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Why committing epistemic injustice against close friends can be distinctively bad

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Abstract

There has been increasing attention given to epistemic injustice in different relational contexts. This paper adds to this literature by providing a novel argument for the claim that epistemic injustice in close friendship is distinctively bad. That is, while it is bad to be epistemically unjust to anyone, it can be distinctively bad to be epistemically unjust to one's close friends. The friendship, at least in some cases, must figure in the explanation for why the injustice is bad. I argue that there are three reasons friendship gives us that we can appeal to in explaining this. Being friends with someone (especially, close friends) gives us reasons to support them emotionally, create conditions in which they can comfortably self-disclose, and to promote their self-esteem, including their epistemic self-confidence, especially when this is unduly undermined. Perpetrating epistemic injustice against our friends compromises our ability to respond to those reasons appropriately. The paper begins by setting out the initial intuition - that we do feel that epistemic injustice is distinctively bad in friendship, at least in some cases. It responds to some initial objections. It examines the empirical evidence on testimonially unjust microaggressions in friendship, which suggests they are an unfortunately common occurrence with significant effects on those who experience them, thus, worthy of philosophical attention. It gives an account of the three salient reasons friendship gives us, that epistemic injustice compromises. And it examines two cases of epistemic injustice being perpetrated against friends in detail, illustrating how this injustice undermines the ability of the perpetrator to live up to these reasons.

Keywords Friendship · Epistemic injustice · Social epistemology

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1 Introduction

Imagine two people: Josie and Michael. Josie is telling Michael about an instance of sexual harassment she experienced at work. Michael has no good reason to doubt Josie's word, but his responses to her testimony describing her experience betray his disbelief. As a matter of fact, Michael has a prejudice against women that is activated in circumstances exactly like this one, and this prejudice is causing him to be testimonially unjust to Josie, assigning less credibility to her testimony than he otherwise would. Now imagine that Michael is Josie's close friend, and the two of them have depended on each other for many years. Should this change our evaluation of Michael's attitudes and behaviour?

I think so. While testimonial injustice is bad regardless of who perpetrates it, the relationship shared between these two agents - a friendship - makes a difference, at least in some cases. Being epistemically unjust to one's friends can be distinctively bad. Injustice like this is distinctively bad when we cannot explain the badness of this injustice - of what Michael does to Josie - without referencing the friendship as part of our explanation. And in many instances of epistemic injustice in friendship, the friendship must play such a role. At least, that is what I will argue in this paper.

The idea that relationships between agents (e.g. between speakers and hearers) can make a difference to our judgements of the badness of epistemic injustice is not itself new. We recognise, for example, that the doctor-patient relationship is morally relevant to explaining exactly how it is that doctors wrong patients when they commit testimonial injustice towards them (Carel & Kidd, 2014). Among other reasons we might give, we naturally appeal to reasons of care that doctors have for patients that they fail to respond to appropriately by not listening to their patient's testimony. Moreover, the relationship between speaker and hearer can make a difference to our judgement of whether a hearer disbelieving a speaker constitutes an epistemic injustice *at all* (Maitra, 2010).

However, there has as yet been no discussion of how the relationship of friendship affects the badness of epistemic injustice¹. This is particularly notable as, unlike the doctor-patient relationship, friendship is not mediated by any institution that is meant to govern its practice. Committing epistemic injustice against one's friend is often distinctively bad. This paper aims to explain why this is, by giving an account of the particular reasons that our friendships with others give us. These are moral reasons to support them emotionally, to promote their self-esteem, and to enable them to comfortably disclose about issues of importance.

I begin with this as a guiding intuition - that being epistemically unjust to one's friend can be distinctively bad - and go on to explain what it is that justifies it. I consider some initial objections. In responding to these objections, and to buttress

¹There has also been discussion of how friendship affects our epistemic duties regarding what we believe about our friends (see Stroud, 2006; Keller, 2004 for the concept of epistemic partiality). This notion of epistemic partiality has also been connected to epistemic injustice. Lee (2023) argues that we may be more willing to accept epistemic injustice from a friend than we would a non-friend, while being less likely to notice it *as* epistemic injustice. And Warman (2025) argues that epistemic partiality can cause us to unjustly disbelieve negative testimony about our friends, thus perpetuating testimonial injustice against this third party. I consider epistemic partiality below.

the significance of this topic, I also appeal to the empirical literature on epistemically unjust microaggressions to show that the phenomenon of epistemic injustice in friendship is unfortunately commonplace, and has a significant effect on the quality of the friendship from the victim's point of view. I then give a more detailed analysis of two examples of epistemic injustice in friendship. These examples, combined with this empirical literature, will help illustrate how epistemic injustice in friendship compromises the friend's ability to appropriately respond to the moral reasons that the friendship provides.

In the process, then, we'll arrive at an explanation for exactly why epistemic injustice can be distinctively bad in the context of friendship. Epistemic injustice undermines the ability of the speaker to engage in self-disclosure. It thereby undermines the perpetrating friend's ability to offer emotional support; moreover, it may undermine the marginalised friend's epistemic self-confidence, which we can see as a component of their general self-esteem (Tanesini, 2018; Kidd, 2015). As we will see, these are all central elements to close friendship, things our friendship gives us good reason to try and do. As epistemic injustice is often motivated by prejudice, this will also indicate how prejudice can undermine our ability to properly recognise and act on the moral reasons friendship gives us.

2 Why is epistemic injustice in friendship distinctively bad?: the initial intuition

This paper takes as its starting point the intuition that it is distinctively bad to be epistemically unjust to one's friends. However bad it might be to be epistemically unjust to non-friends, at least in some cases, we cannot explain what is distinctively bad about epistemic injustice without appealing to the specific relationship shared by the participants.

First, though, let's consider whether we do in fact feel such an intuition. To do so, take the following example. In a passage of Simone De Beauvoir's memoir, she relays the experience of talking through her philosophical ideas with her then friend Jean Paul Sartre:

Day after day, and all day long I measured myself against Sartre, and in our discussions I was simply not in his class. One morning in the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Medici fountain, I outlined for him the pluralist morality which I had fashioned to justify the people I liked but did not wish to resemble: he ripped it to shreds ... I struggled with him for three hours. In the end I had to admit I was beaten; besides, I had realized, in the course of our discussion, that many of my opinions were based only on prejudice, bad faith or thoughtlessness, that my reasoning was shaky and my ideas confused. 'I'm no longer sure what I think, or even if I think at all,' I noted, completely thrown (De Beauvoir, 1959, p. 344, italics added).

While it is difficult to verify the quality of her specific ideas here, it seems unlikely that someone of her intellectual calibre - an already exceptional philosopher - would

have ideas that should be dismissed in the way she comes to dismiss them as a result of her interaction with Sartre. She goes as far as to cite this conversation as a major turning point, causing her to realise that philosophy wasn't for her and she should focus on writing novels instead (Ibid). As Fricker reflects, while this may have been the right choice all things considered, 'it will not have been because her ideas about good and evil 'were based only on prejudice, bad faith, or thoughtlessness', her reasoning 'shaky' and ideas 'confused'" (Fricker, 2007, p. 51). From what's described, it appears that Sartre beat her down, and caused her to lose faith in her philosophical abilities. While constructive criticism is surely beneficial for philosophy, it does not seem that his remarks were all that constructive, and in fact went a fair way to undermining her confidence as a philosopher.

Fricker does not mention the relational context in which this takes place. Yet I think it's relevant to note here that Sartre and De Beauvoir were friends at the time. Intuitively, this seems to make the case described worse. For contrast, imagine if Sartre was not a friend - just a fellow classmate who engages her in a discussion after a seminar they had together. While behaviour of this sort would still very much be bad, it does not feel nearly as bad as it does when we know the two have an on-going friendship.

This is reflected in the advice that another friend might give De Beauvoir if she relayed this experience². If the perpetrator of this injustice was a mere classmate, such a friend might advise her to forget it, ignore him, and move on. But, if the person knew that Sartre was a friend of De Beauvoir's, this advice looks glib and insufficient. Something more nuanced is required. It is not just that it is harder to forget or ignore one's friends - because one's life is intertwined with theirs in a way it isn't with a classmate. It is harder precisely because we (rightfully) expect more of our friends than we do of non-friends. Friendship, it seems, gives our friends particular moral reasons *not* to treat us like this. The question is, what justifies this expectation? What follows will attempt to answer this. Before doing so, I will respond to some initial objections.

2.1 Responding to initial objections

The central claim of this paper is that it can be distinctively bad to be epistemically unjust to one's friends. In this section, I anticipate some objections to this sort of argument. Firstly, I clarify my terminology, and consider some objections that clarify the kind of moral claim I am making. I then consider whether my argument commits me to epistemic partiality - as I suggest, it may commit me to a limited form of epistemic partiality, which should be relatively uncontentious when compared with stronger formulations of the epistemic partiality thesis. Secondly, I examine those objections that generally concede that epistemic injustice in friendship is distinctively bad, but argue that, even so, this claim is not a philosophically interesting one. I argue that this is mistaken: the idea that epistemic injustice committed against one's friends can be distinctively bad is philosophically interesting and morally important.

² It may also affect the phenomenology of the experience: one might feel irritated by the mere classmate, but *betrayed* by the friend.

Firstly, though, I should clarify my terminology. To say that this injustice can be distinctively bad when it takes place in friendship is similar to saying that it is especially bad; however, there are important distinctions here. ‘Especially’ bad implies a comparison with other relationships. Thus, whether epistemic injustice is especially bad depends on what we are comparing it to, and the secondary harms that follow from it. In many cases, the injustice taking place within friendship will make it worse than if it takes place between strangers, for example. But equally, being on the receiving end of this treatment from someone who is not a friend, but occupies some other significant social position (e.g. a judge, medical professional or educator) could make it worse than experiencing this from a friend who did not occupy these roles, depending on the specific circumstances and their effects³.

What matters for the distinctiveness claim is just that it is the features of friendship I go on to discuss below, that are what are figuring in the badness of the injustice in this context. Thus, this leaves open cases where friends wrong one another in ways that are not distinctively bad - I consider some of these sorts of cases below.

Secondly, one might wonder what is meant by ‘bad’ and how this may be understood differently by different ethical systems. I think the badness of epistemic injustice in friendship can be understood along both Kantian and consequentialist lines. For the Kantian, friendship is a relationship that can be conceived of as a tacit agreement between people. By sustaining a close, ongoing friendship, friends are implicitly taking on reasons⁴ (including moral reasons) to act in certain ways towards the friend. This includes promoting their epistemic self-confidence, providing emotional support, and creating conditions in which friends can comfortably self-disclose. Equally, for the consequentialist, friendship can be regarded as a kind of good - a state of affairs in which people have this good, they have friends on whom they can rely, is a better state of affairs. Part of makes friendship be the good that it is is that the friends can trust one another not to commit epistemic injustice against them.

It is not the aim of this paper to dictate which of these normative accounts of friendship is correct; however, I think what I say about the badness of epistemic injustice in friendship should be compatible with either view. Indeed, I take this to be a strength of the account: this should allow for an overlapping consensus, where those more inclined towards one normative vision of friendship can be sympathetic to the argument, even if they would not be sympathetic to the alternative one. Conversely, resting my account on one of these normative pictures being correct would both unnecessarily limit the appeal of the project and make it needlessly vulnerable to criticism of the underlying normative structure.

Likewise, one could question how blameworthiness fits into this picture. If friends have moral reasons not to commit epistemic injustice against one another, does this mean they are automatically culpable for failing to respond to these reasons appropriately? For the purpose of this paper, I leave blameworthiness aside. This is because

³ I thank Luca Barlassina for highlighting this distinction.

⁴ One might ask how binding these moral reasons are. I think that this depends largely on the level of depth, intimacy and longevity of the friendship. Other things being equal, friendships that are particularly deep, intimate, and which have been sustained for a long-period and can plausibly continue into future (while maintaining these valuable qualities), make these reasons more binding than friendships that are comparatively lacking in these qualities.

there is a lively and ongoing debate about how we can apportion blame for phenomena (like epistemic injustice) that have their roots partly in structural causes. Cases like this are therefore especially difficult to adjudicate, and go beyond what I can do in this paper. My goal here is just to illustrate how epistemic injustice in friendship is distinctively bad; how blameworthy the perpetrating party is for this infraction is another matter.

One might also wonder whether my argument commits me to epistemic partiality. This is the view that we have reasons to believe good things about our friends (including, presumably, that they are sincere and competent testifiers) beyond what would be justified by the evidence (Stroud, 2006; Keller, 2004). If so, this may be a problem: epistemic partiality is notoriously controversial (e.g. Enoch, 2016; Arpaly & Brinkerhoff, 2018; Kawall, 2013). As I explain below, I do not think it commits me to epistemic partiality about the doxastic, but does commit me to the zetetic⁵. However, I think this is a much less contentious formulation of the epistemic partiality thesis.

One could think epistemic partiality would impact the commission of epistemic injustice in friendship in the following way: if friendship gives us non-epistemic reasons to believe good things about our friends that go beyond the evidence, and to refuse to believe bad things despite the evidence, then we could have non-epistemic reasons to believe our friend's testimony. This could be true because disbelieving our friend's testimony might imply failing to believe something good about our friend (i.e. that they are a competent and trustworthy testifier) or believing something bad about our friend (that they are not a competent or trustworthy testifier). As these reasons are specific to friendship, they provide an explanation for why epistemic injustice in friendship might be distinctively bad. That is, even in an equivalent scenario where a hearer has the same evidence about the reliability of a testifier, if the pair are friends, the hearer now has an additional reason, specific to the friendship, to believe the testimony of their friend, that is not reducible to the evidence.

Thus, epistemic partiality, in this context, would be about why we should believe our friends even when the evidence may not support their testimony. But the paradigmatic cases of testimonial injustice I'm concerned with are those where we fail to believe our friend even when the evidence supports doing so. We have good reasons to believe the testifier; it's our prejudicial attitudes that get in the way. In other words, it's about why *disbelieving* your friend for prejudicial reasons is bad for the friendship. It isn't an argument for why you should believe your friend when they offer credible testimony. Thus, in principle, the reasons you should believe your friend (e.g. because they are a credible testifier) could be entirely consistent with evidentialism, barring the considerations I raise below. As such, when one commits epistemic injustice against a friend, it may be that we do not need epistemic partiality of the doxastic variety to explain what's going wrong here.

However, what is going wrong here, according to my argument, is that our poor epistemic practices - failing to believe our friend when we have good reason to - prevent us from responding to non-epistemic reasons to treat our friends in certain ways. We fail to be a good confidant, to promote their self-esteem, and to support

⁵Thanks to Max Hayward for recommending this distinction.

them emotionally. To correct for this failing does not require that we believe our friend without sufficient evidence. But it does require that we are especially careful in how we go about *forming* beliefs regarding our friend's testimony, and avoid prejudice downgrading our credibility attribution. With this in mind, I believe my view commits me to a limited kind of epistemic partiality: partiality regarding the zetetic (how we approach inquiry regarding our friends testimony) but not the doxastic (what we believe about them that may go beyond what the evidence justifies)⁶. As this is a moderate and, I believe, fairly intuitive position, I trust that it should not make the overall view expressed in paper regarding epistemic injustice in friendship too contentious⁷.

Another type of objection may concede that epistemic injustice in friendship can be distinctively bad, but still argue that this is ultimately not very interesting. This objection might go as follows. Even if it is true that it is distinctively bad to be epistemically unjust to a friend than a non-friend, this may not say anything specific about epistemic injustice in itself. Perhaps it is just the case that anything it is bad to do to a non-friend, it is distinctively bad to do to a friend. If so, the argument would go, then there is nothing especially interesting about the particular badness of epistemic injustice in friendship. I believe this is mistaken.

Firstly, it is not the case that everything it is bad to do to a non-friend is distinctively bad to do to a friend. Some things may be bad in the same way, or even, less bad because the subject of the bad action is a friend. As an example of the former, consider a lazy civil servant, who in their role does the very bare minimum that their job requires, with predictably poor results for the citizens they serve. They treat these citizens badly; when these citizens also happen to be their friends, they treat them badly in this capacity too. It would be strange to say that the badness of their actions towards their friends is distinctively bad in the sense I intend here. To be distinctively bad, the fact that they are their friends should figure in the explanation of why their actions are bad. But in their role as a civil servant, impartially carrying out the will of the state, the fact that these citizens happen to be their friends should *not* figure in the explanation of the badness of their actions at all. Rather, they are meant to treat all citizens equally. Friendship should not enter into their deliberation or the explanation for the moral badness of the consequences of their actions⁸.

Other things that it is bad to do to a non-friend need not be bad to do to a friend at all. Teasing is one example. It is often bad to tease a non-friend because you do not have the requisite level of closeness for this to be appropriate, for the other to trust that it is meant purely in jest, for you to know enough about the other to avoid hurting their feelings unintentionally etc. Conversely teasing a friend can be appropriate precisely because it can convey this level of intimacy and affection. In this case, friendship does not make the action distinctively bad; it can make it no longer bad at all.

Moreover, even if it were true that anything it is bad to do to a non-friend, it is distinctively bad to do to a friend, that would not necessarily mean that asking why a specific action was distinctively bad in friendship would be an uninteresting question.

⁶For a good introduction to zetetic epistemology, see e.g. Falbo (2025); Friedman (2020)

⁷I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on the issue of epistemic partiality in this context.

⁸I thank Álvaro Rodríguez Gonzalez for this example.

After all, being a good friend requires that we respond to many different reasons that the friendship gives us. Thus, when we do something that it is distinctively bad to do to a friend, we may appeal to many different reasons to explain what makes it so, depending on what the infraction is.

Another objection is as follows. One might initially think that appealing to the specific reasons I consider here is unnecessary to explain what is so wrong with epistemic injustice in friendship. Perhaps being on the receiving end of this treatment from friends is experienced as especially hurtful. If so, we have a purely psychological explanation for what makes this behaviour distinctively problematic in friendship. You shouldn't do this because, other things being equal, it's wrong to hurt people, and being someone's friend means you have particular power to hurt them. You therefore have a special responsibility not to.

While it's true that a given bad behaviour can often be more hurtful when directed at friends than at non-friends, this does not in itself show that this behaviour is wrong. Someone may be hurt by a friend's morally permissible behaviour because they hold their friend to an excessively high standard. Equally, someone may not be hurt by their friend's morally unacceptable behaviour because they hold their friend to an excessively low standard.

We all have expectations of our friends: they can be unjustly high or unjustly low. Ultimately, what we want are those expectations we are justified in having. As such, we need to explain what justifies the claim that epistemic injustice can be distinctively bad in friendship, without merely appealing to how such injustices might make one feel. The point here is not that the emotional consequences of the injustice are irrelevant - far from it. Rather, the point is that such reactive attitudes - of anger, resentment, disappointment etc. - are justified in the central kinds of cases I consider in this paper, and we need an account that explains why⁹. That is what this paper aims to provide¹⁰.

⁹One might wonder whether this rules out any consequentialist justification for our expectations in friendship. I don't think it does. I think the sophisticated consequentialist can surely argue in favour of us having certain shared expectations of our friends as part of our general friendship practices in society. They can argue that the state of affairs in which we all have reasonable expectations maximises the relevant value (e.g. wellbeing). Further, if these are the best practices (or one of the best among a set of possible practices), we would be justified in coming to have these reactive attitudes, for they help ensure cooperation with these norms.

¹⁰One might also wonder why an agent committing epistemic injustice against a friend is not so egregious in some cases as to simply dissolve the friendship entirely, thereby removing the ongoing moral reasons to treat the friend in ways characteristic of friendship. In general, I do not think that committing severe epistemic injustice against a friend necessarily dissolves the friendship entirely. This is because one cannot by default simply dissolve each of one's normative obligations by breaking them - otherwise, breaking them would by default mean that they no longer applied to the agent in question and this would make it far too easy for agents to escape their obligations. Equally, if the infraction was sufficient to dissolve the friendship, this would place the victim in a double bind: acknowledging the failure of the friend would be to lose the friendship, and lose any recourse to expect recompense from the friend. Thus, I think it is plausible that friendships can remain friendships even if they are normatively flawed: a bad friendship is still a friendship. Part of the explanation for this is that friendships are structured partly by affective bonds which can persist even in the light of normative failures on the part of one's friend. I thank Max Hayward for suggesting this sort of response.

The next objection relies on a distinction that Fricker makes between primary and secondary harms. While the primary harms of epistemic injustice are epistemic in nature, the secondary harms need not be - they might instead be broader, affecting one's ability to receive welfare payments, for example (Fricker, 2007, pp. 150–152).

One might utilise this distinction as follows: the epistemic harm of epistemic injustice remains the same regardless of who perpetrates it. One is always harmed as a knower. Thus, it's not clear why the person who harms you being a friend makes a fundamental difference: the kind of harm is the same. Moreover, epistemic harm is the kind of harm we should care most about - it is what makes this form of injustice uniquely problematic, and of special interest to philosophers.

My response is as follows. Firstly, just because the type of harm is the same (it is always epistemic), that does not mean the severity of the harm is. And as Thomas (1987) notes, friends have a 'commanding perspective' on one another's lives, we care about what our friends think, and this gives them particular epistemic power over us to do a lot of epistemic harm (Lee, 2023) (for example, to our epistemic self-confidence). Secondly, just because the primary harm is epistemic, this doesn't mean that the secondary harms that follow are unimportant. Indeed, presumably one of the reasons we as philosophers care about epistemic injustice in the first place is because its secondary consequences can be so devastating. And as I demonstrate below, one of the harms of perpetrating epistemic injustice against one's friends is that it can do significant damage to the friendship - another good that should surely be of interest to moral philosophers. To see this, let's consider the empirical evidence regarding epistemically unjust microaggressions in friendship.

2.2 Epistemic injustice, microaggressions and friendship

I've so far laid out the initial intuition and responded to some objections regarding how philosophically interesting or notable it is. But there is another cause for concern here: one may wonder how pervasive this phenomenon really is. Indeed, given all the ways that the epistemically unjust friend fails to respond appropriately to the moral reasons given by the friendship, one might expect (or at least, hope) that this would be a rare occurrence. If it is, one might question whether it deserves this much attention. Other things being equal, a morally bad phenomenon that is rare may seem less worthy of philosophical attention than one that is pervasive. Unfortunately, empirical evidence suggests this is not the case. Rather, epistemic injustice in friendship is a far more common, everyday occurrence than one might think. To see this, let's consider some relevant empirical research.

While there has not been much direct empirical investigation into the phenomenon of epistemic injustice in friendship, there has been research into the perpetration of microaggressions in this relationship. This is significant: as some have noted, microaggressions can take many forms, some of which line up with the kinds of epistemic injustice I discuss in later sections (Botswick & Hequembourg, 2014).

Microaggressions have been theorised in a number of ways, but the following should act as a helpful definition for our purposes:

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people who are not classified within the “normative” standard. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with people who differ from themselves (Johnson & Johnson, 2019, p. 1)

An example of a microaggression would be asking a racial minority in Britain where they are ‘really from’, with the implication that they cannot claim to be British because they are not white, even if they were born and raised in the country. This can communicate hostility insofar as it suggests that only white people belong in the country and can consider themselves to be ‘truly’ British. We will see other examples below.

Not all microaggressions will count as epistemic injustice, yet, as Botswick and Hequembourg (2014) argue, many microaggressions can be conceived of in this way. For example, many microaggressions involve the denial or dismissal of the victim’s testimony. In their study of microaggressions against bisexual women, they found that many of the participants of the focus-groups they created reported having their identities as bisexual women questioned or denied by others (ibid). This amounts to testimonial injustice insofar as it is a refusal to give due credibility to the testimony of such women, who assert that they are bisexual.

Importantly, friends were not exempt from this. To give one representative example (there are many similar cases in the paper), the paper includes the testimony of one bisexual woman, Chris, who describes her friend’s reaction when she started dating a woman. Chris explains how, despite having identified as bisexual for the whole time her friend had known her, the friend insisted on viewing her new relationship as a sign that she now identified as a lesbian, and would introduce her as having ‘just come out last year’. No matter what Chris said - how many times she insisted she had always been bisexual - her friend’s response was the same. This is an example of a testimonially unjust microaggression: her friend consistently failed to take her testimony seriously, insisting that it had to conform to a monosexual paradigm, irrespective of what Chris said (Ibid).¹¹

Moreover, patterns of denial, dismissal or unjust questioning have been found to be commonly experienced by other members of the LGBTQ community - including lesbian, gay and trans people (Nadal et al., 2016, 2011; Galupo et al., 2014). Again, friends are not immune from perpetrating this behaviour. As one gay man reported:

I recently had a friend say to me, “How do you know you are gay, is it just because you’ve just never slept with a woman? Maybe you are not really gay?” (Platt & Lenzen, 2013, p. 1023).

¹¹One could argue that, when microaggressions persist to this extent, they become ‘macroaggressions’. This could well be the right way to describe them, however a conceptual delineation of these differences is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this.

This is made more complex when the victim of microaggressions occupies multiple intersecting identities. A study of LGBT people of colour found they often had to deal with microaggressions that were racially charged, as well as homophobic (Balsam et al., 2011). Once again, the perpetrators included friends.

Evidence examining the experience of other minorities also found that they experienced microaggressions at the hands of friends. Research on the experiences of Asian Americans reported that:

Most of the racial microaggressions that occurred came from peers, neighbors *friends* or authority figures. It disturbed them that personal or respected acquaintances could make such insensitive or hurtful remarks (Sue et al., 2007, p. 78, emphasis added).

Many of these occurrences likely had an epistemic dimension - this study documented how microaggressions often involved denying the reality of racism against this group, and therefore (implicitly or explicitly) undermining the individual's own testimony of racism, or ability to subsequently testify to experiences of racism (Ibid). Naturally, this would also make it harder to assert that one had experienced racism when one knows one is dealing with an unsympathetic audience (Dotson, 2011).

The quote above points to another theme in this literature: those subject to these experiences of microaggressions often find them most distressing when perpetrated by friends. A study examining ableist microaggressions - in which participants, many disabled, were presented with scenarios in which these took place - found that 'vignettes where family and friends committed microaggressions were rated as most harmful' (Conover et al., 2021, p. 571).

This is reinforced by another study referenced earlier. Regarding microaggressions against trans people:

The majority of participants agreed that microaggressions ... are more upsetting when they occur within a friendship versus another context (72.7-%)' (Galupo et al., 2014, p. 465)

Evidence suggests that feelings of alienation can often result from microaggressions (Gonzales et al., 2015); experiencing them from friends does seem to result in alienation in the relationship (Nadal et al., 2011; Balsam et al., 2011, p. 166). Microaggressions affect the closeness the victim feels to the friend who has committed them. The study mentioned earlier of trans peoples' experiences of microaggressions in friendship found that 'the majority of participants agreed that microaggressions impact how close they feel to their friends (73.8–92.0%)' (Galupo et al., 2014, p. 465).

We expect more from our friends, and the arguments I give below go some way to explaining why. We rightly depend on them as confidants, providers of emotional support, and for a healthy sense of self-esteem. It's not hard to see how someone who commits these microaggressions fails to respond appropriately to the moral reasons given by this relationship. Thus, the arguments I offer below can help explain why

experiencing this behaviour from friends is especially hurtful. It also explains why victims of this behaviour would be justified in expecting more.

In summary, this section allows us to make a number of tentative empirical claims about epistemic injustice in friendship. Far from being isolated incidents, this research suggests that epistemic injustice in the form of microaggressions is common and pervasive. Secondly, friends are not exempt from perpetrating them. Thirdly, they do not only occur for a single marginalised group. Rather, if we take the various different cases together, we can see that they occur for people of all kinds of different marginalised identities - people who are LGBTQ, a person of colour, disabled, as well as people with multiple intersecting identities, such as black LGBTQ people. Finally, they are seen as especially hurtful when committed by friends.

This last claim is congruent with the argument that epistemic injustice in friendship is distinctively bad. However, we might still question whether this reaction is legitimate. After all, what is it about friendship that would justify such a reaction? In the next section, I suggest three moral reasons that friendship gives us that explain why victims of microaggressions may be justified in feeling especially disappointed or wronged by their friends. Their friends, as I argue, are failing to respond to three moral reasons given by the friendship: reasons to promote their friend's epistemic self-confidence, to offer emotional support, and to enable their friend to comfortably self-disclose.

3 Salient features of friendship: self-disclosure, epistemic self-confidence and emotional support

This section aims to briefly draw out three features of friendship that I take to be fairly intuitive, and have, to some extent, been argued for elsewhere. The kind of friendship I have in mind here is close friendship, where 'close' is used in the manner we typically employ to describe a friend with whom we have a significant degree of intimacy, affection, and/or a valued shared history.

Close friends have moral reasons to provide a context in which they can comfortably disclose private information to one another. According to Thomas, this is 'information the dissemination of which matters considerably to the friend'. That is, information they do not want just anyone knowing; the fact that they share it with their friend cements intimacy in the friendship (Thomas, 1987).

This certainly applies to some types of disclosure that make the speaker especially vulnerable to epistemic injustice. Consider cases of harassment, such as the fatphobia example I use below. But other forms of disclosure are relevant here too. The philosophical reflections Simone De Beauvoir shared with Sartre may not have been private information as such, but it still matters for the friendship that her interlocutor (in this case, Sartre) creates a context in which she can discuss ideas that may not be fully formed, without undue hostility. As Emerson says, friendship allows one to 'think aloud' (Emerson, 1842/2009, p. 175). This is hard to do with a friend who is not willing to entertain the potential merit of one's ideas, even if they are not yet fully formed (Mason, 2024).

What is particularly salient when it comes to responding to a friend's self-disclosure is the fact that, as Thomas states, they have a commanding perspective on one another's lives. This is partly epistemic: our friends know us especially well, they have more 'data' regarding what we are like, our prior life experience, and our worldview. It is also partly affective: given this strong epistemic foundation, and given our affection and concern for our friend, we *care* a lot what our friends think about us. Other things being equal, we take their perspective on our lives to be especially important. This gives friends a lot of power to shore us up in cases where we experience undue self-doubt (say, in a case where a friend has been sexually assaulted, but doubt their interpretation that this is in fact what happened). Equally, it gives them a lot of power to undermine a friend's epistemic confidence, an important component of their self-esteem.

One might counter here that, while friends do have reasons to take one another's testimony seriously, they also have countervailing reasons - reasons to offer the friend an alternative, sometimes critical perspective; reasons to be especially candid about their thoughts regarding the friend's testimony, which may require sharing responses that run counter to what the friend wants to hear. A friendship in which both friends merely validated the initial thoughts and interpretations offered by the other would surely be undesirable and well as likely dishonest. Given this, one might think that the badness of epistemic injustice, as it takes place in friendship, is mitigated by these countervailing reasons.

The first response to this is to reiterate that in discussing the badness of epistemic injustice I'm not intending to make claims about the blameworthiness of the friend responsible. Thus, while these countervailing reasons may explain why a friend committed epistemic injustice without meaning to - because they saw themselves as just trying to offer an alternative perspective, which they understandably regard as part of their role as a friend - it doesn't excuse the injustice or transform it into something permissible.

Secondly, we should note that these countervailing reasons do not remove the potential harm that committing epistemic injustice might do to the relationship; however, they do complicate the role of the friend when receiving the other's disclosure. A good friend must balance these competing reasons, judging in context whether the disclosure calls for a critical perspective, or greater receptivity and validation. Equally, the reasons to be honest with a friend about one's own thoughts and feelings mean that the friend has to be especially careful in forming their beliefs, making sure they are accurate, given this expectation.

Indeed, it is particularly important when one is responding to the testimony of a marginalised person, especially about an issue in which their marginalised status is foregrounded. For what could strike one as an innocent alternative interpretation to their friend's testimony, could nonetheless be motivated by prejudice or be based in some kind of hermeneutically unjust framework (e.g. the idea that the friend *should* wonder whether the sexual assault they experienced might have actually been their fault after all). The general norm that one should offer an alternative interpretation may, in practice, risk justifying those perspectives that are morally or epistemically problematic. This is particularly important given the authoritative perspective friends

have on one another's lives, and the effect that their responses have on the friend's epistemic self-confidence and self-esteem. This brings us to the second feature.

The second feature is that friendship gives the friends reasons to promote one another's self-esteem, and this extends to their epistemic self-confidence. As Annis (1987) points out, friendship itself promotes this organically: friends like each other, trust each other, care about one another for their own sake, enjoy one another's company; all this contributes to the friend's self-esteem. But friends can also do this in a more active way. As Lebowitz argues, a central feature of friendship is that friends value one another and successfully *communicate* this to each other¹². They can also do this by providing positive evaluations and interpretations of one another's personalities and appearance (Cocking & Kennett 1998). Further, friends value one another not only for their virtuous qualities but (contra Aristotle) holistically, for their aesthetic qualities (Lintott & Caluori, 2013; Nehamas, 2016; Telfae 1970/71; Kristjánsson, 2020) and for those attributes that may be bad in some respect (Nehamas, 2016; Lintott & Caluori, 2013). This too may promote our friend's self-esteem, insofar as it signals that our affection for them is not contingent on them being a so-called 'moral saint' (Wolf, 1982; Mason, 2024). Importantly, friends don't just *happen* to do this: they have good reasons to do this.

Further, I believe that promoting one another's self-esteem applies to the friend's epistemic self-confidence. That is, one's appraisal of one's epistemic abilities and sense that one can trust these abilities in one's enquiries. Good friends will affirm our positive epistemic abilities when they are unduly undermined. Epistemic injustice is a major way in which such epistemic abilities can be unduly threatened, targeting not just our sincerity, but our epistemic competence (Fricker, 2007). Thus, it is a site for friendship to play a significant role.

Relatedly, good friends have strong reasons to provide one another with emotional support. This can involve offering a listening ear, a comforting gesture, physical affection, displaying empathy and offering advice. Naturally, this will often go hand in hand with the other features. If the friend wants to discuss their problems, a good friend allows them to have the space to do so. If they disclose or otherwise indicate that their self-esteem has been undermined or exposed by some negative event, a good friend may offer reassurance. If they are going through something emotionally turbulent, the friend will offer empathy and understanding. I take all of these observations to be fairly intuitive, but also, instrumental in understanding why epistemic injustice in friendship is distinctively bad. As I argue, epistemic injustice prevents us from responding to each of these reasons appropriately. To better understand how this looks in practice, let's consider some examples of epistemic injustice in more detail.

4 Some examples of epistemic injustice in friendship

This section provides some examples of epistemic injustice in friendship. In being epistemically unjust to their friends, these individuals fail to respond appropriately to the reasons the friendship gives them: reasons to enable their friend to comfort-

¹²Though see Sofronieva (2020) for criticism of this paper.

ably self-disclose, to provide them with emotional support, and to promote their self-esteem. These examples provide an opportunity to see how this would take place in detail.

For example, consider the way that class differences can affect a friendship. The novel *Starter For Ten* gives a helpful case study. The book is a coming-of-age story and satire of the British class system. Set in 1980s Britain, it focuses on Brian, a student from a working class background in his very first term of university. The narrative depicts his strained friendship-cum-romance with Alice Harbinson, another student from an upper middle class family. During the Christmas break, he visits her at her parent's home. The two of them endure an awkward dinner with her parents, strained by obvious class differences between Brian and the Harbinsons. Afterwards, Alice enquires about this:

Alice: 'You were ... strange. Like you thought you had something to prove'.

Brian: 'Sorry, I get a bit nervous. Especially around posh peo ...'

Alice: 'Oh, please ...' she snaps.

Brian: 'What?'

Alice: 'Don't start with that crap, Brian. "posh" - what a ridiculous word. What is "Posh" anyway? That stuff's all in your head, it's completely meaningless. Christ, I hate this obsession with class, especially at this place [university]. You can barely say "hello" to someone before they're getting all prolier-than-thou, and telling you there dad's a one-eyed chimney sweep with rickets, and how they've still got an outside loo, or have never been on a plane or whatever, all that dubious crap most of which is usually lies anyway, and I'm thinking why are you telling me this? Am I supposed to feel guilty?' (Nicholls, 2014, p. 199).

Next, consider this example from Aubrey Gordon's book *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat* (Gordon, 2020). As Gordon states, she is fat, weighing 342 pounds and wearing a women's size 26 (US sizing). At one point, she describes the degrading experience of being on an aeroplane sat next to a clearly disgruntled man who repeatedly asks to change seats so he does not have to sit next to her. This climaxes in him actively harassing her by making fatphobic comments about her body. She then describes telling a friend about this exchange:

I tell a friend about the man on the plane. The way he looked at me. The way he treated me. His clear, naked revulsion at my body, at having to be near me. "All because I'm fat," I say.

"Oh my God, no!" My friend cuts in. "You're not fat, you're beautiful!"

I tell her the rest of the story. She asks why I bought a middle seat. I tell her I didn't. She asks why I provoked him. I tell her I didn't. She says she finds it hard to believe. I tell her it's true. Her voice becomes clipped, irritated.

"I guess if you hate it so much, you should just lose weight".

(Gordon, 2020, p. 36)

In both of these cases we see examples of epistemic injustice which prevent the perpetrator from appropriately responding to the reasons given by the friendship. In order to show the nuances of how these different injustices interact, I will now analyse both cases in detail.

4.1 Epistemic injustice in the Brian-Alice case

The exchange between Brian and Alice in the novel is marked by a number of refusals on Alice's part, which align with some of the forms of epistemic injustice discussed in the literature. For example, Alice engages in testimonial injustice. This occurs when a speaker is not given the credibility they deserve because of a prejudice against the speaker's identity (Fricker, 2007). Alice perpetrates this when she insists that any class differences Brian takes himself to have observed - and judged as significant - are 'all in his head'.

We also see examples of wilful hermeneutical ignorance. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a person is unable to understand and/or communicate about their experience due to a lack of well-fitting conceptual resources (Fricker, 2007; Goetze, 2018; Clanchy, 2023). However, even when a concept exists, those who do not experience the relevant oppression can refuse to use the concept or accept it as legitimate (Pohlhaus Jr., 2012). We see this in the example. Alice not only denies that class - or poshness - makes a difference, but denies the concept of being posh is itself intelligible, stating that it is 'completely meaningless'. The fact that she does not accept the concept of poshness undermines any attempt Brian might make to articulate himself using this concept. If poshness as a concept is spurious, then any testimony that utilises it must be too, and therefore given little epistemic credibility. Here, then, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice interact (Fricker, 2007; Dembroff & Whitcomb, 2023).

4.2 Epistemic injustice in the Aubrey Gordon case

In this example, Gordon is telling a friend about a highly distressing encounter. In response, we see her friend perpetrate testimonial injustice. This is most explicit when Gordon's friend says she finds the story hard to believe. Testimonial injustice is enacted more implicitly in the friend's other questions. Rather than take Gordon's word that this was a straightforward instance of fatphobia, her friend assumes that this cannot be all there is to it. And the most natural way of resisting this conclusion is to assume that Gordon herself must have done something to cause this 'unprovoked' harassment. While we cannot prove that this disbelief is motivated by a prejudice

against fat people like Gordon, this does seem like a reasonable explanation. Thus, this looks like a case of testimonial injustice¹³.

Having analysed the forms of epistemic injustice that take place in these two examples, we can now consider how this would undermine the three valuable features of friendship. Close friends, as we have seen, promote one another's epistemic confidence, create conditions in which self-disclosure can take place, and provide one another with emotional support. Epistemic injustice in friendship undermines each of these, for the perpetrating friend fails to respond appropriately to the reasons the friendship provides to promote these features of the relationship.

4.3 Harms to Brian's and Gordon's epistemic confidence

Alice wrongs Brian during their interaction. But, as with the De Beauvoir example, it seems like the fact that they are friends makes this wrong distinctively bad. While no-one ought to react to another's testimony in this way, we can see that reacting to a friend's in this manner is distinctively bad. Again, if we feel this intuition, it is because we recognise that friendship gives us reason to promote the confidence of one's friend, and that this applies to the epistemic domain as well. Good friends promote one another's self-esteem by positively evaluating their features. Regarding epistemic self-confidence, this can be promoted by the friend receiving the testimony taking testimony seriously, giving it the credibility it deserves, and affirming the friend's perspective when they are likely to experience undue self-doubt.

Remember that epistemic injustice targets one specifically in their capacity as a knower, and being subject to it is liable to undermine a person's epistemic confidence. Indeed, at its most severe, this treatment can become a kind of gaslighting, a phenomenon known for undermining the victim's confidence in their own perceptions of the world¹⁴. Just as it would not be right for Alice to denigrate Brian's appearance, for example, given the harm this would do to his general confidence, it is wrong for her to unduly damage his epistemic confidence. Thus, insofar as friends should not unduly undermine one's epistemic confidence, and should actively promote it where necessary, Alice is failing Brian here. If she valued Brian's epistemic standpoint, his unique knowledge of his own experience at university, and his competence

¹³We should note that this is not the only injustice in the interaction. Interestingly, it is also a case of hermeneutical injustice leading to a discursive injustice during this exchange. That is, when Gordon asserts that she is fat, and her friend counters with "You're not fat, you're beautiful!". The miscommunication arises here partly because Gordon and her friend are using different conceptions of fatness - her friend's being evaluatively loaded while Gordon's is not. This lack of shared hermeneutical resources also leads to discursive injustice (Kukla, 2014). When she says that she was mistreated by the man on the plane just because she is fat, Gordon is attempting to perform one speech act. She is trying to assert that she is fat and explain that this is the cause of her mistreatment. However, as her friend can only view fatness as evaluatively-loaded, she immediately assumes that Gordon must be putting herself down, making an aesthetically negative evaluation of her body. Thus, she responds by denying that Gordon is fat and insisting that she is beautiful. Her friend's remark serves only to underscore that fatness is unattractive and undesirable. At the same time, it ignores the real issue that Gordon is trying to communicate: harassment against fat people.

¹⁴While Abramson (2014) argues that gaslighting is not a distinctively epistemic phenomenon, I am persuaded by Spear's (2020) arguments that it is.

at discussing these things, this would promote his epistemic self-confidence. It would also make her a better friend to Brian.

We can say the same about the Aubrey Gordon example. The fact that her friend persistently doubts her testimony is liable to make Gordon doubt it herself. Indeed, it takes a lot to hold firm to one's own conviction that one's judgments are justified, in the face of persistent and pervasive doubt. And as Gordon documents throughout the book, maintaining this defiant posture can be exhausting¹⁵.

The dismissal of Brian and Gordon's perspective is also especially frustrating when we consider their marginalised epistemic standpoint. The issues that many fat people face are often dismissed by wider society (Manne, 2024), as is the oppression facing working class people, not to mention for those at the intersection of these identities. Thus, dismissal of their testimony reinforces society's ignorance about the problems facing members of these marginalised groups. At the same time, it robs the hearers (friends of Brian and Gordon) the opportunity to learn about an aspect of social experience that they are not well-positioned to know about themselves, without this kind of testimony. This ignorance may also be a good example of both 'not needing to know' and 'needing not to know' about the injustices that one does not face oneself (Medina, 2012).

4.4 Failure of mutual self-disclosure

One feature of close friendship is mutual self-disclosure (Thomas, 1987). This cements intimacy and builds trust in the relationship. Insofar as a friend perpetrates epistemic injustice against another, they damage the other's ability to self-disclose, and thereby harm this important facet of the relationship. This can happen in a number of ways.

The first is intrapersonal. The individual who is subject to the injustice - for instance, Brian - may start to doubt his own interpretation of the events under discussion. Maybe class differences aren't such a big deal after all; maybe he is making too much of it; perhaps it really is 'all in his head'. Such thoughts could seem much more plausible to someone in Brian's position after this exchange.

Of course, the injustice here is that such an interpretation would be wrong: the salience of class differences that he is exposed to have a huge impact on Brian, something he would still be experiencing implicitly even if, intellectually, he doubted this interpretation. This would affect Brian's self-disclosure inasmuch as it compromises the very thing he might otherwise disclose. Brian would still be experiencing the alienation of being working class in a largely middle class environment, he would just not feel quite able to put his finger on where this alienation was coming from. As such, he would be less able to communicate about it, and his attempts would risk being hampered by inarticulacy as he struggled to express something he did not fully

¹⁵The idea that experiencing epistemic injustice can harm one's epistemic confidence is not new. We saw it, for example, in the Simone De Beauvoir example ('I am unsure what I think - or that I think at all'). Experiencing this repeatedly can result in the development of certain epistemic vices, notably, epistemic servility (Battaly, 2021, 2023; Tanesini, 2018, 2021). As friendship is an on-going relationship in which the friends' perspectives are authoritative for one another, I take there to be particular risk of this happening in this context.

understand. Thus, the process of self-disclosure would be frustrated before it could even get off the ground.

Further, even if Brian's own interpretation remained intact in his head, being subject to these epistemic injustices could still prevent him from disclosing what he knows. In this case, he would not doubt the importance that class differences make to his experience of university, but he might self-censor, engaging in pre-emptive testimonial injustice. That is, his knowledge that he would not be given the credibility he deserves would cause him to hold back from testifying altogether, or opt only to offer testimony that he thinks is congenial to his audience - in this case, to Alice (Dotson, 2011; Lee, 2021; Fricker, 2007, p. 130).

Indeed, we see this take place within the very same interaction. The exchange ultimately robs him of his standing to challenge Alice's testimony. Though he initially offers some pushback, the conversation about class concludes with the following interaction:

Alice: Sorry, just letting off steam.

Brian: No, it's fine. I sort of agree with you. In places (Nicholls, 2014, p. 201).

It's clear from the noncommittal nature of his words and short sentences that this is not the case. And this is further reinforced by his internal monologue. When he first meets her family he is introduced to their two dogs, named 'Mingus' and 'Coltrane', and learns that they are fed pasta rather than dog food. This is initially a humorous indication of a class difference between Brian and Alice. But it takes on a sour character when, after Alice's rant, he says to himself 'all I can think about is Mingus and Coltrane eating bowls of pasta'¹⁶ (Nicholls, 2014, p. 201). Despite her insistence that class is meaningless, her words have only made Brian fixate on the class differences all the more.

Thus, the epistemic injustice that takes place here harms Brian's ability to self-disclose not just because it might undermine his confidence in what he knows, but also because it undermines his trust that what he knows will be properly received by Alice. Proper reception here encompasses a number of things: he has to trust that she will give him the credibility he deserves, rather than perpetrating testimonial injustice. He has to trust that she will give the content of the testimony the credibility it deserves, and not assume that conversations about class are merely an irritating pre-occupation of university students. And he has to trust that she will take the concepts he uses to articulate his experience seriously, and not perpetrate wilful hermeneutical ignorance by denying their legitimacy¹⁷.

¹⁶ I take it that naming one's dogs after famous jazz musicians (Charles Mingus and John Coltrane) is also meant to be a sign of class differences, indicating an awareness and comfort with this knowledge or 'cultural capital'.

¹⁷ What I say in this section aligns well with some of Dover's (2022) discussion of 'taking one another seriously' in our conversations with them, in order to get to know them; and Mason's (2024) discussion of taking our friend's seriously - though she notes that this notion encompasses more than purely doxastic attitudes.

Alice fails to do each of these, and this curtails Brian's ability to disclose about this subject. Despite being obviously unsatisfied with how Alice has responded, he drops the subject and never brings it up again. This also affects the mutuality of the relationship. As we have seen, to truly cement intimacy, such disclosure needs to be mutual. But Alice's response to Brian's testimony creates an asymmetry in the friendship. Part of what we disclose about ourselves in friendship is our emotions - both explicitly by stating what we are feeling, and implicitly by showing it through our tone of voice, gestures etc. While Brian does express some of his frustration to Alice during the interaction, it is largely Alice who feels most able to rant about her own feelings and experiences. Alice's half-hearted apology, in which she claims to be 'just letting off steam' is particularly ironic in the context. It's clear to the reader at this point in the novel that if anyone has anything to get off their chest on the subject of class, it's Brian. And yet it's Alice's grievances that get the most airtime within the conversation. This feels particularly unjust given the nature of her frustrations. However irritating it might be to feel that other students are attempting to illegitimately claim a working class identity for themselves¹⁸, this is not the same as being genuinely subject to the injustice of class prejudice, as Brian is. Even if there was an appropriate time and place for this frustration of hers to be raised, a suitably perceptive friend ought to recognise that this interaction was not it.

Something similar occurs in the Aubrey Gordon example. Her friend's responses would also damage mutual self-disclosure in the friendship. It is clear from Gordon's comments about the incident that she finds such interactions with friends and others deeply frustrating. The fact that the two of them cannot even share the same concept of fatness - crucial to the discussion - substantially hampers her ability to communicate her experience. It would be natural to conclude that these conversations are not worth having.

¹⁸The issue of students pretending to be from backgrounds that are more working class than their own actually are is a real phenomenon. David Nicholls, the author of *Starter For Ten*, has stated that the book is largely autobiographical (Nicholls, 2006), and has recalled in an article reflecting on his time at university that this was a common occurrence: 'class consciousness was running rampant on campuses in the mid-1980s, where many students took great care to advertise their working-class credentials, even if they were entirely fraudulent - the "cock-er-ney" son of the barrister, the surgeon's daughter in dungarees' (Ibid). There are discussions related to this in the feminist epistemology literature. Liebow and Ades (2022), discuss the phenomenon of relatively privileged people claiming to know what it's like to experience oppression on the basis of limited and superficially similar experiences.

However, while this phenomenon is real, we should also note the source of Alice's frustrations here. Giving the impression that one is from a marginalised background when one isn't is a kind of injustice, and one that ought to be criticised. But that does not seem to be Alice's concern. She is understandably irritated by students being disingenuous, but the main issue for her seems to be that students should not be so obsessed with class in the first place because 'it's completely meaningless'. On her view, they shouldn't pretend to be working class partly because class differences don't matter anyway. This is very different from a contention that Brian might justifiably have, that such students are trying to get the social cache of being from a working class background, without ever experiencing the actual injustice and deprivation that often goes along with it.

4.5 Failure of emotional support

As we saw, friends not only disclose much about themselves, in doing so, they also seek emotional support¹⁹. Thus, failures of mutual self-disclosure are likely to lead to failures of friends to be emotionally supportive. For example, though the novel catalogues a number of ways that his class negatively affects his experience at university, Brian never discusses these with Alice, despite her ostensibly being a close friend, with whom he seeks a romantic relationship. Thus, insofar as Brian might need support with the alienating nature of this experience, he loses Alice as a friend in whom he could otherwise confide. Likewise, Alice loses out on important information about what it is like to be Brian. While good friends are meant to have some significant degree of knowledge about each other's experience of the world, Alice is unable to gain this from Brian, because of her own refusal to hear and understand his testimony. This also affects the mutuality in the friendship.

Likewise, in the Gordon example, there is a significant failure of emotional support due to the perpetration of epistemic injustice. It is clear that what Gordon most needs is for her friend to take her own testimony at face-value, accept that the harassment took place and was due to Gordon being fat, and fully acknowledge that such behaviour was wrong and should not have happened. She could have also shown Gordon emotional support by allowing her to talk openly about her feelings around the incident, providing an affirming ear.

However, this is prevented by epistemic injustice. In order to support her with this experience, her friend has to believe that the experience took place. She also has to view this experience in the terms that Gordon provides: one of harassment. Testimonial injustice prevents her from recognising this. She also has to recognise, as Gordon's own testimony suggests, that the experience was not Gordon's fault and she is not to blame for it. Failure to do this reinforces the kind of victim-blaming that fat people are regularly subject to, and which she critiques throughout her book.

The takeaway from this interaction and others for Gordon is deep and significant. As she summarises after this incident 'This, then, is my life as a fat person ... it is no one's responsibility to hear me. It is no one's responsibility to care for my body' (Gordon, 2020, p. 37). Again, what seems significant here is the use of the word 'no one'. This underscores the profound loneliness and sense of social isolation that comes with being fat in a fatphobic society. What is implicit here, based on the interaction described with her friend, is 'no one - *not even my friends*'.

5 Conclusion

As the empirical literature on epistemically unjust microaggressions suggests, epistemic injustice can be an unfortunately common feature of many friendships, affecting people from a range of marginalised groups. As I have argued, epistemic injustice,

¹⁹This is not to say that disclosure is the only way friends seek emotional support. A friend might request that a recent troubling event not be discussed, and that the other simply provide pleasant company as a distraction. This too is another way emotional support can be provided.

when it occurs in these relationship, can be distinctively bad, in that we often cannot explain the badness of this injustice without reference to the friendship itself. This is not only intuitive, but can be vindicated by considering the specific sorts of moral reasons that friendship gives us: reasons to enable our friends to self-disclose, to promote their self-esteem, including their epistemic self-confidence, and to provide them with emotional support. As I have argued, perpetrating epistemic injustice against one's friends frustrates our ability to respond to these reasons appropriately. It makes us worse confidants, undermining our friend's ability to self-disclose; it can contribute to undermining our friend's epistemic self-confidence, a vulnerability to which the marginalised are already particularly susceptible; and it hampers our ability to provide the kind of emotional support our friend needs, for which we must first take them at their word. The first step to combating this injustice is understanding why it is bad. For this we need a robust account of the sorts of salient reasons friendship gives us in this context - reasons we fail to respond to appropriately when we commit epistemic injustice against our friends. That is what this paper has endeavored to provide.

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