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Implicit Bias and Epistemic Oppression in Confronting Racism

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Abstract: Motivating reforms to address discrimination and exclusion is important. But what epistemic practices characterise better or worse ways of doing this? Recently, the phenomena of implicit biases have played a large role in motivating reforms. We argue that this strategy risks perpetuating two kinds of epistemic oppression: the vindication dynamic and contributory injustice. We offer positive proposals for avoiding these forms of epistemic oppression when confronting racism.

Implicit Bias and Epistemic Oppression in Confronting Racism[1]

1. Introduction

In taxonomizing the different forms that racism can take, Gloria Yamato identifies the category of unaware/unintentional racism, and its role in systemic and institutionalised forms of racism: 'with the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being "nice" the way we're taught to be nice' (2004: 100).[2] Many recent reform efforts argued for within academia (and beyond) have focused on this kind of racism. Whilst acknowledging that attention to specific acts of discrimination is only part of tackling racism, which is systemic and structural, some have pushed for policies and procedures to be changed in order to combat unintentional racism.[3] Relying on good will and anti-racist intentions cannot be sufficient.

It is important, however, that changes to policies and procedures are driven by the right kinds of evidence. This raises the question of what type of evidence should be used to motivate reforms to tackle unintentional racism. Recent discussions of unintentional racism have given prominence to one type of evidence: studies from social psychology on implicit bias (see e.g. Saul 2013, 2018, the American Philosophical Association Good Practices Guide, e.g. Section 2, p.15, Section 5 p.62). This research has motivated reforms in some institutions (albeit with varying degrees of commitment to rooting out deeply entrenched racism, since the institutions promising reforms based on concerns about implicit bias range from individual Philosophy Departments, to whole Universities, to Google, healthcare providers, and police forces). However, we argue there are risks associated with focusing too

[1] We thank audiences at the Bias in Context Workshop at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; The University of Sheffield; The University of Edinburgh; and The University of Southampton for feedback on earlier versions of this paper, as well as comments from anonymous reviewers that have enabled the paper to evolve significantly since its first submission.

[2] The other categories Yamato introduces and analyses are: aware/blatant racism, aware/covert racism, and unaware/self-righteous racism.

[3] Moreover, attention to structural racism also requires attention to individual actions (since individual action partially constitutes social structures, and since individual action is needed to implement changes to institutional practices). See e.g. Haslanger 2015, Madva 2016, cf. Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015 and Ayala 2016

narrowly on this type of evidence at the expense of another source of evidence about unintentional racism: testimony from lived experience of racism.

We draw on insights from black feminist epistemology to argue that to neglect of this testimonial evidence risks perpetrating two types of injustice: (i) the *vindication dynamic*, in which testimony of lived experience of discrimination is treated as in need of vindication, (ii) *contributory injustice*, which occurs when members of marginalised groups are denied the opportunity to contribute to the shared interpretative resources available within a community. Efforts to motivate anti-racist reforms, therefore, should draw on and integrate both sources of evidence, as we later propose.

2. Sources of evidence

This section introduces two sources of evidence about unintentional racism, each of which provides support for instigating changes to policies and procedures (there are of course various other evidentiary sources: statistical, historical, etc. We set these aside for now).

a. Testimonial resources, literary and social psychological

One source of evidence is testimony from those with lived experience of unintentional racism. One recent source of testimonial evidence is Claudia Rankine's (2014) *Citizen, An American Lyric*, which provides a rich and bleak compendium of the everyday slights and insults experienced by Black Americans. Rankine presents testimonies, based on her own and others experiences, articulated in the second-personal 'you' form, in order to position the reader as 'an apparent part of the encounter.' (Rankine also explains two other reasons for this form of address: first, that since the experiences were not all her own, she did not want to 'own' them with the first personal pronoun, and second, that addressing the reader as 'you' forces them to make assumptions about race: 'you're race-ing these people in order to understand this dynamic. I wanted that positioning to happen for readers' (Rankine, in Sharma 2014).) For example:

> You and your partner go to see the film *The House We Live In*. You ask a friend to pick up your child from school. On your way home your phone rings. Your neighbour tells you he is standing at his window watching a menacing

> black guy casing both your homes. The guy is walking back and forth talking to himself and seems disturbed…. Your partner calls your friend and asks him if there's a guy walking back and forth in front of your home. Your friend says that if anyone were outside he would see him because he is standing outside. You hear sirens through the speakerphone. (2014: 15)
>
> In line at the drugstore it's finally your turn, and then it's not as he walks in front of you and puts his things on the counter. The cashier says, Sir, she was next. When he turns to you he is truly surprised.
> Oh my God, I didn't see you.
> You must be in a hurry, you offer.
> No, no, no, I really didn't see you. (2014: 77)
>
> When the waitress hands your friend the card she took from you, you laugh and ask what else her privilege gets her? (2014: 148)

In these passages Rankine explores the way neighbours, strangers and friends are implicated in – perpetrators of, or party to – a daily grind of racist slights: assuming as other, as dangerous, intrusive, out of place.

The following features of Rankine's examples are especially important to the current analysis. First, these insults are presented as slips, or unintentional, or unthinking. This is not to say they are driven by implicit bias, but rather that perpetrators of them may not be driven by ill will (though this is not precluded). They would fit Yamato's category of 'unintentional racism'. Second, prominent alongside these descriptions is the grappling with ambivalence – 'what did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?' (2014: 9). Third, the deniability of what happened hinders the ability to definitively label any one instance racism – couldn't the incident be rationalised some other way (an honest mistake)? Compare also the title of Yamato's piece: 'Something about the subject makes it hard to name'. Fourth, dealing with the ambivalence that results, in part from the deniability, is part of the burden that Rankine describes. But, fifth, the cumulative effect reveals – to the protagonist and to the reader – a pattern of

treatment underwritten by a set of associations that others apply to her and that she carries with her: Black, dangerous, intrusive, other, trespassing in white space.

Testimonies can also be found in the literature on experiences of microaggressions. In a series of focus groups, Sue and colleagues (2008) gathered testimonies of people of colours' experiences of microaggressions, and identified commonalities in participants' experiences. One of the prominent themes – that resonates with Rankine's writings– is the deniability of the behaviour, and the possibility of rationalising it away as something other than racism, despite how it was experienced. Sue et al write of 'Another participant['s] ... struggle when a White woman changed seats on the train from sitting next to her:

> Maybe it just so happened that the person she decided to sit next to wasn't Black, and she wasn't Black. I can't say that's why she moved, but maybe she wanted to be close to the window. I don't know.' (2008: 332)

Notwithstanding the ambiguity, the understanding of how one might be perceived – dangerous, out of place, incompetent – is reported as ever present and shaping interactions:

> inside an elevator, a closed space, being very conscious if there is a White woman, whether or not she's afraid, or just sort of noticing me, trying to relax myself around her so she's not afraid. (2008: 333)

> So when I walk into a hospital and say I'm here to fix your machine, I get a double take initially … They ask me a lot of questions … It's subtle, it's more like they want to find out what I know and who I am before they trust me with it (2008: 333)

Others reported strategies for dealing with this, notably, identifying what has gone wrong with the interaction in terms of unintentional or unconscious white racism:

> I don't blame it on myself; it's not like, what's wrong with me? It's like, oh, that's that White unconsciousness that they're so well trained in (2008: 332)

However, the participants emphasised the pervasiveness of the slights, and the burden of interpreting or challenging every one of them:

> If you were to address every microaggression, it's like all 'Oh there you go again, you people' (2008: 333)

At issue here again is a failure to be able to effectively communicate due to the incompetence of one's audience (what Dotson has called 'testimonial smothering' (2011: 244)). What one wants to express is that harmful discrimination has occurred, but this is not recognised as such by the perpetrators who would be confronted – instead 'there you go again'.

These examples show how testimony from lived experience can provide evidence about unintentional racism. Note also that again, there is emphasis on the deniability of the discriminatory treatment; there is attention to the difficulty of identifying it as an instance of discrimination; and the difficulty of confronting the perpetrator who (it is anticipated) shares a different way of understanding the incident. As we can see, testimonial evidence - from literature, qualitative research in social psychology, or elsewhere - has the potential to be a powerful tool wherever evidence of unintentional racism can be used to motivate and shape institutional change.

b. Evidence from the social psychology research programme on implicit bias

The second source of evidence about some instances of unintentional racism is psychological research on implicit bias. Many philosophers – and indeed, many people outside the academy – are by now familiar with the notion of implicit bias. Implicit biases are the mental constructs that lead people to automatically associate members of social groups with certain characteristics (though there are competing ways of understanding what these mental constructs are, see e.g. Holroyd et al 2017). These automatic thought processes may encode stereotypes or negative evaluations contrary to the thinker's professed values. For example, studies show that people who report egalitarian principles can harbour implicit biases that encode racist stereotypes and evaluations. Implicit biases are hypothesized to be at work in studies that reveal discriminatory behaviours. Implicit biases are recognized to be pervasive, but difficult to detect and to control (see Jost et al 2009 for an overview).

Psychological studies purport to measure such biases using indirect measures. These are experimental techniques that bypass participants' reflective self-reports of their beliefs or attitudes. For example, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures how quickly and accurately participants respond to stimuli representing a social group (e.g. white or Black) and stimuli representing concepts such as *loyal*, *honest* or *abuse*, *murder* (on an evaluative IAT), or *brainy*, *smart* vs *athletic*, *rhythmic* on a stereotype IAT (Amodio & Devine 2006). The speed and accuracy of participants' responses are used to generate a score that reflects the difference in response times with respect to each social group (e.g. how much faster at categorizing white with positive notions or stereotypes, than Black with positive notions or stereotypes). It is inferred that this indicates how strongly participants associate the respective social groups with the target concepts (the evaluations, positive or negative, or stereotypes). Typically, these studies indicate that participants hold biases against Black people.

Studies also look for the impact of implicit bias on discriminatory behaviours. For example, studies that focused on employment contexts found that participants made differential evaluations of the same CV and differential hiring recommendations based on interview materials depending on the race of the candidate (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). In medical contexts, practitioners who participated in studies made differential treatment prescriptions to white or Black patients based on the same presentation of symptoms – and their tendency to do so correlated with the extent to which they showed implicit racial bias on indirect measures (the Implicit Association Test) (Green et al 2007). In studies that looked at behaviors that may manifest in everyday interactions, white participants were found to sit further away from Black individuals, smile less, converse less and manifest more errors of speech (McConnell & Leibold 2001). If such behaviors issue from implicit bias, then they may be instances of unintentional racism, perpetrated without ill-will or explicit prejudice. Researchers on implicit bias are at pains to emphasise the pervasiveness of the phenomena – the majority of white participants, and perhaps half of Black participants show patterns of anti-Black bias. And it is hypothesized that the occasions on which bias might be most likely to influence behavior are those in which one's behavior can be rationalized by some other, non-race-related considerations (Dovidio & Gaertner 2000).

Drawing on such findings has been a catalyst for change, for example:

a) Enabling individuals (who may be in a position to enact institutional change) to gain a greater awareness of the possibility that they are complicit (albeit unintentionally, and despite good-will) in discrimination;
b) Opening up conversations about discrimination and inclusion – which may prove easier if they do not involve attributions of ill-will or explicit prejudice (though see Eddo-Lodge (2018: xii) on the problems with tailoring discussions of race to accommodate white people's discomfort);
c) Motivating institutional reforms that combat unintentional racism, such as: reform of reading lists, hiring procedures; workplace climate policies and so on (see e.g. Saul 2018, Holroyd & Saul 2018 for an overview of these reforms within academia).

Recent impetus to make institutional changes to combat unintentional racism has been generated in large part due to discussions drawing on the implicit bias research programme. But, despite these gains, there are problems with drawing on this evidence alone—it is these that we aim to highlight.

3. Selecting evidence, the vindication dynamic, and contributory injustice

Since there are multiple sources of evidence to which one might appeal in one's attempts to instigate positive institutional change, what hangs on the choice about to which evidence to appeal? In this section, we argue that there are risks associated with the use of one kind of evidence – that from quantitative research on implicit bias—while not properly incorporating other evidence, i.e. the testimony from lived experience of racism.

This is motivated first by the thought that due to the pervasiveness of discussions of the psychological research on implicit bias, many people are likely to find this evidence to be especially compelling and powerful, and consequently focus on it to the detriment of other evidence. And, second, as we will spell out, there are particular costs and harms associated with focusing solely on the quantitative psychological findings that would not be incurred by focusing solely on testimonial evidence. Specifically, there is a risk of perpetrating what, drawing on Patricia Hill Collins' work, we call a *vindication dynamic*, and a kind of injustice that Kristie Dotson has identified as *contributory injustice.* Note that our claim is not that there is

something intrinsic to the findings of quantitative social psychology that generates these risks. Rather, in our current social and academic climate, which is one in which scholars of colour are marginalized or excluded, and in which testimony of people of colour is often silenced or unheard, these risks loom large.

a. The vindication dynamic

Our concern in this section is an epistemic dynamic that is described by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins provides the following example:

> various descendants of Sally Hemings, a Black woman owned by Thomas Jefferson, claimed repeatedly that Jefferson fathered her children. These accounts forwarded by Jefferson's African-American descendants were ignored in favour of accounts advanced by his White progeny. Heming's descendants were routinely disbelieved until their knowledge claims were validated by DNA testing. (2002: 270)

Testimony provided by Hemings and her descendants was denied credibility until scientific tests supported the claims found therein. Faced with conflicting testimonial evidence, racist norms of credibility ensured that testimony from white speakers was afforded credibility that Hemings and her descendants were not. Yet Hemings' testimony was ultimately vindicated by DNA evidence (Gordon-Reed & Takagi 1997). Whilst this vindication is important, there is something problematic in the idea that certain kinds of testimony - testimony from people of colour, especially when it challenges existing power structures and hierarchies - stand in need of vindication. The assumption that Hemings' testimony alone cannot provide sufficient reason for belief, absent verification from other sources of evidence, is part of a long history of epistemic exclusion.

The vindication dynamic may be thought of as an instance of what Kristie Dotson and Marita Gilbert have recently labelled 'disappearances': as they put it, 'the lives and experiences of Black women are rendered invisible in public narratives' (Dotson & Gilbert, 2014: 873, pointing to the work of Fannie Barrier Williams (1905), Zora Neale Hurston (1950), Audre Lorde (1990), Rebecca Wanzo (2009)). For example, Zora Neale Hurston (1950) described the one-dimensional stereotypes that obscure the intellectual and emotional lives of Black Americans. Rebecca Wanzo

(2009), writing more than half a century later, argues that whilst narratives are present in public discourse, they often homogenise experiences and focus on personal - rather than social - transformation as a way of overcoming oppression, thus obscuring the reality and experience of systemic racism. Our focus in this section is on one epistemic dynamic that can render narrative and testimonial evidence of racism invisible, ensuring that it is often not present in contemporary discourses about discrimination (cf. Davidson, 2019, who raises similar concerns about the use of implicit bias evidence within academic philosophy. Davidson focuses on how the use of the empirical evidence prevents widespread ('third-order') change to epistemic systems).

Collins takes the treatment of Hemings' to illustrate the ways in which 'power relations shape who is believed and why' (2002: 270). In this case, power dynamics of race and gender lead the testimony of a Black woman to be treated as unreliable. The contributions made by her testimony are therefore marginalized and undermined as a source of knowledge and, moreover, the subsequent exclusion of such knowledge conveniently serves to sustain certain myths about race and racial purity (e.g. that whites were superior, that whites and Blacks should not and did not miscegenate and that slave owners' sexual abuse of enslaved women was not one of the ways in which they were exploited), the conduct of whites in power (as morally impeccable, rather than as exploitative, morally corrupt and as perpetrators of abuses with impunity), the place of Black people in America (as passively, indeed naturally, subservient). Collins explores the ways that such epistemic dynamics marginalize important understanding of experiences of oppression, and Black women are further harmed by their exclusion from the epistemic community and the inability to get on the record the nature of their social experiences.

This is just one form of what Dotson calls epistemic oppression: 'the epistemic exclusions afforded positions and communities that produce deficiencies in social knowledge', whereby an exclusion concerns infringements that reduce knowers' ability to participate in epistemic communities (2012: 24). Our suggestion here is that such a dynamic is risked in discussions of unintentional racism focusing solely on quantitative psychological research on implicit bias. To understand this point, let us probe the example of Hemings further. In this case there are multiple epistemic wrongs. In the first instance, there is the wrong of the initial epistemic exclusion of Hemings (and indeed, slave women in general). To the extent that

Hemings' testimony is later vindicated by the emergence of DNA evidence, it is important to note that it is the *proposition* at issue that is vindicated. Her testimony is regarded as something that stood in need of post hoc vindication. Her status as a knower and her testimony alone was and remains insufficient to provide the evidential support for the proposition that Jefferson fathered her children (despite her being, one might think, uniquely placed to determine this, and despite the consistency of her account with what is widely known about the sexual exploitation of enslaved women by white owners).

Note that whilst the later means of vindication might itself be epistemically respectable – endorsing the findings of well conducted DNA studies is a rational response to the evidence – it nonetheless contributes to an oppressive epistemic dynamic. Even though the moment of vindication is not itself one in which we see an exclusion, it puts in stark relief the epistemic norms that cast some knowers as unreliable sources of knowledge. The vindication dynamic contrasts with cases in which some initial evidence, taken to have probative value, is later given further support by being confirmed or corroborated. The initial testimony is not considered to have probative value, which is precisely why the later evidence is vindicatory. To the extent that this *vindication dynamic* entrenches norms that shape who is and is not reliable, or which testimony does or does not stand in need of vindication, it contributes to patterns of epistemic oppression.

What is the relevance of this dynamic to our practical question of to what evidence we might appeal in supporting the proposition that discrimination can be unintentional? Focusing solely on quantitative evidence from the research programme on implicit bias sidelines pre-existing testimonial evidence about racism, foregrounding evidence emerging from academic studies, generated in laboratory conditions. It also marginalises the work of people of colour who have articulated these aspects of their experience, thereby marginalising evidence based in lived experience. This has particularly consequential racial dynamics, insofar as, as Collins (2002) writes, such evidence has particular importance in Black women's epistemic communities. Conversely, evidence emanating from the predominantly white academy is privileged. Collins' diagnosis focuses in particular on hierarchies of knowledge (academic research vs testimonial), which are themselves racialized. This explanatory framework is more plausible than an explanation that appeals just to the race of those producing the research, since in this case much prominent research on

implicit bias is conducted by scholars of colour (e.g. Jennifer Eberhardt, M. Banaji, C. Lai). Testimonial evidence is not valued in this hierarchy, but in particular the testimony of women of colour is devalued, Collins argues.

So, whilst there is something very important about providing evidence for the proposition at issue – that racism can be unintentionally perpetrated– there are risks involved with doing so by appeal only to the quantitative research program on implicit bias. Whilst the *proposition* for which there is testimonial evidence—that there exists unintentional racism—is confirmed by appeal to evidence of implicit bias, the emphasis on that evidence risks entrenching certain oppressive epistemic dynamics. In particular, it risks entrenching the message that certain testimony – qualitative testimonial evidence based in experience, specifically the experiences of people of colour – is insufficiently credible and stands in need of vindication. It risks entrenching the notion that *this,* rather than *that* evidence suffices to warrant belief. (One might think that evidence from research on implicit bias is helpful in that it increases the credibility of future testifiers about racism. This does not mitigate the problem for past and present and future testifiers, whose words apparently need vindication.)

Focusing only on the psychological research on implicit bias also risks conveying the message that the kind of evidence that is important is that which affirms the existence of (the possibility of) unintentional racism by focusing on the cognitions of the perpetrators. The 'mere' experience of those targeted by the discrimination, according to these norms, is insufficient to warrant belief. To prioritise psychological research on implicit bias is to suggest not only that testimony alone is insufficient, but that a certain kind of evidence is needed to vindicate these 'perceptions' – evidence concerning the cognitions of perpetrators.

In drawing attention to the vindication dynamic, we do not need to establish that (as is plausibly the case with Hemings) the disregarding of testimonial evidence is in each instance a case of testimonial injustice in the sense that has become familiar through the work of Miranda Fricker ((2007) namely, involving prejudicial judgements of deflated credibility due to one's social identity). We do not need to maintain that all, or even the majority, of cases in which people appeal solely to quantitative psychological findings on implicit bias when discussing unintentional racism are cases in which those people are displaying *prejudice* or making judgements of reduced credibility. Nor do we want to maintain this, since we lack the

data about the cognitive states of those who have appealed to implicit bias evidence. What is important to the current discussion, however, is that focusing solely on psychological research on implicit bias serves to entrench certain hierarchical norms, and perpetuate epistemic exclusions that produce deficiencies in social knowledge (Dotson, 2012: 24). Failing to heed someone's testimonial evidence is to proceed *as if* it lacks credibility, even if such judgements have not been made. The dynamic that we describe thus instantiates a form of epistemic oppression.

In selecting one's evidence, then, we must be alert to the risk that attention only to psychological research on implicit bias risks entrenching a set of epistemic norms whereby the status of testimony of lived experience of racism is relegated. Moreover, focusing solely on the psychological research on implicit bias risks entrenching oppressive norms about the kind of evidence that is reliable: the lived experience of people of colour is devalued, and stands in need of vindication from more 'respectable' sources of evidence.[4]

b. Contributory injustice

We now consider a second risk faced by focusing on the research programme on implicit bias rather than testimonial evidence: the risk of perpetrating a specific form of injustice identified by Kristie Dotson, i.e. contributory injustice.

Contributory injustice 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 (Dotson, 2012: 32).

[4] By focusing on how epistemic norms and practices produce epistemic wrongs our work here is consistent with recent arguments presented by Charles Mills (2007), Kristie Dotson (2012), Jose Medina (2013), Saray Ayala and Nadya Vasilyeva (2015; Ayala 2016), and Michael Doan (2018). Ayala and Vasilyeva (2015), for example, argue that testimonial injustice is rooted in linguistic conventions. Meanwhile, Doan (2018) emphasises how accounts of epistemic injustice can better capture political struggles for recognition and self-determination if they focus on the epistemic norms underpinning communities and institutions.

Hermeneutical resources are our resources for making sense of the world – concepts, theoretical frameworks, narratives, practical starting points or assumptions and so forth. They are *structurally prejudiced* if the ability of people in different social locations to contribute to the shared hermeneutical resources is asymmetrical. For example, if white people are able to participate in the shaping of the resources available to make sense of the social world to a greater extent than Black people, those resources are structurally prejudiced. Such a pattern of participation will produce hermeneutical resources that are unduly influenced by those hermeneutically advantaged people who have contributed – usually, those in positions of power and influence – and insufficiently influenced by members of the marginalised groups themselves. This asymmetrical influence is likely to result in a set of resources that is a better 'fit' for the experiences of those in a hermeneutically advantaged position, and a worse 'fit' for the experiences of those in hermeneutically disadvantaged positions, in that it lacks the conceptual resources or interpretative meanings that are needed to well capture the experiences of the latter group(s). Marginalised groups may have developed their own hermeneutical resources: 'alternative epistemologies, countermythologies, and hidden transcripts' (Dotson 2012: 31). These alternative sets of hermeneutical resources are available for marginalized individuals to understand their social experiences, but are not part of shared collective resources.

Contributory injustice occurs, then, when the resources that marginalised people use to interpret and articulate their experiences are not acknowledged or taken seriously in an epistemic community, and when the dominant hermeneutical resources used in that community thwart those individuals' ability to contribute to the shared resources (the alternative resources they do have available are not widely understood or regarded as useful conceptualisations). An example of contributory injustice is provided by Reni Eddo Lodge, who describes how the concept of 'intersectionality' - developed by Black feminist scholars to articulate how gender and racial oppressions intersect to disadvantage Black women - has been refused uptake by writers in the mainstream media in the UK, ostensibly for being 'utter jargon' (2015: 140).

On Dotson's account of contributory injustice, these structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources are utilised by an agent or agents due to their *willful ignorance*. Willful ignorance, for Dotson, 'maps onto [an] epistemically culpable failure' (2012: 33), so at stake here are cases of ignorance where one should have known better. On Dotson's account, it is easy to fall short of the relevant epistemic

standards. Her claim is that contributory injustice is very easy to commit, and very difficult to avoid (2012: 38-40). Dotson argues that people can perpetrate contributory injustice without being aware of doing so, without thinking that they are putting a foot wrong (accordingly, the degree to which the failure is epistemically culpable could vary considerably. Since, contributory injustice is difficult to avoid, one might think that the degree of culpability may, in some instances, be minimal).

With this exposition of contributory injustice in place, we now consider how one's selection of evidence – in particular, a selection that focuses solely on research on implicit bias – could perpetrate contributory injustice. Earlier, we presented what can be thought of as two sets of hermeneutical resources that can be used to frame one's understanding of unintentional racism and exclusion. One set of hermeneutical resources is grounded in the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced and witnessed discrimination. The other set of hermeneutical resources has been developed within social psychology, and is concerned with the notion of implicit bias and its role in unintentional racism. (Of course, these two sets of resources need not be exclusive - they may be partially overlapping, as we saw above, when some participants refer to the notion of unconscious bias to explain their experiences.)

Here, we want to argue that in selecting one's evidence, and choosing to focus solely on the resources from the quantitative research programme on implicit bias, one may perpetrate contributory injustice. To show this, we need to show that such resources are structurally prejudicial, that use of them thwarts other knowers from contributing to the epistemic community, and that the use of them can be understood as an instance of willful ignorance.

Recall that hermeneutical resources are structurally prejudiced if the ability to contribute to those resources of people in different social locations is asymmetrical, with the likely outcome that those resources differentially reflect the social experiences of the contributing groups. To the extent that the collective resources utilised in discussions of implicit bias are technical tools developed within academia (psychology, philosophy), the exclusion of Black and minority ethnicity individuals from academia is one way in which differently racialized groups are asymmetrically positioned to contribute to those resources. In the US, the National Centre for Education Statistics finds that, in 2018, 75% of full-time faculty were white, and amongst professors, 80% were white, with Black men and women comprising 4% of all professors. In the UK, a recent study indicates that 'black academics constitute

1.54% of the total UK academic population a significant under-representation in terms of the broader resident black population being 3.3%' (Shilliam, 2015: 32). At professorial level fewer than 1% are Black, 25 (raw figure) of whom are women (Rollock 2019). Insofar as psychology is not an outlier in terms of representation, the context in which the research on implicit bias is being done is one whereby the ability to contribute to those resources of Black and minority ethnicity individuals is asymmetric, simply insofar as there is drastic under-representation. This will be exacerbated in conditions, such as those reported on by Bhopal and Jackson (2013) in which black and minority ethnicity academics feel excluded, stereotyped and over-scrutinised. And, as Romdenh-Romluc argues, there can remain hermeneutical marginalisation even when individuals have access to hermeneutical power and are in positions to shape meanings - even then, their hermeneutical marginalisation is likely to show up in the social meanings available for use (2016: 596).

Secondly, alongside the asymmetries in *who* contributes to the shared resources, we see differences in what kinds of evidence are afforded significance. To the extent that testimonies grounded in lived experience of racism are devalued, individuals offering such understanding for incorporation into the collective hermeneutical resources are thwarted in their attempts to do so. The case to be made here draws in part on the claims set out in our discussion of the vindication dynamic above. There, we drew upon Patricia Hill Collins' claims that Black women's knowledge has been marginalised, and in particular knowledge that is developed through and communicated in testimonies grounded in lived experiences of oppression is devalued. Already marginalised, these testimonies would be further disregarded if we were to focus solely on evidence pertaining to implicit bias.

To a certain extent, this is a contingent matter: given limited air time or journal space, if that is given to quantitative psychological research on implicit bias rather than research that attends to lived experiences of racism, the latter are marginalised. However, this pattern is one that is entrenched in a set of epistemic dynamics that devalues the perspectives and experiences of people of colour, in particular women of colour. Indeed, Dotson draws on Audre Lorde to tease out different mechanisms through which Black women's experiences ('words, work and lives') have been excluded: scrambling or distorting their words (e.g. by dissembling that one simply cannot understand what is being said); erasure; and disregard (2012: 33). On the one hand, as mentioned above, psychological research on implicit bias

may in some sense serve to counteract the tendencies to scramble or erase experiences of racism – indeed, to focus on implicit bias is to point to evidence of its pervasiveness, and to affirm experiences of unintentional racism. However, to draw *only* on such evidence is nonetheless to disregard the contributions to addressing racism that have been made by those who have experienced and witnessed it, and to focus instead on the experimentally revealed dispositions of the perpetrators. This is to perpetuate a certain form of exclusion – both of certain knowers, and of a certain kind of knowledge – namely, that grounded in experiences of oppressive structure of the social world, and presented in the hermeneutical resources that capture those experiences.

So, the hermeneutical resources are structurally prejudiced in terms of who contributes to them; and this corresponds to the kinds of knowledge and understandings that are given prominence and marginalised, respectively, within those shared resources. In particular, testimony offers up a different aspect of the phenomena at issue: what it is like to experience persistent, everyday, racism. The resources needed to describe this aspect of the social world will of course be different from those required to describe the cognitive mechanisms that might underpin such patterns of discrimination. Our resources will be structurally prejudiced if the interpretative resources we have available to understand unintentional racism become dominated by, or excessively focused on, the cognitions of the perpetrators. As such, the shared or dominant resources may be asymmetrical in having rich resources to capture the phenomenon of *perpetrating* unintentional racism, but fewer resources – or a gap in the resources – to understand what it is like to experience such discrimination. This is to the disadvantage of anyone trying to register, in the shared collective resources, such experiences and the concepts needed to make good sense of them.

This exclusion thwarts the abilities of knowers to further contribute to the shared hermeneutical resources. One way these contributions are thwarted is simply the lack of uptake they receive. One cannot contribute to the shared hermeneutical resources if audiences do not hear or attend to the testimonies available. A second way in which such contributions are thwarted is a matter of emphasis: to the extent that evidence about experiences of discrimination is available, if it is not regarded as important or useful, it will be not be fully incorporated into the shared conceptual resources. The conceptual space for such meanings and understandings is there, but

relegated to an unimportant or peripheral aspect of the phenomenon that does not significantly advance collective understanding. A third way in which contributions may be thwarted is if the failure to get any uptake, or to be regarded as contributing valuable concepts for understanding the phenomenon, results in downstream 'testimonial smothering' (Dotson 2011: 244). Testimonial smothering occurs when knowers fail to speak, in a particular context, having learned that they will not be heard. Whilst the harms of hermeneutical injustice and contributory injustice have already been articulated (see e.g. Fricker 2007, Dotson 2011), it is important in this context to emphasise that the collective resources of an epistemic community are overall weakened if the evidence from testimony about lived experiences of racism is not included – there are epistemic costs all round, in addition to the harm that accrues to individuals who are unable to contribute. We elaborate on this in the following section.

Finally, we contend that the use of these structurally prejudiced resources is (often) due to willful ignorance. Recall that on Dotson's view, it is very easy to commit contributory injustice and very difficult to avoid it. Overlooking evidence that one really should be aware of can suffice to make this a case of willful ignorance. An overemphasis on the quantitative psychological literature on implicit bias, when one is aware of other sources of evidence, would constitute willful ignorance on this construal.

Reflection on discourse about implicit bias, however, brings to light that there may be other ways of perpetrating contributory injustice that are not grounded in willful ignorance. For example, as mentioned above, there have been some gains from the attention to quantitative evidence of implicit bias, and one might make a strategic choice to focus on this evidence, rather than testimony, because, for example, one thinks there will be greater uptake amongst one's peers of the psychological research program on implicit bias. There can be benefits to appearing to conform to oppressive epistemic norms of this type – norms such as 'assign comparatively higher value to (quantitative) evidence generated by (white) academic experts' – under specific, localised circumstances. For example, Michael Doan (2018) describes how activists and residents fighting for access to clean affordable water in Michigan (USA) benefited from conforming to epistemic norms giving preference to expert testimony from academic researchers. They (appeared to) conform to these norms by getting such experts engaged in their cause while also pushing back against the comparative

value judgement expressed in the norm, by highlighting the contribution that could be made by the stories of residents (cf. Medina 2013).

We do not wish to underplay the benefits of this type of strategic conformity to problematic norms but we do wish to highlight the associated risks. Whilst not setting aside testimony due to willful ignorance, this kind of strategic choice may still use and maintain structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that thwart others' abilities to contribute to the shared epistemic resources, in the ways we described above - especially if it does not at the same time challenge the oppressive epistemic norms. That is, such a strategic choice in this context may still place focus on quantitative research about the cognitions of discriminators, at the cost of attention to testimony of those who have experienced discrimination. (Our claim is not that these strategic choices could never be justified; rather that they come with certain risks, consideration of which is needed in a full assessment of the strategic choice.) Thus we propose an expansion of the notion of contributory injustice, to extend not only to exclusions that result from willful ignorance, but also exclusions based in strategic choices. However, if one is concerned to preserve the notion of contributory injustice only for those cases grounded in willful ignorance, then it suffices for our purposes to claim that something very much like it – the use of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that thwarts knowers' abilities to contribute to shared epistemic resources, thus compromising their epistemic agency – can result from strategic choices, as well as from willful ignorance.

4. Inclusion, epistemic and practical gains

We are *not* arguing here that there is no place for discussion of the quantitative psychological research on implicit bias in discourse surrounding unintentional racism and institutional change. Rather, we are arguing for a proper integration of both kinds of evidence into the shared hermeneutical resources. Dotson argues that 'addressing contributory injustice is difficult but not impossible. It requires … perceivers to be aware of a range of differing sets of hermeneutical resources in order to be capable of shifting resources appropriately' (2012: 34). Dotson emphasises that this is by no means easy – that resources from marginalised groups might be difficult to access, difficult to navigate for those unfamiliar with the hermeneutical resources, and that considerable trust must be extended and developed by all sides in order to facilitate

'transconceptual communication'. However, in this section we provide some tentative suggestions about how this integration might proceed.

The move towards better integration of testimonial evidence of racism into discussions of unintentional racism will require challenging the oppressive epistemic norms identified in this paper, and which underpin the vindication dynamic and contributory injustice. This requires challenging norms that give greater evidential weight to quantitative data over qualitative testimonial reports - in particular the testimonial reports from members of hermeneutically marginalised groups – or norms that give greater weight to evidence about the cognitions of perpetrators over evidence about experiences of discrimination. We do not want to understate the extent to which there are likely to be difficulties here. For example, one will need to avoid the problems of epistemic exploitation (Berenstain 2016; Davis 2016) and epistemic appropriation (Davis 2018). One will also need to be attentive to matters of *whose* testimony is included; that false assumptions about how representative those experiences are, are not made; and that focusing on issues of 'distribution of attention and conversational power' do not obscure the importance of addressing systems of social power that marginalise (Táíwò, 2020).

We propose the following norms, as tentative starting points for the integrative project: first to address the hierarchies of evidence that Hill Collins articulates, we propose *a norm of epistemic peership*. Such a norm would reject the kinds of epistemic hierarchies we have encountered. As sources of evidence, quantitative and qualitative evidence have pro tanto equal probative value; academic scholarship about and lived experience of oppression each contribute distinctive evidential value. This is not to say that (e.g.) all testimony is as evidentially valuable as all academic scholarship; we well know that any instance of testimony can be unreliable, and any instance of putative scholarship can be junk. Rather, it is to say that there are multiple sources of evidence (not limited to those articulated above, though our norms at present range primarily over them), and their type per se does not determine their epistemic value. Second, to address the problem of selective devaluation of some testimonies in particular, and as a corrective to the extant dynamics that we have pointed to in section 3, we adopt a *norm of epistemic deference to the lived experience of marginalised groups*. As Laurence Thomas puts it: 'the idea that there should be a presumption in favour of the [oppressed] person's account of [their] experiences' (1992: 374). Enacting this norm requires attentiveness to the dangers that 'deference

epistemology', as Táíwò calls it, can present. It requires attention to the relative privileges and oppressions of marginalised group members, such that one does not attend to, and suppose as representative, the testimony of relatively privileged members of a marginalised group. It also requires ensuring that any such norm does not 'provide cover for social abdication of responsibility'; that it does not reduce people to their experiences of trauma; and that focusing on attentional distribution does not distract from - but advances - attention to systemic social and material change (Táíwò, 2020). Finally, we propose a *norm of reciprocal feedback*. Part of recognising the values of the various sources of evidence is recognising the way that each can shape and advance the other. Qualitative testimonial evidence should shape and direct what quantitative data it might be important to gather; conversely, quantitative data may encourage new interpretations of personal experience. Neither academic scholarship in general, nor quantitative empirical research in particular, should be detached from lived experience (cf. Anderson 2007: 608-610). This is an inexhaustive list, but a start at the integrative project.

Earlier, we noted that the collective resources are weakened when testimonial evidence of racism is marginalised or excluded. What are the epistemic gains to be secured in avoiding the epistemic oppression we have described? The first gain is simply that of having *more evidence* about unintentional racism. One illustration of how this additional evidence can be useful is in being able to respond to scepticism that has emerged. Recently, many critiques have emerged of the research program on implicit bias (Oswald et al 2013, Singal 2017). And some take these concerns to undermine the motivation for institutional change.

Integrating testimonial evidence into our body of evidence about unintentional racism is important in helping us remain clear on the focus of this scepticism: what should *not* be cast in doubt is whether unintentional racism exists, whether individuals should be worried about their role in perpetrating it, and whether institutional change is needed in order to address problems of discrimination and exclusion. All this is affirmed by integrating testimonial evidence into our collective epistemic resources. Moreover, and crucially, the motivation for institutional change is not dependent on the robustness of the experimental findings – testimonial evidence provides us with reason to pursue changes to our policies and procedures that combat the forms of racism and exclusion that are described. Of course, sceptics about the implicit bias research program may also be sceptical about testimonial evidence of discrimination.

But as the evidence builds, from multiple different sources, the sceptic faces an additional burden of providing an alternative explanation for why so much evidence points towards what they seek to deny.

The second gain is that, precisely because it draws on the experiences of discrimination, testimonial evidence provides more evidence about the *impact* of unintentional racism. For example, one of the concerns arising from the testimonial evidence concerns the problem of deniability. Recall that unintentional racism may be likely to have a role where individuals (perpetrators) can rationalise their decisions and explain away a choice or action in terms that do not make reference to race. Testimonial evidence shows us how this can inflect the experience of discrimination: the problem of deniability gives rise to doubts about what has really occurred – was it racism, or a misstep, or perhaps I misheard…? Testimonies that elaborate on the problems of discriminators being able to rationalise away biased behaviour enrich the dominant hermeneutical resources by articulating the distinctive harm here: the cognitive and affective burdens of retaining confidence in one's interpretation of one's social interactions.

A third, practical, gain concerns how these hermeneutical resources enrich collective understandings of how to address problems of unintentional racism. One of the great frustrations with the quantitative research program on implicit bias is its failure to deliver robust and long-lasting interventions that change individual bias, or deliver changes in behaviour. Integrating testimonial evidence helps us to identify resources to draw on in taking steps to combat unintentional racism. Plenty of recommendations are already found in, and can be gleaned from, the testimonial evidence. For example, this evidence helps us to identify the importance of removing burdensome contestations, insofar as possible. Thinking about institutional policies or procedure from the point of view of addressing the problem of the contestability or deniability of what one has experienced, as well as from the perspective of reducing the incidence of bias, helps us see where efforts are most likely useful. Simply deploying strategies that aim to reduce bias (see Devine et al 2012) will do nothing to ensure, or provide assurance, that bias is not at work. It may even make it more difficult to challenge, since perpetrators can insist they have undertaken de-biasing strategies. In contrast, interventions that focus not on reducing individuals' biases, but on changes to policy or procedure could do more to acknowledge the facts of systemic racism, provide mechanisms to challenge and address it, and set goals for

reshaping the institution. This might involve instating certain procedures or anti-racist policies, though that is not without potential pitfalls: a concern that came up in examining the experiences of Black and minority ethnicity academics was that procedures sometimes served as a smoke screen for continued discrimination (Pilkington 2013: 230).

We have proposed some norms for integrating qualitative testimonial evidence about lived experience with findings from the psychological research project on implicit bias. Our argument also highlights new questions to be addressed in future research. For example, how should we evaluate conflicting evidence about discrimination? Evidence from testimony may conflict with other testimony from people who are oppressed along the same, or different axes; or with evidence from other sources, such as evidence from the research programme in psychology, or statistical evidence about patterns of advantage or disadvantage (some of the difficulties of addressing these issues are articulated and evaluated by Kristie Dotson (2018)). Our work in this paper highlights the importance and value of finding ways to adjudicate these conflicts.

5. Conclusion

In practical efforts to address the role of unintentional racism in sustaining racial injustices and exclusions, there are choices to be made in selecting evidence to support anti-racist efforts. Whilst evidence from research programs on implicit bias may secure important gains, focusing on this evidence alone, without also incorporating testimonial evidence, risks perpetuating the vindication dynamic, and perpetrating contributory injustice. Moreover, including this testimonial evidence can secure important epistemic gains, both motivating institutional change and enriching the resources available for understanding how to do this better.

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