pervasive shared blueprint for gender relies on these features, and this reliance is partially responsible for the stickiness of gendered social iden-

tities. Such features are difficult to even comprehend changing for many people (even if it is relatively easy to change or minimize them) and the social practices surrounding them may strictly prohibit changing them. By contrast, social identities like being a runner have, for most people, no such hurdle. The practices one needs to engage in are clear and accessible. It is, however, worth pausing to note that entering or exiting the social identity of being a runner will be difficult for some people — a transradial amputee, for example, must go through a difficult, complex process to obtain a prosthetic limb capable of supporting her runs. The stickiness of a social identity, then, is not uniform across individuals.

The degree to which an identity constrains behavior, attitudes, and beliefs contributes to its stickiness because our self-identification with these traits, along with their externality, becomes ingrained — we become accustomed, for example, to dressing in a certain way or holding certain attitudes. These habits can be difficult to change, even when one means to. Their being deeply ingrained in this way can arise from external pressure to maintain them, the duration over which one has had a social identity, or the presence of surrounding social practices that pressure one to socially identify with a role upon being assigned to it. For this reason, social identities that correspond to social roles with strong social momentum (such as those pertaining to familial relationships, gender, race, and socioeconomic states) are more likely to be sticky.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>*Alcoff* (2005) argues that gendered and racial social identities are distinct from all other social identities because these identities are embodied. We think that, if there is such a distinction between these and other identities, it will be better captured in terms of degrees of stickiness.



## Context Sensitivity

Our social identities differ across our social contexts. Among friends, our politics are laid bare. At work, we are more cautious and more diplomatic. At church, we take no pains to let others know a “deviant” sexual orientation, but at University, we might slap rainbow stickers on our laptops or join a queer student group.

Consider Paul, a freshman at St. Pius High School. Paul has a strict Catholic family, a strong church community, and happens to self-identify as gay. In such a situation, despite the fact that he might have a small group of friends outside of the school to whom he is out, the vast majority of his social life involves him passing as straight. In other words, in the social context of his Church, Paul’s social identity includes being Catholic, a high school student, a man, etc., but does not include being gay. Among close friends — a very different social context — his social identity includes his being gay as well.

So, while our self-identities may be consistent across our social contexts, our *social* identities can differ. Of course, some social identities will show up more frequently than others. We take it that very sticky identities like race and gender may show up in all contexts. This, however, will not be the true in certain cases. For example, a closeted transgender individual might choose very carefully the social contexts in which they have a gendered social identity (as opposed to merely passing as the gender with which they do not identify).

We take these to be the critical features of social identities. In the next section, we discuss this explanatory power it affords.

## 4.4 Upshots

This section is devoted to discussing the explanatory upshots of our account of social identities. We first will show that, with this account in hand, we can construct robust, structural explanations of persons' behaviors, as well as discrimination against persons with particular social identities. We will then turn to other types of explanation, and show that our account is capable of dissolving some puzzles surrounding 'passing', as well as explaining our moral and political obligations concerning social identities.

### 4.4.1 Structural Explanation of Behavior and Discrimination

We have argued that social identities should be understood as having two components: self-identification and externality of that identity. In particular, we emphasized that social identities reveal agents' chosen orientation toward particular social roles on the basis of self-identification. The account then, describes social identities as pertaining to psychological features and individual agency, but within constraints of the available (or potentially available) social roles. On one hand, this is to make the fairly mundane point, emphasized by many philosophers, that choice is exercised within constrained options. But it also allows us to provide structural explanations of how individuals' behaviors relate to their social identities, as well as of why there is persistent discrimination against persons with particular social identities, even when this discrimination is unintentional.

Before exploring these explanations, we should first introduce our

understanding of a structural explanation. Here, we again follow (*Haslanger*, 2016, p. 2), who provides the following lucid description of the difference between local and structural explanations:

Suppose I am playing ball with my dog. I stuff a treat into a hole in the ball and throw it for him. The ball goes over the lip of a hill and rolls down into a gully. Why did the treat end up in the gully? If we imagine the trajectory of the treat alone...it would be a huge task to explain the particular events that determined each of its movements. A much easier explanation would be to point out that the treat was inserted into a ball that was thrown and rolled down the hill into the gully. In this latter explanation, we explain the behavior of the treat by its being part of something larger whose behavior we explain.

Haslanger here illustrates the key feature of a structural explanation of behavior: rather than limiting focus to the individual whose behavior we want to explain, we look to the system in which the individual is embedded for clues about how their behaviors were constrained. Such explanation can be fitting, then, for something so minute as why you extend a hand when first meeting someone. A useful explanation of this action will not simply focus on your arm movements and the neurological processes. Rather, it will explain the social meaning of this action (and the lack of this action) — that is, it is considered polite to shake someone's hand when first meeting, and impolite to not to do so.

We think that a similar style of explanation is most useful when we want to explain individuals' social behavior more generally. Recall the

metaphorical shared ‘blueprints’ discussed earlier — a community’s collective interpretive guide for the world, consisting of shared habits, concepts, and beliefs that facilitate interpretation of social meaning. Among the many important results of shared social meaning are what we have been calling ‘social roles’. And, with this in mind, we can begin to see why a structural explanation of individual social behavior is available. Social interactions, on our account, are at least in part driven by persons’ social identities, because social identities are the externalization of self-identification with a social role. But, if we want to predict or explain someone’s behavior, we suspect that it may not be illuminating to merely point to their mental states in isolation — instead, we will need to explain the social significance of roles with which they identify.

For example, suppose a heterosexual couple, call them Jared and Holly, walks into an autobody shop. Even though they both know nothing about cars, Jared walks up to the mechanic to ask about the car, while Holly stays behind. In order to explain these behaviors, it isn’t satisfactory to simply point to their self-identifications. So what if Jared identifies as a man, and Holly as a woman? The heart of the explanation lies in the connection between these self-identifications and the social meaning of the roles with which they self-identify. By looking at what the most pervasively shared blueprint says about how a man (or a woman) should behave or what he/she ought to know, (e.g., he should act assertively and know things about cars), we begin to understand Jared’s and Holly’s behaviors. Persons who socially identify with a group will feel subject to prescriptive ideals and expectations of that group (as determined by the particular blueprint they’ve internalized), may experi-

ence stereotype threat associated with that identity, and can be expected to perform behaviors that align with their social identities.

Importantly, this can also allow for a better explanation of behaviors by persons who self-identify with a social role that is not widely recognized. One author, who identifies as genderqueer and presents androgynously, frequently and intentionally lowers their voice when interacting with strangers who take them to be male in order not to spare them confusion and embarrassment. This action also can be explained by looking to the combination of structural and psychological features: because the most pervasively shared blueprint has no recognized role corresponding to their self-identity, they choose to pretend to be something that they are not. Such structural explanations of how social identities influence behaviors are, we think, incredibly illuminating.

Our account of social identities also allows us to pinpoint and structurally explain certain forms of discrimination. That is, rather than focusing only upon individual biases (implicit or explicit), we think that important forms of discrimination occur at the structural level. The most familiar kind of structural discriminations affect persons who occupy particular social roles or social groups — for example, hiring practices that are discriminatory against persons take to be women and blacks, building codes that discriminate against disabled persons, and so on. A less apparent form of structural discrimination targets persons with certain society identities, insofar as they frustrate persons' attempts to occupy the corresponding social role.

One glaring example of this in the current American healthcare system is the availability of medical treatment that transgender women

need in order to occupy social roles associated with the group ‘woman’. Consider the following newspaper article excerpt about a transgender woman named Alena:

To be able to [be taken to be a woman], she requires a steady, affordable supply of prescription hormones — something impossible to come by in Albany. Alena finds herself in a double-bind that makes securing affordable prescription hormones for transition virtually impossible. She is one of 600,000 Georgians who have been left uninsured for healthcare as a result of the Republican state’s refusal to expand Medicaid under Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act... Even if she were entitled to Medicaid, Georgia — along with 15 other states — specifically excludes health coverage for transition-related treatment, so she wouldn’t get anything anyway.<sup>32</sup>

This form of explanation is structural — even if everyone surrounding Alena was without explicit or implicit bias against transwomen, these policies discriminate against her. And, importantly, they are not discriminatory against her for being assigned male at birth, or for self-identifying as a woman, or for her social role (which is, unfortunately, that of a man). They are discriminatory precisely against her social identity, given that she was assigned male at birth. That is, these policies target persons who were assigned male at birth, but who self-identify as women and so are trying to occupy the corresponding social role. And the policies cause a grave injustice by preventing these women from ac-

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<sup>32</sup>*Pilkington* (2015)

cessing affordable healthcare that would facilitate their gender role transition. Additionally, this level of analysis is valuable because it sidesteps ontological issues concerning what it means to be a woman. While both authors take transgender women to be women, it is nevertheless clear that public debate over this ontological question often impedes progress in rectifying cases like Alena's. On our account, this is a red herring — because social identity does not depend on social group membership, the ontological question is irrelevant.

Similar structural discriminations can be seen in (e.g.) identification requirements that prevent persons from wearing certain religious clothing such as burqas, or laws that prevent homosexual persons from getting married or adopting foster children. All of these practices systematically target persons with self-identities who are attempting to be seen by others in accordance with those identities.

#### **4.4.2 Explaining Identity Passing**

In addition to the structural explanations discussed above, our account of society identity has the virtue of being able to contribute to two ongoing debates in social ontology.

The first concerns a phenomenon known as 'passing'. Passing is standardly described as occurring when a person is taken — even consistently taken — to be part of a social group to which they do not belong. Here are two high-profile examples:

- Rachel Dolezal living as a black woman for years, despite having no black ancestry.

- Caitlyn Jenner (prior to ‘coming out’) living as man called ‘Bruce’, despite not being a man.

Although these particular examples are controversial, the possibility (and frequency) of passing is not. However, we think that the standard description of passing (seen above) is ambiguous. In particular, it does not distinguish between two importantly different (though potentially overlapping) kinds of passing.

When we say that someone is a man, what is picked out by ‘is’: group membership, role occupation, or social identity? By disambiguating these possibilities, we discover that passing occurs in two forms:

**Group Passing:** An individual *group* passes when they occupy a social role associated with a social group to which they do not belong.

**Identity Passing:** An individual *identity* passes when they occupy a social role associated with a self- or social identity that they do not have.

In many cases, both group and identity passing occur. But these can occur separately, so it is important for that a social ontology be able to describe and explain both phenomena. Consider, for example, five-year-old Dolezal — arguably, she was a member of the group of white persons, and she occupied the corresponding social role. Nonetheless, even at this age, Dolezal reports that she expressed a self-identification as black. We might say, then, that while Dolezal did not ‘group pass’ as white because she really did belong to the social group of white people, she did ‘identity pass’ as white because her social identity was black.



The aforementioned case of Nancy Updike provides another useful example here. While she identified as a lesbian, she was ‘group passing’ as a lesbian to those who knew and accepted that identity because, as she explained, she was wrong about belonging to that social group. But, she *was not* ‘identity passing’ as a lesbian at that time because her social identity really was that of a lesbian.

#### 4.4.3 Moral Explanation

The previous discussion was of ways that our account of social identities explained observable phenomena surrounding social identities. We now turn to another dimension of explanation: that of moral facts. Specifically, we think that our account can explain both the moral significance of persons’ social identities — that is, that we can bear responsibility for them — and a *prima facie* moral obligation to permit the formation of social identities, and allow persons to occupy the social roles that correspond to their identities.

Let’s begin, then, with our responsibility for social identities. Two things strike us as wrongheaded ideas about our social identities: (a) that they are not morally evaluable (or always good) just because they are a chosen expression of self-identity, or (b) that they are not morally evaluable because we have no control over these identities. The reason why we dismiss the first suggestion is, in a way, simple: social identities are (in part) ways of being in the world. And we think that there are better and worse ways of being in the world. Consider this example from Anthony Appiah:

[Suppose] I adopt a life as a solitary traveler around the world, [and] my parents tell me that I am wasting my life... You don't have to be a communitarian to wonder whether it is a satisfactory response to say only that I have considered the options and this is the way I have chosen... It is one thing to say that [others] ought not to stop you from wasting your life if you choose to; but it is another to say that wasting your life in your own way is good just because it is your way. (p. 14)

Appiah's tale illustrates that, assuming we have some choice in the way that we live, it is not a *carte blanche* justification to say 'I live this way because it's how I see myself as meant to live'. Our actions are not performed in a bubble — someone who wastes their education and talent harms themselves and others, even if indirectly.<sup>33</sup> And certainly, to use a more extreme example, we would all agree that, no matter how much someone self-identifies as a white supremacist, it would be better for them to keep it to themselves, rather than express this identity with their words and actions.

This tale also illustrates why we reject the second thought — that we are not responsible for our social identities because we have no say in what those identities are. We admit that (at least in many cases) persons might have no control over their self-identifications. But, because we hold to the idea that persons exercise agency over what they do and say, we are committed to the idea that we exercise agency in the develop-

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<sup>33</sup> Nagel (1979, p. 5) picks out a similar point, observing that someone who "wastes his life in the cheerful pursuit of a method of communicating with asparagus" is not living well, despite being happy.

ment of social identities. And this is just because, on our model, social identities are formed when an agent externalizes self-identification.<sup>34</sup>

Because agency and acceptance (within social constraints) is central to our understanding of social identities, it also explains why it seems that we have a *prima facie* obligation to allow the formation of and respect persons' social identities.<sup>35</sup> When the exercise of agency does not cause significant harm to others, we ought not prevent it, even if the agent is making a poor or unwise choice. Discrimination against persons who express non-typical identities, such as male-assigned persons expressing feminine identities, persons expressing queer identities, etc. that prevents them from being willing to express their self-identifications (ie., form a social identity) violates their agency.

Similarly, both individual biases and structural features (such as the ones described above) that prevent someone from having mobility between social roles can also violate agency, as in Alena's case. (Of course, there may be situations in which someone's social identity cannot or should not be accommodated: persons who identify as Vikings or Nazis strike us as examples of both kinds.) In addition, it may perpetuates harmful social roles that would be bettered by allowing the role to be determined by persons who socially identify with the relevant group. This latter thought is captured by Wesley Morris in his recent New York

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<sup>34</sup> This is not to suggest that the social practices surrounding certain roles (in particular, many of the very sticky roles such as race and gender) do not exert substantial pressure on individuals to adopt social identities corresponding to those roles.

<sup>35</sup> This is again nicely illustrated by Appiah's statement that, "It is one thing to say that the government or society or your parents ought not to stop you from wasting your life if you choose to; but it is another to say that wasting your life in your own way is good just because it is your way, just because you have chosen to waste your life."

Times article, “The Year We Obsessed Over Identity”:

[I] wonder if being black in America is the one identity that won't ever mutate. I'm someone who believes himself to have complete individual autonomy, someone who feels free. But I also know some of that autonomy is limited, illusory, conditional. I live knowing that whatever my blackness means to me can be at odds with what it means to certain white observers, at any moment. So I live with two identities: mine and others' perceptions of it.

Here, Morris describes a situation in which his social identity corresponds to a social role associated with blackness, (i.e., “others' perceptions of [his identity]”), that differs from the role that he identifies with. And presumably, we would all be better off if we allowed the social role of black persons to be determined by persons who identify as black, rather than by ‘white observers’. The latter has gotten us less than nowhere.

Similarly, it is reasonable to think that we would do well to (continue to) expand the social roles for ‘women’ to accommodate those who identify as women. As we have seen over the last 5-10 years in America, changing the entry conditions for a social role can in turn affect the everyday concept of the associated group that fits that role. That is, by changing who will be seen as a woman, we affect our everyday concept of what a woman is, shifting it away from a biological concept toward an identification concept.<sup>36</sup> Our concepts and their associated social roles

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<sup>36</sup> Depending on one's view about the relationship between concepts and social

seem to be, in this respect, situated in a feedback loop, with changes to one affecting the other. And so, we would like to suggest, it may be that accommodating agents' social identities can have positive effects far beyond the individual, and may in some cases further the cause of social justice by making our social roles (i) more inclusive, and (ii) determined to a greater extent by persons occupying them.

We are, of course, only touching upon huge themes of structural explanation, individual and group agency, social justice, and inclusivity. These themes would require many more pages to explore in detail, but we hope to have motivated the idea that our account of social identities has a wide breadth of explanatory power.

## 4.5 Alternative Accounts

Now that we have motivated and described our proposed account of social identities, we will briefly explain why we found the two prominent philosophical accounts of social identities unsatisfying. In particular, we will address accounts proposed by Sally Haslanger and Anthony Appiah, and explain why we think that our view is preferable. It is important to note that, because we are not wedded to the idea that there is one one 'correct' understanding of identity, we are not out to argue that Haslanger's or Appiah's proposals are incorrect; rather, we are out to argue that our proposal is a viable theoretical alternative and best serves the suggested purposes for the concept of social identity.

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kinds, we expect there will be varying views about how these shifts to our everyday concepts may or may not additionally change what the social kind in fact is.

#### 4.5.1 Appiah & 'Kinds of Persons'

Let's begin by looking at Appiah's account. In his book *The Ethics of Identity*, Appiah proposes an understanding of social identity that does not distinguish between what we have been calling 'psychological' identity and 'social' identity. His view can be broken down into roughly two parts: kinds of persons, understood as 'ways of being', and identification with those kinds.

Appiah emphasizes that each of us, in the one life that we have to live, is faced with certain constraints on the kind of persons we can be, and that these constraints shape our social identities. Says Appiah:

In constructing an identity, one draws, among other things, on the kinds of person available in one's society. Of course, there is not just one way that gay or straight people [etc.] are to behave, but there are ideas around...about how gay [or] straight [etc.] people ought to conduct themselves. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping our plans of life. [Social] identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories. (p. 21-2)

On Appiah's picture, then, to have a social identity requires modeling one's life according to a shared narrative about how a certain kind of person's life ought to go, be it a woman, a black person, a lesbian, a philosopher, or an American. To construct a social identity is to use the corresponding narrative as a "norm or model" for one's life.

Regarding kinds of persons, Appiah follows Ian Hacking in thinking that, in order to intentionally act as (e.g.) a woman, an American, etc., one must bear the label associated with that group and understand one's actions under a description employing that label. And because (as mentioned above) Appiah understands the construction of a social identity as using a particular narrative as a norm or guide for one's life, intentionally acting in accordance with these narratives is a necessary condition for creating a social identity. For this reason, Appiah argues that labels "mold" identification, because it is by referencing these labels that people think that something-or-other is appropriate to being (e.g.) a woman, an American, etc.

In sum, on Appiah's view, by internalizing social group labels that we bear as part of our identities — and so, shaping our lives in accordance with the narratives associated with these labels — we come to have social identities.

#### 4.5.2 Response

We agree with much of Appiah's view on social identities. For example, we agree with Appiah that social identities involve identification with a certain social group. We also agree that social identities are agential in that they involve more than mere internal identification with a group — they also involve taking certain actions that express that internal identification.

Despite these substantial points of agreement, there are two important respects in which we think that Appiah's account of social identities

frustrate the proposed purposes for the concept of social identity.

The first concerns Appiah's requirement that one bear the label of the group that one socially identifies with. This requirement, as Appiah notes later, means that one belongs to the group of persons that one identifies with, and is seen by others as belonging to that group.

This requirement on possessing a social identity has two negative effects. To see this, consider two kinds of cases:

1. Someone identifies with a certain group, but is restricted because of (e.g.) social discrimination from joining it, and
2. Someone identifies with and belongs to a certain group, but is not acknowledged as belonging to the group.

Examples of the first sort of case might include (e.g.) a young boy who identifies as a dancer, but is then prevented from dancing by his parents, or someone like Rachel Dolezal, who (for a period of time) both identified as and was taken to be black, but was not in fact black. Examples of the second sort of cases might include (e.g.) a bisexual woman who identifies as bisexual, but is presumed to be straight because she is dating a man, or a light-skinned black person who identifies as black, but is presumed to be white by others.

The first thing to notice is that Appiah is unable to explain these seemingly paradigm cases of social identity. On his account, none of the people in the above cases in fact have the social identity that they appear to have. The second and related thing to notice is that, in these cases, Appiah's view might be used to justify dismissing persons' identities as delusional or insignificant. Take, for example, the case of a bi-



sexual woman who is assumed by others to be straight because of dating a man. Her social identity, on Appiah's view, must be different than her social identity would be if (e.g.) she were single and others took her at her word when she said that she is bisexual. But it is undeniably important as a matter of justice that her social identity can be the same, regardless of whether that social identity has uptake.

Our second point of concern lies with Appiah's severe restriction of the number of available social identities. The reason for this restriction lies in the connection Appiah makes between social identities and 'ways of being' or 'kinds of person'. On Appiah's view, the other available social identities are identities corresponding to kinds of persons. But the only kinds of persons are those kinds for whom we have a denoting term in public discourse.

We think that there is good reason to not restrict social identities to ones formed in response to a person's being attributed (and self-attributing) a publicly available label. This view prevents Appiah from capturing cases of social identity when there is no widely-recognized social group, because a social movement is in its early stages. No doubt, the first persons to identify as transgender or feminist found themselves in this position. Regardless of whether they had a label associated with their identity, and regardless of the fact that there was no culturally shared narrative for that identity, they began social movements by forging new narratives, and so new social groups. That is, these social identities were formed (in part) as an attempt to change the available social roles, and not in response to pre-established roles. Not only does this failure conflict with our intuitions about seemingly paradigm cases of social iden-

tity, but they additionally undercut the political importance of respecting social identities when possible and permissible.

### 4.5.3 Haslanger & Internalized Maps

Haslanger's view of social identity differs dramatically from Appiah's. Focusing upon racial identities in particular, Haslanger argues that racial identities are not just due to acting upon internalized terms, but instead, are "deeply embodied." She argues:

Important components of racial identity...are somatic, largely habitual, regularly unconscious, often ritualized. Our racial identities deeply condition how we live our bodies and relate to other bodies. Individuals are socialized to become embodied subjects, not just rational, cognitive agents; so race and gender socialization isn't just a matter of instilling concepts and indoctrinating beliefs, but are also ways of training the body—training the body to feel, to see, to touch, to fear, to love. I do not claim that our identities are entirely non-cognitive, but to focus entirely on the cognitive, especially the intentional, is to miss the many ways that we unintentionally and unconsciously participate in racism and sexism. (*Haslanger*, 2012a, p. 284-5)

Combining this requirement for a more "embodied" account of social identity, along with a further requirement for an account that does not see social identities as having an 'on/off' switch, but as coming in

degree, Haslanger proposes that we understand social identity as consisting of a variety of features that one can have to a greater or lesser degree. For example, she suggests that a satisfactory account of racial identity might include the following as dimensions of racial identity:

- unconscious somatic (routine behaviors, skills, and “know-hows”)
- unconscious imaginary (unconscious self-image/somatic image)
- tacit cognitive (tacit understandings, tacit evaluations)
- perceptual (perceptual selectivity, recognitional capacities)
- conscious cognitive (fear, apprehension, attraction, sense of community)
- normative (aesthetic judgments, judgments of suitability or appropriateness, internalized or not?) (ibid., p. 290)

On Haslanger’s view, we should prefer an account of social identities on which these identities are a sort of map that organizes and guides us with respect to social groups. So, Haslanger argues, someone need not have internalized the label ‘white’ to have a white racial identity; it is enough that their ‘map’ is, to continue the metaphor, a white map. That is, it organizes and guides them to behave, think and perceive characteristically as a white person. While such a person might disavow their white identity, and refuse the corresponding label, they will still have a white identity, according to Haslanger. Social identities are not so much about what we take ourselves to be or want ourselves to be; they are more about the way we in fact are.

#### 4.5.4 Response

Like Appiah, Haslanger seems to presume that having a social identity as (e.g.) a white person requires that one both is white and is recognized by others as being white. Because this isn't an essential part of her picture, though, and because we discussed above our worries about these requirements, we will set this issue aside.

But, having set that aside, we have two remaining worries. Both trace back to her strong non-cognitivism about social identity, which is clearly seen in her claim that one can have a social identity that they disavow, so long as the map guiding their behavior is associated with that identity. This strongly suggests that Haslanger does not require that someone self-identify with a certain group in order to have the social identity corresponding to that group.

We do not deny that the phenomenon that Haslanger pinpoints is a real and important phenomenon. However, we think that it is a mistake to call this 'social identity', rather than distinguishing it both from what we have termed psychological identity, and the external expression of those identities — i.e., 'social identities' on our terminology. We assume what Helen Longino calls the theoretical virtue of "ontological heterogeneity" — that is, the virtue of emphasizing distinctions between qualitatively diverse subjects.<sup>37</sup> And we think that conflation of automatic social responses, (to some degree) cognitive awareness of self-identity, and the expression of those identities under a single term ends up creating two difficulties. First, it hinders the account from being able to

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<sup>37</sup> Longino (1990)

neatly explain the relation between these somatic, incultured responses to one's environment, one's psychological sense of group belonging, and one's expression of agency with respect to that psychological sense. As a result, the account will also have a more difficult route to explaining phenomenon surrounding these distinct states, such as identity passing or transitioning. In early stages of gender transitioning, for example, a transgender woman might have the automatic responses associated with the gender she was assigned at birth, but importantly, we would not want to say that she still has the social identity of a man.

Cases of transitioning also bring the second worry about Haslanger's account to the fore. In its reaction to Appiah's cognitivism, this account completely removes agency from the picture of social identity. By making this move, we think it ends up undercutting many of the political goals that we take to be motivating our account of social identity. Social identities, on our view, are not so much about the way we in fact are, but what we take and want ourselves to be. We think that an account of social identity should emphasize the importance of respecting persons' social identities by recognizing them as an expression of agency, and so enabling (when possible) the person to (continue to) occupy the associated social role.

That is not to say that we think Haslangerian maps are completely up to us. But we also do not think that they are inflexible and permanent — we can, to some extent, revise our maps. That is, while we reject the idea that we build ourselves from scratch, we also reject the idea that we have no say in who we are — we exercise agency, even though we exercise agency within social structures that significantly constrain

our options. Persons demanding recognition of new gender or sexual identities, or persons who (e.g.) have implicitly racist responses to others but who are attempting to change these responses, are doing something incredibly important in rejecting their incultured maps. On our view, it is important to reserve the term ‘social identity’ for the lives they are attempting to lead, the lives they mean to lead — without it, we are left without a category that can figure in our political exhortations to remove discrimination and other injustices that prevent persons from revising these maps. That is, by relegating identity to a somatic realm, there is no clear way to pinpoint the harm that is done in preventing the success of someone’s expressed desire for a different social role.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

In the above, we present a theory of social identities that we argue does better explanatory and normative work than its competitors. On this theory, social identities are understood as role-directed externalities of one’s self-identification with members of a social group.

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