

EMOTIONAL EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

“YOU NEED TO CALM DOWN”
EMOTIONAL EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

By ASHLYNN WHALLEY, B.A.

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for the Degree Master of Arts

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AUTHOR: Ashlynn Whalley, B.A. (McMaster University)

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Lay Abstract

The primary goal of this thesis project is to formally acknowledge the role of emotions in how we are able to acquire and contribute to knowledge construction, and successfully communicate said knowledge to others. Our gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic status, and ability all influence how we are allowed to express our emotions, and to what extent they will receive uptake from a given audience. These social feeling rules allow others to “justifiably” dismiss the information our emotions are signaling based on our social position, and results in the expression of emotion being used to undermine our reason-based testimony or communication as well. By identifying two specific ways in which this is already happening via misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation, as well as presenting a new way of categorizing our emotions as unique forms of information, I will demonstrate that the information our emotions provide can be a powerful tool for real social and political change.

Abstract

Our emotions tell us that *something is happening*. When we experience or express an emotion, it is a reaction to a situation that is happening to or around us. This thesis project seeks to address the social and political inequalities that obstruct certain individuals and groups from being able to access and express the unique form of information that emotions provide.

Emotional epistemic injustice concerns the ways in which our emotions can be used against us as an epistemic agent along gendered, racial, and ableist lines. Our capacity as a knower is influenced by social rules – and these same social rules dictate which kind of people can feel what, and in which situations. The first two chapters of this project are focused on identifying and analyzing two existing kinds of emotional epistemic injustice – *misogynistic emotion reframing* and *emotional epistemic exploitation*. By explicitly acknowledging these phenomena, I provide two new actionable hermeneutical resources, demonstrate the significance of our emotional experiences, and establish the need for a recategorization of emotions as a significant and unique source of information.

The third and final chapter focuses on how this recategorization can be done. By specifically identifying *socio-epistemically significant emotions*, I argue for the recategorization of emotions as an invitation to further investigation of our experiences within the context of existing social and political inequalities. Our emotions, both felt and expressed, have the potential to be powerful tools for real social and political change – and in order for them to have this impact, they must be embraced as their own unique and significant source of information.

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Introduction

Our emotions tell us that *something is happening* – when we feel or express an emotion, it is a reaction *to* something that has happened to or around us. This thesis project focuses on how our emotions are a unique kind of knowledge, how they form an important part of our general epistemic framework, and why they must be considered when exploring individual experiences as well as structural patterns of epistemic injustices. Emotions are information – and like all information, they can be false, misleading, or require additional context to be truly significant. Developing a relationship with our emotional experiences allows us the opportunity to analyze them, which in turn enables personal growth, unique insights, and community-led change. Before continuing, I would like to acknowledge that this project would be impossible without the emotionally taxing, highly personal, and often overlooked work from Black, Indigenous, and historically marginalized feminist authors. Their work is fundamental to this project, and its history of being overlooked and/or dismissed is also a structural example of the very work I am focused on here.

Emotional epistemic injustice concerns the ways in which our emotions can be used against us as an epistemic agent along gendered, racial, and ableist lines. Our capacity as a knower is influenced by social rules – and these same social rules dictate which kind of people can feel what, and in which situations and contexts. The potential for harm here is twofold; one’s emotions can be used as further proof that they should not be taken seriously as an epistemic agent, regardless of the reason or logic-based testimony they are speaking on – and this phenomenon will be addressed in Chapters one and two. The second potential for harm comes from the emotion-based information itself being lost from this structural pattern of devaluing and dismissal. Chapter three looks at the importance of emotions as a unique and significant kind of

information, the extent of the harm that comes from not recognizing it as such, and how we can begin to recategorize emotions for a more thorough understanding of the world and our place within it. Each of these three chapters are meant to stand on their own – and when read together, they build on one another to form a cohesive project of defining, analyzing, and working to dismantle emotional epistemic injustice.

The three chapters of this project explore this interweaving of emotions and epistemic injustice. Chapter one serves as an introduction to emotion-based communication and non-linguistic forms of epistemic injustice while exploring a particular instance of emotional epistemic injustice, what I am calling *misogynistic emotion reframing*: when an individual reframes a woman's emotions due to their own misogynistic beliefs about what a woman should or should not feel or express. I present misogynistic emotion reframing as a new hermeneutical resource that demonstrates just how vulnerable our emotion-based communication is to epistemic injustices, and the consistent but subtly pervasive nature of this kind of epistemic violence. Misogynistic emotion reframing explicitly acknowledges the tactic misogyny – wherein our emotions are reframed as a way of rewarding those who stay within acceptable social roles and punishing those who do not – at play in emotion-based communication. This reframing of emotions is all about control: women's emotions are reframed in order to uphold existing patriarchal norms. When we dictate who can feel what along gendered lines, we are reinforcing the patriarchal status quo by punishing those who step outside the allowed gendered oppression by, quite literally, not hearing what they are saying. The fundamental harm of misogynistic emotion reframing is that a woman (or women in general) so consistently experience this undermining of her own experiences that she accepts the misogynistic reframing

of her emotions as her experience of reality – and buys into the very behaviour that enforces her oppression.

The second chapter takes a more structural perspective on this same concept: *emotional epistemic exploitation* defines the unacknowledged, uncompensated, yet expected labour the dominantly-situated require of the marginally situated when it comes to how, when, and in what ways they are allowed to express their emotions. This particular kind of epistemic exploitation reinforces the imbalances of power that enables the dominantly situated to stay dominant. This can happen on an individual basis; but it is this kind of exploitation on a structural level that not only reinforces these social hierarchies, but also makes it incredibly difficult to overcome them. Most significantly, it also results in the inability for individuals from marginalized groups to attain full epistemic agency outside of their communities.

The third and final chapter shifts the conversation from providing new hermeneutical resources towards presenting a possible solution to the devaluing of emotions and the epistemic injustices this devaluing reinforces. Here I address the epistemically relevant intentions behind the construction and upholding of the reason/emotion divide, and present a case for *socio-epistemically significant emotions* – a recategorizing of emotions as their own kind of information, and specifically as a resource for reason. Socio-epistemically significant emotions provide insight into patterns of injustice that affect us on a personal level – and that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, or been avoided or dismissed. Recategorizing emotion-based knowledge as its own kind of information and insight allows us to recognize, process, and leverage socio-epistemically significant emotions as a powerful resource for change. This chapter includes an analysis of how this recategorizing might happen, potential obstacles to its success, and what the next steps in this work could be.

This project will address both felt and expressed emotions, as both are an extension of the emotion itself. While expressed emotions are more vulnerable to instances of epistemic injustice, even felt emotions – within systemic experiences of emotional epistemic injustices – can be manipulated, dismissed, or ignored by the agent herself. Deciding that you are “too dramatic” or “overly sensitive” can be even more harmful than if the same was said to you by a more dominantly situated individual. Misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation are examples of the role emotions play in epistemic injustice. I am not arguing for the inclusion of emotions as a source of information, but rather that emotions *already* are both a source of information, and one that is undermined by the same patterns we see in epistemic injustice more broadly. When emotions are present in testimony, they are taken to be undermining both the emotion-based information being expressed, *and* any reason-based testimony. This leaves those who are most likely to have personal experiences with injustices – and are therefore the most likely to become emotional when speaking about them – out of the conversation entirely.

My overall goal for this project is to demonstrate that there is a simultaneous (and interestingly, contradictory) devaluing and dismissing of emotions that is already taking place, and that is entirely reflective of existing social power dynamics – and to then provide an analysis, offer new hermeneutical resources, and present possible strategies for dismantling this particular kind of epistemic injustice. With that in mind, I have two specific objectives for this project; the first is to provide two clear, concise, and actionable hermeneutical resources with misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation. By specifically acknowledging and defining these patterns, we can begin to see just how frequently they happen and what the particular and underlying harms are – and why it is so important to begin to address

and dismantle the consistent devaluing and dismissal of emotion-based knowledge and communication.

The second objective is to present a specific strategy, via defining socio-epistemically significant emotions, for leveraging our emotional experiences as an accessible and powerful resource for social change. Our emotions tell us that something is happening – by paying attention to what they are telling us, and by recognizing that when we are told that they both *do not matter* but also that they can only be expressed in *certain ways*, the dominantly situated are showing their hand. By going to such lengths to try to control who can express what kind of emotions in which context, we can see that emotions are already valued and powerful – and we can begin to reclaim them as the unique and significant source of information that they are. I am not arguing that our emotional experiences should entirely dictate how we live our lives and what decisions we make, but rather that we address the structural barriers that keep us from appreciating them as their own kind – a useful and significant kind – of information.

Chapter One: Misogynistic Emotion Reframing

As social creatures, emotional expression is fundamental to how we relate to both ourselves and others. Our emotions are clues that *something is happening* – they signal to us that there is some meaningful thing going on, and that we have had an emotional response because of it. When our emotions are misread, dismissed, or ignored, we may begin to doubt that we are feeling them at all, and even begin to question our own experience of reality. If our emotions are consistently or systematically mischaracterized we may experience epistemic harm – our emotions, and the information they provide us, is silenced, devalued, or dismissed altogether. This chapter will focus on the situations where this mischaracterization of emotions results from misogynistic beliefs, and addresses a gap within the existing work done on epistemic violence and emotion-based communication: we consistently overlook the effects of tactic misogyny, wherein emotions are reframed as a way of rewarding those who stay within acceptable social roles and punishing those who do not, on how the ways in which we can provide testimony is restricted based on the social expectations of our gender.¹ This policing of emotional expression is a direct result of patriarchal social norms, and has the potential to cause serious epistemic harm, both in how it influences what we define as credible testimony, and in how confident we can be in the reality of our own lived experiences. Considering both tactic misogyny and nonlinguistic forms of epistemic violence from a structural perspective highlights the subtly pervasive yet highly significant ways in which gender-based oppression is reinforced by the “allowed” emotional expression of a particular gender.

Through this analysis I develop a new hermeneutical resource aimed at addressing the highly influential yet epistemically harmful role of tactic misogyny on emotional expression:

¹ With reference to Kate Manne’s work in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*.

misogynistic emotion reframing, or the ways in which an audience, either consciously or unconsciously, reframes the emoter's expression of emotion as a way of enforcing patriarchal gender norms.² The influence of tactic misogyny often goes unnoticed in how we perceive and react to the emotions of others – and the explicit identification of this phenomenon allows us to recategorize emotions as their own form of epistemic and political power, and provides new tools for addressing epistemic violence and gender-based oppression.

To illustrate the utility of this new hermeneutical resource, I begin by situating Kristie Dotson's work on epistemic violence and Trip Glazer's expansion of it into the nonlinguistic realm in section I. Glazer's work on emotional misperception as epistemic violence serves as both a foundation for identifying the ways in which our emotions can constitute uniquely insightful sources of information, as well as an opportunity to explore the ambiguity in this theory to identify additional sources of oppression and injustice. In section II I outline why recognizing the extensive influence of tactic misogyny on allowed emotional expression necessitates identifying misogynistic emotion reframing as its own kind of emotion dismissal. Then, in section III, I return to Glazer's emotional misperception, focusing specifically on what he chooses to *exclude* from this kind of epistemic violence as a meaningful example of what can go wrong when we underestimate the pervasive nature of misogyny. I conclude in section IV with two major implications of the preceding discussion of misogynistic emotion reframing: first, in keeping with gender norms, this practice serves to acknowledge the threat that disallowed emotions present to patriarchal systems, and second, that there is significant

² While the following discussion is situated within a gender binary, this fails to capture many folks' lived experiences. The discussion proceeds from this binary because much of the existing work in this space is situated within it. To fully capture the impact of the epistemic violence discussed here, the oppressive nature of this binary needs to be dismantled. Unfortunately that work is beyond the scope of this chapter.

intrapersonal, interpersonal, and political power to be had in embracing a recategorization of what our emotions can do.

I. Emotional Misperception and Epistemic Violence

Kristie Dotson identifies *epistemic violence* as the harm done to a speaker when their audiences' ignorance prevents them from understanding what they are saying.³ This form of testimonial injustice⁴ serves to silence marginalized groups, whether it is intentionally done or not.⁵ Dotson's account of epistemic violence utilizes Jennifer Hornsby's concept of a successful linguistic exchange – namely that there is a fundamental *reciprocity* involved in the knowledge exchange between a speaker and their audience.⁶ The speaker relies on the audience to successfully interpret what she is saying – and this reciprocity requires that the audience understands both the words the speaker is saying, as well as what the speaker is trying to *do* with her words.⁷ Just understanding the words being spoken is not sufficient for genuine reciprocity: misinterpreting or misreading what the speaker intended with her words indicates the communicative exchange has failed. Epistemic violence occurs when an audience fails to perform this process of reciprocation, intentionally or unintentionally, due to their own pernicious ignorance.⁸ When reciprocity fails, the audience has taken the speaker to mean something *other* than what they intended to communicate.

³ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 238.

⁴ See also Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Miranda Fricker (2007).

⁵ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236.

⁶ Jennifer Hornsby, "Disempowered Speech," *Feminist Perspectives on Language, Knowledge, and Reality* 23 no. 2 (1995): 134.

⁷ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 237.

⁸ *Ibid*, 238.

Pernicious ignorance is ignorance that is both reliable, in that it is “consistent or follows from predictable epistemic gaps in cognitive resources,” and harmful.⁹ Reliable ignorance is not by definition harmful – a ten year old’s ignorance of international tax laws is reliable, but not harmful. Ignorance becomes pernicious when an analysis of the context of a particular communicative exchange reveals patterns that go beyond mere reliable ignorance. Identifying instances of harm requires an awareness of the kinds of power dynamics, structural inequalities, and particular contextual factors of a given communicative exchange that make ignorance in *that instance* harmful.¹⁰

The harm that comes from reliable ignorance is not necessarily straightforward: while it could be as conspicuous as not receiving a promotion because of sexist beliefs, it could also be seemingly innocuous comments about one’s tone of voice or word choice, or being called emotional or dramatic. These are the kinds of harms that result from the consistent failure of a communicative exchange owing to pernicious ignorance. The harm enacted in one particular case is not likely to be an obvious source of injustice, but if it becomes a pattern in someone’s life to be on the receiving end of pernicious ignorance, the harm has a compounding effect – a death by a thousand cuts, so to speak. But in this case what is being cut down is one’s confidence in their own perception of reality, or possibly even their very sense of self.

This tracks the conceptual difference between harm and injustice. Harm can be a one-off, isolated incident – injustice signifies a more ongoing, pervasive kind of damage.¹¹ Epistemic violence always causes harm – however, what can appear as a mere hurtful comment or failed communicative exchange can, with the addition of consistency and pernicious ignorance, very

⁹ Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 238.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 239.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 241.

easily and quite quickly turn into the kind of injustice that reinforces and reflects oppressive and unjust social structures. When a speaker's words are ignored, dismissed, or twisted, the audience is claiming that the speaker does not know what they are saying or what they are talking about.¹² This both denies the speaker the uptake for her words and the intention of those words, and signals that the audience does not see them as a credible or knowledgeable speaker.¹³ Again, as an isolated incident, this may not result in epistemic injustice, per se – it may only mean the speaker is harmed by their testimony not receiving its intended uptake. However, when these instances become systemic due to pervasive structural oppression, we can make the case for the existence of epistemic harm even in individual cases of testimonial silencing.

Emotional Misperception

Most work on epistemic violence focuses on how our *words* can be ignored, dismissed, or twisted, but in many communicative settings, we communicate with more than just what words we say. Glazer expands the concept of epistemic violence to nonlinguistic forms of communication as an emotion-specific category of epistemic violence. This is especially significant since research shows that an audience reliably gives more value to tone of voice and body language over what is being said.¹⁴ So if someone both expresses an emotion and states that they are or have experienced the same emotion, the audience will affix more credibility to the *expressed* emotion than to what the individual has said they are feeling. This tells us that not only are our emotions an important source of intrapersonal information about what we are experiencing, but that the expression of those emotions also act as information regarding how

¹² Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 243.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 66.

others perceive what we are experiencing or communicating. And if our emotions, like our words, are at risk of not receiving their intended uptake, there is potential for serious epistemic harm. The misreading of tone or body language – typical nonlinguistic expressions of emotions – can seriously undermine the testimony of an individual:

Our facial expressions, gestures, and tones of voice convey a great deal of information about ourselves, much of it about what we are currently experiencing. These acts of nonlinguistic communication are no less susceptible to being silenced, distorted, and exploited.¹⁵

These emotional comportments – our body language, facial expressions, and even typical expressions of emotions, such as crying or laughing – are all types of nonlinguistic behaviours that communicate information about a person’s emotions.¹⁶ Glazer uses the examples of a man’s smirk betraying his smugness, a woman’s closed stance revealing her distrust of others, and the raised pitch of a child’s voice conveying her excitement.¹⁷ As with linguistic forms of epistemic violence, an individual’s emotional comportment can be misread – and Glazer defines emotional misperception as a nonlinguistic form of epistemic violence wherein an individual can be harmed by testimonial silencing or testimonial smothering.

Emotional misperception occurs when:

1. A misreads B’s nonlinguistic expression of emotion,
2. Owing to reliable ignorance,
3. Harming B.¹⁸

Glazer gives the example of a woman being interviewed by a man. During the interview, the woman speaks politely but forcefully – and the interviewer, expecting her to be more demure (owing to a sexist ideology) misreads her tone as subtly contemptuous.¹⁹ As a result the woman

¹⁵ Trip Glazer, “Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception,” *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

is seen as a bad fit and is not offered the job.²⁰ In this example, the man has misread the woman's emotion (condition 1), as a result of reliable ignorance (condition 2), and due to this misreading does not offer her the job, harming the woman (condition 3).²¹

The first condition of misreading the emotion can be done in one of three ways: a false-negative, wherein an emotion is expressed but the audience deems no emotion has been expressed; a false-positive, wherein an emotion is *not* expressed, but the audience deems an emotion has been expressed; and false-categorization, wherein the emoter expresses one emotion, but the audience perceives the emoter as expressing a different emotion than intended.²² Each of these forms of misreading the emoter's expression of emotion can result in harm, but the misreading itself is not sufficient for it to be categorized as emotional misperception. It is possible that the audience in question was simply not paying enough attention to the emoter's expression, it was difficult to hear or see the emoter during the expression of emotion, or perhaps the emoter expressed said emotion in an unusual way.²³ The misreading of an emotion must also involve reliable ignorance to constitute epistemic violence.

The second condition, that the emotion is misread as a result of reliable ignorance, is based on Dotson's standard of pernicious ignorance. Typically, this form of ignorance is a result of the audiences' social positioning or situated ignorance.²⁴ Glazer sees reliable ignorance playing out in three different ways when it comes to misreading emotions; emotion stereotyping, emotion apathy, and emotion parochialism.²⁵ The first of these, emotion stereotyping, is most relevant for our discussion here.

²⁰ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁴ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 248.

²⁵ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 66.

An *emotion stereotype* is a “fixed, often simplistic generalization about the emotive tendencies of a particular group of people.”²⁶ While racially and socioeconomically based emotion stereotypes are certainly a considerable component of this type of reliable ignorance, this also works along gendered lines. Women are believed to be more emotional and to experience sadness, guilt, and embarrassment more often than men – whereas men are believed to experience anger and pride more often than women.²⁷ In Glazer’s interview example, he notes that the interviewer misreads the woman’s tones as subtly contemptuous due to a stereotype he holds that women’s voices should be softer. In this case, the woman’s emotions are misread due to the interviewer’s belief that women should express certain emotions in certain ways, or perhaps should not express certain emotions (like confidence) at all.

The final necessary component of emotional misperception is that the emoter is harmed. Emotional misperception can silence an individual when the audience refuses to believe a person’s claims about what she is experiencing – and again, will take their own (possibly misled) interpretation of the emotion expressed as more credible than what the emoter has actually said.²⁸ When emotional compartments are misread due to pernicious ignorance, the credibility of the testimony of an individual can be seriously undermined, and in some cases both the individual and the testimony can be silenced altogether.

As a way to clarify some ambiguity in this third, harm-related condition, Glazer uses Sue Campbell’s theory of emotional dismissal as an example of emotional dismissal that is *not* a case of emotional misperception. While I will return to why this is problematic in section III, for now it is important to note that emotional dismissal is omitted as a form of emotional misperception

²⁶ Trip Glazer, “Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception,” *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

because in this instance the emotion is not *misread*, but merely *dismissed*. Campbell's emotional dismissal is the refusal to take women's emotions seriously based on a sexist assumption that women are overly emotional or sensitive.²⁹ While this seems to be a clear instance of the kind of consistent and harmful ignorance that goes into categorizing forms of emotional misperception, Glazer claims this is not emotional misperception because the emotion is not misread, but instead used as a "ground for dismissing the woman as irrational"; the *dismissal* of one's emotions is fundamentally different from the *misperception* of them due to pernicious ignorance.³⁰ Glazer's exclusion of gender-based emotion dismissal highlights the same ambiguity in his third condition; namely, why is emotional misperception always harmful, while dismissing emotions due to the emoter's gender is not? Emotional misperception is an important hermeneutical resource for the epistemic injustices that exist in emotion-based communication, but the exclusion of emotional dismissal as a form of emotional misperception indicates that Glazer has not accounted for the misogynistic reasons women's emotions are often dismissed.

II. Misogynistic Emotion Reframing

Sometimes pernicious ignorance is a kind of tactical misogyny. Misogyny targets women's behaviour simply because they are women living in a man's world – misogyny does not merely exist in an individual's mind or actions, but in the overall structure of a patriarchal society.³¹ Manne identifies the ways in which sexism and misogyny work in tandem: whereas sexism serves as the *justificatory* branch of a patriarchal society ("identifying" ways in which men and women are different), misogyny is the *law enforcement* branch: it serves to punish

²⁹ Sue Campbell, "Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression," *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 64.

women who fail to meet (and stay within) patriarchal standards and expectations, and rewards those who do.³² Misogyny enforces gender conformity along patriarchal lines – stay within your predetermined gendered role, and you will be rewarded. Step outside of said role – dare to attempt masculine-coded or even non-feminine-coded expressions or actions – and you will be punished. So-called “allowed” emotions are typically an extension of these gendered norms – only certain types of emotions are allowed to be expressed by certain types of people. What this means is that misogynistic practices pervade not only how we express ourselves, but also the ways in which we are able to express ourselves without being punished.

Tactic Misogyny and Misogynistic Emotion Reframing

Misogyny relies on loaded terminology for the policing and enforcement of women’s behaviour. The words we use to describe others’ emotions are a foundational component of Hornsby’s reciprocity requirement – if our emotions are not given their intended uptake, a failure of reciprocity, and therefore communication, has occurred. But what of the cases wherein the uptake of an expressed emotion is altered from what was intended? And what happens when this is done on a structural basis? In the case of tactic misogyny, emotions are reframed as a way of rewarding those who stay within acceptable social roles – and punishing those who do not. Glazer’s example of the woman being interviewed demonstrates this exactly: the woman is punished for emoting in a way the misogynistic interviewer deems inappropriate given her status *as a woman*, and her confidence is reframed as contempt. Tactic misogyny is also at play when a white man’s grief is reframed as weakness or a black man’s fear is reframed as aggression. This

³² Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 78.

is a form of control – not only control over the communicative exchange in question, but also control over the person attempting to communicate in the first place.

Manne argues that the dominant social class has “a vested interest in maintaining men’s superiority” – tactic misogyny is the way(s) in which misogynistic practices are deployed in order to maintain the patriarchal status quo.³³ Importantly, this need not be done in conscious ways, or even by men exclusively. Those complicit in white ignorance or a woman’s participation in her own oppression do not require an awareness of the wrongness of their actions or perspective in order for them to be wrong. Similarly, misogyny can be an unconscious societal enforcement mechanism, a way to ensure both women (and men) are “staying in line.” As a function of society, misogyny relies on universally recognized forms of enforcement – it is not just about punishing *one* woman, but using an instance of punishment as a message to *all* women.³⁴ Language is an important feature of this law enforcement function of tactic misogyny: it serves to literally articulate why the woman in question is being punished. Women often find themselves in emotionally truncated situations: “Withholding sympathy makes her a bitch; looking inward makes her cold or selfish; being ambitious makes her hostile and anti-social, as well as untrustworthy.”³⁵ When women step outside of traditionally feminine-coded expressions or actions, they are labelled as “wrong” – not only are their actions condemned by this tactic misogyny, but so is their rightness as a (female) person. Tactic misogyny is an iteration of pernicious ignorance – it is both a reliable feature of patriarchal societies, and enacts epistemic harm.

³³ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 291.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 68.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 296.

This is clearly true of linguistic forms of communication – but the expression of emotion is also an important aspect of how humans communicate. When emotional comportment – the nonlinguistic forms of emotional expression – is also part of a communicative exchange, additional information is being communicated. Emotions are a particularly powerful kind of information because they are so often unintentionally expressed. Whereas language is almost always engaged as an intentional means of communication, emotions are often spontaneous, especially in high-stress or oppressive situations. When an emotion is expressed unintentionally, or even unknowingly, the audience is provided valuable insight into the emoter’s mental state, potentially even without the emoter being aware of this additional information being communicated.

The reciprocity requirement of communication gives certain power to the audience of a speaker or emoter – what is specifically insidious is when an emotion expressed is reframed by a misogynistic audience in order to punish the emoter. Both the emotion itself and what the emoter intended to communicate with that emotion have been reframed, and the communicative exchange has failed. This is where emotion-descriptive language is extremely significant, as the way in which an emotion is articulated is what changes: an emotion is expressed and is then described (either inwardly to oneself or out loud) as something *other* than what the emoter intended to express, due to the misogynistic beliefs of the audience. The harm here is not just that the communicative exchange has failed, or that the emotion or its intention did not receive uptake – the emoter has also been harmed in her capacity to know and express her own emotions, been punished for not conforming to allowed gendered expressions, and, as a result, characterized as the wrong kind of person.

This practice is best understood as *misogynistic emotion reframing*: an audience, either consciously or unconsciously, reframes the emoter's expression of emotion as a way of enforcing patriarchal gender norms. Paradigmatically, this is misogyny at work: the law-enforcement branch of the patriarchy actively policing what can be expressed, by whom, and in what ways. When an emotion is reframed as something else – such as anger as bitterness, sadness as weakness, or confidence as smugness – the audience is making a judgement that the intended emotion is somehow inappropriate or not allowed, and so both reframes it as a different emotion *and* condemns the behaviour and emotions of the emoter. When a woman fails to meet their “allowed” gendered emotional expressions (e.g., by expressing anger) or is attempting a masculine-coded expression of emotion (e.g., being assertive), her emotions are reframed in a way that punishes her for stepping over the (gendered) line. And this is misogynistic emotion reframing.

We can also see this reflected in emotion-descriptive language that enforces gendered norms by rewarding the women who express the “right kinds” (read: “feminine-coded”) of emotions – in this case, the woman has had their emotions reframed as more positive and notably non-threatening. In these situations, a woman's lack of anger is reframed as ladylike, her lack of sadness as bubbly, her withholding of (negative) emotions as demure or poised. Each term is loaded with patriarchal messaging: the right kind of emotions are the ones that women are *supposed* to have in a given situation. The right emotions for a woman to express are the ones that in no way threaten the existing patriarchal order.

Men are certainly not immune to this form of emotion reframing either: men's sadness being reframed as weakness or their anger or aggression as strength are both ways in which the expression of emotion is dictated based on patriarchal norms. In these instances, men are

punished for “being like women” – acting in ways only allowed to be expressed by women. Only women are allowed to be sad, vulnerable, or giddy, so to express these kinds of emotions means you are acting like a woman. As with women who are punished for expressing masculine-coded emotions, these men are punished for their expression of the wrong kinds of (feminine coded) emotions, as well as for their wrongness in how they are *as a man*.

While misogyny affects men and women alike, it is women who are more impacted by this emotional reframing, and it is women who are silenced because of it. A man may be harmed by his sadness being reframed as weakness, but the harm does not constitute an instance of oppression. When an expressed emotion is reframed by the audience due to misogynistic beliefs, the intention is to maintain the patriarchal status quo – and to do this, women must be punished for attempting male-coded emotional expressions. The patriarchal status quo disproportionately benefits men over women, so the harm done to women presents as a structural injustice, rather than a mere harm. When her emotions are reframed, the woman has been silenced in that particular instance of communication, her ability to accurately perceive her own reality has been questioned, and her gender-based oppression has been reinforced. While misogynistic emotion reframing certainly harms all genders, for women it is both a structural injustice and a reinforcement of oppression.

A significant component of misogyny and male dominance relates to how those who are dominantly situated are able to seize control of any narrative – and with that control, they are able to control the person in question.³⁶ This is exactly what is happening with misogynistic emotion reframing – the audience (regardless of gender) are able to reframe the emotion expressed in order to punish the woman’s non-conforming emotional expression – thereby

³⁶ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.

changing what is being expressed and continuing to control the narrative. Misogynistic emotion reframing highlights just how often women's emotions are reframed from the original and intended expression – and why Glazer's theory of emotion misreading needs to take this into consideration. Campbell's emotional dismissal, which I will go into in more detail in the next section, shows that this reframing goes far beyond simply using the expressed emotion as ground for dismissing the woman as irrational. The significant influence of tactic misogyny demonstrates the ways in which emotional dismissal is a built-in construct of misogyny, and *must* be considered a form of emotional misperception, and by extension a form of epistemic violence.

III. Misogyny and Emotional Dismissal

Emotion reframing is an extension of tactic misogyny. When Glazer excludes Campbell's emotional dismissal from emotional misperception, he is (unintentionally) demonstrating how significant the influence of tactical misogyny is in how we perceive and react to the emotions of others. By looking at emotional dismissal within the context of a patriarchal society we can see that it actually fits within the definition of emotional misperception.

Emotional Dismissal

Campbell's theory of emotional dismissal focuses on the concepts of bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality – and the strategic political use of these words to imply the emoter should not be taken seriously.³⁷ These “trait words” serve to dismiss and silence the emoter's initial expression of emotion.³⁸ The audience is not dismissing women for *having*

³⁷ Sue Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

emotions, but instead characterizing their emotional lives as unhealthy – and as a result, they are left unable to legitimately and credibly act within and effect the world around them.³⁹ Their experience of reality, and therefore their lived emotional experience, is *wrong*. Like Glazer, Campbell argues that an emotional experience is not a private one: the individuation of feeling is collaborative in that it is both something felt *and* something expressed, which requires reciprocal uptake from an audience.⁴⁰ Campbell rejects the idea that we could maintain a “well-defined emotional life independent of the power of others to interpret our expressive behaviour” – if our emotions are consistently dismissed or reframed, we would begin to doubt our own feelings, and as a result, doubt the reality of our own experiences.⁴¹ We would not be able to maintain a stable sense of what we are feeling, or even a stable sense of self.

Emotional dismissal is what happens when what we do or what we say is not taken seriously, not taken in context, or not taken for its intended meaning.⁴² Again, this is not merely dismissing someone for *having* emotions, but characterizing someone’s emotional life as somehow wrong. In doing so, the audience dismissing the emotion is attempting to limit the ways in which the emoter can act in the world.⁴³ To label someone’s anger as “bitterness,” for example, is to silence the sufferer.⁴⁴ This kind of mislabeling (or reframing) of an emotion also serves to place the responsibility of being misunderstood on the expresser of the emotion. When your anger is labelled as bitterness, it is now up to you to prove why you are, in fact, angry – and not just bitter.⁴⁵ Not only does this tend to lead to an additional influx in emotions – as you become frustrated with trying to rationalize your emotions – but it also causes the emoter to

³⁹ Sue Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁴² *Ibid*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

question their own emotional experience more generally, especially when their emotions are consistently mislabeled or reframed.⁴⁶

Campbell highlights how these three terms – “bitter,” “sentimental,” and “emotional” – are used against women to devalue their experiences and reinforce their gendered roles.⁴⁷

Women are only “allowed” to express a certain range of emotions, and those that are outside of that range are dismissed. As Campbell states:

[Patriarchal systems] police expression through the development or limitation of certain expressive resources that will, at the same time, allow for the dismissal of what is significant to women about our own lives when this significance is a violation of the constraints on gender performance. That is to say that when we express ourselves we must do so within the constraints of gender...women are constrained to express gender roles when they express feeling.⁴⁸

These types of emotion-descriptive words are a form of interpretive dismissal, and they are exactly the kinds of emotions that are policed by misogyny in a patriarchal society: they interpret the emotion being expressed as inappropriate for the person to be expressing, reframe the emotion in a negative or uncharitable light as punishment, and then dismiss the emoter. The emoter’s gender-based oppression has been reinforced, her communicative exchange has failed, and her ability to accurately perceive the reality of her own experiences has been questioned. This final harm is potentially the most significant: when an emoter has her emotions reframed and dismissed, what she is being told is that she does not understand what is actually happening, and that her emotional response is inappropriate and/or invalid. While this can be frustrating at best, when it happens consistently she can begin to doubt her own experience of reality: Maybe her anger really is just bitterness. Maybe she really is just too emotional. The systemic dismissal

⁴⁶ Sue Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 56.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

of emotions can lead to an individual dismissing the reality of her experiences, and potentially the significance of her own life.⁴⁹ If this happens consistently enough, the woman loses trust in her ability to accurately perceive the reality of her own experiences, and begins to accept the (misogynistically) reframed version of what she is feeling. Why would she not – this is what she has been told, again and again, she is *actually* experiencing or feeling.

An analogous, though importantly distinct, kind of epistemic violence is gaslighting: a kind of manipulation that leads the victim to question her perception of reality, and therefore lose her ability to trust in what she knows of herself and her experiences.⁵⁰ While it is still up for debate whether gaslighting requires a conscious awareness of this manipulation on the part of the aggressor, the outcome is rather similar, at least initially: in both cases, the target begins to question her ability to rely on the truth of her own experiences. However, in the case of gaslighting, this is typically done for a specific purpose: to control an individual person for some particular end. Misogynistic emotion reframing goes much farther. It seeks to not only control women as a gender, but also to persuade individual women to partake in their own oppression. This is the core harm of misogynistic emotion reframing: that a woman (or women in general) so consistently experience this undermining of her own experiences that she accepts the misogynistic reframing of her emotions as her true experience of reality.

Emotional Dismissal and Emotional Misperception

Emotional dismissal undermines one's epistemic authority and epistemic agency – the individual is not able to successfully communicate what they are feeling, and they are not taken to be credible knowers of their own experiences and the emotions that arise from them. For an

⁴⁹ Sue Campbell, "Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression," *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 63.

⁵⁰ For more see Veronica Ivy (2017), Allauren Forbes (2019), and Elena Ruiz (2020).

emotion to be dismissed in this way, it first needs to be reframed – the audience must interpret the emotion being expressed as inappropriate for the emoter, reframe it in a way that reinforces misogynistic norms, *then* dismiss it. Glazer does not categorize emotional dismissal as a form of emotional misperception because he overlooks the pervasive nature of misogynistic reframing that serves to dismiss the emotions in the first place. Campbell clearly states that the emotion of anger is misread as bitterness due to a failure on the part of the audience to understand the emoter's expression.⁵¹ Dismissing someone's anger as bitterness does not come from a mutual failure of communication, but rather from first misinterpreting (likely due to misogynistic beliefs) *then* dismissing the emotion as irrational or unwarranted. So when Glazer says that an emotion must first be misread then dismissed in order to count as emotional misperception, he is failing to account for the misogyny that leads to the rampant misreading of women's emotions – the same misogynistic emotion reframing that leads to Campbell's emotional dismissal.

The tactic misogyny that accompanies so much of this emotional dismissal is itself a misreading of the emotion. The audience is likely not even aware of their reframing of the emotion as punishment. The misreading lies in the reading of allowed versus unallowed emotional expression by women along gendered norms: when the emotion is not allowed, it is misread as a negative expression of emotion; when it is allowed, positive reinforcement is awarded to it. Her anger being reframed as bitterness is used as grounds for a woman to be dismissed – but it fundamentally requires that the emotion is misread as wrong or inappropriate first. The dismissal and subsequent silencing is the harm, but the underlying misogyny is both why the emotion is misread, and a form of reliable ignorance.

⁵¹ Sue Campbell, "Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression," *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 50.

Revisiting the Three Conditions of Emotional Misperception

While it would be easy to claim that Glazer’s failure to address misogynistic emotion reframing, especially in relation to emotional dismissal, is due to his own experience in a male-dominated world, I think that would be both unfair to Glazer and reflect an underestimation of the pervasive nature of misogyny. Glazer’s primary example of emotion misperception was, after all, a clear example of this misogynistic tendency. It is not a matter of us “overlooking” the impact of misogyny on emotional misperception (we certainly know it is there) but rather a failure to *explicitly* address this systemic issue – both in emotional misperception specifically, and in conversations around epistemic violence more generally. Even Manne, who focuses an entire book on how misogyny operates in the world, only briefly goes into tactic misogyny in her conclusion. The insidious nature of misogynistic emotion reframing is just how subtly pervasive it really is. The strategic and explicit highlighting of this specific form of epistemic injustice can act as a significant hermeneutical resource – and begin to dismantle the frequency of occasions for which we need it.

Emotional dismissal is certainly a form of emotional misperception, and results in the same kind of epistemic violence. It is only because of misogynistic emotion reframing that this is not immediately obvious from Glazer’s account. Again, emotional misperception occurs when:

1. A misreads B’s nonlinguistic expression of emotion,
2. Owing to reliable ignorance,
3. Harming B.⁵²

Emotional dismissal, due to misogynistic emotion reframing, would likely fall into the category of false-categorization under the first condition: the emotion that is expressed by the emoter is wrongly categorized, such as anger as bitterness or assertiveness as aggression, based on what a

⁵² Trip Glazer, “Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception,” *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 60.

woman is allowed to express. The punishment is the reframing of the emotion as hostile or negative. While false-categorization is likely the most common way emotions are reframed by misogyny, it is certainly not the only one: black women are often seen as angry simply for existing in a particular space, a false-positive instance of projecting an emotion where there is not actually any present. The false-negative instances of misogynistic emotion reframing, wherein an emotion is expressed but the audience deems no emotion has been expressed, are typical of what happens when men's emotions are reframed as flaws in their character, such as when sadness is reframed as weakness, or enthusiasm as femininity. In these instances, the emotion is not just reframed as a different emotion, but as *no* emotion – men are not allowed, within patriarchal structures, to express those kinds of emotions, so they are reframed as something wrong with them *as a man*.

Glazer's second condition states the misreading must happen due to reliable ignorance: that is, ignorance that is consistent and/or follows from predictable epistemic gaps and is harmful.⁵³ Misogynistic beliefs clearly fall into the category of consistently causing a given audience to fail in their reciprocity within an expressive exchange, as well as qualifying as a power dynamic that makes this ignorance harmful. Regardless of the gender doing the misreading, the emotion is punished or rewarded based on how well it reflects existing gender roles. Misogyny reflects a form of emotion stereotyping: women are supposed to act in certain (gendered) ways, and when they do not act according to those norms, the emotion is misread as hostile. Returning to Glazer's initial example of the woman being interviewed, we can see that this is a case of misogyny-based emotion stereotyping: the male interviewer expects the woman's voice to be softer and her demeanour more reserved – when this is not the case, his

⁵³ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 65.

reliable (misogynistic) ignorance sees him misread her assertiveness as contemptuous. He punishes her for stepping outside her expected (or allowed) gendered expression.

Finally, Glazer's third condition for emotional misperception is that the misreading of the emotion harms the individual expressing the emotion.⁵⁴ While the harm in his interview example is straightforward – the woman is not offered the job – the harm that comes from misogynistic emotion misreading and the emotion dismissal that follows it can be both more subtle and more insidious. By reframing then dismissing a woman's emotions when she does not conform to approved modes of gendered expression, the audience is

1. Changing (and controlling) the narrative of what a woman is allowed to feel, and/or
2. Punishing the woman for expressing an emotion she is not "allowed" to express,
3. Leading the woman to question her own emotional experiences,
4. Resulting in the woman to question the significance of her life more generally.

Emotional dismissal is a form of testimonial silencing, and if experienced consistently enough, will more than likely lead to testimonial smothering as well. The harm, then, can be testimonial silencing *or* testimonial smothering, though probably both. If we consider Campbell's theory of how consistent misreading and/or dismissal of expressed emotions can also lead the emoter to question the reality of her emotional experiences, this harm can go even further: not only are testimonial silencing and smothering highly likely, but so too is a diminished or even total loss of her sense of self.

This expansion of Glazer's emotional misperception to include this kind of emotional dismissal seems in keeping with his intentions for this theory. Glazer claims that his goal for emotional misperception is to "awaken a sense of responsibility" for considering how prejudices

⁵⁴ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 60.

may influence how we read and respond to other people's emotions.⁵⁵ Perhaps he would push back on "reframing" being a kind of misreading – if something is being *changed*, it must first be understood for what it is, *then* changed. However, this would overlook the extent to which misogyny polices our emotional expression. The audience in question is not necessarily conscious of their reframing of the woman's emotions. Instead, they are simply reacting to a challenge of what they expect to happen (such as a woman's demure expression or soft voice) – when those expectations are not met, they misread the emotion as hostile or negative, therefore reframing the existing emotion as something else altogether, with no awareness of this process itself. This seems clear even from Glazer's own example. The interviewer is not conscious of changing the woman's expression of confidence to contempt – he only reacts to her confidence as perceived contempt. At no point does the interviewer acknowledge that the woman is confident. He simply sees her as not expressing the "right" kind of emotion, and so punishes her because of it.

IV. The Political Value and Power of Emotions

Misogynistic emotion reframing is not a new phenomenon, but by explicitly identifying it as its own unique concept, this new hermeneutical resource can better highlight the real-life experience of so many women. The existing work on emotion-based epistemic violence, when combined with the prevalence of tactic misogyny, demonstrates just how common the practice of misogynistic emotion reframing is. As with any hermeneutical resource, naming misogynistic emotion reframing explicitly means it can be more widely seen, addressed, and, ideally, overcome.

⁵⁵ Trip Glazer, "Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception," *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 72.

But there are wider implications of this concept: namely, why are patriarchal enforcement mechanisms so concerned with reframing emotions in “acceptable” ways? The pervasive and consistent (re)framing of emotions in a way that is allowed based on patriarchal norms signals that there is some kind of threat, perceived or otherwise, when expressed emotions do not conform to these standards. If emotions mean nothing or have no meaningful significance, then this would not be a case of applied tactic misogyny.

Revaluing and Empowering Emotions

What misogynistic emotion reframing tells us is that emotions have value – precisely because the law enforcement branch of the patriarchy aims to control them. Misogyny would not see a need to police, punish, or reward something that was not a threat to the power dynamics of the patriarchal system it reinforces and supports. If emotions, and women’s emotions in particular, really were as useless and valueless as the dominantly situated would like us to believe, why go to the trouble of reframing them at all? This seems to highlight a particular internal incoherence within tactic misogyny. Feminist theory historically uses the identification of internal incoherence within patriarchal norms as a way of highlighting fundamental issues within the belief system.⁵⁶ The very view that emotions are valueless and so should not be considered a valid source of credible testimony is contradicted by the consistent and predictable reframing of emotions that do not adhere to specific gender-coded expressions. By treating emotions as a threat, by downplaying and belittling the impact they have, tactic misogyny is actually acknowledging their power. If anger or confidence posed no threat, they would not be reframed as bitterness or arrogance in the first place. When those emotions are reframed so

⁵⁶ For more see Mary Astell (1706).

consistently as to require a hermeneutical resource such as misogynistic emotion reframing, the value and power that they hold becomes apparent.

This reinforces the work done by Alison Bailey’s knowing resistant anger and Alison M. Jaggar’s outlaw emotions. Bailey’s work on knowing resistant anger demonstrates the power emotions can have – when we value them as tools of insight into oppression, and as foundations for actionable change.⁵⁷ “Women’s anger is bitchy, crazy, or hysterical rather than civil or righteous. We are too thin skinned. People of colour’s rage is uncivil(ized), uppity, or aggressive. They have attitude. These tropes pathologize anger, robbing it of its energy, force, and epistemic content.”⁵⁸ Misogynistic emotion reframing serves to diminish and dismiss the value and power behind the expression of emotion. It is not simply dismissal – it is active resistance to liberating knowledge. It is epistemic violence.

Knowing resistant anger does not just have to be about anger. This kind of anger signals to us that something about a situation is unjust, damaging, cruel or dangerous, and that the way our anger is interpreted for us (by those dominantly situated) is not the only means of interpreting it – and this can be true of so many other emotions.⁵⁹ Our exhaustion can signal a power imbalance in work done outside and inside the home. Our relief at returning home unharmed or making it to our cars without incident can signal the disproportionate prevalence of normalized violence against women. Our emotions tell us *something is happening* – and when we can apply the foundations of Bailey’s knowing resistant anger to other emotions, the power that they can provide, intrapersonally, interpersonally, and politically, is staggering.

⁵⁷ Alison Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018): 110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 101.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 110.

Jaggar's work on the socioemotional – how we are taught and allowed to be emotional as individuals – highlights this as well.⁶⁰ Those who are not dominantly situated are conditioned to be allowed only certain emotions, because valuing all emotions is too powerful. Anger signifies something has happened to be angry about – but not if you are just bitter. Confidence signifies a power and assured sense of self – but not if it is just smugness. What is devastatingly ironic is that being told this over and over again can make us question whether we really are even angry, or just overreacting. It can make us question if we even have the right to be confident. By disallowing those emotions, not only are we disconnected from the value and power they hold, but we are quite possibly unable to form a full sense of self.

But it is those outlaw emotions, the ones that we are not supposed or allowed to feel, that enable us to perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions: “the emotional responses of subordinated people in general, and often women in particular, are more likely to be appropriate than the emotional responses of the dominant class. That is, they are more likely to incorporate reliable appraisals of situations.”⁶¹ Our anger, or exhaustion, or relief, when consistently reframed by others as something less meaningful or something different altogether, is the giant flashing red alert that something very wrong is happening. The emotions we are not allowed to feel as women are the very ones that hold the power to bring down patriarchal systems.

Strategic Emotional Power

An awareness of the political power of emotions is not a new phenomenon. In her 1978 essay, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Audre Lorde presents the erotic as a uniquely

⁶⁰ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 157.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 168.

feminine source of power.⁶² The erotic reflects a deep and nonrational source of knowledge – and its existence as a source of specifically feminine power requires it to be suppressed, dismissed, and mutilated by the dominantly situated:

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual place, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change.⁶³

The corruption and distortion that happens in the case of the erotic is to accept only a controllable version of it (as with pornography) while at the same time attempt to neutralize the source of power by reframing it as something suspicious and impure (as with women’s sexuality).⁶⁴ A similar process happens with emotions – the dominantly situated corrupt and distort the power of emotions by designating which emotions are allowed to be expressed based on existing gender norms and power dynamics. In Chapter three I will address how the expression of emotion and the power of the erotic can mutually reinforce this true knowledge, and empower change.

As we can see with Lorde’s description of the erotic, we have been taught and conditioned to distrust our emotional experiences – to, at the very least, approach their existence with suspicions and skepticism, especially when they lie in contradiction to reason. Lorde claims that the idea of “it feels right to me” is an acknowledgement of the strength of the erotic as a true knowledge.⁶⁵ It is an acknowledgement of its strength, but it is also an acknowledgement of a more fundamental truth – an acknowledgement of its existence at all. There is no reason that the experience of “it feels wrong to me” cannot be this same acknowledgement of the existence and

⁶² Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press 1984): 53.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 56.

strength of true knowledge. To take the emotions that an experience produces, whether those emotions are telling us that something feels wrong or right, as a form of information about a situation is to reclaim the power that patriarchal systems of oppression would have us distrust and devalue.

We must recategorize emotions as a valuable political tool in themselves. Women and BIPOC folks have long been dismissed as “too sensitive” – maybe that sensitivity comes from lifetimes of having our emotions dismissed, ignored, or reframed. Or maybe it is not sensitivity at all, but rather our own signalling of the reality of the injustices and epistemic violence constantly and consistently experienced by oppressed individuals and groups. Misogyny is certainly not the only form of systemic prejudice that results in epistemic violence and emotional misperception – racial, socioeconomic, and ableist prejudices are certainly just as harmful and prevalent. But as we can see with the concept of misogynistic emotion reframing, and all the loaded descriptors and emotional dismissal that accompanies it, misogyny is a primary cause of the epistemic violence experienced by women.

Philosophy itself tends to fall into this same pattern, and this will become even more apparent in the following two chapters. Emotions and emotional experiences are consistently given less weight than rational or reason-based arguments, if they are given any weight at all.⁶⁶ This is especially dangerous when discussing emotionally charged topics: folks who are more likely to have first-hand experience with the kinds of injustices and epistemic violence that are discussed in philosophical contexts are the same ones most likely to have some emotional reaction to their discussion – and as a result, those most likely to have their testimony dismissed. Since research shows that the tone and body language of the speaker is given more value than

⁶⁶ Allison B. Wolf, ““Tell Me How That Makes You Feel”: Philosophy’s Reason/Emotion Divide and Epistemic Pushback in Philosophy Classrooms,” *Hypatia* 32, no. 4 (2017): 898.

what they actually say, it does not matter how factual or evidence based their testimony is – if it comes with an expression of emotion, it is far more likely that all related testimony will be dismissed.

By promoting this strict emotion/reason divide and the supposed “neutrality” of truth, combined with misogynistic emotion reframing, the reasons for philosophy’s “leaky pipeline” phenomenon are not so obscure. Women are more likely to have experienced the injustices philosophy is purportedly trying to solve, but they are also more likely to have their testimony dismissed.⁶⁷ While I will address this phenomenon more explicitly in Chapter three, this pattern within philosophy needs to change. At the very least, an emotional reaction is a signal that *something has happened*. Whether through rational evaluation we determine that emotional reaction is grounded in the truth of the given situation is almost irrelevant – we cannot separate the reasoning-through of an experience without acknowledging the value and power of the emotion that initiated it in the first place.

As feminist scholars and activists work toward dismantling the (many) patriarchal structures, emotions and their ability to signal to us that something has happened must be given their due. We need to recognize the power that lies in emotional reactions, outlaw emotions, and any kind of knowing resistant emotion, be it anger, exhaustion, relief or any other signaling emotion – because it is those emotions, the very ones suppressed by misogynistic emotion reframing, that will provide the foundation for strategic dismantling of patriarchal systems. Developing misogynistic emotion reframing as a new hermeneutical resource, and highlighting the ways in which it pervades even our most progressive understandings of epistemic injustice, illustrates the power that can result from this recategorization of emotions.

⁶⁷ For more see A.E. Kings (2019).

Chapter Two: Emotional Epistemic Exploitation

How we express ourselves varies based on the specific situation, as well as our own unique preferences and experiences – but social rules dictate *what* can be expressed, *when*, and *by who*. This is especially true of emotional expression; a person's social position dictates how, and to what extent, they are allowed to express their emotions. If an individual fails to take these social rules into consideration, they risk losing their credibility as an epistemic agent, especially regarding the reality or truth of their own experiences. This chapter will explore the relationship between epistemic injustice and emotional labour, and specifically how individuals from marginalized groups are forced to suppress their emotions during testimony. This highlights a specific phenomenon: *emotional epistemic exploitation*, wherein an epistemic agent is forced to do additional emotional labour to ensure that their testimony is comfortable for their audience, or else risk losing their epistemic credibility altogether. When this happens, individuals from marginalized groups are then forced to choose between expressing appropriate emotions or having their testimony receive its desired uptake. By being forced to make this choice, emotional epistemic exploitation obstructs the possibility for true epistemic agency for individuals from marginalized groups.

I will begin in section I with an overview of epistemic exploitation, using work by Nora Berenstain as an initial framework, including her four required components: unacknowledged labour, opportunity cost, default skepticism, and the no-win double bind. In section II I will argue that emotional labour, while not inherently negative, is often an extension of the same kind of unequal, unvalued, and unacknowledged labour that is expected depending on one's social position. Emotional labour is not always exploitative in nature, but when it is only required to be done by marginalized individuals for the comfort of the more dominantly-situated, it has

significant epistemic consequences. Finally, in section III I will outline my case for this particular kind of emotional labour – emotional epistemic exploitation – as its own phenomenon, wherein dominantly situated individuals require marginalized individuals to suppress their emotions in order to be considered credible epistemic agents, which in turn leaves them unable to achieve true epistemic agency. By explicitly recognizing emotional epistemic exploitation as a specific kind of epistemic injustice, I will argue that it is necessary to reevaluate the relationship we have constructed between emotional expression and an agent’s epistemic credibility – or else risk further oppressing individuals from marginalized groups by impeding their ability to realize true epistemic agency outside of their communities.

I. Epistemic Exploitation

Epistemic exploitation is a particular kind of epistemic oppression that describes what is happening when a dominantly-situated individual compels a marginalized person to educate them on the nature of their oppression.⁶⁸ This form of exploitation is identified by the “unrecognized, uncompensated, emotionally taxing, [and] coerced epistemic labour” it requires – the marginalized person must justify and explain their conditions of oppression, to a person that is culpable in, or at least benefits from, that very oppression.⁶⁹ Here I will focus specifically on Nora Berenstain’s work on epistemic exploitation – this particular framework draws from broader traditions of exploitation, but is applied specifically to how our capacity as epistemic agents can be exploited. On Berenstain’s view, epistemic exploitation a) requires mentally and emotionally taxing unpaid labour, b) results in an opportunity cost of time and energy that could be put to better use, c) is often met with default skeptical responses, and d) typically results in a

⁶⁸ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 570.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

no-win double bind situation for the individual being exploited. This section will look at each of these requirements in turn, and argue that Berenstain’s framework can be applied to other, more specific instances of epistemic injustices to establish new and actionable hermeneutical resources – as with emotional epistemic exploitation.

Unacknowledged Labour

That contributions to knowledge building is often uncompensated is nothing new – but in the case of epistemic exploitation, the labour that is being compelled by the dominantly situated in cases of epistemic exploitation is rarely acknowledged as labour at all. There is a mental, emotional, financial, and even health-related cost that comes from the demand that you explain your trauma to the dominantly situated.⁷⁰ Marginalized folks often experience additional symptoms of psychological distress and trauma when they are required to relive and/or explain said experiences – circumstances that consistently shorten their lifespan and negatively impact their long-term health incomes.⁷¹ Brittney Cooper calls this the Black or POC tax: the expectation that as a person of colour you will take on the extra (and typically unacknowledged) labour, time, and resources required to educate peers or colleagues, champion diversity, and create safe spaces for other people of colour to exist within.⁷² From Cooper: “If I ramp up my cortisol levels to express my anger and hurt at white women for failing once again to get it, is that not a tax and toll on my health that I pay either in future medical bills or in years un-lived?”⁷³

⁷⁰ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 573.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Brittney Cooper, “Black America's Hidden Tax: Why this Feminist of Color is Going on Strike,” *Salon*, February 25, 2015, https://www.salon.com/2015/02/25/black_americas_hidden_tax_why_this_feminist_of_color_is_going_on_strike/, accessed June 15, 2022.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Requiring someone to relive these traumatic experiences to the benefit of the same folks responsible for, or at least complicit in, is exploitative.

Despite this personal burden, this potentially traumatizing work is not actually seen as labour at all. That the person doing the exploiting is conscious of the labour it requires is not a requirement; this instance of exploitation is particularly nefarious because it is assumed that it *is* appropriate to expect and even rely on it as a necessary resource. As the Black Lives Matter movement gained visibility in the summer of 2020, Black folks were called upon in workplaces, schools, government, and the general public to explain *why* their oppression was oppression, and how it could be solved. As an outsider, this might even seem like a reasonable request; if you are telling us something is wrong, tell us why it's wrong and how we can fix it! *We are just trying to help!* While this line of reasoning might track in the instances where individual wrongs have taken place, here the dominantly-situated individual or groups requiring this labour *are themselves* both the cause and the solution, even while asking what the cause and solution is. The issues at the heart of Black Lives Matter are not new, nor are they secret – it is exploitative on the part of the dominantly-situated, even the “allies,” to expect that oppressed groups will educate them on the problem (and possible solutions) when both information is widely available and accessible to the dominantly situated too.

Opportunity Cost

Even if – and this is a big if – the additional labour done by the oppressed individual to educate and justify their oppression inspires the dominantly-situated to further research, understand, and actively oppose their oppression, the marginalized individual has still sacrificed

their own time and energy to the dominantly-situated's benefit.⁷⁴ This opportunity cost varies depending on the specific situation – for example, whether it happens within a friendship or in the workplace – but in all cases it involves a diversion of the marginalized individual's time and energy from other projects. Not only does this distract the individual from identifying their own needs and pursuing their own goals, it centers the needs and demands of the dominant group – further reinforcing the oppressive systems that the dominant person is requiring explanation and justification for.⁷⁵ Constantly calling on marginalized persons to explain and justify their experience of oppression, requesting that they solve the problems they claim exist – and then dismissing the information they provide and the work they have done – is a typical and primary “tool of the oppressor”.⁷⁶ This exploitation is a strategy of distraction and diversion: it keeps the oppressed occupied, distracted, and “bogged down” in the demands of the oppressor.

The opportunity cost resulting from this additional work applies to all aspects of the marginalized individual's life – it becomes an additional (and unpaid) expectation at work, which typically results in their actual job-related expectations not being met, or requiring additional time and energy to meet or exceed said expectations, resulting in promotions or even mere recognition of their work becoming more difficult than their dominantly-situated colleagues. This pattern is reflected in personal relationships as well – if some or all of the individual's friend group or romantic partner does not have the same experiences of oppression, they will often be called upon to explain their own experiences, provide commentary on related incidents in the news, while at the same time be expected to praise their dominantly-situated friends for the

⁷⁴ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 575.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 570.

⁷⁶ Audre Lorde, “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House,” in *Sister Outside: Essays and Speeches*, (Crossing Press, 2007), 7.

minimum effort of allyship or work they have done to educate themselves.⁷⁷ This means reliving their own trauma and constantly being called on to explain group-trauma, but it also means their identity in the group can become focused on their existence as a member of a marginalized group, rather than on their own individual needs and desires. The individual is faced with the potential of having their entire person reduced to the colour of their skin, gender, sexuality, etc. This is not to say that being a member of a marginalized group is not important to one's identity – only that in many cases it can be seen as their *entire* identity, resulting in the opportunity cost of being unable to form deeper relationships with others.

There is also a personal opportunity cost – if someone is constantly being required to explain and justify their own (and their groups') experiences of oppression, whether at work or in their relationships, in addition to the mental and emotional labour required to do their actual jobs and maintain their various relationships, they have significantly less time to dedicate towards self-care and self-exploration. While this is discussed more in Chapter three, in a world that constantly devalues your existence as a person, self-care, self-exploration, and self-actualization is a radical act of resistance – one that becomes increasingly inaccessible as the individual has increasing external demands on their time and energy. This opportunity cost is exploitative when it happens consistently and reliably across multiple aspects of an individual's life.

Default Skepticism

The opportunity cost of doing this unacknowledged labour is often met with skepticism of the validity of the claims altogether. When the dominantly-situated have their own perspective

⁷⁷ Brittney Cooper, "Black America's Hidden Tax: Why this Feminist of Color is Going on Strike," *Salon*, February 25, 2015, https://www.salon.com/2015/02/25/black_americas_hidden_tax_why_this_feminist_of_color_is_going_on_strike/, accessed June 15, 2022.

on the world challenged, the default response is typically to be skeptical not only about the validity of the other perspective, but of the person giving testimony of the differing perspective themselves. Coming from a privileged position, it is not likely that these individuals have experienced the kind of oppression and marginalization that is explained to them, and so even when they have *demand*ed that it be explained to them, they question whether it actually exists, or at least exists in the way the marginalized person has described.⁷⁸ They question if it was *really that bad*, or suggest it was merely an isolated, but certainly unfortunate, incident.⁷⁹

This skeptical response is exploitative because it serves to elevate the epistemic credibility of the dominantly-situated to the same level as the individual who has first-hand lived experience of the situation in question. By questioning the validity of the marginalized individual's experience, the implicit suggestion is that both the marginalized individual and the dominantly-situated individual are *equally qualified* to evaluate what counts as an experience of misogyny, racism, or ableism – despite only the marginalized individual having that direct (and often repeated) experience. This often results in the dominantly-situated individual (or group) introducing irrelevant context or “playing devil's advocate” in a way that dismisses or undermines the marginalized individual's testimony of their first-hand experience(s). The privileged often set the terms of the debate – so the marginalized person is required to respond to contextually or epistemically irrelevant and nonsubstantive challenges, or else be seen as being wrong about their own experiences. This requires additional cognitive and emotional labour (as well as resulting in a double-bind, which I will go into next).

It is important to recognize that gaslighting and testimonial smothering that can, and often does, take place in these circumstances. Gaslighting undermines one's confidence in their

⁷⁸ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 578.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

grasp on reality, potentially leading to self-doubt and the inability of someone to trust their own perceptions of a situation.⁸⁰ When someone constantly has their own experiences of oppression questioned, even by the people who are supposedly trying to better understand those same experiences of oppression, they can start to lose confidence that what they experienced was, in fact, oppression. Even if gaslighting does not occur, testimonial smothering, where the individual avoids engaging in communication or testimony due to the consistently demonstrated lack of uptake on the part of the audience, becomes more and more likely.⁸¹ The marginalized individual knows her testimony will not receive its intended uptake, so she avoids talking about it altogether. Both gaslighting and testimonial smothering results in the individual experiences of systemic oppression not being discussed or even brought up – which in turn reinforces the dominantly-situated view that the supposed misogyny, racism, and/or ableism are not actually problems at all.

Double Bind

Since the request for this labour is seen as reasonable by the dominantly-situated, if the request is denied by the oppressed individual – that is, they refuse to explain or justify their oppression – it is the oppressed individual that is now taken to be the problem; “we are just trying to help you, you do not need to be so difficult.” This results in a double bind for the person in question; they either have to do the coerced labour being demanded of them and deal with the negative emotional, physical, and mental consequences, or they refuse to do it and risk being labelled difficult at best or being gaslight or resorting to testimonial smothering at worst. At the core of epistemic exploitation is the expectation that marginalized individuals will always take

⁸⁰ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 580.

⁸¹ Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 244.

on this labour – it is their job to engage and educate, whether they want to or not.⁸² From Berenstain;

Marginalized persons often do not have the option to simply disengage from an epistemically exploitative situation without being subjected to harm as a result of their perceived affront...The existence of the double bind means there there is little possibility of a marginalized person choosing to engage an epistemically exploitative demand without fear of what might happen if they refuse.⁸³

This is perhaps where the exploitative nature of epistemic exploitation is really underscored: not only is it unnecessary and unfairly taxing labour, it is also coerced. The individual is unable to refuse the additional labour required of them without losing credibility as an epistemic agent. Even in the cases where they do refuse to take on this labour, their refusal to participate in the additional labour is seen as the problem, not the demands of the dominantly situated or even the instances of oppression. The marginalized individual, regardless of how they decide to respond to the demand for this work, will be at a distinct disadvantage – one that could have serious implications on their career, relationships, and their own mental, physical, and emotional health. It can also, as I will argue in section III, prevent them from realizing full epistemic agency.

These four components of epistemic exploitation all work to keep the oppressed “in their place” – this labour is distracting and dehumanizing, and only serves to reinforce the same structures of oppression the marginalized are forced to educate the dominantly-situated on. While Berenstain acknowledges that a large component of epistemic exploitation is the emotional labour it requires to relive and explain instances of oppression and trauma, and to describe this oppression to the very folks that are culpable in its existence, what has not been given due consideration is that not only is the oppressed individual expected to do this additional

⁸² Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 575.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 576.

labour, but that they are expected to present it in a neutral, comfortable way. That is, they are expected to present it in a way that makes their audience, the dominantly-situated, most comfortable. And this requires an additional kind of emotional labour – the intrinsic and extrinsic suppression of our own emotions for another’s benefit – one that has the potential to be exploited to an even greater extent than Berenstain has recognized with epistemic exploitation.

II. Emotional Labour

Epistemic exploitation involves the emotionally exhausting work of reliving, explaining, and justifying one’s experiences of oppression. This emotional labour is a core component of the exploitative nature of epistemic exploitation, but there is also something specific happening in the cases where one has to do the additional work of regulating their emotions due to this demand for labour from a more dominantly-situated audience. In these cases what is required is both the emotional labour in doing the cognitive work of explaining and justifying one’s experiences, but also in presenting it in a way that is comfortable for their audience. Not all emotional labour is negative, and it is a necessary component of interpersonal relationships – in this section I will focus specifically on the kind of emotional labour that the dominantly situated require of those from marginalized groups in order to be taken as a credible epistemic agent.

Defining Emotional Labour

Emotional labour is often done for the benefit of others – it requires calibrating one's own emotional responses and expression in order to create a specific state of feeling in their audience.⁸⁴ Emotional labour is not inherently negative; the success of all personal relationships,

⁸⁴ Mirjam Müller, “Emotional Labour: A Case of Gender Specific Exploitation,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 22, no. 7 (2019): 10.

and often success in many professional environments, requires some level of emotional labour. Emotional labour is what enables us to connect with others – when we can regulate our emotional responses and expressions, and our partner or friend or family member does the same, we create space to connect on a deeper, more intimate level. Mirjam Müller explores emotional labour within these kinds of interpersonal relationships:

[Emotional labour] involves listening to the other’s worries, sensing that something is going on and providing space for the other to talk about it, keeping in touch, remembering important things in the other’s life...this currency includes care, respect, attention, affection, or empathy.⁸⁵

Emotional labour, when done in a mutually respectful way, is the foundation for intimate relationships. However, in practice emotional labour is also clearly distributed along gendered lines – women are assumed to be naturally suited to or better at emotional labour than men.⁸⁶ This assumption means that women take on the tasks related to emotional labour, such as child and elder care or facilitating empathy and affection, far more frequently than men. This has a tangible effect on women’s lives – an OECD study in 2014 found that women in Europe spend on average two and a half more hours, every day, on unpaid care labour than men.⁸⁷ This is not necessarily a problem – even if this emotional labour is unpaid, if it is acknowledged and valued as a kind of labour, the gendered imbalance would not necessarily be an instance of injustice. Of course, because emotional labour is seen as something women are just “naturally” better at or something quintessentially female, the time and energy this work requires is devalued, if it is acknowledged at all.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Mirjam Müller, “Emotional Labour: A Case of Gender Specific Exploitation,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 22, no. 7 (2019): 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The kind of emotional labour I am focused specifically on for this project is the emotional labour required of the marginally situated by the dominantly situated when the former is speaking about their experiences of oppression. This kind of emotional labour can be both intrinsic and extrinsic – and often it is both. Myisha Cherry distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour based on whose emotions the individual in question is trying to regulate. With intrinsic emotional labour, the individual experiencing the emotion attempts to regulate their own emotional experience and/or expression.⁸⁹ This kind of intrinsic regulation is especially necessary for individuals from marginalized groups who must abide by certain “feeling rules” as dictated by their social status – the things they are allowed to feel in virtue of their gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic status, or ability. In these cases, the individual must regulate their emotional experiences and expressions to adhere to these social feeling rules – which can be done both consciously and subconsciously. In a world that openly punishes individuals for expressing disallowed emotions – as with crying men or angry women – we quickly learn what is considered acceptable emotions based on our social position. This can result in both the subconscious suppression or reframing of disallowed emotions, as with misogynistic emotion reframing, or a conscious regulation on the part of the person experiencing them. In the latter case, the individual knows they are feeling something in opposition to what they are “allowed” to feel, and so they suppress the emotion itself, or regulate its expression.

In the case of extrinsic emotional labour, an individual attempts to regulate another person’s emotions.⁹⁰ While Cherry gives the examples of encouraging someone to look on the bright side or telling them to take a deep breath, this can be done in more subtle, non-verbal ways

⁸⁹ Myisha Cherry, “Gendered Failures in Extrinsic Emotional Regulation; Or, Why Telling a Woman to “Relax” or a Young Boy to “Stop Crying Like a Girl” is Not a Good Idea,” *Philosophical Topics* 47, no. 2 (2019): 96.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

too. When we present emotionally-charged information to someone in a way we hope they will be amenable to, or when we modify our tone of voice to make someone feel more comfortable with what we are saying, we are employing extrinsic emotional labour. When a white woman tells a black woman to tell her story in a less “aggressive” manner, or a man tells a woman to “calm down,” they are demanding extrinsic emotional labour from the individual giving testimony. What the dominantly-situated individual is signalling by demanding this extrinsic emotional labour is that they refuse to hear what the person in question is saying unless it is presented in a way that is *comfortable for them*. This requires the marginalized individual to perform intrinsic emotional labour in that they must regulate their own emotions to appear calm and composed, and extrinsic emotional labour in an attempt to keep their audience feeling comfortable and unthreatened by their testimony.

Social feeling rules dictate who is expected to do this emotional labour in a given situation. Individuals from marginalized groups, or even the marginalized individual in a particular context (as in a white woman being marginally-situated in relation to a dominantly-situated white man), are required to regulate their emotions to fit within those social feeling rules. This is especially apparent in those cases where an oppressed individual is providing testimony on their experience(s) of oppression to a more dominantly-situated audience: regardless of the emotions the retelling (and subsequent reexperiencing) of their oppression brings up, the individual is expected to describe said experiences in a manner that is comfortable for their dominantly-situated audience. While I will go into this more in section III, it is important to note here that the demand that the marginally situated perform this emotional labour when describing instances of oppression is *itself* an instance of oppression. There are physical harms that come with this constant expectation of emotional labour – simultaneously

experiencing and regulating intense emotions initiates a state of physiological arousal, involving the release of stress hormones (like cortisol) and an agitated nervous system, resulting in increased heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure.⁹¹ When our bodies are operating from this state of stress, energy is not available for other tasks – whether that’s critical thinking or immune system regulation.⁹² Over thirty years of research show that “emotions and the management of emotions are associated with health problems such as cancer and heart disease.”⁹³ This is in addition to the increased likelihood of burnout, social withdrawal, depersonalization, and general emotional dissonance.⁹⁴ The expectation that we regulate our emotions according to social feeling rules has a direct impact on long-term health outcomes, our ability to connect in a meaningful way to others, and our capacity for self-care.

This is also epistemic violence – the marginally situated are consistently expected to perform intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour in order to be taken seriously as an epistemic agent, to the detriment of their own wellbeing. There is a kind of epistemic oppression going on here: an individual from a marginalized group is required to perform intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour in order to be seen as a credible epistemic agent – regardless of her other, even reason-based testimony. The individual’s testimony is at risk of being oppressed and/or dismissed if it is not presented in a way that is comfortable for her dominantly-situated audience – so she is required to partake in testimonial smothering or else risk testimonial silencing. This phenomenon must be recognized as its own unique form of epistemic exploitation: emotional epistemic exploitation.

⁹¹ Alicia A. Grandey, “Emotion Regulation in the Workplace: A New Way to Conceptualize Emotional Labour,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 5, no. 1 (2000): 99.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Jill Blackmore, “Doing “Emotional Labour” in the Education Market Place: stories from the field of women in management,” *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 17, no. 2 (1996): 346.

III. Emotional Epistemic Exploitation

Emotional epistemic exploitation describes the emotional labour individuals from marginalized groups are required to do in order to be taken as a credible epistemic agent by a dominantly-situated audience. This phenomenon is a combination of epistemic exploitation, testimonial smothering, and emotional labour. I will start by distinguishing emotional epistemic exploitation from Berenstain's epistemic exploitation framework and emotional labour more broadly, and outline why it needs to be considered a particular form of epistemic violence. I will then address the structural nature of emotional epistemic exploitation, and why it acts as a significant obstacle for individuals from marginalized groups to realize full epistemic agency.

Emotional Epistemic Exploitation as a Distinct Hermeneutical Resource

Epistemic exploitation requires an individual to explain and justify their own experiences of oppression, and consists of unacknowledged labour, opportunity costs, default skepticism, and a double bind. Emotional labour requires the intrinsic and extrinsic regulation of emotions in adherence to social feeling rules – while not inherently negative, both are heavily influenced by one's social position and status. But something specific is happening when an individual is exploited for their emotional labour on a structural level, while also being forced to regulate their own and other's emotions in accordance with social feeling rules in order to be taken as a credible epistemic agent. If a Black woman is speaking on her experience of oppression, it is not enough that she merely tells her story – she must also tell it in a way that is comfortable for her audience, requiring both intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour. Audre Lorde describes experiencing this first hand: "I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, 'Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I

cannot hear you.’”⁹⁵ The exploitative nature of this situation is that this emotional labour, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is required of her in order to be taken seriously as an epistemic agent.

If we look at Berenstain’s framework for epistemic exploitation within the context of the social feeling rules that require additional emotional labour from marginalized groups, the necessity for a specific kind of emotion-focused epistemic exploitation becomes clear. The unacknowledged labour and opportunity cost of emotional labour dictated by social positions is a key component of emotional labour more generally; the more marginalized an individual, the more unvalued and unacknowledged labour is required of them in order to participate in society as an epistemic agent. The social feeling rules are set and reinforced by the dominantly situated, so it should come to no surprise that those more marginally-situated have more of these rules to adhere to – and those that are more dominantly-situated can move through the world unconcerned about whether those in power will take them seriously as an epistemic agent if they express emotion during testimony, because they *are* the ones in power.

It would be fair to argue that members of dominant groups are often forced to suppress their emotions as well. The white man may be required to suppress his sadness to avoid being called a “pansy” and having his credibility as a man called into question. While this is a valid commentary on the issues emotional suppression highlights in toxic masculinity, and it is certainly possible that the dominantly situated individual may experience social identity prejudice for expressing emotions (i.e., not being “manly” enough) – their emotional expression does not seem to affect the credibility of their testimony. If anything, a crying white man seems to provide further evidence of the truth of his claim of being wronged, rather than to contradict it.

⁹⁵ Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,” in *Sister Outside: Essays and Speeches*, (Crossing Press, 2007), 125.

Take for example the contrast in allowed emotional expression during Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing: Kavanaugh was able to cry, angrily rage and accuse, and even go so far as to raise his voice at the committee and make violent gestures.⁹⁶ While some perceived him as a temperamental toddler as a result, his many and intense emotional expressions did not invalidate the credibility of his testimony. In fact, many saw his emotional expression as further proof of his supposed innocence – why else would he be so outraged and upset? Dr. Blasey-Ford, on the other hand, was required to undertake significant intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour; she was visibly suppressing her emotions throughout her entire four-hour testimony – her voice shook, but that was the only expression of emotion as she recounted an incredibly personal account of sexual assault.⁹⁷ Kavanaugh ranted and raved, Dr. Blasey-Ford demurely recounted – they each did what they were *allowed* to do based on their social identity while still remaining credible epistemic agents. Kavanaugh was allowed to express a range of emotions and still be considered credible because he belongs to the dominant social group, and by extension had the fewest social feeling rules he was expected to adhere to. Had Dr. Blasey-Ford expressed a fraction of the emotion expressed by Kavanaugh and not performed the emotional labour required of her as a woman, she would have labelled an overly emotional, crazy, or irrational, and her epistemic credibility, and the credibility of her testimony, would more than likely have been dismissed.

When a member of a dominant group forgoes the emotional labour required of him it has significantly less impact, and in certain contexts possibly *no* impact, on his credibility as an epistemic agent. The more dominantly-situated individual in a given exchange is the one who

⁹⁶ “Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford Testimony,” CBC News Canada, September 27, 2018, accessed July 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ7ovA37u-0>.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

“allows” (or not) emotional expression – they are the ones dictating the terms of the necessary reciprocity. It benefits those in dominant positions to allow for emotional expression in situations that uphold the status quo – the emotions are not misread or dismissed in these situations because there is a vested interest by the dominantly situated in them *not* being misread or dismissed. This signals that there is in fact a known (even subconsciously or implicitly) impact of emotional responses, and that they can provide further evidence of something having happened – but it is only allowed in instances of the dominantly situated individual’s testimony. Dismissing emotions in the marginalized individual’s testimony actively reinforces the privilege enjoyed as a member of a dominant group – giving them a vested interest in upholding the social feeling rules at play.

The default skepticism inherent in epistemic exploitation is also further highlighted by the additional context of emotional labour. When the dominantly-situated are skeptical of a marginalized person’s experience of oppression, they are questioning whether it was *really that bad* or if it was really a reflection of structural, rather than individual, issues. But when we include the context of the required emotional labour on the part of the marginalized individual giving testimony, what the dominantly-situated are also saying is that they must present this information in a way that is *comfortable* in order for them to hear it. The anger, fear, sadness, or any other emotion that is expressed during the marginally-situated individual’s testimony is met with skepticism of its validity.

The existence of emotions in testimony serves to undermine the validity of *all* components of the testimony, including the reason or fact-based aspects, even when they are entirely relevant and appropriate context of the testimony. The speaker already has to contend with a default skepticism of whether her experiences of oppression were really experiences of oppression, and she has to deal with a default skepticism of whether her emotions are valid

responses to the initial situation and/or its retelling, by an audience that has an active interest in discrediting both. And here is the specifically emotion-related double bind the individual faces: do they redirect energy to the regulation of intense emotions in order to have a better chance of receiving uptake and risk, at the very least, emotional dissonance and depersonalization? Or do they express their appropriate, relevant emotions while speaking on a personal experience of oppression and risk being dismissed as overreacting or overly-emotional?

This emotion-regulation double bind is reflected in Alison Bailey's work on silencing spirals. Bailey describes an example of an anger-silencing spiral: a woman giving testimony is angry, and it shows. The expression of her anger during her testimony prompts her audience to demand that she suppress her anger in order for her testimony to receive uptake – in order for her to be “heard.”⁹⁸ This leads to a further expression of anger by the speaker, both because of the anger-inducing content of her message, and because she now suspects she is not being heard.⁹⁹ This again prompts the audience to demand she suppress her anger...and so goes the spiral. The speaker is in a double bind – she either expresses her appropriate and contextual anger and has her testimony dismissed, or she performs the emotional labour for the comfort of her audience, resulting in her losing an important contextual element of her testimony, and having her testimony's “appropriateness” regulated by her dominantly-situated audience.

As Bailey notes, these spirals are a “closed hermeneutical system in which the speaker suffers a double epistemic injustice – neither her testimony nor her anger get uptake.”¹⁰⁰ Her emotional response is not seen as valid testimony, but the presence of the emotion also discredits her linguistic, reason-based testimony. This same silencing spiral can be true for all emotional

⁹⁸ Alison Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018): 98.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

expressions – replacing anger with tears or fear has the same epistemically discrediting, emotion-silencing spiral effect. In addition to neither the emotion or the testimony receiving uptake, Alfred Archer and Georgina Mills also see this demand as an injustice in itself: when the dominantly-situated demand an appropriate emotional response to an injustice be suppressed, the agent has suffered both the injustice the emotion was a response to, as well as the injustice of the requirement of emotional neutrality.¹⁰¹ The opportunity for injustice to occur, both epistemically and affectively, builds with each layer of demands from the dominantly-situated audience.

The harms of emotional epistemic exploitation goes beyond what we see from epistemic exploitation and emotional labour – it is a distinct form of epistemic violence in that it forces the individual to choose (not necessarily consciously) between risking testimonial quieting or engaging in testimonial smothering. Dotson defines the former as what happens when an audience fails to acknowledge a speaker as a credible epistemic agent – which is what happens when an audience uses the existence of the marginalized individuals’ emotions as a reason to dismiss her testimony.¹⁰² Testimonial smothering is the preemptive version; the speaker knows her testimony will not receive its intended uptake, so she self-silences to avoid being misunderstood and/or dismissed.¹⁰³ Our emotions are their own kind of information, and are especially relevant in the context of experiences of oppression – when we are forced to suppress or regulate them, we are losing out on a significant source of relevant and powerful information. If the marginalized individual does the emotional labour required by the dominantly situated in an attempt to be seen as a credible epistemic agent, she is partaking in testimonial smothering – if she does not, she risks her testimony being silenced. Emotional epistemic exploitation is

¹⁰¹ Alfred Archer & Georgina Mills, “Anger, Affective Injustice, and Emotion Regulation,” *Philosophical Topics* 47, no. 2 (2019): 77.

¹⁰² Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 244.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

epistemic violence in the form of testimonial smothering – and it is particularly exploitative when the alternative is to risk additional epistemic violence in the form of testimonial silencing.

We must recognize emotional epistemic exploitation as a form of epistemic violence, and as an additional hermeneutical resource. But there seems to be something else at play here too – if we consistently require individuals from marginalized groups to regulate their emotions according to social feeling rules that are established and reinforced by the dominantly-situated, we are requiring them to either a) regulate their emotions to their own mental, emotional, and physical detriment, as demanded by their dominantly-situated audience, in order to have a chance of being seen as a credible epistemic agent, or b) refuse to adhere to the social feeling rules, express their emotions and their reason-based testimony, and risk being dismissed as a credible epistemic agent altogether. If the choice is between being heard but only if you express it in the way the dominantly-situated approve of, or fully expressing all relevant components of your experience and risk having your testimony emotion *and* reason-based dismissed, there seems to be a lack of full epistemic agency altogether. And this is the primary harm of emotional epistemic exploitation – it acts as a major obstacle to full epistemic agency for members of marginalized groups.

Epistemic Agency and Emotion-Based Information

Epistemic agency is the ability to use shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community in order to participate in the production, revision, and distribution of knowledge.¹⁰⁴ When an individual is forced to suppress appropriate and relevant aspects of her testimony to be considered a credible epistemic agent, there is a breakdown in this knowledge sharing process

¹⁰⁴ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 586.

– critical context and personal nuance is missed when we are required to strip all emotion from our testimony in order to abide by the social feeling rules dictated by those more dominantly situated.

When an epistemic claim must be reasoned and rational – and specifically non-emotional – to be taken as valid, marginalized groups begin every communicative exchange at a credibility disadvantage. When women are stereotypically seen as the “emotional” gender, their epistemic credibility is devalued before a communicative exchange has even begun. Women (and other members of marginalized groups) have to justify or prove their credibility as epistemic agents to dominant groups from a place of devaluation – if your entire gender is seen as emotional, and there is no room for emotion in credible testimony, you must both suppress all situation-specific emotion, as well as justify why you are not merely being your (gendered) emotional self, and are in fact a credible epistemic agent. It is not enough to simply *know things* – as a woman, you must prove that your knowing is not being contaminated by either situation-specific emotions or your gender’s so-called tendency towards emotion in general. This requirement for emotionless testimony, on top of existing identity prejudice about who is “emotional” leads to an emotion-specific form of epistemic exploitation.

This form of epistemic exploitation is directly related to active ignorance: the dominantly situated have designed the emotion/reason cultural divide in order to uphold the importance of dispassionate, reason-based testimony. When the system benefits and privileges you above others, it is significantly easier to remain detached and unemotional when giving testimony; the system is, after all, built to your advantage, and the “facts” you need to support your argument are your experience of reality. While I will address this in detail in Chapter three, it is worth noting that this existing emotion/reason divide encourages the dominant group, as its

beneficiaries, to uphold the same standard of cognition that “effectively creates a tacit agreement to misinterpret the world” – emotions are meaningless, wholly personal expressives, which only serve as evidence *against* the epistemic claim being made by the individual in question.¹⁰⁵ It is to the benefit of members of dominant groups for them to perform emotion misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and evasion, as well as self-deception on matters relating to emotions.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, they are able to justify the “reasonable” conclusion that nothing epistemically demanding has actually happened when an emotion is expressed. This active ignorance functions to construct and uphold a narrative under which dismissing not just the emotions, but the entire content of the individual’s testimony, appears reasonable.¹⁰⁷

The dominantly situated have a vested interest in upholding their dominant status, so they make it as difficult as possible for a marginalized individual to give full and credible testimony. By requiring the marginalized individual to regulate her emotions in order to be heard, they are blocking her from participating in the production, revision, and distribution of knowledge, not only because at least some of her energy and effort is going towards suppressing those emotions rather than providing said testimony, but also because the emotional experience of an oppressed individual *is* epistemically important information. If one’s credibility as an epistemic agent requires their testimony to be stripped of all emotional context and presented under the conditions of intrinsic and extrinsic emotional labour, she is not a full epistemic agent. When dominantly situated audiences require emotion to be stripped from all testimony for it to be seen as credible, we force the suppression of the emotion to be the focus of the testimony, and we lose out on the original evidence that *something has happened*.

¹⁰⁵ Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation” *Ergo* 3, no. 22 (2016): 586.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 587.

An emotional response to a situation is an indication that there is potentially something serious going on, something worthy of attention and that needs to be further considered or investigated. This is important and epistemically-relevant information: it is the answer to “why should we care?” in relation to the testimony given by an individual. We should care because an emotional response signals that something has happened – and in order for that individual to have even the possibility of justice and agency, those emotions and what they are a response *to* need to be considered worthy of serious attention and investigation. Rather than emotions being considered counter-evidence to a reason-based claim, they should be seen as evidence that something serious has happened. I am certainly not arguing that we should begin to value emotions over reason, but rather that they should be given equal consideration: we should use the presence of an emotion to further justify additional reason-based investigation, not to discredit or work against reason-based evidence.

This may sound like a dangerous argument – if having a valid option to express emotion during testimony is required for full epistemic agency, then those who have the power to dictate whether or not emotional expression is allowed can dictate who is a valid epistemic agent. From a theoretical perspective, this is problematic – the absolute last thing I want to do is exclude marginally-situated individuals from full epistemic agency because the dominantly situated refuse to accord their emotions the significance they deserve. But this is already happening: I am not saying that a marginalized individual’s epistemic agency *should* be dictated by the dominantly situated, but that it already is. The choice between giving full, emotion-inclusive testimony and suppressing emotion to be (hopefully) taken as a credible epistemic agent is already being forced – the epistemic violence is happening whether it is testimonial quieting or testimonial silencing. The requirement by dominantly-situated that the marginalized individual

take on significant emotional labour in order to be heard invalidates their ability to partake in sound knowledge production. For an individual to have true agency of any kind, let alone epistemic agency, these kinds of foundational restrictions cannot be present.

This process results in situation-dependent epistemic agency; members of marginalized groups, when forced to take on emotional labour to be heard, are not full epistemic agents. However, when they are providing testimony with their communities or like-groups, they *can* be full epistemic agents – the kind of information they share, be it emotion-based or based in personal experiences or research, does not have the same requirements for self-regulation of their emotions. There is still emotional labour required – reliving and explaining experiences of trauma is still emotionally taxing – but it is not *exploitative* in nature, because their audience has a vested interest in these experiences and their corresponding emotions being shared and incorporated into the group’s reservoir of information. Within communities, sharing the emotions triggered by an experience is just as important to the production, revision, and distribution of knowledge as the description of the experience itself. Of course, this is complicated further if the individual in question is a member of multiple marginalized groups – the intersectionality of their marginalization would make it that much more difficult to find a community where they are fully understood, and therefore able to be a fully realized epistemic agent.

I am not arguing for this because I want it to be true – that individuals from marginalized groups are always at an epistemic disadvantage when interacting with members of dominant groups is simply unacceptable. But this does not make it any less real – recognizing this phenomena as a foundational issue with epistemic agency is necessary before we can start the work to change it. Until emotions, and the particular kind of labour they require to be regulated

and expressed, are more generally recognized as a valuable and important source of knowledge, members of marginalized groups will not be able to realize full epistemic agency outside of their communities.

Emotional epistemic exploitation captures the intersection of a broader form of epistemic exploitation and the ways required emotional labour is unequally distributed among different social groups. It also highlights the ways the dominantly situated establish and uphold their status by forcing additional emotional labour requirements on the marginalized – and how this results in a major obstacle to full epistemic agency for those same individuals. Felt emotions are information – they signal that something has happened that is, in the very least, worthy of investigation. As I will argue in the next and final chapter, under conditions of oppression those emotions are that much more epistemically relevant, and crucial to a more robust understanding of one's own oppression. By demanding a marginalized person remove all emotion from their testimony in order for it to be considered credible, we are missing out on significant, and certainly epistemically relevant, information about a situation. Emotional labour and epistemic exploitation can be problematic all on their own – but when we acknowledge the consistency with which they rely on and reinforce one another, we can see that this form of epistemic injustice is inherently structural. Emotional epistemic exploitation must be addressed by recategorizing what our emotions are, and what they can do – otherwise we risk continuing to exclude those with the very information we need to change these social structures from realizing full epistemic agency at all.

Chapter Three: The Epistemic Importance of Recategorizing Emotions: Socio-Epistemically Significant Emotions

Emotions are not a uniquely human experience – but our ability to acknowledge, process, and rationally act because of them is. Despite this, we consistently devalue the unique kind of information emotions can provide. This is especially true for women and people of colour: there is a direct negative correlation between one's position in society, and how likely their emotions are to be taken as representative of the truth in any given situation. This chapter focuses on how we can begin to recategorize emotions as this particular and dynamic kind of information, and how it can be a powerful social and political resource – one that acts as a common language of solidarity and resistance, and is highly accessible regardless of social position or privilege.

To this end, I'll be focusing on socio-epistemically significant emotions¹⁰⁸ which are emotions that: a) exist despite it being inappropriate or potentially unsafe for them to be felt, b) highlight a pattern of oppression, injustice, or inequality on an individual level that may have otherwise been unnoticed, avoided, and/or dismissed, and c) have the potential to be acted upon as a powerful resource for individuals and groups to use as a common language of resistance and solidarity to fight all manner of injustices. I will begin in section I by outlining why we should care about emotions, why they have been consistently devalued, and what makes them a unique source of information. In section II I will describe why socio-epistemically significant emotions are a distinct kind of emotion, and how we can recognize and value them as such. Finally, in section III I will address the practical aspect of this work – including some potential issues – in

¹⁰⁸ While I will get into this in more detail later, I want to clarify that while all emotions are information, not all emotions accurately represent the truth of a situation. Further, dominantly-situated folks are more likely to have their expressions of emotion taken to be representative of the truth, even when they do not, and members of marginalized groups tend to have their emotions dismissed altogether. By socio-epistemically significant emotions, I mean the instances when what we're feeling accurately highlights a source of injustice or inequality in a particular way.

how we can recategorize emotions as information, recognize instances of socio-epistemically significant emotions, and begin to leverage them as a resource for positive social change.

I. Why Should We Care About Emotions?

Emotions are a unique form of information: our emotions are clues that *something is happening* – they signal to us that there is some meaningful thing going on, and that we have had an emotional response because of it. We do not *choose* to feel anger, we just feel it. Like perception more generally, our emotions are a sensory means of gathering information about our internal and external environment – both track the circumstances of a given situation, and how it can change from one moment to the next.¹⁰⁹ And as we have seen in Chapter one and two, we are already ascribing value and power to emotions; when the dominantly-situated try to control who can feel what, and in what situations, they are signalling that this control is necessary to uphold existing structures of oppression. If emotions did not matter, they would not need to be policed and controlled.

In this first section I will begin by addressing the reason/emotion divide, and how it has been constructed to undermine the legitimacy of emotions as a kind of information or knowledge construction, which serves to both create and uphold systems of oppression. Emotions have been situated as the inverse of reason: but the reason/emotion divide undermines the value of both emotions *and* reason. I will then outline why this dichotomy is false, and how we can begin to shift our perspective on what emotions can do for us epistemically. By recategorizing emotions as a phenomenologically different but equally valuable form of information as reason, we create

¹⁰⁹ Julien A. Deonna, “Emotion, Perception, and Perspective,” *dialectica* 60, no. 1 (2006): 29.

the foundation for a more robust process of decision making, and gain a new resource for tackling both individual and systemic cases of epistemic injustice.

The Reason / Emotion Divide

Western cultures operate within value-hierarchical foundations – we do not just value something for its own sake, but also (or exclusively) for its domination over some supposedly inverse concept.¹¹⁰ Val Plumwood calls this the “master model,” wherein one side of a given duality is the dominant or “master” concept, and the other is the subordinate.¹¹¹ In this dichotomous construct, emotions are the “other” – they are the secondary, inferior side of the reason/emotion divide. As Karen Warren argues, the division of reason and emotion in these binary, disjunctive terms serves to define emotion as *oppositional* to reason.¹¹²

Within this dualistic construct, the concepts are “seen as exclusive (rather than inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary), and...higher value or superiority is attributed to one disjunct (or side of the dualism) than the other.”¹¹³ This duality both creates and depends on an otherness and negation of one half of each pair, or what I am calling the “second side.” And this is true whether that duality is of reason/emotion, or culture/nature, male/female, white/non-white, or heterosexual/queer.¹¹⁴ Not only does this dualistic division obstruct our ability to evaluate all sources of information in the search for a reason-based conclusion, it also reinforces patriarchal and colonial social structures that rely on it as a tool of oppression. By situating emotions as not just *different* from reason, but actually *oppositional*, the existence of emotion in

¹¹⁰ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 42.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Karen J. Warren, “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections,” *Environmental Ethics* 9, no. 1 (1987): 6.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Greta Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): 116.

any kind of testimony or communication – whether described or expressed – gives the audience a seemingly legitimate reason to dismiss all reason-based testimony as well. Reason on its own is credible and worthy of consideration, emotions on their own are not – but even reason with the addition of emotions is seen as unreliable and unworthy of consideration. Emotions are positioned as a corrupting force – where any emotions exist, any reason is invalidated as well. While I will go into this more in later sections, the result of this divide is that those who are closest to instances of injustice – and therefore those most likely to have an emotional reaction – are those least likely to be taken seriously.

The reason/emotion divide tends to be presented as a practical one, especially in relation to decision making and communication. Both require a foundation of universal and verifiable practices grounded in “truth” – all of which reason (allegedly) provides. But this perspective entirely discounts (or perhaps specifically ignores) the dualist construct that has been created to increase the value of reason by devaluing emotions. Instead of reason being more practical *in certain situations* or *to specific ends* than emotions, the two are presented as oppositional, to the point that they become defined as the inverse of the other. Reason is not just *one* way to practically communicate or make decisions, but the *only* way.¹¹⁵

Recategorizing Emotions

The dichotomy of reason and emotion categorizes the latter as useless at best, and counterproductive or corrupting at worst – emotions are presented as a distraction, insignificant, and actively undermine our capacity for reason. But this oppositional categorization means we are unable to actually employ reason – whether Kantian or Aristotelian, reason requires an

¹¹⁵ For more see Allison B. Wolf (2017).

analysis of the relevant and available information. When we dismiss any emotion – or emotion-corrupted reason – we are missing relevant information.

Emotions are our insight into how we have perceived a situation: they represent what we have recognized as meaningful, and how it might affect us. Experiencing anger is representative of being angry about something, experiencing fear is representative of fearing something.^{116 117} Emotions are everywhere, and affect everything, all the time;¹¹⁸ that they are an involuntary representation of our reaction to something is often why they are so often dismissed outright as unreliable or even counterproductive – but this can also be their strength. That emotions are an automatic and subconscious reaction gives us uniquely reliable information into what we are perceiving in a given situation, which is something no amount of reasoning or logic can answer.¹¹⁹ While our analysis of said information may be incorrect, regardless of our own judgment of them, our emotions represent and react *to* something: they are information about a situation, and how that situation (may) affect us. To acknowledge an emotional response is to acknowledge that we have this additional information at our disposal. While I will go into this more in section II, recognizing an emotion as information is not enough to know how (or if) to act on it, or even what it “means” – this requires a certain level of introspection and contextual analysis, and is where differentiating socio-epistemically significant emotions becomes especially compelling.

While this analysis of the appropriateness of truth-tracking of emotions is important, it rests on recognizing that emotions help us understand the world and our place within it. They are

¹¹⁶ Julien A. Deonna, “Emotion, Perception, and Perspective,” *dialectica* 60, no. 1 (2006): 29.

¹¹⁷ While all three traditions of emotion theory fit within this framework, I am focusing on the Evaluative Tradition, or Evaluative Perception, as a grounding perspective. For more on the other two traditions, see William James (1884) and Carl Georg Lange (1885) for the Feeling Tradition, and Julien A. Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (2012) and Andrea Scarantino and Michael Nielsen (2015) for the Motivational Tradition.

¹¹⁸ Amelia & Emily Nagoski, *Burnout*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2020: xii.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

intrinsically social and political, because the individuals who make up society and politics *have emotions*.¹²⁰ It would be just as impossible to remove emotions from decision making and political and social structures as it would to remove our requirement for sleep or to eat – and yet they are treated as though they are extrapersonal and have no role in how we live and act, or build and govern societies as human beings.

The perspective of recategorizing emotions I am arguing for identifies reason and emotions as mutually-reinforcing sources of information. In this view, our emotions are an invitation to further inquiry: experiencing an emotion is a clue that *something is happening*, and we can then employ our capacity for reason to determine *what* it is that the emotion is highlighting for us. We have traditionally seen reason and emotion as different at best, and oppositional at worst – however, each inherently relies on the other not just for effective decision making and communication, but also to actually move through the world as a human being. Just as it would not be practical or effective to move through the world acting only on emotional impulse or reactions, it would not be effective (and arguably impossible) to move through the world without an emotional experience ever influencing our perspective on or reaction to a given situation. Emotions are certainly not a uniquely human experience – but the ability to acknowledge, process, and rationally act *because* of them is.¹²¹

A major obstacle for emotion-based work, both in the practical day-to-day application and within feminist philosophy, is that this work either needs to be prefaced with a lengthy description of why emotions are just as or more important than reason, or operate under the assumption that the audience already believes or understands this to be the case. However, with

¹²⁰ Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to the Anti-Racist Struggle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021: 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 9.

the perspective I am presenting here, recategorizing emotions does not require a whole new framework for communication or epistemology more generally, but rather an expansion of the existing reason-only framework to include *other* valuable sources of information as well. There is an intellectual aspect of emotions that this recategorization highlights: emotions are not characterized *by* some information or description, but rather they *are* information and description.

Whether we take a Kantian or Ancient, a naturalist or normative definition, reason is, at its core, meant to be an analytical and deliberate investigation of all available information – so we do ourselves a critical disservice by excluding the information that emotions can uniquely provide. This is along the same lines of the Cartesian notion of wonder – by approaching emotions that are unfamiliar or that we do not understand by investigating their meaning and/or appropriateness, (rather than simple dismissal), that wonder becomes a resource for our capacity for reason.¹²² The information that we can access from an awareness and analysis of our emotions cannot be replicated – our emotions are an immediate, unconscious reaction that provide an unfiltered view of a given situation. Even in the cases where our emotions are not truth-tracking or misrepresent the context of a situation – which I will go into in more depth in section II – they are telling us something about the world, our place in it, and ourselves.

By recategorizing emotions as a form of information, they become a *resource* for reason, and we can begin to deconstruct this false dichotomy – and in doing so, potentially begin to deconstruct the othering and negating of all “second sides” that have been constructed by, and are inherently relied upon, patriarchal and colonial systems of oppression. This is not an altogether new perspective; feminist philosophers often reject the reason/emotion dichotomy

¹²² René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, translated by Stephen Voss, Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1989: 56-57.

altogether, and instead argue that emotions and reason are inherently connected, or that emotions enable reason.¹²³ By reimagining emotions as a source of information, and particularly as a resource for reason, we can recognize when particular emotions in a particular context – that is, socio-epistemically significant emotions – empower individuals to create genuine social and political change.

II. Socio-Epistemically Significant Emotions

All emotions are information – but not all emotions are *socio-epistemically significant* sources of information. It would be inappropriate to tell someone “you are not angry” – if someone is feeling anger, it is enough that they are feeling it at all for it to be a source of information.¹²⁴ The experience of “anger” is representative of the thing(s) that have made them angry. However, our emotions do not always accurately represent what is going on around us: we may experience fear in a situation where no actual threat exists, or anger or disappointment where no wrongdoing has occurred. Even in these cases, our emotions are still a valuable source of information. Fear can tell us we are in danger, or, in situations where there is no legitimate threat, can call attention to information we may not have otherwise been aware of – whether that be a phobia or general anxiety, or more relevantly here, the existence of personal biases, racial stereotypes, or structural inequalities.

¹²³ Allison B. Wolf, ““Tell Me How That Makes You Feel”: Philosophy’s Reason/Emotion Divide and Epistemic Pushback in Philosophy Classrooms,” *Hypatia* 32, no. 4 (2017): 898.

¹²⁴ This assumes, of course, that the individual in question actually knows what they are feeling. This is certainly not always the case – and especially when we consider how little effort goes towards holding space for our emotions to exist and be reflected on. While important, this discussion (and especially how it relates to interacting with and educating children) goes beyond the scope of this project.

The Role of Emotions in Epistemic Injustice

That our emotions are a significant source of information becomes especially important when considering emotions within the context of socio-epistemic injustices: the dominantly situated are far more likely to have their emotional experiences accepted as accurately representing the truth of a situation, regardless of the *actual* context or reality. We accord a higher level of credibility to those in dominant social positions – not because they have some unique perspective or knowledge that legitimizes this additional level of credibility, but because those that judge one’s level of credibility are, more often than not, dominantly-situated themselves. This creates a closed-loop credibility system: those in the position to judge others’ credibility have a significant vested interest in being seen as credible themselves, and so will accord a higher credibility to people *like them*. Reason alone will never break this closed-loop, since those on the inside are the very ones determining what reason is, or at least what counts as a rational argument. So while emotions are often taken to be the inverse of reason, in the case of the dominantly-situated, the audience has a vested interest in upholding the credibility of the like-wise dominantly situated expresser – so emotions are not seen to be as contradictory, and do far less damage to, reason-based arguments.

Members of marginalized groups, on the other hand, are not only more likely to have their emotional experiences dismissed as irrelevant, but due to the existing reason/emotion dichotomy, they are also used as evidence of a lack of capacity for reason altogether, resulting in both their emotions *and* their reason-based testimony being dismissed.¹²⁵ The same pattern that emerges with the dominantly situated affording credibility to those like them works oppositely here – those in the position to judge do not want to lose their own inflated credibility, so they are

¹²⁵ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Philosophy,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151.

that much more likely to discredit those *not like them*, unconsciously or otherwise. Discrediting reason-based testimony because any emotion is being expressed is a highly convenient – and often widely accepted – way of doing this. While certainly not the only strategy for discrediting those marginally-situated (personal attacks and irrelevant information and context are also often used), that those who are closest and most affected by an instance of injustice are also most likely to become emotional during testimony makes this a particularly nefarious and powerful method of discrediting valuable information.

Research shows that those perceived as emotional or personally invested in a topic or situation are actually accorded *less* epistemic credibility or authority – despite them having first-hand knowledge of the issue at hand.¹²⁶ However, the emotional responses of marginalized individuals are also more likely to be appropriate and truth-tracking than those who are dominantly-situated.¹²⁷ We have seen this same pattern play out with misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation in previous chapters – the emotions of the marginalized are not seen as epistemically valid. The result is those that are most likely to have the most accurate insight of a particular situation, and especially injustice, are also those most likely to become emotional during testimony *directly because* of their personal experiences with a situation – and are therefore also likely to have their relevant, appropriate, and first-hand knowledge dismissed. And with this cycle, those same systems of oppression and dismissal continue, and the instances of epistemic injustice persist.

As a general rule, the more dominantly-situated you are in a given situation, the more likely you are to have your emotions be taken as a credible source of information, and the more

¹²⁶ Allison B. Wolf, ““Tell Me How That Makes You Feel”: Philosophy’s Reason/Emotion Divide and Epistemic Pushback in Philosophy Classrooms,” *Hypatia* 32, no. 4 (2017): 898.

¹²⁷ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 168.

marginalized, the less likely you are to have your emotions be taken as a credible source of information. The perceived socio-epistemic value of emotion-based knowledge is directly related to the social standing of the individual in a given exchange. For example, a white woman's fear is, more often than not, taken to be saying more – that is, it *means* more – than a Black woman's fear. This is also why white cis males can cry during their murder trial or supreme court confirmation hearing and still be acquitted or confirmed, but Black women must maintain a “respectable” tone of voice and mannerisms or else be accused of being angry, and as a result have their (reasons-based) testimony dismissed. This distinction can be seen rather plainly in the case of the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Brett Kavanaugh compared to that of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. Kavanaugh's dominantly-situated social position enabled him to yell and cry in response to appropriate questions and still be seen as an individual fit to serve on the Supreme Court – at least by those in similarly dominantly-situated positions who held the power to, quite literally in this case, confirm him. However, Judge Jackson was required to maintain a calm, even tone and demeanor in the face of blatantly irrelevant and even ridiculous lines of questioning – all from dominantly-situated individuals in a position of judgment – or else have her competency seriously undermined.

There is a direct correlation between one's likelihood to be taken seriously despite emotional expression, and their perceived social positioning. Brittney Cooper argues that white fear and white rage rest on the presumption that they are rooted in fact, while everyone else's fear and rage are treated as though they are the stuff of fantasy.¹²⁸ This is reflected in the closed-loop credibility accordance at play in these supreme court confirmation hearings, as well as day-to-day interactions, communication, and testimony. When a white police officer claims he feared

¹²⁸ Brittney Cooper, *Eloquent Rage*, New York: Picador, 2019: 209.

for his life as a reason for shooting unarmed Black children, those in a position to judge the situation and the officer's credibility are more often than not *like him* – white, older males – and this supposed fear is taken as an appropriate and legitimate reason for taking another person's life. But a Black man claiming he feared for his life during a routine traffic stop would have that fear dismissed or trivialized by the very same group of people. It is because of this imbalance that Cooper sees white fear and white rage as illegitimate political emotions – white rage is “deeply connected to a fear of losing privilege in a browning American empire.”¹²⁹ This is where the distinction between socio-epistemically significant and illegitimate political emotions is really grounded – some emotions represent a reaction to injustice, whereas others represent a perceived loss of control. I will go into this more shortly, but the major takeaway here is that this pattern of selective valuing of emotions is highly consistent. While deeply problematic, this consistency does demonstrate that we are *already* ascribing value to emotions – but it is only recognized as such when it serves the dominantly situated.

This does not mean that we should treat emotions as insignificant if a white individual is experiencing or expressing them – but it does mean that we need to consciously consider the particular context of a given emotional expression. More importantly, we need to ensure we are taking care to raise other folks' emotions to the same level of credibility – or in many cases, a *higher* level of credibility. A person of colour or other member of a marginalized group experiencing, for example, fear or rage, is far more likely to be signaling something of social and/or political significance than if a white person is feeling the same thing. Individuals in a non-dominant social position know that their emotions are unlikely to receive epistemic uptake – as we have seen with misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation – and

¹²⁹ Brittney Cooper, *Eloquent Rage*, New York: Picador, 2019: 203.

they know that their emotions can, and often will, be used against them. If, despite these obstacles, their emotions are still being felt and/or expressed, there is a much higher chance that they are a reaction to a source of personal wrongdoing or larger patterns of injustice or inequality. It is in these instances, when it is seemingly counter-productive or even unsafe to feel or express an emotion, that said emotion can become socio-epistemically significant, and potentially act as a powerful source of information and change.

Defining Socio-Epistemically Significant Emotions

Both ancient philosophers and (most) modern psychologists argue for the elimination, or at least the active moderation, of our emotional experiences.¹³⁰ This fits squarely within the social framework that promotes the duality of reason/emotion: rationality and reason leave no room for our perspectives to be swayed or our actions dictated by our emotions. If our emotions are given their due consideration, this would not only upset the existing power (im)balance, but also make it impossible to ignore issues of systemic oppression. Socio-epistemically significant emotions provide insight into patterns of injustice that affect us on a personal level – and that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, or been avoided or dismissed. Socio-epistemically significant emotions are defined by three core elements; first, they are present (either by being felt and/or expressed) despite it being “inappropriate” or even unsafe for them to exist. Second, they highlight a structural pattern of oppression, injustice, or inequality on an individual level that may have been overlooked otherwise. And third, they have the potential to be *acted upon*, either personally or within like social groups or communities. Recategorizing emotion-based

¹³⁰ Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to the Anti-Racist Struggle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021: 141.

knowledge as its own kind of information and insight allows us to recognize, process, and leverage socio-epistemically significant emotions as a powerful resource for change.

Inappropriate Emotions

Alison Jaggar coined the term “outlaw emotions” in 1989 to capture the emotions we experience that exist in opposition to dominant perceptions and values – the emotions that we feel despite it being conventionally unacceptable to feel them:

People who experience conventionally unacceptable, or what I call 'outlaw' emotions often are subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the *status quo*. The social situation of such people makes them unable to experience the conventionally prescribed emotions: for instance, people of color are more likely to experience anger than amusement when a racist joke is recounted, and women subjected to male sexual banter are less likely to be flattered than uncomfortable or even afraid.¹³¹

These outlaw emotions can be better guides to the truth than the beliefs that they contradict – discomfort in the face of something that others more dominantly-situated are comfortable with, especially when at the expense of those more marginally situated, tells a story of inequality and/or injustice. And these kinds of emotional experiences can trigger epistemic insights that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.¹³² When we experience an emotion that is seemingly only being felt by us (or by people “like us”), or if an emotion is being felt despite it being considered unreasonable or unacceptable to feel it, this can be our first indication that there is something going on beyond just feeling something at odds with what we, or others, are expected to feel in that particular situation. It is not simply that the joke or gesture is not understood, but that it is telling us that there is something wrong, on a deeper level, with it being

¹³¹ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 166.

¹³² Laura Luz Silva, “The Epistemic Role of Outlaw Emotions,” *Ergo* 8, no. 23 (2021): 1.

expressed at all. The discrepancy between how we are expected to react or feel and how we actually react or feel signals that we need to investigate the situation further.

Jaggar specifically outlines how outlaw emotions can provoke observations that in turn may challenge dominant conceptions of right and wrong, and even fact and fantasy: “[outlaw emotions] may help us to realize that what are taken generally to be facts have been constructed in a way that obscures the reality of subordinated people.”¹³³ This reflects the closed-loop credibility accordance discussed previously – when those in dominant social positions are the ones dictating the answers, they are also the ones deciding which choices are actually available to each individual based on their social position. Sally Haslanger’s work on triggering versus structural causes describes this condition: triggering causes explain why we chose this option *in this case*, and structural causes are responsible for the options we *legitimately* had available to us.¹³⁴ Haslanger outlines an example wherein a heterosexual couple is deciding who should stay home to care for their newborn: while it may seem that the woman chose to stay home with their baby (triggering cause) despite a lack of gendered expectations at home, her lower income potential relative to her male partner’s made the choice of him continuing to work and her staying home a pre-determined one (structuring cause).¹³⁵ Our emotional experiences work in a similar way: we are told we can only feel or express certain emotions in certain situations, because that is the appropriate thing to do (triggering), but these rules are vastly different depending on whether you are dominantly or marginally situated (structural).

While Jaggar’s work focuses specifically on *women*’s emotions being epistemically, socially, and politically significant, the same concept applies to all manner of marginalized

¹³³ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 168.

¹³⁴ Sally Haslanger, “What is (Social) Structural Explanation?” *Philosophical Studies* 173 (2016): 120.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 123.

individuals or groups within a particular context. Socio-epistemically significant emotions build on the idea of outlaw emotions, as both capture the essence of emotions as a kind of information that we might otherwise not have access to. While Jaggar focuses on the kinds of emotions that are felt in opposition to those deemed appropriate by the dominantly situated, I am focused on *all* emotions felt by members of marginalized groups, within a given communicative exchange or situation. This is where socio-epistemically significant and outlaw emotions differ: Jaggar struggles to justify what an “appropriate” emotion actually is, and how we can judge or justify what is and is not appropriate in a given situation.¹³⁶ And this is a significant obstacle; how can we recategorize emotions as a valuable source of information, while at the same time providing a credibility analysis based on who is feeling and expressing them, and in what context? How do we avoid the same devaluing that exists now? And more practically, how could we possibly make this kind of credibility judgment every time an emotion is expressed or articulated?

Socio-epistemically significant emotions are categorized based on them being felt or expressed despite it being inappropriate or even dangerous to do so. A white woman’s fear, when in the context of speaking with a Black woman, is not likely to be socio-epistemically significant – but a white woman’s fear, when in the presence of a white man, *is* likely to be socio-epistemically significant. What needs to be considered is what social rules around emotional expression exist for those in a given communicative exchange: a white woman and a Black man, or a Black woman and a disabled white man, might be on a more “level” playing field socially, but they will each have prescribed rules as to what they can and cannot appropriately express. Janine Young Kim’s work on the connection between feeling rules and race describes this phenomenon: Black men being expected to suppress their anger or Black women being expected

¹³⁶ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 168.

to “watch their tone” are examples of the ways we prescribe rules based on race, gender, ability, and social positions more generally.¹³⁷ If the emotion being felt or expressed breaks these rules, it is likely that the expresser will be punished. And it is the awareness of these rules – and the consequences of breaking them – that makes emotions expressed despite these contradictory expectations so powerful.

Highlighting Individual Instances of Structural Injustices

Emotions have a unique ability to give us insight into the individual implications of structural inequalities. We can say that women are paid 25% less than men or that Black folks are more likely to be stopped by the police, and we will know that this is wrong. But when, as a woman, you are paid 25% less than your male colleagues, or as a Black man you are frequently stopped by the police, there is an emotional component that brings this wrongness into focus. Feminist philosophers often highlight how this works with anger and fear: these emotions bring the large-scale social and political inequalities down to an individual, more intimate scale. When we experience these injustices, they are highlighted by the emotions we feel in response to them. Anger and fear are important components of this, but they are not the only emotions that have this ability: feeling joy can highlight the times when joy was absent, feeling hope can highlight an awareness of other, more equitable futures, and feeling anticipation or excitement can highlight the potential for change. All emotions can have this function – and even merely experiencing or feeling them is its own kind of resistance: an internal resistance that says *something is just not right* – a clue that points to larger patterns of injustice.¹³⁸ Socio-

¹³⁷ Janine Young Kim, “Racial Emotions and the Feeling of Equality.” *University of Colorado Law Review* 87, no. 2 (2016): 487.

¹³⁸ Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to the Anti-Racist Struggle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021: 93.

epistemically significant emotions are not just the “negative” ones we feel in response to these structural injustices, but also the “positive” ones that we feel in the (potentially rare) moments that exist outside of them.

Emotions that Empower us to Act

All emotions tell us something is happening – but socio-epistemically significant emotions tell us something epistemically important is happening that we need to pay attention to. The two are not mutually exclusive. Every socio-epistemically significant emotion starts off like any other emotion: insight into a situation that prompts us to investigate said information further. If this investigation leads us to understand that this emotion is inappropriate or disallowed based on our social position, and it gives us insight into a larger pattern of inequality, the final qualifier for it to be socio-epistemically significant is if it empowers us to *do* something about what we have come to understand by feeling and investigating it. This action does not have to be drastic – even a newfound understanding of the “feeling rules” you have been confined within due to your race, gender, or ability is critical insight. While this can have more impact when done within communities (of which I will go into more detail in section III), our emotions enabling us to act does not require large-scale organization or movements. Action can be as simple as beginning to pay more attention to how you feel more generally, when your feelings seem misaligned with the status quo, and how others react to and/or try to dismiss or ignore how you feel.

I have kept the qualifier for “empowering action” purposely broad: not everyone will have the personal capacity or practical ability to act on these kinds of emotions on a large scale with any kind of consistency, but that does not mean that they are any less valid. The important

aspect of this component of socio-epistemically significant emotions is that what we are being told by the emotion empowers us to *do something because of it* – even if that is simply a deeper connection with ourselves and not attending a protest or running for office. Small action does not mean insignificant impact.

The Impact of Recategorizing Emotions

If we can begin to recategorize emotions as a source of information, one that acts as an invitation to further investigation within the context of existing social and political inequalities, the impact of our emotional experiences, and especially those that are socio-epistemically significant, on social injustices becomes clear. In order for emotions to have this impact, they must be taken as a source of information from ourselves, to ourselves – we have to start acknowledging our emotional experiences as information, and valuing the process of applying our capacity for reason to investigate them. I see this happening in three, non-exclusive ways: first, as a tool for self-awareness and self care, second as insight into our own culpability in social inequalities, and third as a resource for larger social change.

Self-Awareness and Self-Care

In some cases the investigation into what our emotions are signaling will be a source of information that increases our self-awareness and a practical means of self-care. Being open to understanding how grief or hope or joy feels *for you* is an important act of self-connection and self-acceptance. In an ideal world this kind of practice might be apolitical – but caring for and accepting ourselves is an act of resistance in of itself: in a world that wants to dismiss, oppress, and disappear you, self-care is a radical form of resistance.

Lorde writes at length on the importance of a capacity for joy. Recognizing our capacity for feeling gives us insight into our capacity for satisfaction: “once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of.”¹³⁹ Not only are injustice and inequality unacceptable, so too are the structures at play that keep us generally unsatisfied and the things that keep us disconnected from our joy. The choices we have on offer from a society that wants to keep us confined become unacceptable as our capacity for understanding our emotions enables us to know what “feeling good” actually means. The structural causes as discussed by Haslanger are no longer enough: the insight we can uniquely gain through embracing the information our emotions provide becomes a reminder to not settle “for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.”¹⁴⁰ These are the places we’ve been confined, and these are the places the dominantly-situated would like us to stay. Embracing our emotions as a way of knowing – a category of information – means we can recognize the difference between the options we have, and the options we deserve.

“Wellness” is not static or a state of being – it is the freedom to move fluidly through the cycles of being human.¹⁴¹ If we are constrained by social or political forces as to what we are allowed to do, what we are allowed to express, and who we are allowed to be, we can never truly be well. A capacity for action, to move through our emotions and acknowledge, process, and understand what they are telling us is foundational to everything else in our lives – but it is so often overlooked or ignored altogether. This is also likely why women and people of colour are so much more likely to experience burnout: a core component of burnout is emotional

¹³⁹ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press, 1984: 57.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Amelia & Emily Nagoski, *Burnout*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2020: 28.

exhaustion, and result of getting *stuck* in our emotions.¹⁴² Emily Nagoski describes our emotions as tunnels – if you go all the way through them you get to the light at the end.¹⁴³ Emotional exhaustion happens when we are unable to go through that tunnel because we have been taught to ignore and dismiss our own emotional experiences. We never get to the light at the end, those unfinished tunnels pile on top of one another, and we remain exhausted, stuck, and oppressed. And – certainly relatedly – it becomes that much more difficult to change the systems causing it all in the first place: who has time to go to protests or petition their representative when just getting through the day is struggle enough?

Appreciating our emotional experiences is a way of appreciating ourselves. When we appreciate what our emotions are doing, we are recognizing their value and their potential – and when we can recognize socio-epistemically significant emotions specifically, we are recognizing that there is another way of doing things: a better, more equal way.¹⁴⁴ That can look like large-scale change, protests, or running for office, but it can also mean knowing when you need to rest, ending an abusive relationship, or recognizing a toxic workplace. When we see our emotions as the insight that they are, we understand ourselves and our own needs that much better.

Taking Responsibility

Allyship can be messy: all too often supporting and advocating for others can turn into a kind of white saviorism or a complete lack of awareness of one's own culpability in the same unjust and unequal social structures one is trying to help fight against. Taking the time to investigate our emotional experiences can help bring this to light: for the dominantly situated,

¹⁴² Amelia & Emily Nagoski, *Burnout*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2020: xii.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, xi.

¹⁴⁴ Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to the Anti-Racist Struggle*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021: 53.

recognizing that you feel fear or anxiety when you see a person of colour can highlight internalized prejudices or biases that may otherwise go unnoticed. This practice can act as a legitimate avenue for change for those who are as-yet-unknowingly benefitting from and enabling the continuation of structural social inequalities.

As I will go into in more detail in section III, there are some practical issues with this particular situation – namely, that the dominantly-situated are unlikely to take kindly to challenges to their belief systems and relative position of power – but this has the potential to counteract the undue credibility the emotions of the dominantly-situated are accorded. Cherry’s politically illegitimate emotions gain strength by recognizing their opposite in socio-epistemically significant emotions: if we can recognize that some emotions are powerful social and political barometers for injustice, we can also recognize that the emotional experiences of the dominantly situated – like white rage and white fear – must be challenged to ensure they are not merely reflections of existing social and political inequalities. Here we can see the potential for a particular kind of dominantly-situated individual – a judge or teacher, perhaps – to recognize that emotions felt or expressed by those in positions of power, or even just dominantly-situated in a particular context, should be treated with caution, and not automatically assumed to be truth-tracking or taken at face value.

A Resource for Social and Political Change

Perhaps most importantly, that further investigation into what our emotions are telling us may highlight an instance of injustice – thus becoming a socio-epistemically significant emotion and having the potential to act as a resource for genuine positive change. These are the emotions that we need to pay close attention to on an individual and collective basis, for they will be the

ones that provide insight into particular instances or structural cases of inequality (as with outlaw emotions and social feeling rules), and act as a crucial resource for change. Recategorizing our emotional experiences as information is a powerful restructuring of value: it allows us insight into ourselves and our place in society, it gives us an opportunity to enhance and strengthen our ability to make rational assessments and decisions, and it means that there is no viable explanation for why reason and emotion must remain independent.

There is, of course, a practical component to this work – and the importance and difficulty of what is required cannot be underestimated. In the next and final section, I will look at how this work can be done to be most impactful, and address some significant potential challenges.

III. The Practical Work of Recategorizing Emotions

Recategorizing emotions gives us unique insight into the world, and our position in it – because of the way social feeling rules dictate how we are allowed to feel based on our race, gender, or ability, socio-epistemically significant emotions are the *only* way to gain access to this particular kind of socio-political information. That emotions are important is not new philosophy – acknowledging this particular category of emotions (socio-epistemically significant emotions) as the *exclusive* way to access information crucial to social change is the particular contribution of this project. And the potential impact of recategorizing emotions as information is substantial – though the practical work of this process is just as important as recognizing its potential impact. So how can we begin this recategorizing process, from a practical perspective? In this section I will present the two necessary components to this process: recategorizing emotions on an individual basis, and within communities. The former is a necessary foundation for all

emotion-based knowledge, and the latter is where the real potential for this work to become a resource for social and political change lies. I will also address some potential practical issues and obstacles with this project.

Individual Emotions and Self-Awareness

Experiencing emotions is a highly personal experience. While many emotions are expressed and perceived strikingly similarly across cultures,¹⁴⁵ we still *experience* them individually: when someone feels angry, they are physically feeling that emotion in their bodies. We have been taught to dismiss or ignore our emotional responses or to see them as a nuisance to be overcome or suppressed.¹⁴⁶ And so the first step to revaluing emotions as a source of information must be acknowledging, to ourselves, that emotions act as a kind of information: my anger tells me I am angry about something, my fear tells me I am afraid of something.

This might seem overly obvious, but again, we are systematically conditioned to devalue, dismiss, and/or ignore our emotions. The experiencing, articulation, and expression of emotions has not, historically (and especially in western traditions), been seen as a valuable means of knowledge-gathering or communication. These are learned behaviours, especially for women and people of colour – it becomes very clear, very early, that emotional “outbursts” will not be tolerated, directly work against being respected or credible, and will be taken as proof of a lack of capacity for reason.¹⁴⁷ The constructed reason/emotion dichotomy means that you can be rational or emotional, but not both – so we value reason and dismiss emotions, even when they are our own.

¹⁴⁵ Trip Glazer, “Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception,” *Hypatia* 34, no. 1 (2019): 65.

¹⁴⁶ Sue Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” *Hypatia* 9 no. 3 (1994): 55.

¹⁴⁷ Hanna Pickard, “Stop Telling Me What to Feel! A Clinical Theory of Emotions and What’s Wrong with the Moralization of Feelings,” *Philosophical Topics* 47, no. 2 (2019): 1.

This pattern is not new, and it has been analyzed at length within feminist philosophy. Lorde's conceptualization of the erotic has, at its core, the recognition of the value of self-knowledge and the power that can result from this self-awareness:

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves.¹⁴⁸

The systemic devaluing of our emotions has not only made it inappropriate for us to take our own emotional experiences as a valid source of knowledge, but it has also made us afraid to feel them at all. Lorde captures this fear of emotions – our own and those of others – beautifully: and re-approaching them as a kind of information may be the solution to help overcome both the fear of feeling, and the fear of what those feelings mean.

We are missing out on the opportunity for depth of knowledge; of ourselves, of others, of what is going right or very, very wrong. And once we acknowledge emotions as a source of information, we have to do the work of understanding what that information actually is. Is the source of our fear a legitimate threat, or an internalized bias? Is the source of our grief a legitimate loss, or a perceived loss of power? This work allows us to get to know ourselves on a deeper, more intimate level, while at the same time actively situating ourselves within larger social structures, and their many inequalities.

This is where the revaluing has to start. It's crucial to learn this process for ourselves before we can hope to expect it of others, and eventually apply it to larger projects of resistance. Where this individual work really comes in, and when emotions as a resource for political

¹⁴⁸ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press, 1984: 53-54.

change becomes both impactful and practical, is when this revaluing work is done within communities.

Recategorizing Emotions Within Communities

Recategorizing our emotions as a unique kind of information allows us the opportunity to gain exclusive insight into both our own lives and how we fit into larger social structures. So while recategorizing emotions has an important role as an avenue to self-awareness, where the impact of this work really comes to fruition is in how it can help transform social and political structures of inequality. If we do the work to know what anger, grief, joy, happiness, and hope feels like for *ourselves*, we have a solid foundation for understanding what that might feel like for someone else. And this is why this work is so important for genuine change: it can act as a common language of resistance and solidarity.

Alison Bailey argues that knowing resistant anger – a particular kind of transformative anger – is an essential component to the creation and growth of resistant epistemic communities:

Anger at injustice unites us because, in our moving, we come to realize that we are not alone in our anger. What first feels like an isolated subordinated anger is really part of a larger collective resistant anger experience. There are terrains when our anger feels at home, where it is supported by coalitions of oppressed/silenced \Leftrightarrow resisting/angered selves. Resistant epistemic communities must treat our collective knowing resistant anger as an epistemic resource because collaboratively it offers us epistemic traction.¹⁴⁹

Bailey's focus is on how this transformative anger, once recognized and understood, acts as an epistemic and political resource for change – this anger unites folks with similar experiences, and it creates an environment for stories to be shared and emotions to be

¹⁴⁹ Alison Bailey, "On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018): 113

echoed across individual experiences.¹⁵⁰ If a community wants to bring about social or political change, they must affirm, nurture, and cultivate that knowing resistant anger on an individual basis, and leverage it as a resource.¹⁵¹

The position we hold within society dictates what we can and cannot do, and who we can and cannot be. Haslanger’s work on how social structures constrain and define the choices genuinely available to us underscores the importance of this community-level valuing.¹⁵² Cultivating, affirming, and nurturing knowing resistant anger towards injustice within a community serves to make it a viable choice for members of said community, and gives it power as a resource for change. Dismissing, ignoring, or de-emphasizing that same emotion would be to dismiss, ignore, and de-emphasize its potential as a resource, *and* exclude it as a possible choice for members of the community to appropriately feel and express. In the worst case, it can also dismiss and belittle the individual trying to express it.

By expanding this same perspective to all emotions, an opportunity is created for that much more information to be understood, shared, and acted upon. This community-driven emotion recategorizing acts as both an additional source of socio-epistemically significant information, by sharing experiences and expressions of emotions that may not otherwise receive uptake; and as a common language of solidarity and resistance – my experience as a white, cis, able-bodied white woman is going to be very different than women who are marginalized based on their race, sexuality, or disability – but if we can both understand what the other means by fear, anger, hope or joy, than we can understand

¹⁵⁰ Alison Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018): 114.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Sally Haslanger, “What is (Social) Structural Explanation?” *Philosophical Studies* 173 (2016): 120.

each other on a more basic, experience-based level. I will never understand what it means to move through the world as a Black woman or a transwoman, but I can understand fear and anger and hope. And that can act as a common language to understand, support, and fight for one another.

Practical Issues

There are certainly practical issues that come with this project – namely, will individuals actually take on this work? This recategorizing process not only requires a reframing of emotions as information, it also requires an unlearning of the reason/emotion divide, a substantial (though not, I think, unreasonable) level of self-awareness, and a commitment to the effort and time required for this kind of introspection.

I am under no illusions that this is something everyone will take on – I fully understand that there are people who will simply never do this work. These may be the folks who are dominantly-situated and see no need for it, or those with the reason/emotion dichotomy thoroughly internalized. Not everyone will do this work, but it also doesn't require everyone to do it in order to have a positive impact: this is a low-obstacle and accessible resource for these projects of resistance, not the *only* one. When combined with other methods of resistance, it becomes a resource for change just as much as it becomes a resource for reason. With that in mind, there are two main potential issues I would like to address here; issues of accessibility, and issues of actual impact potential.

Issues of Accessibility

Perhaps the most significant aspect of revaluing emotions as information is that it can be done by anyone, in any situation, at any time: this work, at its core, is about reframing the relationship with your own emotional experiences. However, while there are no physical barriers to this work – it doesn't require access to higher education, medical professionals, or specific tools or programs – structural barriers do still exist.

The primary resource that this work requires is time – which not everyone, and most certainly those most likely to be impacted by social inequalities, has access to. If someone is worried about feeding their kids, paying rent, or just making it home alive, how much time and energy will they realistically have to dedicate to the evaluation and appreciation of their emotional experiences? Can we still label this an accessible resource for change if it requires additional epistemic labour from marginalized individuals and groups?

While certainly not perfectly accessible, as far as resources go, acknowledging our own emotional experiences is certainly more accessible than many others. It also does not follow that a resource not being entirely accessible means it is less valuable as a resource. Bailey's knowing resistant anger and Jaggar's outlaw emotions are only going to be successfully leveraged as a resource if the individual can recognize the differences in her emotional experiences and somehow have them validated at the community level. The recategorizing of emotions that I am arguing for – as a source of information – acts similarly, but is even more accessible than the work by Bailey and Jaggar. While the community-level work is important for it to have the greatest impact, anyone, regardless of social or political position, can start to reframe their emotional experiences as a source of information – rather than as a nuisance to ignore or dismiss.

When an emotion is recognized as socio-epistemically significant, the individual feeling it may need the support of a like-minded or like-experienced community in order to act on that information on a larger scale, or even recognize it as the specific kind of information that it is. But it is not actually necessary – understanding that your emotions are telling you something of socio-epistemic significance can still make a powerful impact on the individual level, from practicing self-care to providing insight into relationship dynamics.

Issues of Actual Structural Impact

The individual impact of socio-epistemically significant emotions should not be discounted, but for this to be a genuine resource for collective change, it has to have the potential for actual impact on social and political structural inequalities. And so the epistemic elephant in the room must be addressed – why should the dominantly situated care about the information we can access by revaluing our emotions? In short, they will not. But that’s already the case now.

While ideally this recategorizing and acknowledging emotions as information provides a legitimate avenue for “allies” to understand their own internalized biases, prejudices, and privileges in a way that does not require additional labour or resources from members of marginalized groups, there will certainly be dominantly situated folks that have no (genuine) interest in being an ally, or even recognizing that inequalities exist. And they are highly unlikely to take on this work, stop unknowingly (or otherwise) participating in emotional epistemic violence practices like misogynistic emotion reframing or emotional epistemic exploitation, or even acknowledge that there is work to be done at all.

I am not convinced it matters: doing this work on an individual and community level means that we are choosing to recategorize emotions and act on the information they provide,

regardless of what the dominantly situated value or recognize. This is a source of information the dominantly situated actively seek to dismiss – which gives it all the more power if it can be recognized and leveraged as a tool for political change. It can be how structural injustices and practices like misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation are recognized, understood, and fought against. By leveraging emotions as a common language of solidarity and resistance, it does not actually matter what the dominantly situated choose to acknowledge or not; in fact, the more effort a dominantly situated individual or group puts into dismissing a particular instance or pattern of emotions, the more closely we should be paying attention to that emotional experience and the information it provides. The dominantly situated are in many ways showing their hand when they so desperately denounce the emotions of the marginalized: what, exactly, are they so afraid of? The power of emotions come from the same place as their oppression – emotions have the potential to give us important insight into our own experiences and patterns of inequality and injustice, and by recognizing them as such they become immune to the closed-loop credibility accordance controlled by the dominantly situated. And this is exactly why those in positions of power who want to stay in positions of power try to use our emotions against us. This is the potential of recategorizing emotions – reclaiming the insight, agency, and power they can provide.

Feminist philosophy has long recognized the value of emotions in knowledge construction. Anger, especially, is often identified as a significant source of epistemic consciousness-raising. What I have argued for here is the expansion of this acknowledgment to *all* emotions, a way of specifically identifying emotions that are socio-epistemically significant, and a starting point for the more practical recategorizing work. This work has to start in

philosophy classrooms too: we need to ensure that formally reflecting and investigating all sources of information is taken just as seriously as argument, debate, and logic. Those marginally situated are the most likely to have first-hand knowledge of the structural inequalities so often discussed in philosophical spaces, and with that first-hand knowledge comes an increased likelihood of emotional expression alongside their reason-based arguments. Instead of seeing these emotions as a justification to dismiss their perspective, we need to see them as justification for even more credibility and truth-tracking.

In 1985 Lorde wrote “the white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.”¹⁵³ Black feminists have been calling for a recategorization and empowering of emotions for decades – what I have contributed here is a potential path towards this recategorization and empowerment, one that could operate as a powerful resource for change. Our emotional experiences provide a unique opportunity for a common language of solidarity and resistance – one that false dichotomies and political agendas have devalued for far too long. If we can recategorize our emotions as a source of information, as a resource for reason instead of its opposite, we can begin to recognize socio-epistemically significant emotions as a genuine and highly accessible resource for real social and political change.

¹⁵³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press, 1984: 38.

Conclusion

This project argues for the recategorizing of emotions as a unique and significant source of information. Our emotions are insights into our experiences as social and political human beings – and excluding our emotional experiences from social and political spaces only serves to exclude our humanity from them as well. Misogynistic emotion reframing highlights the subtly pervasive but highly impactful ways misogyny restricts our ability to act on the world – and that even those who are working within epistemic injustice can underestimate the impact of misogyny, and its potential for epistemic violence. Emotional epistemic exploitation indicates just how far these harms can go – not only as an impossible choice between epistemic silencing and epistemic smothering, but also as an obstacle to realizing full epistemic agency. That misogynistic emotion reframing and emotional epistemic exploitation so consistently contribute to epistemic violence and oppression demonstrates that our emotions do have value and are epistemically significant. This recognition necessitates the recategorizing of emotions as a unique form of information, to recognize that this is something we are already doing, and how it reflects the same social hierarchy rules as epistemic injustice more broadly.

Identifying socio-epistemically significant emotions establishes that there is a way forward with this recategorization – and while not without its own practical issues, it is still possible to realize these intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, political strides towards equality. We need to ensure that the testimony of folks with first-hand knowledge and experience of epistemic violence and oppression is given its due credibility – and that their emotional responses to these same experiences are seen as further resources for information, not reasons for dismissal. By defining, analyzing, and working to dismantle this emotion-specific form of epistemic injustice,

we can begin to value and leverage emotions as a powerful resource for real social and political change.

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