

THE EPISTEMIC HARM OF NORMATIVE MASCULINITY

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Philosophy

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

By

Phillip Z. Hintikka Kieval

May 2019

THE EPISTEMIC HARM OF NORMATIVE MASCULINITY

Phillip Z. Hintikka Kieval

APPROVED:

Luis Oliveira, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Daniel Engster, Ph.D.

Tamler Sommers, Ph.D.

Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Department of Philosophy

THE EPISTEMIC HARM OF NORMATIVE MASCULINITY

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Philosophy

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

By

Phillip Hintikka Kieval

May 2019

I identify a peculiar case of hermeneutical injustice thus far absent from the literature on epistemic injustice: when masculine norms prevent some men from understanding and talking about the finer minutia of their emotional experience. I argue that patriarchal norms which deem certain kinds of emotional expressions as deviant create a hermeneutical gap in our shared epistemic resources to the detriment of some men's emotional capabilities. In addition to this epistemic harm, I develop from the ethics of care further harms to these men's non-fungible relations of care. Analyzing these subsequent harms reveals a blind spot in Fricker's model of hermeneutical injustice. Often men whose emotional capacities are hermeneutically blocked trade in anger and misogyny, therefore Fricker's notion of the interpersonal virtuous hearer must be replaced in such cases. When a dominantly situated knower is hermeneutically impaired, the primary and secondary harms of epistemic injustice are pulled apart and the approach to ameliorating hermeneutical injustice must be revised to protect the livelihood of those situated marginally.

Introduction

Recent work in feminist epistemology has brought attention to the relation of knowers to the shared epistemic resources needed to make sense of the world. People who are socially marginalized tend to have weaker standing when it comes to participating in the generation of these shared epistemic resources, which will in turn be less suited to marginally situated knowers. This process gives rise to an epistemic harm. Take *hermeneutical injustice* as a harm that occurs when a subject has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding as the result of structural prejudice in the economy of collective interpretive resources.¹ I aim to flesh out a distinct kind of hermeneutical injustice absent from Fricker's account, that is when the mechanisms of patriarchy obscure crucial epistemic resources to the detriment of both marginalized and socially dominant knowers. I will show that such cases pull apart the social and epistemic harms of hermeneutical injustice such that Fricker's approach to hermeneutical justice must be revised.

Take *normative masculinity* as the set of socially constructed ideologies regarding the character of manhood, which promote patriarchy, or the systematic dominance of men over women.² In this paper, I identify normative masculinity and the resultant patriarchal attitudes as the cause of a so far neglected kind of hermeneutical injustice. Finally, take the

¹ For variations on this definition, see Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154-160.

² This characterization draws inspiration from delineations of "hegemonic masculinity" in Connell and Messerschmidt (2005).

virtuous hearer as a person with a reflexive awareness of the objective hermeneutical limitations that restrict a victim's ability to interpret and articulate their particular social experience, and who proportionally adjusts the credibility judgments they make of said victim.³ Subsequently, I argue that cases of hermeneutical injustice caused by normative masculinity require a reconceptualized definition of the virtuous hearer in order to suitably address the harm incurred. I suggest an expanded account of the positive content of hermeneutical justice based on a need stemming from these new insights on masculinity.

This essay is structured as follows. In section 1, I briefly explain the framework of epistemic injustice with specific attention to possible extensions to toxic, or normative, masculinity. In section 2, I lay out the case for normative masculinity as a cause of hermeneutical injustice and consider some salient examples. In section 3, I develop the harms of these novel cases of hermeneutical injustice and raise some reasons for thinking that Fricker's framework requires revision in these instances in order to protect socially marginalized knowers, particularly women and people of color. In section 4, I conclude by rejecting Fricker's notion of the virtuous hearer with respect to instances of hermeneutical injustice incurred by toxic masculinity. I then sketch out various suggestions for correcting the harms discussed throughout the paper.

³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 169-172.

1. Epistemic and Social Harms

Many feminist scholars have raised important concerns regarding the ethical dimensions of knowledge. In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing* (2007), Miranda Fricker considers the implications of structural prejudice on epistemic conduct. She diagnoses a notion of harm she aptly terms *epistemic injustice* – that is, an injustice aimed at one's capacity as a knower. One's capacity to be a subject of knowledge, who is capable of both receiving and imparting knowledge, is essential for one's capability to achieve well-being. When a person is wronged in their capacity to give and receive knowledge, they are undermined in their essential capacity for reason. Knowledge and reason are not only traits essential to human value, but they also structure hierarchies of power in relationships. Thus, epistemic injustice can cause an intrinsic harm to a subject's sense of self-worth as a person.

Fricker argues that notions of identity and social power are essentially related to the manifestation of epistemic injustice. Social power is the degree to which we have the agency to influence our social world. Intuitively, the situatedness of knowers coupled with the existence of social stereotypes and structural prejudice means that identity has real implications on one's ability to exercise their agency in the social world. Rooted firmly in this idea of social power as the capacity to exert influence on the social world, Fricker outlines the ways in which our collective social imaginations regarding identity often lead our epistemic conduct astray. The result is an intrinsic harm, both to individuals as

knowers, and to our shared pool of epistemic resources, that can result in psychological and material damage, particularly for the already disenfranchised.

I want here to examine a particular type of epistemic injustice, which Fricker refers to as *hermeneutical injustice*. Specifically, I argue that the ways in which masculinity is codified in our collective social imagination result in a particular and surprising kind of hermeneutical injustice. Furthermore, I suggest that problematic ideals of western masculinity⁴ pose a special case within the broader schema of hermeneutical injustice in which the social and epistemic harms come apart. My account of masculinity as a cause of hermeneutical injustice, we will see, requires an expansion of Fricker's concept of hermeneutical justice as well.

Social constructionism is a widely supported theory in contemporary sociology of gender and critical theory that challenges notions of what is purportedly natural.⁵ Briefly, I conceptualize *normative masculinity* as the set of popular ideologies that characterize what it means for a man to be a man. These are a spectrum of culturally embedded normative beliefs regarding what manhood ought to look like.⁶ This is not to say one should reduce gender or masculinity to a universal, structurally determined monolith. Rather, we should

⁴ Masculinity as a whole is not monolithic and performances of masculine norms differ across, and even within, cultures. Not all cultures subscribe to the heteronormative, warrior-like masculine ideal that I lean on here. As such, the main contributions herein apply to the largely patriarchal, war-reliant liberal societies where these heteronormative, warrior-like masculine norms are most prominently found.

⁵ The foundations of my account draw upon the groundwork laid by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and the significant contributions to understandings of social construction within the realm of analytic philosophy advanced by Sally Haslanger in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (2012).

⁶ For a more comprehensive account of social constructions of masculinity in popular media and national imagery see the work done by Michael Kimmel (2010) and Bonnie Mann (2014).

examine how men's complex, situationally dependent, and often ambivalent relationship as subjects to idealized notions of manhood inform their discursive conduct.

By using the taxonomy of “normative” masculinity, rather than “hegemonic” or “toxic” masculinity as popularized in the sociology of gender, my intent is to capture the broad normative character of masculinity and the effect of patriarchy on value claims about the “right way” to perform manhood.⁷ Of course, it should be understood that there is no such “right way” to perform one's gender identity. Yet, constructs of masculinity in western culture are often preoccupied with being more of a man in virtue of being less of a woman. It would be incorrect to assert that a majority of men exhibit the regressive behavior or attitudes endemic to “hegemonic” or “toxic” masculinity. However, I take it as fairly plausible that the social constructions of masculinity more broadly carry a pervasive normative influence on men's socialization. In this paper, I look to militarism and the gendered nature of military training as a salient kind of “hypermasculine” socialization in order to better understand how normative masculinity is reinforced. I aim to explore the social and epistemic harms resulting from such problematic constructions of masculinity within the framework of epistemic injustice.

Specifically, I argue that deeply entrenched, patriarchal norms that govern masculinity create a lacuna in place of a more complete range of emotional capacities. As a result, men are prevented from living a fully enriched inner life and are unable to make sense of their own social experience in a way that is damaging, both for themselves and their loved ones.

⁷ A more detailed treatment of the jargon of masculinity appears in Timothy Laurie (2015).

Because men are socialized to position themselves in relation to idealized conceptions of masculinity – pictures of men rendered as unflinchingly stoic, confident, aggressive, independent, and totally self-reliant – they are ill-equipped with the interpretive language to make sense of the greater complexities of their lived experience, particularly with respect to dependency relations and self-care. This is the surprising way in which normative masculinity is a cause of hermeneutical injustice: it prevents men from making sense of themselves.

Building upon the framework of the relational self, developed in the ethics of care, we will see that the resulting injustice is an intrinsic harm that manifests itself in two interrelated ways: in the damage done to one's capacity as a knower and in the damage done to men's interpersonal relationships that are essential to their very identity and sense of self. We will also see, perhaps surprisingly, that Fricker's model of the independent virtuous hearer fails to adequately address this particular kind of harm.

According to Fricker, the process of ameliorating the harm of hermeneutical injustice falls upon persons with the proper corrective virtue of hermeneutical justice. She defines such a person as a virtuous hearer. The task of the virtuous hearer consists of a reflexive awareness of the objective hermeneutical limitations that restrict the victim's ability to interpret and articulate their particular social experience, and proportionally adjusting their credibility judgments of said victim. Essentially, the virtuous hearer must work to create a more inclusive hermeneutical climate that accommodates the epistemically marginalized victim.

I will argue that Fricker's account of the virtue of hermeneutical justice relies too much on the paradigm of a victim who is *both* socially and epistemically marginalized. I aim to demonstrate how these social and epistemic harms come apart in certain cases. I will show that normative masculinity produces victims who are socially empowered and yet still hermeneutically marginalized. However, since men traditionally capitalize from the norms of patriarchy, and since these social norms operate to the detriment primarily of women and people of color, I suggest exploring some new avenues regarding hermeneutical justice. I consider these particular cases of normative masculinity and argue that Fricker's model of the virtuous hearer is ill-suited and potentially endangers the hearer's own well-being. In cases of normative masculinity, the role of virtuous hearer becomes unfairly gendered in a manner that is overly burdensome to women and perpetuates men's emotional codependence. Therefore, I suggest that ameliorating the harm of hermeneutical injustice in such cases must begin with broadly expanding our understanding of empathy in order to encourage men to openly engage with their own emotions. Men must be their own 'virtuous listeners'. In the case of normative masculinity, the relationship between virtuous listener and victim must be reflexive.

2. Manhood, Trauma, and Hermeneutical Injustice

Miranda Fricker (2007) defines two central types of epistemic injustice and their corresponding corrective virtues. These are *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. Here, I am concerned with instances of the latter shaped by normative masculinity and the implications these have on Fricker's framework. Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice attempts to capture a notion of harm resultant from persistent *hermeneutical marginalization* owing to a hole in the shared pool of hermeneutical resources. Hermeneutical marginalization means the exclusion of disadvantaged groups from equal hermeneutical participation with respect to a significant area of their social experience.⁸

Social learning equips us with the knowledge and tools that we use to interpret and navigate our individual social experiences. If we conceive of these shared understandings as reflections of the socially situated perspectives of various social groups, then it becomes easy to see how asymmetrical power relations and structural prejudice might produce hermeneutical marginalization, which unfairly skews the collective hermeneutical resources in favor of those who are in a better position to generate social meaning. In other words, hermeneutical injustice occurs when one has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding as the result of structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources.⁹

⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 153.

⁹ Ibid., 154-160.

I want here to examine some serious examples that might also be instructive for less extreme cases. Soldiers and the hypermasculine space of the military present a particularly salient example that is instructive of the ways normative masculinity perpetuates hermeneutical injustice in society writ large. The characterizations of manhood coded into military spaces draw upon the same tropes that hold weight in our prevailing social imaginations. I argue that military training codified by gender is a condensed process of social learning that reflects the normative character of masculinity diffused throughout men's broader socialization.

The lives of soldiers and the transitional space between military and civilian life is a space thickly laden with normative masculinity. The icon of the soldier holds weight as a symbol of normative masculinity that is characterized by manly aggression and stoic self-sacrifice. West Point psychology professor Lt. Col. Dave Grossman writes that war is "the business of killing". While we are at times loathe to admit it, the specific purpose of military combat training is to teach our young men and women how to kill.¹⁰ This necessarily entails a purposeful repression of empathy and of the natural mechanisms that make us resistant to violence against our fellow human beings. The methods of conditioning and unlearning of empathy used in the process of teaching soldiers to kill are steeped in the language of normative masculinity. In *On Killing*, Grossman makes this painfully clear. He argues that, in addition to making use of classical and operant conditioning methods, the most powerful tool for training soldiers is social learning. This primarily involves the observation and imitation of role models. Social learning is particularly strong because it *indirectly*

¹⁰ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995) 252-253.

reinforces behaviors and attitudes without punishment or reward. This means social learning might occur anytime and anywhere, from the home to the battlefield.

Grossman emphasizes the singular importance of the drill sergeant as the quintessential role model for young soldiers. He argues that the drill sergeant represents the icon of hypermasculinity that trainees aspire to become. As a masculine symbol, the drill sergeant embodies the values of strength, aggression, and obedience. “The lesson [he] teaches is that physical aggression is the essence of manhood and that violence is an effective and desirable solution to the problems the soldier will face on the battlefield,” Grossman writes.¹¹ Furthermore, Grossman readily acknowledges the parallel between the condensed social learning of military training and the more dispersed conditioning writ large in society through culture, media, and socialization. Militarism has weaponized our belief in the essentialism of masculine aggression. In a sense, military training becomes a concentrated site of hypermasculinity that mirrors the process of social learning that codifies what it means to be a *real* man for soldiers and, more broadly, for powerful visions of western masculinities.

On this point, I must agree with Tom Digby’s general assessment of the ways in which militaristic culture more broadly structures the symbolic economy of gender.¹² Modern feminism reshapes our conception of womanhood as women become more socially empowered. While our cultural imagination regarding femininity has grown in response to

¹¹ Grossman, *On Killing*, 322-323.

¹² Tom Digby, *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Sexuality and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

our changing society, we are unable to say the same of masculinity, which has remained largely staunch and inflexible. Digby argues that war-reliant societies consistently exhibit a troubling pattern of patriarchal domination that glorifies displays of force and aggression. I think he judges correctly that this is how we come to conceive of masculinity and manhood. Hegemonic, militaristic ideologies shape our notions of manhood into something that is adversarial and self-isolating.

In war-reliant societies, men are culturally programmed to perform the masculine, warrior ideal, characterized by the presumption that men are naturally violent and emotionally hardened. Internalizing this code of masculine conduct prevents men from accessing the full range of their emotional capacities, which are essential to their ability to make sense of their social experience and nurture crucial interpersonal relationships. This is a clear instance of hermeneutical injustice that can be mapped onto Fricker's definition. Structural prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource that conceives of men as essentially tough and aggressive, prevents individual men from interpreting a given range of social experience. In the case of men, this means an inability to make sense of emotional trauma and properly navigate relations of care and interdependency. This renders men unable to satisfyingly articulate their emotional needs. Without the language to relate their feelings, men fumble through complex issues like coping with residual trauma, mental illness, and care work like exiled warriors on foreign soil.

Our ability to form abstractions from our individual experiences as they relate to common social phenomena is an intrinsically valuable cognitive exercise that seems to be lost on

men when it comes to matters of emotion. We have seen already how the ability to relate one's individual experience to something common can be a valuable source of validation and epistemic confidence. This kind of communal bonding functions to show that one's experiences are not uniquely unintelligible, but something shared among equals. Hermeneutical injustice disrupts this process. A missing link in our collective social imagination prevents individuals from understanding and relating their experience.

Consider the troubling case of Sgt. Jon Trevino, whose marriage became destabilized after serving multiple tours of active duty. Trevino was a U.S. Air Force medic who had a history of psychological problems including post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite his struggle with mental health issues, Trevino continued to serve repeated deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. His relationship with his wife and his own mental health continued to suffer as a result until his instability led to tragedy. On February 20, 2006, shortly after Sgt. Trevino's estranged wife Carol had served him with divorce papers, he barged into their Edwardsville home just before dawn. In front of their nine-year-old son, Trevino shot and killed his wife before turning the gun on himself.¹³ Sgt. Jon Trevino's case is a particularly illustrative and sad example of the potential consequences of warrior masculinity. Unable to come to grips with his emotional distress, Trevino continued to serve in active duty despite his mental instability. He was unable to articulate his troubled emotional state to those closest to him, resulting in the collapse the relationships with those he cared about most.

¹³ Lizette Alvarez and Deborah Sontag (2008).

Trevino is not an aberration in this.¹⁴ In 2012, the number of deaths by suicide in the U.S. military exceeded the number of soldiers who died in combat.¹⁵ Furthermore, this manly, warrior ideal more broadly underscores the tone regarding the prevailing norms of western masculinity. Expectations of masculine toughness and liberal self-sufficiency pathologize the kind of empathy and emotional vulnerability necessary to heal through trauma and nurture care relations. Driven by the fear of being perceived as weak or unmanly, men like Trevino lock themselves away in their own personal fortress of solitude. This marks a case of hermeneutical injustice whereby men are unable to reconcile their emotional distress with their masculine identity and thus are unable to understand or take steps to articulate their unfulfilled emotional needs. Rather than cope with loss and emotional vulnerability Trevino, like so many others, turned to the only solution he could understand: violence.

This troubling outcome flags the need to rethink the positive content of hermeneutical justice and expand on Fricker's framework in a way that takes stock of the potential dangers of some men's emotional shortcomings. This will require men to reframe their understanding of empathy. In a 2014 New York Times opinion piece, war writer Phil Klay recounts an epiphanic moment he had while listening to a friend relate her story of

¹⁴ While surely not all veteran suicides are direct products of warrior masculinity, it is clear that problematic masculine norms are not helping our men to adequately cope with mental illness. Indeed, such norms tend to exacerbate the existent problem of veteran trauma, PTSD, and other mental illness. See the suicide letter of Daniel Somers (2013). Therein, he refers to the American military as a "regime built upon the idea that suffering is noble, and relief is just for the weak." He describes his own suicide as a "mercy killing," ending both his own suffering as well as what he views as the burden he places on others who will be better off once he is dead. He expresses a "fear that, just as with everything else that requires the involvement of people who cannot understand by virtue of never having been there, it is going to fall apart as careers get in the way." Somers displays a familiar conception of empathy as a limited commodity and this leads him to conclude that he must take his own life.

¹⁵ Bill Chappell, "U.S. Military's Suicide Rate Surpassed Combat Deaths In 2012," NPR, January 14, 2013.

childhood abuse.¹⁶ He appreciates her readiness to be heard and understood despite the disparity of their lived experience. Even though Klay never experienced the kind of abuse she had suffered as a child, she openly invites him into her sphere of empathy with the hope that he can come to better understand her as a person. Klay poses her receptiveness in contrast to the soldierly mentality that the atrocity of war fundamentally cannot be understood or communicated. He realizes that veterans like himself want to feel understood, but they more often falsely believe that relating their experience to others is impossible because other people could not possibly understand what they have been through. Klay reflects that “It’s a powerful moment when you discover a vocabulary exists for something you’d thought incommunicably unique.” He writes about the latent trauma of war and his process of making sense of that experience. Klay suggests that, if our soldiers are to achieve a “commonality of consciousness,” we must put an end to cultural practices that exclude civilians from discussions of war and its traumas. He describes the way that the cultural deification of our soldiers and the fetishization of the atrocities of war can trap its survivors inside their own anxiety riddled minds. Survivors often find that their trauma has been rendered incommunicable. Klay argues that veterans must receive support from an audience that can listen openly, but not credulously, to their testimony regarding their experiences with war. Furthermore, these men must feel that they can be understood in spite of a disparity of lived experience. We must tear down the invisible walls that silence our soldiers and let civilians abdicate their role in the healing process.

¹⁶ Phil Klay, "After War, a Failure of the Imagination," *The New York Times*, February 08, 2014, accessed July 26, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/opinion/sunday/after-war-a-failure-of-the-imagination.html?_r=0.

This same principle may be extended more broadly to men and masculinity as a whole. Without some sensitivity to the ways in which objective hermeneutical limitations resultant from normative masculinity render men emotionally inarticulate, we will continue to enable corrosive behavior that erodes fundamental interpersonal relationships and stymies the process of emotional healing and growth. The mechanism for correcting this problem begins with men reflexively recognizing the hermeneutical limits on their individual experience, restoring self-confidence in the veracity of their emotional needs, and allowing themselves to be heard so that they may come to be better understood. In essence, this entails men becoming their own virtuous hearer, a suggestion I will develop further below. Phil Klay's experience illustrates the need for men to reframe empathy as a capacity to relate across a multiplicity of lived experience in order to facilitate a sense of mutual understanding.

On Fricker's account, the central harm of hermeneutical injustice is an epistemic one. That is to say that hermeneutical injustice is harmful because it excludes the subject from the social pooling of knowledge. Like other forms of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice prejudicially excludes certain individuals from participating in the spread of knowledge, which is an essential capacity for achieving well-being. This is no different in the case of men who are wronged by their exclusion from knowing and relating to their own emotional experience. However, this also incurs a particular secondary *social* harm. Because men cannot properly interpret or relate their emotional needs, their interpersonal relationships suffer as a consequence. Building on the framework developed in care ethics, we will see that this secondary harm is also an injustice in and of itself.

3. Care Ethics and the Harm of Normative Masculinity

Traditional models of moral and political philosophy have fixated on the so-called “rational man.”¹⁷ That is to say that they have concerned themselves with first principles that assume interactions between independent, autonomous agents. The Western philosophical tradition has historically prejudiced emotion as a cognitive barrier to reason, further associating the public and intellectual spheres with the masculine and the private, natural, and irrationally emotional with the feminine. Allison Jaggar interrogates this notion that emotion acts as an obstacle to reason and argues that, to the contrary, our emotional capacities have useful cognitive content. She remarks that women appear more emotional because they are permitted if not required express emotion in a particular way that men are not. Conversely, men who freely express emotion in this way appear to be deviant from the masculine norm. In particularly extreme cases, men repress and fail to develop their emotional capacities such that they are unable to identify and appropriately express their own emotions.¹⁸ This underscores the kind of hermeneutical injustice men experience as a result of normative masculinity and the social repercussions for both men and women. While certainly harmful to men, the false dichotomy of reason and emotion functions to sustain epistemic and social dominance. As such, we must special take care in how we approach hermeneutical justice in the case of men.

¹⁷ The vast literature on personal and moral autonomy, particularly from the Kantian approach to moral action, attempts to pin down sufficient conditions such as reflective reason and libertarian freedom from coercive forces. Surely, in liberal societies, the personal freedom to determine one’s own goals and the path to flourishing ought to be considered a right. The problematic I have in mind here arises when public discourse in liberal societies begins to confuse self-sufficiency with a necessary condition of autonomy and the further rights entailed by citizenship. For more on this distinction see Iris Marion Young (2002).

¹⁸ Alison M. Jaggar (1989) “Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology,” *Inquiry*, 32:2, 151-176.

The emotions that are generally deemed permissible, like anger, serve the purpose of reinforcing patriarchal authority and hegemony. Just as Simone de Beauvoir notes that men compel women to the status of the dependent Other,¹⁹ so too does contemporary masculinity conflate the autonomous subject with complete self-sufficiency. Normative masculinity now characterizes self-sufficiency and independence as necessary conditions on manhood and dependency as pathological. This contradicts the reality that human beings are inextricably linked in a web of care relations. Care ethics proposes a model of moral inquiry that considers the essential labor of care and the ethical dimension of interactions between caregivers and dependents.²⁰ It is incontrovertible that most of us spend much of our lives in relations of care, either as dependents, caregivers, or in other relations that bear responsibilities for dependents. So long as we confuse autonomy with self-sufficiency we will continue to obscure these inevitable dependencies and perpetuate the unequal distribution of care labor. In a liberal society, care ethics reveal that care labor and dependency are necessary for the healthy development of autonomous individuals. Through ethics of care arises the notion of a fundamental right to care of which the failure to meet marks an injustice.

Dependency is largely understood as the reliance of an individual on another to meet their fundamental needs. However, there is an additional sense that both our dependencies and our shared nature as interdependent creatures are essential to self-understanding. Kelly

¹⁹ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2010).

²⁰See Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder (2002) for various essays on care ethics and their moral implications.

Oliver suggests that the very conditions of subjectivity itself depend on having dialogues with others.²¹ We learn to talk with ourselves – to exercise our subjectivity – by talking with others. We arrive at a sense of what is meaningful through our relationships with others. For many, the activity of care work and the fruits of that labor of love are central to instilling life with meaning. Caregiving is the emotional labor that props up the foundation of our interpersonal relationships. Thus, care labor is not only necessary for our survival, but it is also a vital component of the well-being of the individual and flourishing of the community. Certainly, caring constitutes an important part of our identity. With this in mind, it is easy to see the harm in play when relations of care are disrupted.

I have argued that men are culturally programmed to reject empathy in pursuit of the self-sufficient, warrior-like masculine ideal. Normative masculinity characterizes the outward expression of emotion and care work as a signal of weakness, femininity, and pathological unmanliness. This incurs an instance of hermeneutical injustice that prevents men from properly interpreting and relating their emotional needs. This emotional deficiency fundamentally disrupts men's ability to navigate crucial relations of care that are important to their very sense of self. What we are now in a position to see, however, is that men here not only experience epistemic injustice but also harm to their well-being viz-a-viz damage to their essential interpersonal relationships. In some extreme cases like our earlier example of Sgt. Jon Trevino men can become so emotionally impoverished that violence and suicide become the only viable solutions to their emotional distress.

²¹ Kelly Oliver, "Subjectivity and Responsivity: The Ethical Implications of Dependency," in *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

While Sgt. Trevino's case is extreme, he and others like him are symptomatic of a larger pattern of behavior wherein men are resistant to empathy and emotional labor. The gendered division of care work is more broadly illustrative of this troubling pattern. Far too often men reduce their role as caregiver to that of a fiduciary duty at best. This trend continues even as women, who have traditionally assumed the bulk of care work, continue to take on more responsibilities outside the home. The distribution of care work has largely failed to match the shifting gender composition of employment. This makes women further susceptible to exploitation. The need to address hermeneutical injustice stemming from normative masculinity goes beyond the interests of men alone. Because men are inevitably nested within a web of care, their inability to interpret and extend branches of empathy harms both themselves and those who depend on them for care. Given the nature of these interdependencies, there arises a need to reconceptualize the positive content of hermeneutical justice that takes into account men's resistance to empathy. When men reject compassion for solitude or violence, those who care for them are tested both mentally and physically. It becomes clear that Fricker's concept of the virtuous hearer is insufficient for hermeneutical justice in cases where men are unable to process and make sense of the full range of their emotional capacities.

4. Expanding the Virtue of Hermeneutical Justice

The previous sections have laid out reasons to take normative masculinity as a special case of hermeneutical injustice in virtue of men's dominant social position. The symptoms which arise from the masculine repression of emotion includes a further intrinsic harm to care relations that are crucial to a subject's self-worth. Moreover, the resultant tendencies towards anger, aggression and patriarchal hegemony give us reason for pause in our approach to hermeneutical justice. I argue that the role of virtuous hearer must be revised in this context.

How can we move from a mere recognition of these kinds hermeneutical injustice to taking actual steps to alleviate its harms? Phil Klay instinctively has a finger on the pulse of this very issue. Klay's admonition sounds remarkably similar to Miranda Fricker's concept of the virtue of hermeneutical justice. As she formulates her concept of hermeneutical justice, Fricker develops the notion of the *virtuous hearer*. Since any instance of hermeneutical injustice limits the epistemic resources by which an individual can make sense of their experience, it necessarily reduces the intelligibility of the speaker. Because a missing link in the collective pool of hermeneutical resources legitimately handicaps the speaker, they cannot articulate a region of their social experience in any satisfiable way. The fundamental point of the virtue of hermeneutical justice is the realization that the speaker's inability to communicate regarding some aspect of their experience is not a failing on the part of the subject, but a result of an objective handicap on their ability to articulate said aspect of their experience. As such, Fricker characterizes the virtuous hearer as one who is sensitive

to the how the identity of the speaker impacts their level of intelligibility and appropriately adjusts their credibility judgment as a result. The virtue of hermeneutical justice attempts to correct for deficits in credibility judgments resulting from structural prejudice in the shared climate of interpretive resources. The basic idea here is to provide individuals afflicted by hermeneutical injustice with an audience that is sensitive to their struggle to articulate an aspect of their social experience that has been obscured from interpretation. This requires the virtuous hearer to have a degree of reflective awareness of the reality of structural prejudice and how that unequally hampers to interpretive capabilities of the speaker.

The virtuous hearer has a responsibility to understand how their respective social identities inform their discursive relation with the speaker and subsequently frames the credibility judgments they make. So, the work of hermeneutical justice is to appreciate how an impaired speaker's testimony would make good sense given a more inclusive hermeneutical climate free of identity prejudice. The strength of this conception of hermeneutical justice lies in its ability to over time create and spread a more inclusive discursive environment. Combining hermeneutical justice with collective political action can effectively create a social climate where once marginalized victims of hermeneutical injustice are readily heard and understood to have valid concerns. In effect, this virtue facilitates the generation of a more inclusive pool of shared epistemic resources. We have seen a modern example of this in action in the heightened awareness of the severity of sexual harassment and the growing #metoo movement exposing the exploitation of coercive power relations in the workplace.

However, I do have specific concerns with mapping Fricker's account to issues with normative masculinity. In the case of men, I worry that Fricker's account puts too heavy a burden on the virtuous hearer and perpetuates men's empathetic deficiency. On Fricker's account, the virtuous hearer's reflexive awareness saddles them with the responsibility of generating a more inclusive hermeneutical dialogue with the speaker. However, this can quickly become a gendered issue. In the case of masculinity, the role of virtuous hearer more often falls on women, who must satisfy the emotional needs of the men for whom they care. This job entails a sort of proactive listening. The virtuous hearer must be aware of the limitations on the speaker and facilitate the interpretive moves that are crucially absent from the speaker's testimony. They must have an awareness not only of the reasons for the reduced intelligibility of the speaker but also of the unspoken needs that are omitted or rendered incommunicable. While this notion of hermeneutical justice seems appropriate for instances that Fricker has in mind, it is weak as a panacea to the broader sense of hermeneutical injustice we have outlined. One suggestion that I offer with respect to the reality of normative masculinity is such that men must become their own virtuous hearer. In the case of masculinity, the relation between speaker and virtuous hearer must be one of reflexive *self*-awareness.

What I envision here is a kind of mindfulness training. This entails a kind of self-reflexive cognitive exercise wherein men divorce themselves from particularly strong emotions as they well up, examine them within their social context, and evaluate them as more or less appropriate. It is abundantly clear, however, that this is a kind of skill that must be taught

to willing participants. Resources for this kind of mindfulness approach already, but they will do men no good if they lack access or have no meaningful knowledge of the problem in question. Ultimately, this means the virtue of hermeneutical justice must become the burden of social institutions.

The task of the virtuous hearer is essentially an exercise in empathy. However, this exercise can become precarious when dealing with men who are programmed to be resistant to empathy. How can the virtuous hearer navigate such a treacherous emotional landscape where their interlocutor may pose a very real threat of violence to themselves or those around them? The partners and family who make up men's emotional support already take on an enormous burden. One ought to not challenge them further with taking up the role of the virtuous hearer, at least as the sole facilitator of hermeneutical inclusivity as Fricker conceives of her.²² Furthermore, by continuing to outsource empathy to their loved ones, men fail to learn how to empathize with themselves. By relying on an independent virtuous hearer, rather than ameliorating the harm of hermeneutical injustice, this model perpetuates men's inability to reflect on their own emotional and empathetic needs. I argue that, for men, the process of bridging these epistemic gaps must come in the shape of change from within. Rather than dumping their emotional needs on others, men need to recognize and give empathy to themselves so that they may begin to receive empathy in a way that fosters healthier relationships. The process of healing should be a mutual endeavor. Fricker's

²² José Medina (2013) outlines some cases in which an interlocutor may not be obligated to expand hermeneutical inclusivity. Especially socio-politically oppressed subjects may be right to suspend their hermeneutical responsibilities to promote shared epistemic agency when doing so might further jeopardize their well-being. I tend to agree and argue that hermeneutically marginalized men present such cases, but I want to say more about what ameliorative alternatives exist to an interpersonal virtuous hearer in such cases.

conception of the role of virtuous hearer remains important for activating broad structural change, but we must do better to empower men with the language and tools that will allow them to make sense of themselves for themselves.

Consider a brief analogy to feminist standpoint theory, wherein, “[k]nowledge claims are always socially situated and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effect of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantaged one for generating knowledge.”²³ The central claim of standpoint theory that “the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what a person who performs such activities can understand” delineates the clear hermeneutical limitations acting on privileged groups. As the socially dominant class, men are ill-positioned to understand and generate meaning about patterns of behavior that marginalize others. In a sense, the harm they perpetrate is unknowable to them without an outside perspective. The norms and activities governing masculinity that function to disenfranchise others simultaneously limit what men can understand about themselves. Subsequently, men’s situation within the schema of hermeneutical injustice is a special case because men are uniquely positioned as both the victims and perpetrators of an injustice which is ostensibly unknown to them. Thus, it would seem that instances of men’s experience of hermeneutical injustice do not map cleanly to Fricker’s conception of the virtue of hermeneutical justice. Even though men do

²³For greater context on the above quote and more on standpoint epistemology and the distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ objectivity, see Sandra Harding (1992). For a nuanced treatment Black feminist thought and how such an outsider perspective generates meaningful insight on dominant social paradigms, see also Patricia Hill Collins (1986). Such distinctive standpoints, which note the intersectional nature of oppression, must be heard in concert with men’s own reflexive ‘virtuous listening’ in order to address the root cause of hermeneutical injustice.

experience a form of hermeneutical injustice, we require a reformulated notion of hermeneutical justice that considers the threat of the physical and material consequences posed by men's emotional deficiencies. Men who are ill-equipped with the interpretive tools to navigate the finer minutia of their emotional experience invite harm onto their dependents and the people who constitute their emotional support structures. As such, we must reconsider the positive content of hermeneutical justice accordingly.

Yet, before we can move on to this task we ought to examine more closely how ours is subtly different from the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice. The concept of *hermeneutical marginalization* is central to understanding this discrepancy. A feature of Fricker's account locates the harm of hermeneutical injustice in light of inequality in the background social conditions such that the deficit in the collective hermeneutical resources disproportionately affects the wronged party. This is because the paradigm case occurs in a climate of hermeneutical marginalization. Here, the particular deficit in our shared pool of hermeneutical resources comes about through unequal participation in the generation of social meaning. This deficit limits the intelligibility of our victim and reduces credibility judgments of them when they attempt to communicate about a harm. This is clearly true of cases that Fricker has in mind where the victim is both socially and epistemically marginalized. Yet, this does not seem obviously true of instances regarding men who *are* in a position of adequate social power that allows them to contribute to the generation of our collective hermeneutical resources. I argue that, while men generally do not experience social marginalization, they do experience hermeneutical marginalization.

I believe that Fricker's account relies too much on this notion of social marginalization in diagnosing the harm of hermeneutical injustice. Fricker seems to lean too heavily here as an attempt to more cleanly match her definition of harm to her paradigm case of sexual harassment. She badly wants to say that, despite the fact that both parties experience the same deficient hermeneutical climate, the victim of sexual harassment experiences an epistemic injustice, while her harasser merely experiences a case of epistemic bad luck. I agree with Laura Beeby (2011), who points out in her critique of Fricker's account that such a distinction pulls us away from the intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice and towards a notion of social harm as a *consequence* of epistemic injustice in confluence with structural prejudice. Beeby argues that perhaps we ought to move away from such a reliance on background social conditions and be open to the possibility that both victim and harasser experience a hermeneutical injustice, even if the consequences are not equal. Patriarchy has a profound normative influence on the epistemic lives of all. The case for epistemic injustice becomes stronger and more nuanced when the loss of epistemic goods is central to its harm.

In Fricker's paradigm case, her victim certainly experiences hermeneutical marginalization. It is this process of hermeneutical marginalization that generates a deficiency in our shared social meanings, which serves to epistemically disadvantage all parties involved. Both harasser and victim experience an epistemic harm. The harasser simply does not face the same magnitude of secondary harm. What is crucial to understand for our case is that men in spite of their social privilege do experience a form of hermeneutical marginalization. In this case, it manifests in a form of self-silencing rather

than deflated external credibility judgments. Men who internalize a problematic code of manhood pathologize their own emotional experience. Because they lack the empathetic resources to sufficiently interpret their emotional needs, men effectively deem their own emotional experience with incredulity. This results in a deep internal conflict which is often outwardly projected as frustration or rage. This reflects negatively on their own perceived credibility and thus reinforces the cycle of epistemic harm.

Fricker's answer to ameliorating the harm of hermeneutical injustice is the virtuous hearer. Their role is predicated on a reflexive awareness of the objective hermeneutical limitations burdening the victim and proportional adjustment of their credibility judgments. But how can we expect this of our virtuous hearer when their interlocutor becomes a danger to themselves and others? Barring widespread structural change that culturally redefines what it means to be a man, the burden of alleviating the harms of normative masculinity must shift towards expanding men's capacity for empathy. I worry that Fricker demands of her virtuous hearer too much for too little, particularly in the case of men. Compounded with the already exploitative division of emotional labor, the role of virtuous hearer becomes too taxing to navigate alone. It seems we ought to ask more of our men, but this becomes a tenuous proposition when often men's only intelligible outlets for emotional expression are anger.

Therefore, I suggest we need to do more to challenge men's failure to imagine a reality where the content of their emotional situation can be adequately understood. In a sense, men must become their own 'virtuous listeners' by reflexively recognizing how their

identity as a man informs how they conceive of and engage with empathy. I suggest an epistemological model that reflects critically on our emotional responses within the broader context of the prevailing norms of our social world. By doing this, men can reevaluate their relationship with emotions. They can begin to learn to empathize with their own struggle to voice their emotional needs. This is not to say that men ought to be totally self-reliant in their own rehabilitation. Rather, it merely means they must allow themselves to accept the possibility of being genuinely understood. By instilling their own lives with self-empathy men can begin to restore epistemic self-confidence, which will help to facilitate healthy, emotionally rich dialogues with their loved ones.

In part, this involves interrogating our shared assumptions of trauma as something that is unique which prevents us from conducting the imaginative exercise of empathy and excuses a level of emotional distance from survivors. Patriarchy persists by disrupting relationships and care and requires an act of shared understanding and empathy to be dismantled. Rather than operating under the assumption of ‘I could never understand,’ we ought to ask ourselves ‘How can I begin to understand?’. Men must also learn to see that someone need not have been their ‘buddy in the trenches’ in order to understand their struggle to grapple with emotional distress. Men must begin to realize, as Phil Klay has, that empathy and shared understandings can extend across a multiplicity of lived experiences.

To truly ameliorate the harms of hermeneutical injustice, men require constructive outlets of emotional expression. Reframing emotional content as something positive and to be

desired is something that must be internalized from within. This is a task the virtuous hearer is not equipped to accomplish alone. The content of hermeneutical justice must include support structures in place to assist caregivers as well as comprehensive support for emotional rehabilitation. The breadth of harm caused by hermeneutical injustice goes beyond what single individuals can accomplish alone. We cannot overcome the injustice in question until we dismantle the racist, classist, and sexist institutions which perpetuate these problematic social norms. We require more widespread structural changes to destigmatize men's emotional lives and demystify empathy.

References:

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Chappell, Bill. "U.S. Military's Suicide Rate Surpassed Combat Deaths In 2012." NPR. January 14, 2013. Accessed July 28, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/01/14/169364733/u-s-militarys-suicide-rate-surpassed-combat-deaths-in-2012>.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): 14-32.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640853>.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage, 2010.
- Digby, Tom. *Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Sexuality and Romance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Harding, Sandra. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity?'" *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (1992): 437-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23739232>.
- Haslanger, Sally. *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Jaggar, Alison M. "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology." *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151-76.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Misframing Men: The Politics of Contemporary Masculinities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010.
- Kittay, Eva Feder., and Ellen K. Feder. *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.
- Klay, Phil. "After War, a Failure of the Imagination." *The New York Times*. February 08, 2014. Accessed July 28, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/opinion/sunday/after-war-a-failure-of-the-imagination.html?_r=0.

Laurie, Timothy. "Masculinity Studies and the Jargon of Strategy." *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 20, no. 1 (2015): 13-30. DOI:10.1080/0969725x.2015.1017373.

Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Oliver, Kelly. "Subjectivity and Responsivity: The Ethical Implications of Dependency." In *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, 322-33. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Mann, Bonnie. *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Somers, Daniel. "'I Am Sorry That It Has Come to This': A Soldier's Last Words." Gawker. Accessed August 8, 2018. <http://gawker.com/i-am-sorry-that-it-has-come-to-this-a-soldiers-last-534538357>.

Sontag, Lizette Alvarez and Deborah. "When Strains on Military Families Turn Deadly." *The New York Times*. February 15, 2008. Accessed July 26, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/15/us/15vets.html?pagewanted=print>.

Young, Iris Marion. "Autonomy, Welfare Reform, and Meaningful Work." In *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, 40-60. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

