



Hermeneutical Injustice and Epistemic Basing Failure *Injusticia hermeneútica y fallo epistémico de fundamentación*

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RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un problema relacionado con la injusticia hermenéutica que se fundamenta en un fallo en la fundamentación epistémica. Mona Simion ha defendido recientemente una ampliación del concepto de injusticia hermenéutica de Miranda Fricker para que abarque los casos en los que los sujetos tienen buenas razones para tener creencias importantes, pero no logran formular las creencias pertinentes. Este artículo sostiene además que las injusticias hermenéuticas pueden surgir en casos en los que los sujetos tienen buenas razones disponibles y sostienen las creencias pertinentes que se sustentan en esas razones, pero no logran sostener sus creencias sobre la base de las buenas razones que tienen a su disposición.

PALABRAS CLAVE: argumentación, creencias, epistemología, injusticia epistémica, Simion.

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a problem relating to hermeneutical injustice that is grounded in epistemic basing failure. Mona Simion has recently argued for an extension of Miranda Fricker's concept of hermeneutical injustice, to cover cases where subjects have good reasons for important beliefs available to them, but they fail to form the relevant beliefs. This paper further argues that hermeneutical injustices can arise in cases where subjects have good reasons available, and they do hold the relevant beliefs that are supported by those reasons, but they fail to hold their beliefs on the basis of the good reasons that are available to them.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, beliefs, epistemology, epistemic injustice, Simion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Fricker (2007) brought the concept of epistemic injustice into the mainstream philosophical eye, theorists have proposed many refinements, criticisms, and applications of the concept. Epistemic injustice is injustice that harms someone specifically in her capacity as a knower, and Fricker proposed that it comes in two main stripes: *testimonial* injustice, when people's testimony is unjustly given reduced credibility on the basis of social identity prejudices; and *hermeneutical* injustice, when (roughly) there is a lack of shared conceptual resources to understand or communicate a problematic aspect of people's experiences.¹

The aim of this paper will be to consider a revision and extension of the concept of hermeneutical injustice. Simion (2020) has argued that hermeneutical injustice should be understood as a failure to *apply* relevant concepts to problematic features of one's experiences; and although the failure to apply such concepts is often due to a failure to possess them, it needn't always be. Simion then articulates a novel understanding of hermeneutical injustice as what she calls *basing failure*: a subject has evidence or experiences, and might or might not possess relevant concepts that apply to those experiences, but in any case she does not form correct beliefs on the basis of her experiences.

Simion's argument is correct, I think; but there is more to the phenomenon of basing failure than what her paper considers. In particular, what I think is more naturally categorized as basing failure occurs when a subject possesses a belief, and a reason that supports it, but she does not hold the belief on the basis of that reason. This kind of basing failure puts people in the awkward position of having reasons available to them, but being unable or unwilling to appeal to those reasons in their deliberations or arguments. It consequently also has the potential to cause further hermeneutical, as well as more tangible, injustices.

2. EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

Injustices come in many unsavoury flavours: material goods, responsibilities at home,

¹ Some later extensions of these concepts include testimonial smothering (Dotson, 2011), argumentative injustice (Bondy, 2010), argumentative smothering (Henning 2021), participatory injustice (Hookway, 2010), and willful hermeneutical ignorance (Polhaus, 2012). See McKinnon (2016) and Almassi (2018) for good overviews of epistemic injustice and some of its variants.

criminal laws, and so on and on, can be distributed, administered, or enacted unequally and unfairly. *Epistemic* injustice is particularly difficult to effectively address, because it has to do with a kind of good—knowledge, justification, understanding, and the like—that is not tangible in the way that material goods are, and so there’s a temptation to treat epistemic goods, and injustices related to them, as less real, or at least less important, than other kinds of goods and injustices. But because the capacity to possess and communicate knowledge is central to what it is to be a full autonomous human agent, these kinds of injustices can cause real harm to people as full members of the human community. Epistemic injustice can undermine autonomy, self-confidence, intellectual authority, and so on; and it can also lead directly and indirectly to further, more tangible, injustices.

3. TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE

Fricker (2007) influentially characterizes two kinds of epistemic injustices. *Testimonial* injustice is a reduction in the credibility that hearers place in a speaker’s testimony, on the basis of an unjustified social identity prejudice. Fricker gives two persuasive examples. One example, from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, involves the dismissal of a black defendant’s, Tom Robinson’s, testimony when he is on trial in a racist American town. Everybody dismisses his claims about what happened, as well as his claim that he (dared to have!) felt sorry for a white woman. He is eventually found guilty.

The other key example is from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. (Spoiler alert!) In this film, Ripley kills Dickey, and leaves a fake suicide note. Dickey’s girlfriend, Marge, tells everyone that Dickey wouldn’t commit suicide; that wasn’t like him at all. Marge also notices that Ripley has Dickey’s rings, and realizes that Ripley must have killed Dickey. But nobody believes Marge, largely because she is a woman and is presumed to be thinking emotionally rather than rationally; they assume that she just needs to find somebody to blame for her boyfriend’s death.

Both Marge and Tom are dismissed as credible testifiers because of identity prejudices in the minds of their audiences (and in society more broadly). A key difference between their cases, though, is that Tom’s testimony about the *facts* is dismissed; he is treated like a liar. Marge, on the other hand, has her testimony about Dickey’s *character*, and her *inference* that Ripley killed Dickey, dismissed. Tom is treated like an unreliable reporter; Marge is treated like an unreliable reasoner. Marge’s is a clear instance of both aspects of what I’ve called argumentative injustice (Bondy 2010): hearers unjustifiedly

lower both the credibility they assign to her premises, and the credibility they assign to the strength with which her premises support her conclusion.

That is as far as the account of argumentative injustice goes in (Bondy 2010): it is an extension of the concept of testimonial injustice, to include cases of credibility excess or deficit regarding the premises and the premise-conclusion links in arguments, based on unjustified social stereotypes. The aim of this paper is to consider a further extension of epistemic injustice that has a bearing on reasoning and argumentation, this time relating to hermeneutical injustice.

4. HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE

Fricker characterizes hermeneutical injustice as “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization” (2007: 158). That is, this kind of injustice occurs when a person is part of a social group that lacks the conceptual resources to understand, articulate, and communicate some important aspect of their experiences. Fricker’s key example is the experience of women being sexually harassed, before there was a concept of sexual harassment. Without that concept in hand, it’s difficult to describe and communicate patterns of sexually suggestive behaviour, lewd jokes, rude comments, and such things, under a unified category that is clearly problematic.² Though these behaviours often caused discomfort and distress, there would be no real recourse and no recognized complaint to be made, as long as there was no actual assault or coercion.

There are many other problematic behaviours or structures that have only recently been described and named, such as white ignorance, spousal rape, and systemic racism. With these concepts in hand, we can adequately describe aspects of lived experiences that would otherwise be difficult to characterize and successfully communicate.

In fact, the concepts of systemic racism and willful ignorance represent important ways in which the concept of hermeneutical injustice can be broadened. Fricker initially characterized hermeneutical injustice as injustice resulting from a marginalized group’s

² There’s an additional difficulty with a concept like sexual harassment: accusations of sexual harassment are often taken as implying an *intent* to sexually harass, which harassers don’t always have (e.g., they often don’t intend to make the other person uncomfortable or upset); and before the concept of sexual harassment became widely accepted and employed, it would have been very difficult to make the case that someone was a victim of sexual harassment, because it can be very difficult to prove intent. Importantly, however, the concept of harassment, sexual or otherwise, does not include intent as a necessary condition.

lack of conceptual resources to understand or communicate their experiences. However, as Pohlhaus (2012) has pointed out, marginalized people can fail to communicate their experiences, even if they possess the conceptual resources to describe them, due to a lack of conceptual resources on the part of a dominant group. For example, although the concepts of systemic and structural racism have recently gained currency, there has been quite a lot of resistance to their popular uptake, in America at least. Consequently, even if marginalized people in America understand the concept of systemic racism, they can expect to have a difficult time successfully communicating with the socially dominant white majority about the effects of a racist system on their lives. So that is one way in which the concept of hermeneutical ignorance should be broadened: it can result from a lack of conceptual resources on the part of *either* a marginalized *or* a dominant social group.

A second way in which the concept of hermeneutical ignorance can be broadened, Simion (2020) argues,³ is by removing the restriction to cases where conceptual resources are *absent*. The failure to understand and communicate about one's own experiences can arise when one *possesses* certain concepts, like the concept of sexual harassment, but fails to *apply* those concepts in cases where they should be applied. Simion describes a plausible case where a woman's friend has been shaken by his recent divorce, and he begins to display a pattern of harassing behaviour toward her. The woman understands the concept of sexual harassment; she is experiencing sexual harassment; but she fails to apply the concept to her own case, because the man is an old friend, and she doesn't want to think ill of him. In cases like this, Simion writes,

HEI [hermeneutic epistemic injustice] is a failure in basing: the HEI victim has a particular experience of type T, she is propositionally warranted to believe that she is undergoing T – that is, there are reasons available for her, or her social circle, to believe that she is undergoing T, but she fails to form the relevant belief in virtue of unjustly-brought-about episodic failure in concept application: she fails to base her beliefs on available reasons to believe. (2020:183)

Similar failures to apply known concepts to friends or family, in ways that can lead to serious harms for those involved, should be easy to imagine or recall. Think of a family member who begins to display obvious behaviours associated with drug or gambling addiction; you might explain away their odd behaviour in ways you would not do if it were not someone so close. Or think of a friend who becomes both manic and paranoid, in

³ Falbo (2022) makes a similar case, regarding concepts that are possessed but fail to be applied because they are crowded out by other distorting concepts and influences.

ways that you don't want to acknowledge, so you perform interpretive gymnastics to explain away their behaviour; or maybe you just ignore the behaviour as much as you can. When we are dealing with friends or family, we often want to interpret their behaviour as charitably as we can for as long as possible; and so we sometimes fail to apply concepts such as *addiction* or *mental illness* to cases where we would see that they apply, if we were not personally involved. Consequently, we can fail to understand our own experiences and interactions, even if we do possess the relevant concepts. Our resistance to the application of such concepts to our friends and family might be willful, because we don't want to believe such things; or it might be something that we are not even aware of. In such cases, we have reasons available to us, but we intentionally or unintentionally resist or fail to form the beliefs that those reasons support.

Of course, there are countless propositions that we could justifiably come to believe, on the basis of reasons that are currently available or very easily accessible to us. But for most such propositions, it doesn't matter that we don't bother to form beliefs about them, because they are entirely unimportant to us, and we have no reason to bother considering them. When we have good reasons that support belief in propositions that aren't about anything particularly important, our failure to form beliefs in them needn't constitute hermeneutical injustice. Only in those kinds of cases that Simion targets, where it's important that we gain true beliefs about or understanding of a particular topic, and a failure in basing is unjustly brought about, does basing failure generate hermeneutical injustice.

Similar remarks will apply to cases of basing failure and hermeneutical injustice in what follows. I'll take it as read that we are only concerned with beliefs about important matters, in our discussion of injustices.

5. THE EPISTEMIC BASING RELATION

I think that Simion's point is well taken; but I also think that there is more to the phenomenon of basing failure than simply failing to form beliefs that are supported by reasons that we already possess. To see this, and to appreciate the novel type of hermeneutical injustice that basing failure can generate, we need to start with a rough characterization of the epistemic basing relation, which is the relation that holds between beliefs and the reasons on which they're based. For example: if you withdraw cash from the bank, and you receive a receipt indicating that you have 50 dollars remaining in your account, you will normally then form a belief that you have 50 dollars remaining in the

account; and that belief will be based on what you see on the receipt.

Holding a belief, B, on the basis of a reason, R, is a familiar phenomenon; indeed, it's so familiar that it seems sort of banal and obvious what it means when we say that we hold B on the basis of R. But it's remarkably tricky working out the details of that relation, and there are a number of extant proposals relating to it.⁴ For the purpose of this essay, it's enough to note some central features that are typically taken to be characteristic of the basing relation.

First, most theorists think that *causation* is often or always involved in basing beliefs on reasons.⁵ When you believe that you have 50 dollars remaining in your account, that belief is caused by your observation of what is printed on your receipt; and if you hadn't seen the number on the receipt, then you (probably) wouldn't have that very belief about your remaining balance.

Second, basing beliefs on reasons seems to be closely related to what we're *disposed* to do in certain circumstances. For instance, if you forget what's printed on the receipt, you might be disposed to lose your belief about how much money remains in the account. If your spouse asks you how you know the remaining balance, you might be disposed to provide the receipt. And so on.

Third, causes and dispositions can be very weird. Having a reason, R, and having a belief, B, is not by itself sufficient for holding B on the basis of R, even if R is a cause of B. For causal chains leading from R to B can be *deviant*, when a reason causes a belief but it does so in the wrong kind of way. Alvin Plantinga illustrates the point nicely:

Suddenly seeing Silvia, I form the belief that I see her; as a result, I become rattled and drop my cup of tea, scalding my leg. I then form the belief that my leg hurts; but though the former belief is a (part) cause of the latter, it is not the case that I accept the latter on the evidential basis of the former. (1993: 69n8)

The lesson here is that mere causation from R to B is not sufficient for basing B on R; something else is needed. (Similar remarks can be made regarding deviant dispositions.)

⁴ See Bondy (2016) and Carter and Bondy (2018) for detailed discussions of the basing relation. In most discussions of this topic, a belief is called *propositionally justified* if there are good reasons available for it; and a belief is called *doxastically justified* if it is held in a correct way. Typically, though not always, "a correct way" is taken to mean: the belief is held *on the basis* of what propositionally justifies it. Doxastic justification is the kind of justification required for knowledge.

⁵ In Carter and Bondy (2020) (see also Carter and Bondy, 2018), we argue that there are some cases where causation is not necessary for basing, and I still think that is correct; but in this paper, for simplicity, we can employ the more common conception of the basing relation according to which causation is necessary. With or without the causal requirement, the kind of problem case I have in mind will be a case of basing failure.

There are various proposals about how to rule out problem cases like these. For instance, in order for S's belief B to be based on reason R, maybe S must also have the further belief that R is a good reason for B (Audi, 1986). Or maybe S must have such a further belief, and that further belief must also cause R to cause B (Ye 2020). Or maybe S must be disposed to give up B if S loses R (Evans, 2013). Or maybe the key question is really about what S is in position to offer in support of B: does S, or can S, appeal to R? (Leite, 2004).

Fortunately, for the purpose of this paper, it's not necessary to try to establish a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for B to be based on R. All that's needed, to establish the possibility of the kind of case that I will be interested in here, is an understanding of a condition that is sufficient to block basing of B on R. And one obvious condition that stands out as able to block basing of B on R is: *S believes that R is not a good reason for holding B*. For if you think that R is not a good reason for holding B, then your possessing R probably does not *causally sustain* your holding B (if R does cause B, it will do so deviantly); and you're probably not *disposed* to give up B if you were to lose R (if you are so disposed, it'll be a deviant disposition); and you do not draw an *inference* from R to B; and you would probably not *provide* R as your reason for holding B in an argument. So, for example, if you think that bank receipts do not provide good reasons for holding beliefs about bank account balances, then even if you possess a bank receipt that matches your belief about the balance in your account, you will not hold your belief on the basis of what's printed on the receipt. Your knowledge of what's printed on the receipt isn't a non-deviant cause of your belief about your bank balance; you will not be disposed to change your belief about your bank balance if you receive a new receipt with a different balance printed on it; and if you are challenged to justify your belief about your bank balance, you will not provide the receipt as a reason that supports your belief. (You might provide the receipt to someone else if you know that *they* think that receipts provide good evidence for beliefs about bank account balances; but that's beside the point, as far as *your* basis for your belief goes.)

6. EPISTEMIC BASING FAILURE

As we've seen, Simion argues that the concept of hermeneutical injustice should be broadened to include cases of what she calls basing failure, where a subject has good reasons for holding a belief, but fails to form the target belief. This can happen when we have experiences that fall under certain categories, and we are aware of concepts corresponding to those categories, but we fail to apply the concepts to our experiences.

We consequently fail to understand our own experiences, in ways that can lead to real harms.

Such cases are certainly worth theorizing about. But it's also worth theorizing about cases where subjects have good reasons or evidence that supports a belief in a proposition, and they *do* hold the belief that their evidence supports, but they don't hold the belief on the basis of that evidence.

Such cases are problematic from the perspective of having knowledge, because when you have a justified true belief but don't hold that belief on the basis of what justifies it, and instead you hold it only on the basis of a bad reason, you don't have knowledge. Further, such cases are problematic from the perspective of reasoning and argumentation, because when you have a belief, B, and you have a good reason, R, and R supports B, but you don't hold B on the basis of R, you will not respond to important objections correctly; and you will not provide R as a reason for holding B in an argument; and you will not properly revise your standpoint in light of new evidence.

As an example of this kind of basing failure, consider the following (lightly edited) version of Lehrer's (1971) case of the superstitious lawyer:

Larry is a lawyer who trusts his Tarot readings completely. One day Larry gets a client, Courtney, who stands accused of murdering eight people by way of choking them with copies of the *Philosophical Investigations*. There is no doubt that Courtney has committed the first seven murders. Everyone believes it, including Larry. But there is some question about whether she committed the last one; so Larry does a reading of the cards, which tell him that Courtney is in fact innocent of the last murder. Now that he fully believes she is innocent of that murder, Larry is motivated to very carefully revisit the evidence, and in so doing he uncovers a convincing line of reasoning that shows that Courtney could not have obtained the copy of the PI that was used in the final crime. *A-ha! Larry thinks to himself. This is just the evidence that will convince everyone that Courtney is innocent. I, of course, remain steadfastly committed to the cards, which already told me that she's innocent. This evidence changes nothing for me.*

In this case, Larry has a belief, B: Courtney is innocent of the final crime. And he has good reason, R, for that belief: the evidence indicating that she could not have obtained the final murder weapon. But Larry doesn't hold B on the basis of R; he holds it on the basis, and only on the basis, of the Tarot reading. (If this seems implausible, assume that whenever a valid Tarot reading is available, Larry relies on it to the exclusion of all else, for fear that relying on anything else might someday undermine his faith in the cards. So, for example, if it later turns out that the evidence vindicating Courtney was

inaccurate, that finding will not shake Larry's belief in her innocence even a little bit.)

That case is a bit silly, but it illustrates the possibility of this kind of basing failure. It is not yet a case of hermeneutical injustice, though, because the lawyer is not failing to understand or communicate an aspect of his own experience due to a failure to apply or possess relevant conceptual resources on his part or on the part of a dominant group.

Notice that in Larry's case, it's only an unjustified belief in the *reliability of a particular belief-source* that leads to his failure to base his belief on the other good evidence that he possesses. In other cases, though, we can see the same kind of thing happen due to a subject's false belief about the conditions under which the application of a concept would be correct or justified. For when we misunderstand the application conditions of some concepts, we are not in position to correctly and justifiably use reasons that involve those concepts in argumentation or advocacy for ourselves or others.

To illustrate this phenomenon, consider the following three cases.

Case 1: Interpersonal HI

Bobby, Owen, and Gina all work in the same office. Over time, Gina becomes overly familiar with Bobby: she begins making inappropriate remarks and jokes, she touches him in ways that make him uncomfortable, and so on. Bobby doesn't want to ruffle any feathers, so he lets it slide. Eventually it gets to the point that Bobby's work suffers, he has recurring nightmares, and he experiences other symptoms of anxiety.

Bobby confides in Owen that he suspects that he is experiencing ongoing sexual harassment. Owen scoffs, "Oh come on, dummy, girls don't sexually harass boys. That's not how it works. I'm sure Gina is just innocently flirting with you." Bobby and Owen are friends; Bobby trusts Owen; and so Bobby decides that he really doesn't have good reason to think that he's being sexually harassed. Nevertheless, he can't shake the feeling that he is being sexually harassed. So: he continues to hold the belief that he is being sexually harassed; his belief is caused by his interactions with Gina; but at the same time he also explicitly believes that his interactions with Gina do not count as good reasons for believing that he is being sexually harassed. So he just tries to forget about it, hoping that the feeling will go away and he'll eventually be able to stop believing he's being harassed.

The key features of this case are: (1) Bobby is experiencing sexual harassment. (2) Bobby's interactions with Gina provide support for his belief in the proposition that he is being sexually harassed. But (3) Bobby has a false belief about the conditions under which the concept of sexual harassment can be applied: he believes that men can't be sexually harassed by women. (This is where the identity prejudice essential to epistemic injustice comes in: Bobby is pushed to believe that, as a man, he cannot be sexually harassed by a woman.) Consequently, Bobby believes that his experiences cannot support his belief that he is being sexually harassed. Yet Bobby continues to believe that he is being sexually harassed anyway; but because he believes that that belief is unjustified, he is unwilling to appeal to his experiences that support it, in his further reasoning and argumentation.

The point to notice here is that this is a case of hermeneutical injustice arising out of basing failure. For Bobby's basing failure leads him to fail to understand an important aspect of his own experience, even though he has a true belief about it. Again, Bobby has a belief, B: that he is being sexually harassed; and he has good reason, R, that supports B: the experiences of harassment from Gina; but he does not hold B on the basis of R. That's because, as we have seen above in section 5, S does not hold B on the basis of R if S believes that R is not a good reason for holding B. Bobby satisfies that condition, because he does not think that his experiences are good reasons for believing he's being sexually harassed. No doubt, his experiences of being harassed are a *cause* of his belief that he is being harassed; but as we have seen, causation is not sufficient for basing.

Case 2: Intrapersonal HI

As in Case 1, Bobby and Gina work together, and Gina begins sexually harassing Bobby. But in this case, there is no Owen for Bobby to confide in. When Bobby begins to think that he is being sexually harassed, he mostly just tries to ignore it and forget about it. Still, in a moment of reflection, he turns his attention toward it. A sense of shame and embarrassment keeps him from really confronting it, however, and he scolds himself: "come on, dummy, girls don't sexually harass boys; that's not how it works."

As in Case 1, Bobby retains the belief that he is being sexually harassed; he can't seem to shake that belief yet. Also as in Case 1, Bobby also believes that his experiences do not count as good reasons for holding that belief. Consequently, Bobby fails to base his belief on his good reasons. He simply tries

to push the belief to the back of his mind, in such a way that he can live with the mild cognitive dissonance for the time being.

This version of the case is odd in at least one sense: it is clearly a case of hermeneutical injustice, but's less clear here than in Case 1 where the blame for the injustice lies. Some amount of blame may be appropriately attributed to the social circles (friends, TV shows, etc.) and structures (workplace sexual harassment trainings, etc.) in which Bobby finds himself, for his social circles implicitly attach stigma to men who are victimized, and his workplace harassment trainings fail to make any mention of men who are harassed by women. But in Case 1, one also wants to blame Owen, as the proximate cause of the hermeneutical injustice Bobby suffers, when Owen scoffs and scolds Bobby. In Case 2, on the other hand, the scoffing and scolding are internal to Bobby. One wants, therefore, to attribute the same sort of blame to Bobby in this case, as we attribute to Owen in the first case.

That seems like an odd result; but perhaps it is a result that we can live with, especially once we remind ourselves that some injustices are less blameworthy than others; and sometimes "you're doing yourself an injustice" is an appropriate response to someone with low self-esteem who undervalues herself or her work. Further, and more generally, most ethical frameworks leave room for obligations that we owe to ourselves; and in failing to fulfill an obligation to oneself, one can do oneself an injustice.

Case 3: HI in a Gettier case

This is exactly as in Case 1, except that Owen also tells Bobby that Gina isn't sexually harassing him; but their boss, Miles, is. For Miles gives a lot of fist-bumps; and Owen tells Bobby that Miles gets sexual gratification out of it. In fact, Miles's fist-bumps are just normal fist-bumps. (Owen is just messing with Bobby; but Bobby believes him.)

Now Bobby has a belief: *I'm being sexually harassed*. And he has good reasons available to him for that belief: the unwelcome interactions with Gina. But Bobby doesn't hold his belief on that basis; instead he holds it on the basis of what Owen tells him about Miles's motivations for giving first-bumps all the time.

Case 3 is a Gettier case: Bobby has a justified true belief that fails to be knowledge. He believes that he is experiencing sexual harassment; the belief is true, because Gina is sexually harassing him; and he has justification for that belief, which comes from Owen's testimony; but that justification for his belief is entirely disconnected from what makes his belief true. Consequently, Bobby lacks knowledge about an

important aspect of his own experiences.

7. CONCLUSION: BASING FAILURE AS A NOVEL KIND OF HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE

All three of the cases presented in section 6 are cases of basing failure: Bobby has a true belief about something important in his life, and although he has good reasons available to him that can support his belief, he also has a false belief about the conditions under which the concept of sexual harassment applies, which blocks him from holding the target belief on the basis of those reasons. Further, each of these instances of basing failure gives rise to a hermeneutical injustice: for in each of them Bobby is prevented from understanding or knowing something important about his own experiences, due to a false belief about the conditions under which the relevant concept applies, which arises out of a social identity prejudice. Consequently, he will fail to appropriately advocate for himself; he will not be in position to advance the necessary arguments to get the harassment to stop, or to have management introduce structural or other types of changes in the workplace to prevent or rectify this sort of problem when it occurs; and he'll continue living with the harassment.

Bobby's basing failure blocks him from fully understanding and communicating his own experiences; and it does so specifically by way of blocking him from being able to make appropriate use of the reasons that he possesses for the beliefs that he has. His basing failure prevents him from reasoning and arguing well, and from fully understanding his situation; and this epistemic harm can also lead to further practical harm, as he might consequently fail to extricate himself from a harmful situation.

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