Once upon a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. (Mignolo, 2009)

The subject of knowledge has been a central concern of feminist epistemological analyses since their inception. Early work in standpoint theory, for example, focused on the links between privilege/power and the nature and limits of knowledge. Informed by Marxian analyses of the shaping of knowledge by dominant interests, standpoint theory addressed the inextricable connections between politics and knowledge production. As early as 1983 standpoint theorist Nancy Hartsock argued that “feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women’s material activity and must be part of the political struggle necessary to develop areas of social life modeled on this activity” (Hartsock, 1983, 304). Patricia Hill Collins’ standpoint analysis in Black Feminist Thought (1990) focused on how feminist theorizing must attend to the way “social phenomena such as race, class, and gender . . . mutually construct one another” (1998, 205) rather than assume that there is a somehow neutral “women’s standpoint.” Standpoint theory was designed to be a method that would render transparent the values and interests, such as androcentrism, heteronormativity, and Eurocentrism, that underlie allegedly neutral methods in science and epistemology, and clarify their impact. Such attention to the subject of knowledge illuminated the various means by which oppressive practices can result in or reinforce epistemic inequalities, exclusions, and marginalizations. In this way, feminist and other liberatory epistemologists aimed to transform the subject of knowledge in the sense of focusing on knowledge obscured by dominant interests and values and thereby to identify and provide tools for undermining the knowledges and practices implicated in oppression. “Androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric, and heterosexual conceptual frameworks,” Sandra Harding argues, “ensured systematic ignorance and error about not only the lives of the oppressed, but also the lives of their oppressors and thus about how nature and social relations in general worked” (2004, 5). Feminist and other liberatory epistemologies aimed not only to diagnose and contest epistemic injustices, but also to provide resources for more just epistemic practices. One of my aims in this essay is to provide a genealogy of the concept of epistemic injustice by tracing its origins in feminist
and other liberatory epistemological attention to the relations between power, knowledge, and difference. This historically informed understanding provides a lens for both understanding and expanding upon later deployments of the concept of epistemic injustice as we find it developed, for example, in the work of Miranda Fricker (2007). Rather than footnoting and potentially downplaying my coupling of feminist and other forms of liberatory epistemologies in this essay, I would like to acknowledge the frequently parallel, sometimes fraught, but often interactive genealogies of feminist and other forms of liberatory epistemologies. As highlighted in the quote from Harding, gender oppression does not happen in a vacuum but is complexly linked to colonialism, racism, heterosexism, as well as class biases, Eurocentrism, androcentrism, ableism, and other manifestations of power/privilege. Feminist epistemologies emerge with awareness of and attention to these linkages, some of which I will highlight in this essay. I will drop the “other” in my use of the locution, “feminist and liberatory,” for stylistic reasons, but it is essential to see the “and” coupling them as a both/and, not an either/or. These epistemologies are liberatory in the sense that they aim to reveal the workings of power in the governance and disciplining of knowledge practices and institutions in order to generate paths to freedom (cf. Tuana, 2001, 18).

In addition to focusing attention onto knowledge obscured by dominant interests and values, feminist and liberatory epistemologists were attentive to the subject of knowledge through a second lens, namely, attention to what kind of subject one must be in order to be (seen as) a knowing subject. Through this lens, questions about who counted as a knowing subject and who did not led feminist and liberatory epistemologists to examine what qualities were deemed necessary to be a knowing subject and how the social situations of groups impacted who counted as a knowing subject and who did not. Lorraine Code’s “Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemically Significant?” and Sandra Harding’s “Is Gender a Variable in Conceptions of Rationality: A Survey of Issues” appeared in 1981 and 1982 respectively and broached the topic of the relevance of the situation of knowers to their epistemic capacities. This is also a position developed by Donna Haraway in “Situated Knowledges” in 1988. Code’s What Can She Know? (1991), Lynn Hankinson Nelson’s Who Knows? (1990), and Harding’s Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? (1991) aimed to critique and offer alternatives to traditional “S knows that p” epistemologies that posited a knowing subject as singular and unmarked in the sense of assuming that perception and cognition would be invariant. On traditional accounts, knowers were viewed as distinct but not distinctive, and subjective qualities of knowing subjects, their affective and material dimensions, were deemed irrelevant at best, contaminating at worst. In contradistinction to this view, feminist and liberatory epistemologists demonstrated the ways that a knower’s situatedness affects not just what she or he knows, but also how she or he knows. Knowers, then, far from the disinterested, interchangeable subjects of knowing, are “social, embodied, interested, emotional, and rational and whose body, interests, emotions, and reason are fundamentally constituted by her particular historical context” (Jaggar and Bordo, 1989, 6).

Who knows?

Genevieve Lloyd’s classic 1979 article, “The Man of Reason”, and her eponymous 1984 book brought to light the historical linkage of maleness and masculinity with conceptions of reason and rationality. Lloyd argues that the view of reason as manly was more than symbolic. She demonstrates that accounts of reason throughout the history of Western philosophy systematically exclude capacities historically deemed feminine and often attributed to women and marginalized men. The underlying argument is that the Western epistemic tradition itself, due to its biased conceptions of reason, is epistemically unjust. These conceptions of reason, and corresponding social arrangements, resulted not only in conceptions of the maleness of reason, but in women
and marginalized men being viewed as less capable of reason and more fitted for emotional or manual labor. As Donna Haraway explained, these are “the embodied others, who are not allowed not to have a body, a finite point of view, and so an inevitably disqualifying and polluting bias in any discussion of consequence” (1988, 575). Lloyd argues that the linkage between reason and the attainment of freedom and the capacity for an ethical life further distances all but privileged men from the capacities required for the realization of full humanity. This coupling sets the stage for some groups of people being seen as less than fully human. The subject of knowledge thus involves not only whose knowledge is deemed worthy, but whose lives are so deemed. As Judith Butler queries, “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?” (2004, 20).

Early feminist epistemological work thus identified the ways that traditional conceptions of knowers as distinct, but not distinctive, occluded the fact that the qualities required to be a knower – objectivity, disinterestedness, lack of emotionality – excluded all but privileged individuals from full achievement of that ability. In other words, traditional epistemology was based on the false assumption that a particular standpoint was neither particular, nor a standpoint, and thereby obscured the linkages between knowledge and power. “What we have,” Naomi Scheman explains, “are sets of complex interactions among (at least) social, economic, cultural, pedagogical, and familial structures that, in thoroughly circular fashion, shape the world, shape people to occupy different positions in that world, and shape the norms in terms of which some of the beliefs those people have about that world will count as justified” (1995, 183). Clarification and analysis of the mechanisms through which those not in privileged positions are unjustifiably excluded from the domain of knowers are key themes of early liberatory epistemological work. Adrienne Rich, for example, refers to the practice of “gaslighting” as a mechanism for invalidating the experiences and knowledges of those not in privileged positions. “Women have been driven mad, ‘gaslighted,’ for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which validates only male experience. The truth of our bodies and our minds has been mystified to us” (Rich, 1979, 190).

Through the growing recognition of the epistemic salience of the situatedness of knowers, liberatory epistemologists argued for the importance of reconsidering and often reclaiming dimensions of human capacities that had been excluded from the domains of reason and rationality. Philosophical accounts of reasoning and rationality were shown to be exceedingly narrow and serving to demarcate as irrational beliefs, habits, affective dispositions, behaviors, or inferential patterns that are outside those narrow boundaries that include affective, relational, and material dimensions. As Phyllis Rooney emphasized in relation to the male-female opposition: “The problem is not simply that a male-female division is set up but that the loci of voice, of agency, of subjectivity, of (rational) power and knowledge are all located within the male mode. The dialectic of rational discourse is such that the female is given the minimal agency of interference or simply the voice of silence” (1991, 95).

Whose knowledges?

Attention to neglected ways of knowing provided a venue for attending to and valuing the experiences and knowledges of oppressed groups, a vehicle for what Patricia Hill Collins termed oppositional consciousness (1989). Collins argued that oppositional consciousness provided an epistemic resource for those who were often ignored or treated as the object of research to become subjects of knowledge in both senses. Oppositional consciousness contests the exclusion of marginalized groups from the category of knowers and serves as the wellspring of knowledge to displace oppressive practices. “Those who do the devalued work in a society, or who are oppressed and exploited in other ways, can learn how to use their oppressed social position as a source of
Insight about how social relations work—in insight unavailable or at least hard to come by within the conceptual frameworks of dominant institutions, including research disciplines” (Harding, 2006, 25). Lisa Heldke brings in a class dimension by examining why “some forms of knowledge [are] actually regarded as leaving one incapable of other forms of rational thought” through “an attempt to show why and how defining entire classes of people—in this case rural people and farmers—as ‘stupid knowers’ ensures their marginalization and subordination, clever resistance moves on their part notwithstanding” (2006, 155).

Kimberle Crenshaw’s analysis of intersectionality (1991) illustrates both sides of liberatory transformations of the subject of knowing. Crenshaw’s attention to the marginalization of the issue of violence against women of color is a good example of oppositional consciousness. Shifting attention to this neglected area of concern through the lens of the experiences of women of color serves to transform both who knows and what is known. Intersectionality’s transformative impact on the field of liberatory epistemologies is well described by Vivian May as the effort “to account for how knowledge derived from and crafted in marginalized locations entails a double struggle: the struggle to articulate what cannot necessarily be told in conventional terms, and the struggle to be heard without being (mis)translated into normative logics that occlude the meanings at hand” (2014, 99).

Feminist attention to affect played an important role in giving liberatory attention to a crucial aspect of experience that traditional epistemic frameworks have excluded from the epistemic domain. Some have turned to what Alison Jaggar (1989) called outlaw emotions as an epistemic resource for what May called the double struggle. One such outlaw emotion, that of anger, has been seen by feminists as particularly fruitful for providing insights into the ways in which those of us who have been marginalized have been epistemically oppressed, and it has served as a vehicle for reasserting our epistemic agency. What María Lugones called hard to handle anger has been embraced by many liberatory epistemologists as a wellspring for knowledge about ways in which oppressive practices are formulated and work upon us. It has functioned as a resource to unveil “gaslighting” and serves as a way of asserting our epistemic agency (e.g., Campbell, 1994; Frye, 1983a; Lorde, 1984b; Lugones, 2003; McKinnon 2017; McWeeny, 2010; Narayan, 1988; Scheman, 1980; Spelman, 1989).

Systematic epistemic silencing

Liberatory epistemological attention to the interrelated issues of who knows and what is known gave rise to a virtual explosion of concerns about epistemic silencing and violence. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985 deployed the conception of epistemic violence to illustrate “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other.” (1988, 280–281). Spivak’s conception of epistemic violence has been developed to illuminate the complex silencing of marginalized groups through appropriation and homogenization. Kevin Ayotte and Mary Husain (2005) show this complex silencing by delineating the representation of the women of Afghanistan through arguing “that representations of the women of Afghanistan as gendered slaves in need of ‘saving’ by the West constitute epistemic violence, the construction of violent knowledge of the third-world Other that erases women as subjects in international relations” (113). They provide an analysis of Western discourses concerning the burqa arguing that “the use of the burqa as a generalized symbol of female oppression performs a colonizing function” (118) in which Afghan women are rhetorically constructed as objects of knowledge that legitimize U.S. military intervention to liberate, but in a way that “creates the epistemological conditions for material harm” (113). Ayotte and Husain detail the epistemic
violence inflicted by such discourses in that they “unwittingly obliterates vital aspects of feminist agency for Afghan women” (119), occlude the diversity of Islamic practices, amplify “the distinction between ‘liberated’ U.S. women and ‘unenlightened’ Afghan women” (120), and cause “the reduction of Afghan women’s agency to their conformity to popular U.S. notions of feminist liberation” (121). Such (mis)translation into normative logics mischaracterize, standardize, and silence marginalized groups, contributing to distorted knowledges about them.

The theme of systematic silencing is central to postcolonial epistemological perspectives. “One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, “was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the ‘arts’ of civilization” (1999, 25). Smith explains that the epistemic violence of such misconceptions was to deny full humanity to such groups. “In other words, we were not ‘fully human’: some of us were not even considered partially human” (25). Through such epistemic violence, certain lives, indeed entire populations are conceived of as less valuable. “If certain lives do not qualify as lives within certain epistemological frames,” Butler explains in Frames of War, “then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense” (2010, 1).

Systematic silencing not only happens through means that render some groups of people less than fully human. It can happen even to those who are members of so-called “privileged” groups by practices that violate their credibility in certain domains. Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton (1998) provide an early analysis of epistemic violence involving hearers not giving credibility to a speaker’s testimony, in this case a woman’s statement that she is refusing sex. Taking up Catharine MacKinnon’s claim that pornography interferes with women’s freedom of speech in that it silences women, Hornsby and Langton develop an analysis of the nature of this form of silencing, arguing that pornography can have the result of making “certain speech acts unspeakable for women” (1998, 27). Hornsby and Langton’s claim is that one of the harms of pornography is that it silences women through what they term illocutionary disablement. Their focus is on those cases in which women say “No” to sex, but the hearer fails to recognize the utterance as a refusal. The problem they identify is a form of what Austin (1962) referred to as “uptake” failure, namely that the hearer does not understand the illocutionary force of her statement, her intention to refuse. “The point is that a woman’s liberty to speak the actions she wants to speak has been curtailed: her liberty to protest against pornography and rape, to refuse sex when she wants to, to argue about violence in court, or to celebrate and promote new ways of thinking about sexuality. The point is that women cannot do things with words, even when we think we know how” (Langton, 1993, 328). Their point is that there is a systematic uptake failure in this domain due to pornographic images of women’s sexuality through which women as a group are being silenced.

Kristie Dotson develops the concept of epistemic violence to illuminate the impact of such silencing. “To communicate we all need an audience willing and capable of hearing us. The extent to which entire populations of people can be denied this kind of linguistic reciprocation as a matter of course institutes epistemic violence” (2011, 238). Dotson develops the notion of pernicious ignorance to develop a robust account of epistemic violence, identifying two practices of silencing involving testimony that are the result of an audience’s failure to offer communicative reciprocity, namely, testimonial quieting, in which the audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower and testimonial smothering, in which there is coercion not to introduce risky testimony.

More recently, Mary Kate McGowan builds on this work by identifying a different type of silencing, what she calls sincerity silencing. McGowan argues that in addition to the cases identified
by Hornsby and Langton, sincerity silencing occurs when there is a failure to recognize a speaker's sincerity. She illustrates sincerity silencing through the following example:

A woman says “No,” sincerely intending to refuse sex but, although the man recognizes her intention to refuse, he mistakenly believes that she is doing so insincerely... and he proceeds to rape her. In this case, the addressee recognizes the speaker’s illocutionary intention (to refuse) but fails to recognize that the speaker is doing so sincerely. Assuming that the hearer’s failure (to recognize that the speaker’s sincerity condition is met) is brought about in some systematic manner, this is a case of sincerity silencing. (2014, 463)

She stresses the importance of understanding sincerity silencing by arguing that it is a relatively widespread phenomenon that is implicated in various forms of discrimination. McGowan’s claim that this is a widespread phenomenon is developed through Rebecca Kukla’s conception of discursive injustice, where she examines how already marginalized speakers can be disempowered due to a distortion of their intended speech act in which “the performative force of [their] utterances is distorted in ways that enhance disadvantage” (2014, 441).

Akin to sincerity silencing are the various ways in which members of marginalized groups are systematically seen as epistemically untrustworthy. Nancy Daukas argues that

Where unjust power relations are in play, the link between individual epistemic agency and social epistemic practices forged by attitudes about the epistemic capacities of self and diverse others, creates a mutually supporting “feedback loop” between a widespread, socially inculcated habitual failure of epistemic trustworthiness, on the one hand, and patterns of epistemic interactions, on the other, which perpetuate those power relations. Since these retrograde patterns of epistemic interaction are structurally in line with normal modes of social/epistemic interaction, they easily become normalized. As a result, their hold on an epistemic community is easily concealed, and difficult to break. (2006, 116)

Daukas analyzes, for instance, the feedback loop between the tacit assumption that people of color are not-fully-rational leading to their systematic under-representation in roles where rationality is a primary qualification, which then is argued to evince that they are “cognitively, psychologically, or emotionally unsuited to those fields and roles” (2006, 116). In this way, the attribution of epistemic untrustworthiness is reinforced with modes of social/epistemic interaction and become normalized.

The link between trust and epistemic justice has been a key theme of feminist and liberatory epistemologies. Karen Frost-Arnold identified three types of trust essential to epistemic justice:

1. self-trust – members of oppressed groups must trust themselves (Daukas, 2011; Jones, 2012a; Mills, 1997, 119),
2. trust in others – they must be trusted by fellow community members (Daukas, 2006, 2011; Fricker, 2007), and
3. trust in practices – community members must trust the practices, institutions, and social structures that create avenues for critical discourse (Scheman, 2001).

If oppressive practices or structures undermine the trustworthiness of oppressed groups in any of these ways, they are thereby unjustly excluded from full membership in the epistemic community.
Even efforts by those who see themselves as allies can unintentionally undermine an individual’s or group’s trustworthiness. For example, a particularly problematic form of systematic silencing is cloaked within the well-intentioned efforts of some members of privileged communities to fight against oppression by engaging in what Linda Martín Alcoff (1991–1992) refers to as “the problem of speaking for others.” Rather than reinforcing the importance of creating spaces for those who have been marginalized to speak for themselves and to be seen as trustworthy speakers, Alcoff cautions that the practice of speaking for others is often grounded in a desire for mastery and power. bell hooks warns that “[o]ften this speech about the ‘Other’ is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking” (1990, 151). Mariana Ortega develops a related analysis of a form of ignorance that she calls “being lovingly, knowingly ignorant,” in which members of privileged communities, although often well-intentioned, “are actively involved in the production of knowledge about women of color – whether by citing their work, reading and writing about them, or classifying them – while at the same time using women of color to the perceiver’s own ends” (2006, 61). Ortega argues that the “result of this ignorance is that women of color continue to be misunderstood, underrepresented, homogenized, disrespected, or subsumed under the experience of ‘universal sisterhood’ while ‘knowledge’ about them is being encouraged and disseminated and while feminism claims to be more concerned and more enlightened about the relations between white women and women of color” (2006, 63).

In addition to such systematic silences of oppressed groups, there are also systemic epistemic silences of knowledges and knowings. As Walter Mignolo explains, “geo- and body-politics of knowledge has been hidden from the self-serving interests of Western epistemology and that a task of de-colonial thinking is the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued” (2009, 4). His goal is to unmask the “epistemic privilege of the First World” in framing the terms of knowing and not just the content of knowledge. “In the . . . distribution of scientific labor, the First World had indeed the privilege of inventing the classification and being part of it” (2009, 8). The theme of epistemic privilege is central to what María Lugones calls the monologism of the colonizer, which “is a way of silencing all contestatory interlocution. There is no place for conversation that includes the colonized tongue – the one you and I hold in our mouths – as a centrifugal force altering the society’s language and its map of reality” (2006, 81–82). For Lugones, resistance must happen in a borderlands, what she calls the limen. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Walter Chambati in Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization detail “the processes of universalizing Western particularism through epistemological colonization (colonization of the mind) that decentered pre-existing African knowledge systems” and argue that “the worst form of colonization of a people is that which created epistemological mimicry and intellectual dependency” (2013, 38).

Ramón Grosfoguel reminds us, in a related vein, of the way epistemic racism operates through the privileging of an essentialist (“identity”) politics of “Western” male elites, that is, the hegemonic tradition of thought of Western philosophy and social theory that almost never includes “Western” Women and never includes “non-Western” philosophers/philosophies and social scientists. In this tradition, the “West” is considered to be the only legitimate tradition of thought able to produce knowledge and the only one with access to “universality,” “rationality” and “truth”.

(2010, 29)

His critique of this form of “identity politics” is echoed in the work of André Keet, who talks about the “epistemic othering” that occurs in the academy. He argues that it
emerges from a lack in collective interpretive resources as a structurally anchored prejudice. This anchor is the disciplines, because they help us produce a work where voids in hermeneutical assets are falsely regarded as equally distributed . . . these “otherings” are legitimized by knowledge and are thus rendered, for the most part, invisible to the academy itself.

(2014, 24)

Epistemologies of ignorance

Charles Mills’ conception of the epistemologies of ignorance has been particularly fruitful in uncovering such systematic epistemic silences. In The Racial Contract (1997), Mills introduced the concept to refer to the active production and preservation of ignorance by those in privileged positions about the mechanisms of racism and the ways in which they benefit the privileged. Mills views the racial contract as resting upon an inverted epistemology in which those in privilege are ignorant of the privileges they reinforce and benefit from. Such instances of ignorance are not simple “gaps” in knowledge, but rather what Marilyn Frye (1983b) identified as “determined ignorances” and what I have labeled “willful ignorance” (Tuana, 2006, 10) that involve an effort to willfully misrepresent in ways that sustain privilege.

Linda Martín Alcoff develops the concept of epistemic ignorance through tracing the origins and implications of three different liberatory frameworks for understanding epistemologies of ignorance: i) Lorraine Code’s analysis of the significance of our situatedness as knowers, ii) Sandra Harding’s standpoint analysis of ignorance as emergent from the systematic experiential differences among social groups, and iii) Charles Mills’ structural account of the nature of oppressive systems and the desire, and perhaps need, to “see the world wrongly.” Her conclusion is that “to truly understand the cause of the problem of ignorance, we also need to make epistemology reflexively aware and critical of its location within an economic system” (2006, 57). Understanding the epistemic function and the mechanisms for cultivating ignorance has been a valuable resource for liberatory epistemology in both domains of the subject of knowledge demarcated in this essay. Work on epistemologies of ignorance has provided valuable insights into how power gets complexly woven into the subject of knowledge – both in terms of what we do (and do not) know and in terms of who is (and is not) deemed a knower (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007; Tuana and Sullivan, 2006).

Miranda Fricker’s work in Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing builds on such efforts to identify the mechanisms of epistemic ignorance that serve to maintain systematic unknowing. She identifies two such mechanisms: hermeneutical and testimonial injustice. While testimonial injustice arises from the undermining of epistemic trustworthiness, hermeneutical injustice is “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experiences obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource” (2007, 155). She argues that there are gaps in hermeneutical resources that prevent members of marginalized groups from fully understanding their experiences, thereby obstructing the knowledge of such experiences by privileged groups as well. Unlike willful ignorance, where privileged individuals actively maintain ignorance about racist or other oppressive structures and the ways they benefit from them, Fricker identifies injustices that do not (yet) have a name (comparable to what Betty Friedan dubbed “The problem that has no name” [1963]) and which impair the ability of such groups to make sense of their experiences or to communicate them to members of other groups. Understood in this light, Fricker’s understanding of hermeneutical injustice functions primarily to identify ways in which marginalized individuals can be epistemically disabled, while Mills’ conception of epistemologies of ignorance frames what privileged
groups effect to not know, or what Alison Bailey labeled “the ignorance of internalized oppression,” in which the privileged are ignorant of their role in oppressive practices, and oppressed groups internalize the negative images of themselves created through oppressive practices (2007, 85), or what Mills called the epistemology of victims (1997, 109).

The systematic exclusion or distortion of the experiences of marginalized groups that preclude members of such groups from full hermeneutical membership due to meanings being “unduly influenced by more hermeneutically powerful groups” (Fricker, 2007, 155) locates such accounts of epistemic injustice in the lineage of standpoint, postcolonial, and other liberatory epistemologies that attend closely to the couplings of power and knowledge. Fricker’s notion of hermeneutical injustice is akin to Lorraine Code’s account of rhetorical spaces (1995) and Sarah Lucia Hoagland’s analysis of conceptual coercion in which “those working to preserve the sense of a dominant paradigm employ an array of strategies to appropriate, coopt, and erase distinct worlds of sense” (Hoagland, 2001, 127). In Rhetorical Space: Essays on Gendered Locations, Code develops an analysis of how “territorial imperatives structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them with a reasonable expectation of uptake and “choral support”: an expectation of being heard, understood, taken seriously” (1995, ix–x). Consider, she explains, “trying to have a productive public debate about abortion in the Vatican in 1995, where there is no available rhetorical space, not because the actual speech acts involved would be overtly prohibited, but because the available rhetorical space is not one where ideas on such a topic can be heard and debated openly, responsively” (1995, x). Devonya Havis brings a similar lens to traditional practices of philosophy when she asks, “Do our practices as philosophers overtly or covertly exclude the possibility that philosophies derived from some Black women’s experiences can be intelligible?” (2014, 240). Writing from the situated location of Africa, André Keet explains that “given the Eurocentric nature and practices of the disciplines in African higher education, it is plausible to argue that what is systematically obscured by the ‘structural prejudice in the collective interpretive resource’ [Fricker’s hermeneutical injustice] is that which is designated ‘African’ . . . in relation to a discourse that presents Africa as that which is ‘incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished’” (2014, 25).

Rebecca Mason offers an important corrective to the conception of hermeneutical injustice. She argues that reading Fricker’s conception of hermeneutical injustice through the lens of Mills’ analysis of ignorance “reveals an epistemic asymmetry,” namely that the hermeneutical lacuna may not be symmetrical. Some hermeneutical lacunas, say in the case of sexual harassment, may only be in the domain of the harasser, in which the “harasser was cognitively disabled by ethically bad epistemic practices that maintained (to his benefit) his ignorance of her experiences” (2011, 304). Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (2012) labels this form of epistemic injustice willful hermeneutical ignorance, which describes instances where “marginally situated knowers actively resist epistemic domination through interaction with other resistant knowers, while dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world” (2012, 716). Kristie Dotson develops Pohlhaus, Jr.’s conception of willful hermeneutical ignorance to identify a third category of epistemic injustice, what she labels contributory injustice (2012).

Contributory injustice, in this analysis, is defined as the circumstance where an epistemic agent’s willful hermeneutical ignorance in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources thwarts a knower’s ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community by compromising her epistemic agency.

(2012, 32)
Dotson argues that addressing contributory injustice will demand a form of what Marí Lugones (1987) called “world”-traveling.

**Epistemologies of resistance and liberation**

The liberatory responses to active ignorances, epistemic occlusions, and systemic silences are numerous. Efforts to identify the various ways in which subjects can be systematically silenced have led to various strategies to address such injustices. However, some liberatory theorists caution against unwittingly reinscribing a logic of purity by seeing all silences or all ignorances as oppressive. Aída Hurtado (1996), for example, argues that silence can be a strategic act of resistance.

Silence is a powerful weapon when it can be controlled. It is akin to camouflaging oneself when at war in an open field: playing possum at strategic times causes the power of the silent one to be underestimated . . . the knowledge obtained by remaining silent is like a reconnaissance flight into enemy territory that allows for individual and group survival.

Hurtado calls attention to what she calls “subjugated knowledge,” or strategic suspensions that constitute a positive and productive domain of not knowing. “**Subjugated knowledge** is knowledge that is temporally suspended or subjugated to resist structures of oppression and to create interstices of rebellion and potential revolution” (386).

Marí Lugones deploys the concept of the trickster to analyze how ignorance can be deployed strategically by those who take advantage of the ignorances of the privileged. Lugones’ trickster functions at times to more safely or effectively navigate worlds in which the groups or perspectives they represent are oppressed. Alison Bailey provides the example of Frederick Douglas using such ignorance strategically to trick white boys into teaching him how to write (2007, 88). But the trickster can also engage in epistemic disobedience by challenging the privileged to unlearn their ignorance and become aware of their oppressive norms. There are “truths that only the fool can speak and only the trickster can play out without harm” (Lugones, 2003, 92).

Walter Mignolo argues that awareness of epistemic violence requires that we engage in epistemic disobedience. He argues that “the task of de-colonial thinking and the enactment of the de-colonial option in the 21st century starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience” (2009, 15). In a similar vein, Sarah Lucia Hoagland calls for epistemic resistance, which involves

a double operation: (1) finding resistant logics, and (2) resisting the logic/language-games of hegemonic medical, legal, and scientific models, exploring how those at the center keep the center by rendering the resistance of others invisible as resistance . . . I am interested in strategies of resisting rationality both in the sense of resisting (dominant) rationality and also of finding nondominant resisting rationalities.

(2001, 140)


José Medina (2013) develops this theme by developing epistemologies of resistance that engage epistemic disobedience that are, as Eduardo Mendieta explains “fueled by epistemic outrage at the production, the making of new inequalities, new injustices, new forms of ‘expulsion’”
Medina calls for epistemic resistance through using “our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures” (2013, 3). Medina reanimates the links between the affective and the epistemic often found in the work of feminist epistemologists. Code, for example, critiqued the traditional epistemic position that would “accord no epistemic worth to the attunement, the sensitivity, that certain kinds of knowing demand” (1995, 122). Medina invokes a similar epistemic role for empathy, arguing for the importance of those in privileged groups overcoming their “impoverished affective structures” in order to develop the empathy and trust required to undermine willful ignorances against such groups. He sees epistemic resistance as a mode of relationality essential to democratic sociability. Mary Jeanne Larrabee argues that resistance epistemologies move away from the epistemic violence of seeing “knowledge as primarily mentally cognitive and . . . epistemology as a reasoned reflective enterprise” (2006, 456). She turns instead to Cherrie Moraga’s and Gloria Anzaldúa’s conception of “theories in the flesh” (1983, 23) as a type of resistance epistemology. Larrabee deploys Sarah Hoagland’s conception of resistant logics as a lens for seeing forms of resistance that have been silenced and rendered invisible by dominant logics (2001, 140).

María Lugones’ conception of “world”-travelling (1987) and the importance of “world”-travelling for those in privileged groups is similarly based on the link between responsible knowing and affective connection. In her dialogue with Elizabeth Spelman, Lugones (1983) argues that genuine dialogue between groups will require recognition, comprehension, respect, and love. Liberatory epistemologists have begun to explore whether the various forms of epistemic injustice can be ameliorated through such encounters (Butnor and McWeeny, 2014; Code, 2013; Hoagland, 2007; Ortega, 2006; Potter, 2013; Sullivan, 2004).

Through travelling to other people’s “worlds” we discover that there are “worlds” in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions, even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (Lugones, 1987, 18)

Medina underscores the importance of challenging epistemic silencing through respectful exchanges between dominant and marginalized groups, enabling “mutual resistance and beneficial friction and not a mere overpowering of one perspective by the other (which would simply reproduce internally the relation of subordination and cognitive domination that characterizes oppression)” (2013, 198).

In closing, let me acknowledge at least some of the limitations of this essay that animate the critical importance of attention to the complex interchanges of power/knowledge. My efforts to include nonwestern perspectives was impacted by the limitations of language – both my own abilities as well as the decisions of others about which theorists are worthy of translation. It was also limited by access and the politics of library collections. As just one example, many important African academic journals are not included on the shelves or in the electronic databases of even the top research libraries. Furthermore, important work arising from continental philosophical attention to power/knowledge gets marginalized by the very category and practices of what counts as epistemological inquiry. My efforts to frame this essay in light of liberatory epistemologies was also limited by the paucity of epistemic analyses of the import of class on issues of ignorance and knowing, as well as my personal limitations regarding queer or disability perspectives on these topics.

Related chapters: 10, 13, 15, 27, 37
Notes

1 This chapter was enriched and improved thanks to feedback from the editors.
2 While racism functions differently at different historical periods, the linkage between denigrated traits and marginalized men has been tightly coupled, a coupling that results in nonprivileged women often being doubly “othered.”

References

Feminist epistemology


Nancy Tuana


