

TRAPPED IN THE IN-BETWEEN:
EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE
IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The model minority stereotype confers material benefits to Asian Americans. However, it is also the cause of them experiencing epistemic injustice and harms that affect them not only *as knowers*, but as persons. In this thesis, I offer a new perspective on Miranda Fricker’s notion of *epistemic injustice* by looking at the experience of Asian Americans socially constructed as the ‘model minority’. Scholars have expanded, critiqued, and nuanced Miranda Fricker’s seminal concept of epistemic injustice. My thesis adds to this literature by analyzing the wider set of harms associated with the model minority stereotype.

The model minority is, on one level, a “positive” stereotype. I argue, however, that its internalization that informs Asian American identity, leads to subtle forms of *intrapersonal* epistemic injustices due to the interactive, looping, and self-reinforcing nature of stereotypes influencing social constructions not picked up by Fricker. Furthermore, due to the dynamics of intrapersonal epistemic injustice being entangled with material benefits, Asian Americans are simultaneously accepted and othered and become “truncated subjects” with limited (and controlled) epistemic agency that is domain specific and perpetuates broader social injustices. Additionally, living as a truncated subject contributes to further epistemic, ethical, practical, ontological, and affective harms.

The interactive nature of epistemic injustice also leads to *group-level* epistemic injustice and the harms of *persistent unknowability* and *persistent hypervisibility/invisibility*, respectively. These group-level injustices and harms force Asian Americans into a liminal space where their social identity is dependent on the racial contexts they find themselves in amidst white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

However, I conclude on a constructive note. My argument is that because of their troubled construction and liminal identity, Asian Americans, can develop what I call *liminal consciousness* that can serve as avenues of resistance.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Epistemic Injustice, Stereotypes, and Identity Construction.....	9
1.1 Epistemic Injustice – Testimonial and Hermeneutical.....	9
1.2 The Relationship between Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice.....	11
1.3: Stereotypes and Prejudice.....	17
1.4 Testimonial Injustice and Credibility Excess.....	22
1.5 Hermeneutical Injustice and the Productivity of Stereotypes as Epistemic Resources.....	28
1.6 Identity Construction – Stereotypes and Harms.....	31
Chapter 2. Broadening Epistemic Injustice through the Asian American Experience.....	39
2.1 Sociohistorical Formation of the Model Minority Stereotype.....	39
2.2 Internalization of the Model Minority Stereotype Perpetuating Epistemic Injustice.....	44
2.3 “Model Minority” Constructed Identity and Epistemic Injustices.....	51
2.4 Asian Americans and Four Types of “Intrapersonal” Epistemic Injustice.....	54
2.4.1 <i>Silencing and “pre-emptive testimonial injustice”</i>	55
2.4.2 <i>“testimonial smothering”</i>	57
2.4.3 <i>“pre-emptive hermeneutical injustice”</i>	59
2.4.4 <i>“hermeneutical smothering”</i>	61
Chapter 3. Beyond Epistemic Injustice - Expanding Harms through Asian American Experience.....	65
3.1 Introduction.....	65
3.2 Fricker’s Primary and Secondary Harms of Epistemic Injustice.....	66
3.3 Primary, Intrinsic Harm - The Asian American as “Truncated Subject”.....	72
3.4 Additional Harms in Asian American Populations.....	80
3.5: Group-level Epistemic Injustice and Harms in Asian American Populations.....	89
3.5.1 <i>The Group-level Epistemic Injustice of “Persistent Unknowability”</i>	89
3.5.2 <i>The Group-level Harm of “Persistent hypervisibility/invisibility”</i>	95
Chapter 4. Conclusion: Towards Resistance.....	97
4.1 Resistance and Paths Forward.....	97
4.2 Liminality and Identity (Re)construction.....	98
4.3 Asian Americans and “Liminal Consciousness”.....	103
4.4 Both/And.....	107
Bibliography.....	109

Introduction

In the popular imagination, Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status: not white enough nor black enough; distrusted by African Americans, ignored by whites, unless we're being used by whites to keep the black man down. We are the carpenter ants of the service industry, the apparatchiks of the corporate world. We are math-crunching middle managers who keep the corporate wheels greased but who never get promoted since we don't have the right "face" for leadership. We have a content problem. They think we have no inner resources. But while I may look impassive, I am frantically paddling my feet underwater, always overcompensating to hide my devouring feelings of inadequacy.

- Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*¹

On the face of it, Asian Americans² seem to be doing okay, but beneath the surface they are suffering. If we think about what it means to be in purgatory, we don't really know what happens during that time or perhaps if it even exists. It is unseen, unknown, and elusive. It seems like a painful place to be in, but we don't really understand the pain. Although Hong is not talking about purgatory in the religious sense³, the metaphor is apt when it comes to evaluating the racial status of Asian Americans. Asian Americans are often unknown and forgotten unless someone remembers them—unless someone vouches for them. Hong gives us a glimpse into the hidden reality of what it means to be an Asian American—what you see does not reveal everything that Asian Americans are experiencing.

As this project is a work of social, feminist epistemology, it is important to identify the context we are working with and in. Hong notes that Asian Americans are understood in a particular way within "the popular imagination" or in other words, a dominant narrative about

¹ Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (New York: One World, 2021), 9.

² For the purposes of this project, I am generalizing the term "Asian American" without considering the intricacies and complexities within the term itself and the subgroups that make up the Asian American diaspora. These nuances are beyond the scope of this project. I acknowledge that there are inherent tensions, inequities, and differences among those who are regarded as Asian Americans, and work has been done and continues to be done to articulate, clarify, and build on this important work.

³ Often thought of as an in-between world after death that one can only be released from through atonement by another who is still alive.

Asian American identity (Hong 2020, 9). The dominant narrative is based on the model minority stereotype⁴, sometimes called the model minority myth⁵. The model minority stereotype allows Asian Americans to become the “middle managers” of society, and characterizes Asian Americans as hard-working, intelligent, quiet, unassuming, diligent, STEM experts, who get the job done without making a fuss. The model minority stereotype allows Asian Americans to reach middle-class status in highly valued professional fields, such as law, medicine, and engineering, and many might think that Asian Americans have achieved the “American Dream” of making it in a meritocratic America from humble beginnings.

By now you might be asking: what, if any, connection is there between the model minority stereotype and epistemology and further, with injustice? How is it that Asian Americans are being epistemically wronged and ethically harmed as the model minority? But first: what is “epistemic injustice”? According to Miranda Fricker, who coined the term, “epistemic injustice” refers to the different ways that marginalized communities are wronged specifically as knowers owing to identity prejudicial stereotypes (2007). A knower is an individual involved in knowledge-building and sharing practices. An *identity prejudicial stereotype* is “a widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment” (Fricker 2007, 35). An *identity prejudice* is a prejudice against a person based on some aspect of their social identity, such as

⁴ Erika Lee, referring to Chair Judy Chu’s remark of Asian Americans as a “community of contrasts”, notes that there is much “diversity and disparities within and between different groups” (E. Lee 2015, 376). Although the model minority stereotype often refers to those of East Asian (e.g., Japan, China, Korea) and South Asian (e.g., India) descent, I want to note that other Asian subgroups can also be taken up as modeling this stereotype if their life trajectory fits. Lee and Zhou (2015) interview several Vietnamese Americans who fit the model minority stereotype.

⁵ Scholars sometimes choose to use the term “model minority myth” to point towards the fact that not all Asian Americans fall in line with the stereotypical features of what it means to be a “model minority” (Chou and Feagin 2015). I chose to use the term “model minority stereotype” in this project to highlight the epistemic side of the model minority myth and because I evaluate how the model minority functions as a stereotype.

gender, race, and/or class (Fricker 2007, 4). The generalizations that are built out of the associations we make between people and certain characteristics that seem to define a group, influence what roles they are allowed to play in the social practice of knowledge-gathering and sharing in society. Thus, being associated with an identity prejudicial stereotype affects how one can or cannot participate in knowledge-related social practices. Furthermore, the influence of identity prejudice negatively skewing generalizations and how someone might interpret information from the people they interact with, can lead to individuals experiencing epistemic injustice. For Asian Americans, their identity is articulated in terms of the model minority stereotype. And this is prejudice.

Much scholarship exists around the notion of epistemic injustice causing both epistemic and ethical wrongs endured by epistemic agents. The concept brings together feminist, virtue, and social epistemology in addition to ethics, revealing that being epistemically harmed has larger (negative) ramifications to our lives as knowers and as *people* more broadly. Additionally, evaluating epistemic injustice is important because of the inextricable link between social injustice, epistemic injustice, and social identity.

The Asian American experience, however, highlights an interesting paradox. Fricker bases her understanding of epistemic injustice primarily on the notion of *negative* identity prejudice. For example, a police officer might disbelieve a Black man's testimony based on the racialized stereotype that Black men are aggressive, lying criminals, and are not to be trusted. The Black man is judged based on the negative identity stereotypes that the dominant population holds, which construct Black men as "brutes" who are aggressive and/or "thugs" who lie and are involved with criminal acts. This construction reinforces the racial prejudice that the police officer holds. Due to the negative identity prejudicial stereotypes associated with the Black man

(even if the Black man didn't display any sort of aggression or criminal act), the police officer does not take the Black man's testimony seriously. The negative generalization leads to credibility deficit and what Fricker deems "testimonial" epistemic injustice (2007, 28). The stereotypical association of Asian Americans as the "model minority" implies, however, that the generalizations linked to this group are *positive*—we have here a positive identity prejudice. Building on previous scholarship, one goal of my project is showing how positive stereotypes can cause epistemic injustices and harms in distinctive ways. Asian Americans are positively stereotyped, where the dominant population generally has good feelings or affect towards Asian Americans due to the model minority stereotype. On the outside, this seems like a good situation to be in, but beneath the surface there are problems brewing.

The concept "model minority" entered into US social consciousness in the 1960s and can be defined as "a racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening, and definitively not-black" (Wu 2014, 2). I use this description of model minority highlighting the sociopolitical position of Asian Americans as "not white" and "not black", as well as highlighting the assimilationist ideology on which it is based. Asian Americans are often seen as a political wedge between whites and Blacks, to keep Black and Brown bodies marginalized. "Upwardly mobile" points to Asian Americans achieving middle-class and upper middle-class status through their academic and professional success. Understanding the formation of the stereotype with its sociopolitical roots is crucial to this project because of the continued impact of the stereotype on Asian Americans and other groups.

But how is it that something that confers material benefits and positive associations to a racial group causes epistemic, ethical, and other types of harm? We need to look deeper at the generalizations that emerge from stereotyping and how these function in knowledge production,

which involves not only sharing knowledge, but having the ability to shape knowledge. Thus, following Fricker, we will look at the two epistemic practices of (1) sharing knowledge and (2) making sense of experiences in order to highlight what is epistemically and ethically going wrong in Asian American populations. Asian Americans are uniquely situated in comparison to other racial groups. The links between race and socioeconomic status, or class more generally, reveal that even a positive stereotype boosting class status for Asian Americans involves epistemic injustice and harm because of how race and class interact with one's individual and collective, group identity.

The broader goal of my project is evaluating the Asian American experience—how being “Asian American” can both harm and equip us as people. Other philosophers look to experiences of Black men, white women, Latina women, and Black women and girls⁶. And now I offer how epistemic injustice and resistance to it manifests in Asian American populations. More specifically, I argue that the model minority stereotype, which is a socially entrenched racialized stereotype, congeals into a positive identity prejudice that (re)constructs the person whereby Asian Americans perpetuate epistemic injustice *intrapersonally*. The Asian American experience offers another viewpoint—differing from Fricker's and current literature on the topic—of how epistemic injustice manifests and the deep influence on who someone becomes. I want to track how identity prejudicial stereotypes loop back and harm knowers as *persons*. Harm to knowers is intertwined with harm to persons, and this is another context within which epistemic injustice can be studied.

⁶ See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).; Kristie Dotson, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability.” *Social Epistemology* 31, no. 5 (August 18, 2017): 417–30.; José Medina, *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In Chapter 1, I first articulate Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice, which includes testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. I argue that testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are much more closely linked than what Fricker suggests by showing how stereotypes function in both types of epistemic injustice. This relation sets up the scene revealing that identity stereotypes construct individuals based on social identity, social relations, and power dynamics within society. The paradox of a *positive* stereotype causing epistemic injustice and harm, however, cannot be fully captured by Fricker's account and therefore, I refer to other philosophers who have expanded Fricker's work. I look at cases of *positive* identity-prejudicial stereotypes and *credibility excess* resulting in testimonial injustice. I also evaluate the productive function of existing, entrenched stereotypes that cause hermeneutical injustice. By analyzing the functioning of stereotypes in social relations and how identity prejudicial stereotypes (re)construct the individual into a specific type of knower/person, I point to broader harms that individuals experience in relation to epistemic injustice.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the specific types of epistemic injustice Asian Americans experience via the dominant, positive identity prejudicial model minority stereotype. I start with the sociohistorical formation of the stereotype that motivated and continues motivating the cultural and normative nature of the model minority stereotype as *the* Asian American identity. Due to the positive, material benefits that come along with the stereotype, many embrace the stereotype as "good". The "stereotype promise" that comes out of the model minority stereotype, however, becomes a coercive and oppressive force shaping one's identity and self-worth in ways leading to the *internalization* of the various characteristics as essential traits of what it means to be Asian American. I argue that this internalization continues to (re)construct the individual while undermining epistemic agency perpetuating epistemic injustice. Relying on scholarly work

of Kristie Dotson, Adrianna Falbo, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., I then show how the (re)construction of the Asian American knower as the model minority, perpetuates four kinds of “intrapersonal” epistemic injustices that go beyond Fricker. These are: “pre-emptive testimonial injustice”, “testimonial smothering”, “pre-emptive productive hermeneutical injustice”, and “hermeneutical smothering”.

In Chapter 3, I trouble Fricker’s distinction between “primary” and “secondary” harms by speaking of the broad swath of harms—epistemic, ethical, practical, ontological, and affective—that Asian Americans encounter when suffering epistemic injustice. The model minority stereotype confers material benefits and class privilege, constructing Asian Americans as “model” in areas of success and achievement while also maintaining their marginalized status as a “minority” race. This *simultaneously* and conditionally includes and excludes knowers in social practices. Thus, drawing from Fricker, Emmalon Davis, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., I argue that the primary, intrinsic harm that Asian American experience is that of “truncated subjectivity”. The status of being a truncated subject, however, blurs the lines between what is considered a primary and secondary harm, revealing that the harm caused by identity prejudices are better characterized as epistemic, ethical, practical, ontological, and affective. I conclude the chapter by arguing that a truncated subject is linked to the cultural, group-level epistemic injustice of “persistent unknowability” and the harm of “persistent hypervisibility/invisibility” in Asian American populations.

In Chapter 4, I conclude by beginning to articulate the possible *positive* epistemic fallout from Asian Americans experiencing such epistemic injustices and harms. I offer a potential path of resistance by looking at the status/space that Asian Americans occupy as “truncated subjects” that perpetuates persistent and simultaneous hypervisibility/invisibility. I argue that Asian

Americans occupy a “liminal” space between the Black and white binary, and offer that “liminal consciousness” is a way for Asian Americans to begin resisting epistemic injustice. I theorize “liminal consciousness” by drawing from social anthropology, organizational management literature, and Emmalon Davis and Orlando Hawkins’s analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness”. Asian Americans can benefit from liminal consciousness by recognizing and understanding the sociohistorical context, genealogy, and structure of relations that exist in a white supremacist and anti-Black society in order to redefine their relationship with the model minority stereotype identity they have inherited. Asian Americans recognizing that they live in a constant state of liminal tension of simultaneous hypervisibility/invisibility can help point out spaces and joints where they can begin to simultaneously (de)construct and (re)construct the Asian American knower, and ultimately, the “person”.

Chapter 1. Epistemic Injustice, Stereotypes, and Identity Construction

1.1 Epistemic Injustice – Testimonial and Hermeneutical

Miranda Fricker in her book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, theorizes a specific category of injustice that is epistemic in nature and wrongs people in their “capacity as a knower” (Fricker 2007, 44). She states, “the overarching aim [of my book] is to bring to light certain ethical aspects of two of our most basic everyday epistemic practices: conveying knowledge to others by telling them, and making sense of our own social experiences” (Fricker 2007, 1). These practices can get distorted by identity prejudice and lead to the two types of epistemic injustice Fricker brings into the philosophical literature: testimonial and hermeneutical. The identity prejudices she focuses on are primarily negative construction of the identity of others.

Testimonial injustice involves people interacting as “speaker” and “hearer”. Credibility is the epistemic currency that is either given or not given by the hearer to the speaker. Testimonial injustice is caused when *negative* identity prejudicial stereotypes lead to a credibility deficit attributed to a speaker by a hearer (Fricker 2007, 28). Credibility deficits due to identity prejudice forestall a speaker’s words from being considered trustful, and thus, the speaker is wronged in their capacity as a “giver of knowledge” (Fricker 2007, 44). The paradigmatic example that Fricker uses is that of Tom Robinson from Harper Lee’s book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom gives testimony defending himself against the allegations of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell, in the American south during the 1930s (Fricker 2007, 23). Although the jury has disconfirming evidence that shows Tom’s innocence, as Mayella’s injuries reveal that the perpetrator hit with their left arm and Tom is disabled on that arm, the jury convicts Tom as guilty. In Fricker’s terms, the white jury judges Tom through a negative identity prejudicial

stereotype that Black men are violent and liars⁷. Tom's words are given less credibility by the jury due to a racial prejudice based on a stereotype of what it means to be a Black male in US society. What Tom says is not believed, and this harms him initially as a participant, but spills into harming him as a person in the ethical sense.

Hermeneutical injustice on the other hand, pertains to understanding and interpreting one's experiences. It does not necessarily involve one-on-one interpersonal interactions although this is how it manifests in many cases. Fricker writes that, "hermeneutical injustice is: the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a [negative] structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker 2007, 155). Thus, hermeneutical injustice occurs when a speaker cannot make sense of and articulate their experiences owing to a lack of concepts in the dominant conceptual scheme in use. The paradigmatic case of hermeneutical injustice is an example from Susan Brownmiller's memoir⁸, where Brownmiller describes the experience of Carmita Wood working in an administrative role in the physics department at Cornell University. While there, Wood experiences unwanted attention and advances from a male professor, including enduring non-consensual kisses while in an elevator. Wood goes on to experience a host of physical, mental, and emotional ailments due to repeated stressful occurrences with the male professor, and ultimately quits her job. Carmita Wood did not have access to adequate language and concepts to articulate and understand the sexual violence she encountered, which we now know as sexual harassment. She probably appeared irrational and confused when attempting to share her experience. And thus, Wood suffered an epistemic injustice: the truncated structure of the hermeneutical resource pool she had access to failed to make her experience intelligible to

⁷ Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (London: William Heinemann, 1960), 208.

⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1990), 280-281.

herself and to others. More specifically, Fricker theorizes that the lack of collective understanding in Wood's case was due to a "structural inequality of power between men and women" where no particular agent can be blamed (2007, 149).

Unlike hermeneutical injustice, which is structural, Fricker argues that testimonial injustice is agential because it involves the utilization of identity power of a specific hearer over a speaker who is in turn epistemically wronged (2007, 9-10). Unlike hermeneutical injustice, testimonial injustice can be traced to a specific agent. I want to argue, however, that the links between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice shows that there are structural elements in testimonial injustice as well.

1.2 The Relationship between Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice

Sally Haslanger, who takes up the notion of systemic and structural injustice in her paper, "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?", offers a helpful framework to understand how identity prejudicial stereotypes are structural, and thus, how all epistemic injustices broadly are structural too. Haslanger defines *structure* as "a network of social relations" that "emerges through the coordinating function of social practices" (2023, 2). Moving from this definition she argues that,

structural injustice occurs when the practices that create the structure – the network of positions and relations – (a) distort our understanding of what is valuable, or (b) organize us in ways that are unjust/harmful/wrong, e.g., by distributing resources unjustly or violating the principles of democratic equality (2023, 22)

We can map the definitions of structure and structural injustice to cases of epistemic injustice, including both testimonial and hermeneutical.

Fricker evaluates the epistemic practices of sharing testimony and making sense of one's experience where these practices involve our "positions and relations" to each other. To make this point clearer, Haslanger notes that "structures are the network of relations that hold between

the parts” and “in a structure, we can distinguish the individual in the system (me), from the position within the structure (parent, spouse)”, where “we ignore the particular individuals that occupy the places, and focus on the relationships that hold between places” (2023, 3-4). In emphasizing structure, our goal is to focus on *relations* between different individuals, for example man-woman in the case of Carmita Wood and the male professor. It is the *relation* that creates a pattern of how things function together in the epistemic context of sharing knowledge. When looking at the man-woman dynamic we can see that structures “constrain” and set up the parameters of how things function within a larger system (i.e., knowledge exchange) (Haslanger 2023, 6). So, testimonial injustice clearly has structural elements. Additionally, hermeneutical injustice involves individuals (e.g., Wood and male professor), the relations between the individuals (woman and man), and the background conditions within the dynamic system (patriarchy) that distorts self-understanding of some. These structural elements of hermeneutical injustice have been emphasized by Fricker herself.

Fricker foregrounds her work in identifying the broad role power, more specifically, social power⁹ and how identity power plays in perpetuating epistemic injustice. Identity power is “power that depends in some significant degree upon shared imaginative conceptions of social identity” such as “what it means to be a woman or a man, or what it is or means to be gay or straight” (Fricker 2007, 14). Identity power is crucial to the notion of epistemic injustice because of its connection to identity prejudice, which is prejudice that tracks people in some aspect of their social identity (Fricker 2007, 27). What is hopefully becoming clearer is that identity power is at work in both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice caused by identity prejudicial stereotypes.

⁹ Social power involves social control over specific groups by other groups to “create or preserve a given social order” (Fricker 2007, 13).

Social power and in turn identity power is exercised in the example of Carmita Wood. In the 1970s, women were not regarded as full citizens in many ways and experiences that Wood encountered with the male professor were probably written off as mere “flirting” due to the norms defining the relation between man and woman (Fricker 2007, 153). Carmita Wood experienced a hermeneutical injustice via identity power exercised by the male professor because she was excluded from adding to the pool of knowledge about what right conduct in the workplace looked like for women living in a patriarchal working world. This is a structural notion that involves testimonial injustice as well because Carmita Wood in trying to share and testify to her experience was not taken seriously, for example, by the unemployment office who denied her benefits (Fricker 2007, 150). Wood’s reasons for leaving being “personal” did not have the uptake that Wood needed because the relation between Wood and the claims investigator, which influenced the social understanding of what counted as a viable reason to get unemployment benefits could not account for Wood’s experience (Fricker 2007, 150). The concept of “sexual harassment” coming into social consciousness was imperative for not only women to know and understand what they were experiencing, but for all of society. It caused a shift in understanding man-woman relations and brought to light what it is like living in an oppressive system of patriarchy.

Fricker delineates that testimonial injustice is agential and hermeneutical injustice is structural because she wants to highlight the epistemic dysfunctions that occur in our epistemic practices of telling and understanding our experiences, respectively (Fricker 2007, 90, 159). Fricker sees these two occurrences as distinct because telling involves interpersonal interactions and making sense of one’s experience does not necessarily require a dialogical interaction. Fricker herself notes, however, that “hermeneutical injustice most typically manifests itself in the

speaker struggling to make herself intelligible in a testimonial exchange” (2007, 155, 159), and reveals the mutually reinforcing nature of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Let us ask the question: why is it that the framework in use did not have the concepts appropriate to capture women’s experiences? Going back to the example of Carmita Wood, Wood suffered a hermeneutical injustice due to lack of concepts. When attempting to articulate her experience, she wasn’t taken seriously because her experiences had not contributed to the pool of concepts in use. She did not have the epistemic (social and identity) power to participate in the creation of the conceptual scheme in use because she was not afforded credibility in testimonial exchanges. Hermeneutical resources were unavailable because the testimony of minorities (like Carmita) was not taken seriously. And due to the shared hermeneutical resources not having the concept of sexual harassment, Carmita Wood’s *understanding* of her own experience was distorted, and in turn, she could not articulate, or *testify*, to her mistreatment by the male professor.

We can see the interconnectedness of hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice from another angle as well: why is it that women’s experiences do not contribute to the conceptual resource pool? Because women are given a deflated level of credibility when they speak up due to negative identity prejudices that work against them. And because of this lack of credibility, their conceptual inputs are not taken seriously. This could have been occurring when Wood requested to be reassigned to a new department and filed for unemployment benefits, but was denied in both cases.

Ishani Maitra in her paper “The Nature of Epistemic Injustice” also argues that there is a closer link between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice by offering an analysis of Fricker’s examples and the stereotypes in use:

Hermeneutical injustice, for Fricker, is a matter of structural prejudice because whether there is such an injustice turns on a structural matter, namely, the availability (or

unavailability) of particular hermeneutical resources in our collective understanding. Thus, Carmita Wood suffers this injustice partly because the resources needed to understand her experiences are unavailable in the collective understanding. But much the same can be said about testimonial injustices as well. After all, Tom Robinson and Marge Sherwood both suffer as they do because certain racist and sexist stereotypes are so easily accessible and so powerful in the collective understanding. Had these stereotypes not been such an important part of their hearers' 'imaginative social coordination' (to borrow a phrase from Fricker), it is far less likely that those testimonial injustices would have taken place. But what stereotypes are available, how powerful or accessible they are, seems in large part a structural matter. If so, whether there is a testimonial injustice also seems to depend (at least in part) on a structural matter." (2010, 209)

Maitra's analysis of the structural nature of testimonial injustice reveals that *stereotypes* are hermeneutical resources that color and influence *how we perceive ourselves and others*. The example of Marge Sherwood and Herbert Greenleaf's interactions from a scene in the film version of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, reveals the connection between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice caused by sexist stereotypes. In the specific scene, Herbert Greenleaf says to Marge Sherwood, "there's female intuition, and then there are facts" (Minghella and Highsmith 1999, 130). In saying these words, Greenleaf silences Marge on her suspicions that Tom Ripley is the one that killed Dickie Greenleaf, Marge's fiancé, who is also Herbert's son. Greenleaf uses his privileged status as a man and Marge's subordinated status as a woman to silence Marge (Fricker 2007, 14). This passage also reveals that Marge is silenced, not only by the credibility deficit that Herbert associates with Marge's speech, but that *Marge could be passively silenced through structural prejudice in the collective conceptions that are shared and understood by both Marge and Herbert*.

Haslanger's account is relevant in this example. We are dealing with a structural prejudice because the man-woman relation creates a pattern of how things function within the larger system of patriarchy. Marge and Herbert both had an idea of women being quiet, docile, and hysterical (Fricker 2007, 88), and these stereotypical gendered features informed how

Herbert judges Marge's testimony about Dickie and possibly even how Marge viewed her own intuitions about Ripley's sinister side. Marge could also have suffered the testimonial injustice of pre-emptive silencing through gendered stereotypes related to her social identity further revealing that testimonial injustice is also structural. Pre-emptive silencing shows how the relation between individuals is what constrains and set up the parameters for what information is used to understand one's experience as well as what information is deemed credible and trustworthy (Fricker 2007, 130).

Rae Langton also notes that,

Herbert Greenleaf is not simply prejudiced: his prejudice is given a particular shape by the concept 'women's intuition.' The ready availability of this stereotype is not his own doing (as Fricker indeed allows), though his refusal to give Marge credit is. The point is, the hermeneutical resources include damaging *presences*, as well as damaging absences, and these may sometimes be implicated in testimonial injustice. Seen this way, the presence of stereotypes is just a different side of the structural problem of hermeneutical injustice. (Langton 2010, 462; emphasis in original)

Langton shows that the presence of stereotypes can be viewed as hermeneutical resources that inflict not only hermeneutical injustice, but testimonial injustice as well. Although Marge was given a credibility deficit by Herbert due to his prejudiced stance, the prejudice that led to the testimonial injustice came from the existing stereotypes that Herbert based his judgments on.

Furthermore, Fricker's central cases of identity prejudice are also "tracker prejudices" in being systematic and persistent. Systematic epistemic injustices are caused by prejudices that "track a subject through different dimensions of social activity—economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, and so on" (Fricker 2007, 27). Both Tom Robinson and Carmita Wood suffer not only from epistemic injustice in particular exchanges, but the prejudice against them tracks them (i.e., creates a pattern) in various other aspects of social activity. For example, Tom goes to jail and Carmita Wood loses her job. Because both

testimonial and hermeneutical injustice involve these “tracker” stereotypes that sustain a pattern across different domains, both have structural elements.

We are starting to get a picture of how *stereotypes* function structurally and play a larger role in epistemic injustice than Fricker herself articulates. It will be helpful now to further define what a stereotype is, its function, and when a stereotype becomes a prejudice to investigate how the *presence* of a *positive* identity stereotype (e.g., model minority stereotype), causes epistemic harms and wrongs.

1.3: Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are heuristics or shortcuts to understand the people and society we live in, and these generalizations can be positive or negative. Stereotypes as generalizations are used to make judgments about individuals or whole groups of people based on shared characteristics of the group being assessed. Stereotypes can also be regarded as cognitive and cultural resources that not only impact interpersonal relations, but intrapersonal perceptions of the self, and the broader notion of intergroup relations (Pratto, Henkel, and Lee 2013, 151-152).

Erin Beeghly in her paper, “What is a Stereotype? What is Stereotyping?”, suggests that a stereotype is a “generalization about a social group” and is considered a type of *generics*¹⁰ drawing from the field of linguistics (Beeghly 2015, 676). Stereotypes as generics “do not make claims about specific individuals. Instead, they state general claims about kinds” (Beeghly 2015, 676). Some examples include, “zebras have stripes” and “spoons are for eating”. When

¹⁰ According to Beeghly (2015, 676), “generics lack quantifiers like ‘some’, ‘most’, or ‘all’”. Drawing on the work of Sarah-Jane Leslie (2007), who separates generics into “majority generics”, “characteristic generics”, and “striking-properties generics” where there are certain conditions that need to be fulfilled to be considered that type of generic. Majority generics involve statistical truths, characteristic generics involve general claims to roles or function of what is typical in those groups and group members, and striking property generics involve claims that have “dangerous or appalling characteristics” which are not typical of a group or group members (Leslie 2007; Beeghly 2015, 676).

stereotypes are associated with people it involves *social kinds*¹¹, such as “Black people sing”¹² and “Asian Americans are good at math”.

In Beeghly’s analysis of what a stereotype is, she offers a few important insights drawing not only from linguistics, but from psychology. She states that there is a “psychological reality independent of speech” when dealing with stereotypes (Beeghly 2015, 677). This psychological reality involves ways in which “groups can influence people’s plans, expectations, and actions even if they are never expressed in public, directly or indirectly” (Beeghly 2015, 677). And therefore, it is imperative to understand how psychologists view stereotypes: as concepts or cognitive tools that are used to form concepts¹³ (Beeghly 2015, 677).

Beeghly offers philosopher Jerry Fodor’s hypothesis, who argues that stereotypes are needed to form concepts (Beeghly 2015, 678; Fodor 2008, 150). This point is important because stereotypes are hermeneutical resources that shape our understanding of the social world. What I want to draw out of Beeghly’s account, which Fricker alludes to but is not explicit about, is the link between stereotypes and concepts that lead to epistemic injustice. We can say that stereotypes are minimally related to concepts in that they inform concept formation. But then, stereotypes do not only help us to acquire concepts, but go on to inform the creation of expectations and norms about how people *should* act. This normative functioning of stereotypes

¹¹ According to Katherine Jenkins (2023, 2), “in general, ‘kinds’ are groupings of things that help us explain and predict the world. Chemical elements are good examples of kinds. The term ‘kind’ is closely related to the term ‘category’, but whereas categories are usually understood to have at least something to do with our mental representations, or how we conceptualise and classify the world around us, kinds are usually understood as more independent of our classificatory practices. Social kinds are kinds that are brought into existence by our social arrangements. Money, monarchs, and monuments are all social kinds.”

¹² This is an example from Ralph Ellison’s book *The Invisible Man* where the black narrator is stereotyped by a white man because supposedly all black people sing (Beeghly 2015, 676; Ellison 1995, 311-312).

¹³ Beeghly notes that philosophers “are more apt to say that stereotypes are required to form or use concepts though they themselves are not concepts” (2015, 677-678).

is key to the project of revealing the impact of identity prejudicial stereotypes on the construction of the self as a knower who can be harmed by testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

Our next step is to parse out when a stereotype goes wrong—when prejudice enters in—and it becomes an *identity prejudicial* stereotype. Fricker herself notes that stereotyping is common and often useful to understand people and experiences, but in her account, stereotypes become problematic when prejudice is present (2007, 35). According to Fricker, “prejudices are judgments, which may have a positive or a negative valence, and which display some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to some affective investment on the part of the subject” (2007, 35). Thus, we have a prejudicial stereotype when there is evidence that might contradict the stereotype. And this could be due to either positive or negative affect towards the group being evaluated (Fricker 2007, 30).

A stereotype becomes an identity prejudicial stereotype when it resists change or correction from the outside. Although prejudices can have a positive or negative valence, in that we can be for and not only against something or someone, Fricker focuses on *negative* identity prejudicial stereotypes as causing epistemic injustice because negative associations connected to one’s social identity cause harmful distortions. These negative identity prejudices, like “women are hysterical” cause distortions in how hearers judge testimony and deflate credibility of a speaker (Fricker 2007, 36). Although Fricker does not use the language of distortion when considering hermeneutical injustice and the impact on the person experiencing it, identity prejudicial stereotypes as hermeneutical resources can distort self-understanding as well as how others understand us.

Ishani Maitra offers an important point regarding prejudice and stereotypes that expands Fricker’s account of how a stereotype becomes prejudicial. Maitra states that it is not only

resistance to counter evidence, but a “lack of proper regard to the evidence” that can lead to prejudice (2010, 206). Maitra develops this argument from Fricker’s own articulation of prejudice when she writes, “the idea of prejudice is most basically that of a *pre-judgment*...a judgment made or maintained without proper regard to the evidence, and for this reason we should conceive of prejudice generally as something epistemically culpable” (Fricker 2007, 32-33; emphasis in original). We can see that resistance and lack of regard are two different things. Maitra offers the example of David, who stereotypes Black people as lazy based on a small sample size of the Black people living in the same apartment complex. David could get to know other Black people who are not at all lazy and do not fit the stereotype, but David does not want to get to know others because he doesn’t like Black people (ethically bad affect). Maitra notes that if David actually got to know others—a wider sample—he would encounter people who don’t fit the stereotype, which would lead David to give up his generalization. Thus, he isn’t resistant at all to counter-evidence: David’s stereotype is based on evidence of the people he knows, but the evidence is restricted and doesn’t tell the whole picture. He seems to be prejudiced on the basis of *not regarding other information that is available* (Maitra 2010, 206).

Maitra’s argument is important because prejudice does not always involve a strong disregard of evidence, but can also occur when one doesn’t regard all information that might be helpful to let go of a stereotype. The relevance of looking at prejudice in this light will become clearer when evaluating Asian American model minority experiences. In this population, a positive identity stereotype and material benefits that come out of the positive stereotype keep people locked into perceptions of Asian Americans as the model minority not only due to resisting counter-evidence or counter-narratives, but also due to not regarding all the information that is accessible in the sociohistorical context of Asian American identity formation and those

that deviated from the model minority stereotype. Thus, it will be important to articulate the formation of the model minority stereotype and why society continues to hold onto the dominant narrative of Asians as “successful Americans”. The success framework emphasizes achieving the American Dream via assimilationist ideology as the ultimate goal of wellbeing. Positive affect towards Asian Americans as hard-working, high achievers also reinforces the dominant perspective of the success of this racial group. Historically (and currently), there have been Asian Americans who have deviated from the success framework, but attention to these cases is often not given.

This leads us to the next point where we see how identity prejudicial stereotypes cause not only epistemic and ethical harm as a knower, but also as a human, and ultimately a person.

Fricker writes,

I think it is obviously an essential attribute of personhood to be able to participate in the spread of knowledge by testimony and to enjoy the respect enshrined in the proper relations of trust that are its prerequisite. A culture in which some groups are separated off from that aspect of personhood by the experience of repeated exclusions from the spread of knowledge is seriously defective both epistemically *and ethically*. Knowledge and other rational input they have to offer are missed by others and sometimes literally lost by the subjects themselves; and they suffer a sustained assault in respect of a defining human capacity, an essential attribute of personhood. Such a culture would indeed be one in which a species of epistemic injustice had taken on the proportions of oppression. (2007, 58-59; emphasis mine)

Fricker notes in this passage that epistemic harms and more pervasive wrongs are connected to who we are as people and influence who we become.

Given this account of the functioning of prejudicial stereotypes, we can now turn to our main contention: the harmful functioning of *positive* identity prejudices. This is the discussion of how even credibility excess due to the prejudicial but positive identity constructions can lead to testimonial and hermeneutical injustices and the ethical, epistemic, practical, and other harms people face under these circumstances.

1.4 Testimonial Injustice and Credibility Excess

Since we want to evaluate a positive stereotype, we need to look more closely at *credibility excess* in cases of dialogical engagement and testimonial injustice. Recall that Fricker focuses on negative identity prejudicial stereotypes that are utilized in deflation of credibility in testimonial injustice. She focuses on negative identity prejudices because of the epistemic and ethical harm that one faces of being prejudicially *excluded* from sharing knowledge in testimony as a giver of knowledge. The deflation of credibility of a speaker cuts them off from engaging in trustful conversations (Fricker 2007, 53).

Although Fricker notes that there might be some disadvantages to credibility excess, she ultimately rules out that credibility excess leads to epistemic injustice noting that “on the whole [credibility] excess will tend to be advantageous, and deficit disadvantageous” (Fricker 2007, 18). One example she shares involves a medical practitioner who is given credibility excess by their patients. Fricker notes that credibility excess can create an unwanted or even psychologically harmful ethical burden and responsibility for the GP to give the best medical direction even when the GP might also be unsure of how to best diagnose (2007, 18). Ultimately, however, although the GP is ethically disadvantaged (i.e., pressure to give the right medical diagnosis), the GP is not *epistemically* harmed or wronged in their ability to share knowledge (Fricker 2007, 18). The doctor is given credibility excess by their patient, and is seen as an epistemic authority who is a good informant, a giver of knowledge, and thus, no epistemic injustice occurs.

Yet another example is that of a junior professor giving feedback to a senior professor. Credibility excess in this case is disadvantageous to the senior professor due to the academic hierarchy of senior and junior roles. The junior professor may overly esteem the senior professor viewing the senior professor’s writing as excellent, and is thus, unable to give helpful, critical

feedback (Fricker 2007, 18-19). Fricker goes on to say that “while credibility excess may (usually) be disadvantageous in various ways [such as was described by the general practitioner and professor], it does not undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge; so in itself it does her no epistemic injustice, and *a fortiori* no testimonial injustice” (Fricker 2007, 20). Fricker’s admission that credibility excess does not harm the speaker as a giver of knowledge reveals that these cases of credibility excess, however, does not apply to the examples involving Tom, Marge, and Carmita. For Tom, Marge, and Carmita, as speakers, are in an *epistemically marginalized position in comparison to the hearer*, who is in a privileged position. Fricker’s cases of credibility excess are thus importantly different.

Fricker’s examples of disadvantageous credibility excess do not consider the *epistemic* position from which the speaker and hearer is sharing. The social identity of being a doctor and a professor already places one in a position of power as valuable *epistemic* agents. Although there are ethical and practical disadvantages in being overly esteemed as a senior professor and being overly trusted as a healthcare professional, the doctor and senior professor are in positions of epistemic authority in relation to their patient and junior professor, respectively. It is because of this that no *epistemic* disadvantage occurs. Therefore, we need to look at cases where the speaker is in a marginalized position to begin with and then consider the possibility of epistemic disadvantage due to credibility excess.

Furthermore, Fricker’s examples do not take into consideration the social identity of the individuals involved, such as the person’s gender or race, that affects how we evaluate individuals. Recall that when looking at epistemic injustice, we are looking at identity prejudicial stereotypes that involve identity power, and thus, we cannot only look at the profession that an

individual holds (like that of a doctor or professor), but other aspects of the person's identity that might shape the prejudice that an individual as a social kind experiences.

Other scholars offer arguments that consider the social identity of the speaker and hearer while arguing that instances of credibility excess are epistemic injustices. José Medina in his book, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, articulates the “comparative and contrastive” method of assessing credibility where credibility excess linked to one's social identity is harmful to a speaker when evaluating the positionality of the different parties involved (Medina 2013, 61, 64-65). Medina takes up Fricker's example of Tom Robinson's trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and expands her thesis to include credibility excess due to positive identity prejudice as cases of systematic testimonial injustice. Medina argues that the contrastive and comparative nature of credibility judgments where “being judged credible to some degree is being regarded as more credible than others, less credible than others, and equally credible than others” reveals that credibility cannot be applied in individual isolation, but “always affects clusters of subjects in particular social networks and environments” (Medina 2013, 61).

Tom Robinson's case reveals comparative and contrastive evaluations of credibility assessment where more than just the main speaker is harmed in prejudiced testimonial exchanges. Medina notes that Mayella disappears and is invisible in Fricker's analysis of Tom's trial, and as Medina rightly points out this is problematic (2013, 65-66). Medina states that Mayella Ewell receives an automatic credibility excess in being white when Tom's verdict is decided by the all-white jury. Mayella is a white woman, so she is privileged in being white in comparison to Tom's blackness. Medina rightly notes, however, that Mayella is simultaneously marginalized as a woman. She is more credible than a *Black* man, but less credible than a white

man. Thus, Mayella finds herself both in a privileged and marginalized status at the same time. The comparative and contrastive method for assessing credibility allows us to see that being positively prejudiced and being given credibility excess is not always a good thing, especially when looking at the intersectional aspects of a person's identity. Although Mayella, in being white, is privileged over Tom, Mayella still finds herself in a marginalized position in being a woman in comparison to a white man.

Furthermore, Tom is not the only one who is subjected to a testimonial injustice, but as Medina argues, Mayella is also a victim of sexism and undermined as a white woman when her desire for a Black man is written off as impossible (Medina 2013, 71). The pity that Tom could feel for a white woman and a white woman sexually desiring a Black man is so far removed from the resources in the dominant social imagination that it is unimaginable. This unimaginability leads to a "broader and deeper epistemic injustice that they have to endure as communicators and epistemic subjects for occupying certain social locations, that is, by virtue of belonging to social groups...who cannot talk about certain things...without their intelligibility being questioned" (Medina 2013, 72). Medina is pointing towards broader problems within the hermeneutical resource pool of epistemic resources that can cause various epistemic injustices.

Additionally, the interplay between credibility excess and deficits involving Tom, a Black man, and Mayella, a white woman, reveals how the hermeneutical resources that are utilized by different parties within the social collective have a significant influence on the epistemic injustices that occur. The all-white jury defaults into using the dominant resources available to them, which is that white people are trustworthy, and therefore, more credible, while the Black people are untrustworthy, and thus, less credible. This interplay between who is given credibility excess and deficit is harmful because it forecloses any path for both Tom and Mayella

to be viewed in other ways than that of which the prejudicial stereotypes depict them. Medina notes that Mayella “is also a victim (a victim of sexual abuse and of a racist and sexist ideology), and her voice is also inhibited and diminished and clearly coerced to lie—to hide and dissimulate—about those things that the culturally dominant mindset defends itself against and the social imaginary rejects” (Medina 2013, 71). Mayella is privileged in her white status, but is epistemically harmed as an epistemic agent even if we don’t regard her marginalized status because of her gender. She is epistemically excluded from sharing her experience due to the very fact of what it means to be white person in the south in the 1930s—where loving a Black person is impossible. The dominant stereotypes that society utilizes have powerful effects on how people are perceived, how they act, who they become, and how they live.

Emmalon Davis, in her paper, “Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice” also approaches credibility excess from an angle that is helpful in evaluating the Asian American experience. She argues that testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker in a *marginalized position* is given credibility *excess* based on a *positive* stereotype and prejudice that is held by the hearer (Davis 2016, 486). Thus, Davis pushes back against Fricker by offering the argument that positive stereotypes and “identity prejudicial credibility excess” can also lead to testimonial injustice by latching onto stereotypical features of a social group that make that group unique and distinct in ways that are positive, yet still othered (Davis 2016, 485-486, 487, 490). Davis’s work is significant for my project because Asian Americans are marginalized as a group in the sense that they are still “othered” as a minority (e.g., as perpetual foreigners), but given credibility excess through the positive evaluations of being “model” citizens.

Identity prejudicial credibility excess is given based on essentialist features that seem to be intimately tied to one's social group identity and thus, there is an expectation for a speaker to present or act a certain way. Davis argues "that [inflated] assessments interfere with the transmission of knowledge and signify a disregard for the speaker as an epistemic subject" ignoring the individual identity of the specific person that one might be interacting with (2016, 488). Furthermore, identity prejudicial credibility excess harms people through "the speaker's epistemic subjectivity [being] externally constricted by dominantly situated hearers and inquirers" (Davis 2016, 488, 499).

Davis gives both gender-based identity prejudicial credibility excess and race-based examples. The race-based identity prejudicial credibility excess involves an Asian American student who is stereotyped as being good at math and is asked by others for help in the subject (2016, 487). This is evidence of Davis's notion of "compulsory representation", where Asian Americans are assumed to be good at math and must live up to this expectation. Davis says that an intrinsic epistemic harm arises for a marginalized knower when,

a marginalized speaker's acceptance in an epistemic community or inclusion in a testimonial exchange is conditional upon the speaker adopting a—the—voice of distinction.... In cases of PCE [identity-prejudicial credibility excess], this harm is uniquely manifested through compulsory representation, whereby a speaker's epistemic subjectivity is recognized only insofar as the speaker might provide some informational service, where the information in question is perceived by dominant hearers to be inaccessible from their epistemic position. In nearly all cases of PCE, the hearer or inquirer presumes some social entitlement to the information. Compulsory representation introduces a unique form of epistemic exclusion. While marginalized knowers are invited to participate in epistemic exchanges, the invitation is extended to the individual only insofar as the individual satisfies a certain description (woman, person of color, sexual minority, etc.) (2016, 490)

Davis points out that marginalized speakers are restricted in their epistemic agency through being allowed to share information that only conforms to stereotypes. For example, one should seek out an Asian American student when needing help in math because Asians in general are good at

math. If a writing-related task comes up, however, Asian Americans might not be considered as a first-choice tutor¹⁴. Davis's analysis reveals that individuals can only participate as a knower and sharer of knowledge if they share a *certain* type of knowledge. Recall that this is the case for Mayella as well. She is only allowed to be seen or seen as a valuable epistemic agent in her whiteness, but when we look at her intersectional status as a white woman loving a black man, this fact is not considered because it is unintelligible to the all-white jury (and most likely the nation given the time period the trial occurs). Thus, we have multiple instances showing that credibility excess must be evaluated from a marginalized speaker's perspective, how their identity in this position interacts with others involved to produce credibility excess as well as deficits, and how positive identity prejudicial stereotypes leading to credibility excess might cause epistemic injustice. When looking at each of these cases, although speakers are allowed to share information, the type of information they are allowed to share is limited. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the dominant population or narrative controls what is considered valuable information and knowledge, in the hermeneutical resource pool, which I will take up in the next section when I evaluate how positive (and negative) stereotypes function in perpetuating hermeneutical injustice.

1.5 Hermeneutical Injustice and the Productivity of Stereotypes as Epistemic Resources

Arianna Falbo in her paper "Hermeneutical Injustice: Distortion and Conceptual Aptness" theorizes how hermeneutical injustice occurs through the lens of the "overabundance of distorting and oppressive concepts" that are dominant in society (2022, 344). Rather than a lack of hermeneutical resources causing hermeneutical injustice, which is Fricker's main argument,

¹⁴ One might argue that Asian Americans seem to excel in every subject, so they may also be considered as a writing tutor, but since we are looking at stereotypes that are dominantly accepted and understood to the masses, I think this example still works.

Falbo argues that the *presence* of hermeneutical resources can cause hermeneutical injustice. Falbo employs Patricia Hill Collins' work of a "controlling image", which "function to distort social reality by perpetuating oppressive stereotypes and fueling the normalization of unjust social arrangements" (Hill Collins 1990, 76-77; Falbo 2022, 347). The "productive function and power of hermeneutical resources" that can be likened to Collins' notion of a "controlling image" makes "racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Hill Collins 1990, 76-77; Falbo 2022, 347). Collins' notion of a controlling image points to the fact that hermeneutical resources shape and reinforce social relations and structures that we saw in Haslanger's work. Therefore, hermeneutical resources are gleaned and utilized in what Falbo calls "productive" ways. In using the word "productive", Falbo is referring to how hermeneutical resources can "organize members of society and cast them into certain roles and relations with expected behaviors" (Falbo 2022, 348). We can liken this also to Katherine Jenkins' work on "ontic injustice" where "social constraints and enablements" based on the social kind that we belong to, which are created by the structure of relations and the roles that people occupy in relation to others, dictate how hermeneutical resources are utilized in social practices and ultimately shape people through experiences (Jenkins 2020, 191). Although Falbo focuses on concepts that have productive power, recall that stereotypes are minimally part of concept formation and thus, we can also note how the presence of identity prejudicial stereotypes can "serve to sustain, normalize, and justify oppressive social practices and unjust social arrangements" (2022, 348).

Falbo theorizes a case which she calls a "hermeneutical clash" (2022, 349), where she looks at how the presence of a positive stereotype makes it difficult for a negative stereotype to be associated with someone in a privileged status. The example that Falbo uses is that of Brock

Turner¹⁵, who was found raping unconscious, Chanel Miller, who were both attending a party at Stanford University. Falbo cites this example to show that Miller’s dominant persona as a “golden boy”, who “is probably white, cis, heterosexual, nondisabled, hyper-privileged, athletic, popular, educated (perhaps at an elite institution)”, made it difficult for the term *rapist* be associated with him as a person. Falbo writes, “rapists are typically construed as creeps, loners, strangers, deviants, monsters, or savage animals” (2022, 349).

Turner was indeed a student athlete, and even his parents and friends wrote letters to the judge appealing to his “all-American” persona and the many achievements that had probably gotten him into Stanford in the first place. The positive stereotype of golden boy associated with Turner contrasted with the negative stereotype of rapist seemed to have impacted the judge in favor of Turner, as he got a less harsh sentence at the end of the trial. Falbo writes that “conceptual competence does not ensure the accurate application of a concept, especially in high-stakes social contexts where privileged groups stand to gain from conceptual distortion and oppressive ideological practices” (2022, 353). This is what happened in Turner’s case. It was not a lack of a concept that caused hermeneutical injustice, but rather, it was the presence of a concept and how it was applied (and not applied in the case of *rapist*) that mattered. Thus, we can see that hermeneutical resources have both “*productive* as well as *interpretive* value” (Falbo 2022, 353, italics in original). The interpretive value connected to the context that the various players find themselves in goes on to shape those involved.

In the case of Asian American experiences, Falbo’s analysis needs to be slightly modified. We indeed are evaluating situations where a positive stereotype or controlling image is so entrenched that it helps Asian Americans retain their class status like Brock. But rather than

¹⁵ This example is originally from Kate Manne’s book, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* (New York: Crown, 2021).

associating a negative stereotype to a person for justice to be served, the entrenched, productive concept (i.e., stereotype) perpetuates unjust social relations where Asian Americans must give up their choice to speak up or out against the model minority identity and role, and continues oppressing the group epistemically and otherwise. Prejudice remains as other concepts are blocked from entering the mix of identities that Asian Americans are allowed to hold. Brock in his privileged status is allowed to retain his “golden boy” identity, embrace it as others have confirmed and affirmed it, and continue the dominant narrative of “good, upstanding boys”. While on the other hand, but much in the same vein, Chanel’s identity as a woman, who is powerless and silent, is reaffirmed, perpetuating epistemic injustice and other harms through the dominant narrative of “loose women”.

1.6 Identity Construction – Stereotypes and Harms

Now that we’ve looked at how the presence of positive identity prejudicial stereotypes can cause epistemic injustice, we are in a position to evaluate what other types of harms individuals encounter via identity construction. Recall that identity power is at work both in testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Fricker highlights the connection between identity power and stereotypes when explaining what epistemically goes wrong when Marge Sherwood is mistreated by Herbert Greenleaf. Fricker notes how identity power can function in different ways:

[w]hether an operation of identity power is active or passive, it depends very directly on imaginative social co-ordination: both parties must share in the relevant collective conceptions of what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, where such conceptions amount to stereotypes (which may or may not be distorting ones) about men’s and women’s respective authority on this or that sort of subject matter. Note that the operation of identity power does not require that either party consciously accept the stereotype as truthful. If we were to interpret Marge as thoroughly aware of the distorting nature of the stereotype used to silence her, it would still be no surprise that she should be silenced by it. The conceptions of different social identities that are activated in operations of identity power need not be held at the level of belief in either subject or

object, for the primary modus operandi of identity power is at the level of the collective social imagination. Consequently, it can control our actions even despite our beliefs. (2007, 15)

Identity power is exercised over an individual, either by another person or via the prejudiced structures in the shared social conceptions based on an individual's social type. Belief need not be involved to silence Marge because Marge and Herbert both draw from the cultural norms of the role of women and men. The controlling nature of the stereotypes interacting with identity power, I argue, shapes who the person is: their self-construction, self-understanding and self-identity. The shaping of personhood is structural, which we can see when Haslanger writes, "we must also be sensitive to the fact that agents in a social system are shaped by it – we come to 'fit' niches in the structure by, among other things, internalizing the relevant norms for the positions we occupy – and coordination on available terms is imperative" (2023, 9). Marge and Herbert both internalized the norms of society and became what the structure dictated. Haslanger goes on to theorize how social relations are connected to social practices. Therefore, we can extend Haslanger's analysis to cases that involve epistemic injustice, which include the social practice of testimony and making sense of experience. Haslanger writes,

social relations – the relations that form the structure of a system – emerge and are enacted in social practices. Roughly, social practices are patterns of learned behavior, but need not be guided by rules or performed intentionally; they also allow for improvisation. However, they are not mere regularities in behavior, either, for they are the product of social learning and evolve through responsiveness both to each other's performances and the parts of the world we have an interest in collectively managing. Our responsiveness is mediated by social meanings and signaling mechanisms that enable members of the group to communicate, coordinate, and manage the things taken to have value. This will create loops: culture provides tools to interpret some part of the world as valuable (or not) – as a resource – and offers guidance for how to properly interact with it. In turn, our interaction with a resource affects it: we grow it, shape it, manage it, distribute it, dispose of it, etc. And how it responds to our actions affects our ongoing interactions with it. In cases where a practice takes hold, *we shape ourselves and the resource in order to facilitate the ongoing practice.* (2023, 9-10, italics mine; 2018)

We can analyze Marge and Herbert's interactions utilizing Haslanger's argument. Marge suffers a testimonial injustice when her words aren't taken seriously (social practice of giving testimony), and also suffers a hermeneutical injustice because she cannot understand and articulate her experience (social practice of making sense of one's experience). What is important to note is that the epistemic injustice manifests due to the structure or social relations that hold between Marge and Herbert. Recall that identity power is tied to identity prejudice that causes epistemic injustice, and identity power involves "shared imaginative social conceptions of social identity" that depend on imaginative social-coordination (Fricker 2007, 14). Marge and Herbert are responding to each other based on the collective social meanings or shared imaginative social conceptions that come in the form of cultural norms. The culture guides and informs what information is valuable to both Marge and Herber, as it did for Tom, Mayella, and the jury, as well as Brock, Chanel, and the judge. How Marge and Herbert respond to the prejudiced stance that Herbert takes of Marge's testimony, unfortunately, reinforces the negatively prejudiced structure of a woman's word being less credible than a man's. This *interaction* then shapes the *people* involved in the social practices of giving testimony and making sense of one's experiences. After all, functioning as a knower is an important part of being a human. So, it is not unlikely that being harmed as a knower will affect being harmed as a person too.

Fricker also notes how identity power and identity prejudicial stereotypes shape personhood in her example of the "pre-suffrage, politically minded woman" who believes in fairness and equity for women, but if experiencing persistent testimonial injustice in the practice of attempting to share different political opinions without community,

might actually become something closer to the prejudicial stereotype that is directed against her: a social type intellectually and temperamentally unsuited to political

judgement. Thus the construction of gender; thus identity power's ability to shape the people it cramps. Constitutive construction does not lend itself easily to empirical verification. But there is an empirical literature on the self-fulfilling power of stereotypes that illustrates the causal constructive mechanism. Stereotypes make themselves felt in the form of expectations, and expectations can have a powerful effect on people's performances. (2007, 55-56)

Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are linked to what Fricker argues is "the very construction (constitutive and/or causal) of selfhood" (2007, 168). Fricker goes on to mention that "testimonial and hermeneutical injustice have this *identity-constructive* power in common," supporting the argument that stereotypes as identity constructing hermeneutical resources both at the testimonial and hermeneutical level, perpetuate Fricker's primary, intrinsic harm of affecting who we are and who we become (2007, 168).

By arguing that the primary harm involved in both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice is not only a prejudicial exclusion from the sharing of knowledge, but that people are wronged in how they are constructed as a subject, we can also see how prejudicial *inclusions* in sharing knowledge might be problematic (Fricker 2007, 132, 163). In being constructed as someone who embodies a stereotype, those very stereotypes might also reinforce how one *should* act in society. For example, Marge is *expected* to be silent and hysterical, and thus, when sharing information that is outside of her social role, her testimony is deemed unacceptable. Marge's experience and testimony is included, but as testimony that is not useful or reasonable. Identity power involving Greenleaf's privileged status as a man and Marge's subordinated status as a woman influences Greenleaf's judgment of Marge's testimony. And those judgments are based on the social conceptions available and how Marge is allowed to be included, which ultimately makes her seem like a hysterical person.

Furthermore, Marge could use the stereotype to understand her own experience, distorting how she sees herself as a knower and how she acts (or doesn't act) in the future. We know that

Marge was not being unreasonable and hysterical when accusing Ripley of being involved in Dickie's murder, but identity power distorts how Marge's testimony is interpreted. Fricker writes, "identity power at once constructs and *distorts* who the subject really is" revealing that perhaps Marge and the politically minded woman might have a certain conception of who they are, but if they continue to suffer from epistemic injustices caused by identity prejudicial stereotypes, who they are might actually change into something that resembles the stereotype (2007, 55, emphasis in original). Perhaps Marge, internalizing Herbert Greenleaf's comment, shuts up and shuts down, and feels that she cannot speak up when encountering another situation that might be similar in the future.¹⁶

The self-fulfilling power of stereotypes to construct as well as distort a subject is articulated well by Stacey Goguen, in her dissertation, "Stereotype Threat, Epistemic Agency, and Self-Identity" (2016). Goguen shows how the links between stereotypes and social identity formation of the self affects one's personhood. She offers, indirectly, that stereotypes are hermeneutical resources that affect one's social identity. Stereotypes have the power to shape who we become through internalization of the very features that make a stereotype a stereotype.

Goguen evaluates the phenomenon of "stereotype threat" and reveals the deeper implications that stereotype threat can have on one's self-identity and epistemic agency as an epistemic injustice (2016, 67). Stereotype threat is the phenomenon of underperforming, often in academic settings, due to negative features and associations via stereotypes that highlight some inferior aspect of a social group. For example, Black students are stereotyped as being

¹⁶ Gaslighting as an epistemic injustice could be manifesting in the situation that Marge finds herself in. I won't be elaborating on this type of epistemic injustice in this project, but (philosophers) have theorized on this concept. See Kate Manne's "What is Gaslighting?" www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxWFGnFpUCc, Rachel McKinnon's "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as epistemic injustice" (2017), Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr.'s "Gaslighting and Echoing, or Why Collective Epistemic Resistance is not a 'Witch Hunt'" (2020b).

intellectually inferior to White students, and this negative stereotype in turn leads the Black students living and growing into the negative stereotype and actually underperforming. This shows that the negative stereotype of Black students being deemed “stupid” or “not smart” threatens the Black students and hinders them in their academic life (Goguen 2016, 2). Drawing from social psychologists, Steele and Aronson, Goguen writes,

the specific trigger was bringing to individuals’ attention a negative stereotype that could potentially apply to them. When Black students who cared significantly about academic success were subtly reminded that their performance on a test could confirm or deny the stereotype that they were intellectually inferior, their performance suffered. Steele and Aronson had confirmed that this portion of the performance gap was not about race itself (if such a thing exists). Rather, part of the gap may be due to the threat of a negative racial reputation, as embodied in a stereotype. They called this phenomenon “stereotype threat.” (Steele, Aronson, and Kruglanski 1995; Goguen 2016, 2)

We see here that the racialized *stereotype* tied to the Black students is what threatens and thus, causes Black students to buy into negative viewpoints and underperform. Stereotypes, whether positive or negative, have the power to shape not only the behavior of people, students in the paradigm cases, but furthermore, “[s]tereotype threat can also affect our epistemic agency, our sense of belonging, and even our sense of self. Thus, it can erode our well-being on a much deeper level than a focus on underperformance indicates” (Goguen 2016, 3). This ties in well with Fricker’s primary harm involved in testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Fricker says that the primary harm that is done to someone is an intrinsic one when someone is wronged in their “capacity as a knower” (Fricker 2007, 44). This implies that they are wronged “in a capacity essential to human value” (Fricker 2007, 44). Rather than the rational capacity human beings have every right to ethically exercise, Goguen focuses on the aspect of being wronged as a person. She builds her argument to reveal that the coercive influence of stereotype threat has direct links to how one sees oneself, one’s self-identity, and in turn, can inhibit one’s epistemic agency which is an essential feature of being a person. She argues that,

people who experience chronic stereotype threat are less ‘free’ to explore certain avenues of self-knowledge. They are not as free to explore whether they might be a math person, or a science person, or a philosopher. By making these avenues of self-knowledge more risky, stereotype threat hinders not only specific self-knowledge, but our epistemic agency more broadly. We may become less comfortable exploring new avenues at all or feel less entitled to do so. Individuals are being hindered by an unfair pressure or constraint on their potential self-knowledge, which is a constraint on their ability to grow and flourish as epistemic agents. (2016, 85-86)

Goguen points to roadblocks to self-knowledge due to stereotype threat. When someone is not allowed to share the knowledge that they possess or reflect on the self-knowledge that they could possess, they are harmed and wronged as a human being and as a person. In sum, we can see how stereotypes affect who we become and contribute to epistemic injustice through undermining our epistemic agency in general. Goguen argues that “anything that unfairly wrongs someone in their capacity as a knower—what I interpret to mean anything that undermines one’s epistemic agency—counts as an epistemic injustice” because,

stereotype threat can coerce us away from certain identities, which stunts our self-knowledge of who we are and who we could possibly become. In stunting our self-knowledge, it is undermining our epistemic agency, and this qualifies as an epistemic injustice. (Goguen 2016, 87)

I offer Goguen’s analysis to raise the following questions: could positive stereotypes of a model minority also block the freedom to explore other ways of being, whether it be a philosopher, artist, or scientist? Could this positive identity prejudicial stereotype also be “risky”, making other sources of self-knowledge not worth pursuing? And could it be that positive stereotypes pressure, constrain, and make those affected not able to imagine discovering new ways of being and becoming? I argue that rather than fear of negative racial reputation like in stereotype threat, the “threat” of positive stereotypes could be upholding a positive racial reputation in order to survive and be successful in US society.

Asian Americans have been socially constructed through the internalization of the model minority stereotype. As we've seen, these situations are problematic if we talk of negative self-fulfilling stereotypes, but in the case of Asian Americans they have been given opportunities throughout US history to be constructed in positive ways. Thus, Asian Americans have epistemic agency or seem to have epistemic agency because they occupy positions of epistemic authority, such as doctors and lawyers. In reaching these goals, however, they only embody the narrow model minority stereotype. The limited and controlled construction of the Asian American person forestalls people on their way towards other opportunities. Furthermore, I argue that the internalization of the model minority stereotype as Asian American identity perpetuates various forms of epistemic injustice and harms. I will flesh out this argument in the following chapters.

Chapter 2. Broadening Epistemic Injustice through the Asian American Experience

2.1 Sociohistorical Formation of the Model Minority Stereotype

Erika Lee in her book, *The Making of Asian America*, describes the history of how Asian Americans came to be defined by the model minority stereotype. Lee notes that this stereotype was birthed and strengthened out of multiple iterations of how Asian Americans were praised as a racial group. Beginning with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, which grew out of WWII and the Cold War, there was a shift to viewing Asian Americans as the model minority. Asian Americans were viewed as “economically and academically successful...[who] respected authority, had high moral values, adhered to strict gender roles, and enjoyed strong, stable nuclear families. Confucian traditions, social scientists said, led to upstanding youth and model families and communities” (E. Lee 2015, 275-277, 283, 285; Wu 2014, 251). Today, common features of the model minority stereotype include being high-achieving, hard-working, passive, unassuming, upright, and respectful people.

Asians, however, weren't always looked upon as favorable citizens and although the notion of “yellow peril” was directly connected to Japanese living in America, disdain for Asians in America was felt among various ethnic groups. Asians all over the world were seen as the “yellow peril” beginning with Kaiser Wilhelm's painting, *Die Gelbe Gefahr* (The Yellow Peril), which depicted “European fears of an Oriental invasion of the West” (E. Lee 2015, 123). Yellow peril was disseminated into US social consciousness at a steady rate in the 19th and early 20th century, with a growing number of Asian immigrants in the US. There was outright anti-Japanese and Asian sentiments displayed, for example, in the San Francisco newspaper headline: “YELLOW PERIL—HOW JAPANESE CROWD OUT THE WHITE RACE” (E. Lee 2015,

124). Yellow peril ideology reveals another side of history when Asian Americans were excluded and looked down upon as perpetual foreigners in the US (E. Lee 2015, 8, 60, 123-125).

Additionally, the Chinese Exclusion Act passed on May 6, 1882, “barred the entry of Chinese laborers for a period of ten years, allowed entry only to certain exempt classes of Chinese (students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats), and prohibited all Chinese from obtaining naturalized citizenship. The message was clear: Chinese could come for business, travel, or study, but not to settle” (E. Lee 2015, 94). Furthermore, on May 14, 1904, the Japanese-Korean Exclusion League was created by “delegates from sixty-seven local and regional labor, political, and fraternal organizations” whose goal was the,

total exclusion of Japanese immigrants from the United States, including the then territory of Hawaii. At stake, they believed, was the survival of the white race. With their slogan, ‘Absolute Exclusion of the Asiatics,’ the league concentrated their efforts on spreading their message through legislation, boycotts, and propaganda. (E. Lee 2015, 125)

Theodore Roosevelt, who was US president at the time, realized that he had to be strategic in how diplomacy occurred (E. Lee 2015, 125).

In 1965, the US government decided to remove the quotas on Asians settling in the US. Therefore, there was a mass influx of Asian immigrants with professional backgrounds and families were also allowed to be brought over (E. Lee 2015, 285-286; Wu 2014, 251-252). Ellen D. Wu in her book, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, notes that this established,

a ‘chain migration’ of Asians equipped with the educational and financial capital to enter straightaway the ranks of American middle class. All told, the post-1965 Asian ‘brain drain’/US ‘brain gain’ has led to a marked shift in the socioeconomic composition of Asian American communities, tilting away from their historical roots in agriculture and labor. Today’s perception of Asian Americans as highly educated and affluent can be traced directly to these selective immigration policies. (2014, 251-252)

Shortly after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act passed, the term “model minority” was introduced in William Petersen’s 1966 article, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style”, which was disseminated through the New York Times Magazine media outlet (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 11; Wu 2014, 169). The fact that the term showed up in mainstream news meant that the perception of Asian Americans as a model minority was able to reach a much broader audience. The term entering social consciousness at a mass level and other media sources jumping on the bandwagon reinforced the stereotype to become what it is today (Wu 2014, 251-253).

Wu also notes that the model minority stereotype has always been tied to capitalistic gains and how to perpetuate American power on American soil and around the globe (2014, 253). The government had an agenda based on geopolitics and the wars that were being fought: “the United States’ battles against fascism and then Communism meant that Asiatic Exclusion, like Jim Crow, was no longer tenable. Seeing global legitimacy, Americans moved to undo the legal framework and social practices that relegated Asians outside the bounds of the nation” (Wu 2014, 4). Additionally, the rise of racial liberalism emerged out of World War II and “the growing belief in political and intellectual circles that the country’s racial diversity could be most ably managed through the assimilation and integration of nonwhites” (Wu 2014, 4).

Asian American identity and the model minority stereotype has and continues being used as a sociopolitical tool to keep Black and brown bodies at the margins. In creating essentialist features of the model minority, and juxtaposing them to other (often negative) essentialist features of the Black race, who were described as lazy, aggressive, and unaccommodating, dominant narratives depicted Black and Brown bodies not only as an unideal American citizen, but persons in general. Claire Jean Kim in her essay, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans”, theorizes the role and position that Asian Americans as model minorities play and

occupy, respectively, in the racial hierarchy of society as being “racially triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites” (1999, 106-107). In her most recent book, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*, Kim revises her thesis to emphasize that Asian American positionality is not only about being white adjacent or assimilationist, but also anti-Black, or what Wu describes as “definitively not-Black” (2023, 2). In essence, Asian Americans are positioned as superior to Blacks and considered insiders in comparison to Blacks. Asian Americans are also continually used as a wedge to keep Blacks in their inferior and othered position (C.J. Kim 1999).

What is often not mentioned in mainstream media is that dissenting voices about the role that Asian Americans played in the US were also present during the time just outlined. The dissenting voices, however, never got far enough or touched the right sources, often remaining in smaller, grassroots levels of organization (Wu 2014, 246). For example, Asian Americans were present in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, but this is often left out of textbooks or dominant historical knowledge (Wu 2014, 245). These historical facts provide a window into the struggles that Asians have faced in America and reveal the deep sociopolitical and racial struggles that have come with immigration.

History shows that although many of the Asian Americans who came to America with the 1965 immigration wave indeed embodied the model minority stereotype, this was a political move to create a certain type of “model” American based on race. Dominant information often obscures other information that is *not* regarded in attempting to understand that the Asian Americans experience is more than the model minority stereotype. I argue this creates an identity prejudice based on essentialist features of Asian Americans being “model citizens” that are often left unchallenged and taken for granted. Recall Maitra’s example of David who could have

sought out more evidence to disconfirm his negative perception of Black people, but in choosing not to, remained prejudiced based on the small and incomplete data set of evidence that he had.

I offer, through this brief historical sketch, that the model minority stereotype is currently the dominant epistemic and hermeneutical resource available to understand Asian American identity. What is not usually studied are the epistemological dimensions of this issue.

Additionally, I argue, that a more expansive understanding and analysis of the sociohistorical context in shifting perceptions of Asian Americans over time is vital in revealing the epistemic injustices that Asian Americans suffer. I also want to offer that the model minority stereotype as an identity prejudicial stereotype is problematic not only epistemically, but ethically, practically, ontologically, and affectively, which I will take up in the next chapter. For now, I want to emphasize the epistemic harms linked to the epistemic injustice Asian Americans face through the racialized, identity prejudicial model minority stereotype. The “positive” prejudice that people have of Asian Americans is a pre-judgment, but it is not only due to disregarding disconfirming evidence, but is also due to the *lack* of regarding certain sociohistorical information as evidence (Fricker 2007, 32-33; Maitra 2010, 206). Thus, it is vital to look at the role that dominant stereotypes play in informing our pre-judgments because certain stereotypes might be crowding out additional data that might reveal how certain generalizations are more pernicious than one expects. Additionally, as I previously stated, it is important to evaluate the deeper role that stereotypes play in identity prejudices because stereotypes shape not only our judgments in how an epistemic agent’s testimony is perceived and how an epistemic agent might understand their experiences, but who the epistemic agent actually becomes. In this chapter, I argue that the model minority stereotype, although positive in that confers material benefits to

Asian Americans in being seen as epistemic authorities socioeconomically or in class status, is also wrongful in simultaneously perpetuating what I deem intrapersonal epistemic injustice.

In section 2.2, I will articulate that the *internalization* of the model minority stereotype perpetuates epistemic injustice. In section 2.3, I will offer two accounts of how Asian Americans experience further epistemic injustices through *credibility excess* by revealing the constructed situatedness of the Asian American as epistemically problematic. In section 2.4, I reveal that Asian Americans experience “intrapersonal epistemic injustices” whereby the epistemic agent who has internalized their role and identity within the dominant social structures causes epistemic injustice to themselves without any outside “help”. In other words, Asian Americans perpetuate epistemic injustice intrapersonally both testimonially and hermeneutically because of the coercive cultural structures and systems that Asian Americans must survive in. The four types of intrapersonal epistemic injustice include “pre-emptive testimonial injustice”, “testimonial smothering”, “pre-emptive hermeneutical injustice”, and “hermeneutical smothering”.

2.2 Internalization of the Model Minority Stereotype Perpetuating Epistemic Injustice

The model minority stereotype continues to shape Asian American identity today (E. Lee 2015, 374). Sociological scholarship helps capture what is epistemically going wrong when associating Asian American populations with prejudicially maintained positive stereotypes. We must recognize that there are material benefits to Asian Americans being positively stereotyped and positive effects of internalizing the characteristics of the model minority stereotype in being perceived as a hard-working, intelligent, and capable group. There are benefits to being viewed as a model minority who performs well in school, work, and life in general. It is difficult to capture what could epistemically be at stake when someone experiences *credibility excess* and the productive functioning of dominant concepts in understanding one’s experience because

epistemic agents are able to share information, and understand and articulate their experiences. Although this sharing is limited, partial, and domain-specific, the fact that Asian Americans have some agency, allows for the stereotypical construction to continue and is difficult to demolish, more so than negative stereotypes. With negative identity prejudicial stereotypes, as Fricker outlines, the lack of credibility associated with a speaker and lacking a concept to understand one's experience, points towards epistemic agents being directly epistemically wronged because their words and experiences are completely excluded; there is no uptake of the words being spoken and/or understanding of the wrongful experiences that someone encounters. This is not the case, however, with positive stereotypes associated with Asian Americans.

Fricker also notes that internalization is problematic in perpetuating epistemic injustice. It is a good starting point for my own argument. For Fricker, internalization is when “commitments...linger in our psychology in residual form, lagging behind the progress of belief, so that they retain an influence upon our social perception” and furthermore, when someone’s “psychology remains such that in many contexts she is influenced by a [negative] stereotype” although her beliefs might be different (Fricker 2007, 37). Recall the “card-carrying feminist” who believes that women can hold political office, but residual internalization in the form of a prejudicial stereotype influences the feminist in taking the testimony of a female candidate as less credible than a male candidate (2007, 37). Fricker’s example shows that internalization shapes how we view *others* at the subconscious, non-doxastic level. For Asian American populations, however, a prejudicial stereotype reinforces the internalization of certain characteristics in how one views *oneself*. I argue that this type of internalization by blocking someone from self-knowledge perpetuates epistemic injustice.

Lee and Zhou in their book *The Asian American Achievement Paradox* note that contra stereotype threat, Asian Americans experience “stereotype promise”, which is a social psychological process wherein one is “viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype, which enhances performance by leading one to perform in a way that confirms the positive stereotype” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 124-125).

Stereotype promise is an internalized phenomenon that is so deeply entrenched that unlike in stereotype threat, stereotype susceptibility¹⁷, and stereotype boost¹⁸, for stereotype promise, one’s ethnoracial¹⁹ identity need not be cued for stereotypes to enhance performance...rather, because stereotypes are ‘*in the air*,’ as Steele vividly describes it, simply being placed in a context where others’ expectations are elevated can enhance the performance of an individual from a positively stereotyped group. (Steele and Fowler 1997; J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 124-125, emphasis mine)

Stereotypes being “in the air” describes a situation where the stereotype is known and felt by all who understand it, and I argue, have internalized it.

erin Khuê Ninh in her book *Passing for Perfect*, highlights this internalization by theorizing the links between racialization, identity, and the model minority stereotype. She writes about Asian Americans who went to the extreme in becoming criminals to keep up pretenses and “save face” because of how deeply the model minority identity was internalized. She asks, “what if what seems to be outlandish and outlier behaviors are instead depressingly Asian American?”

¹⁷ Stereotype susceptibility is the phenomenon where “test performance is both malleable and susceptible to implicit cues” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 124; M. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999).

¹⁸ Stereotype boost is the phenomenon where “activating a negative stereotype of an out-group can also improve the performance of the in-group” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015; M.J. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ho 2011; Walton and Cohen 2003).

¹⁹ Lee and Zhou define and use the term *ethnoracial* “to denote America’s racial and ethnic groups. We recognize that both race and ethnicity are socially constructed, and that racial and ethnic boundaries have changed over time and will continue to evolve. Our 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese interviewees often used racial and ethnic categories interchangeably, although in the several instances when they drew clear boundaries around race and ethnicity, the terms we use reflect these distinctions. We also recognize that Asian American is a broad, heterogeneous category that encompasses more than twenty national-origin groups. However, given the racialization that occurs in the United States, ethnic distinctiveness is less salient and apparent to most non-Asian Americans compared to racial differences. Again, we are cautious in our usage of ethnic and racial categories and distinguish between the two when relevant.” (2015, 2, 201)

(2021, 4). Most importantly for this project, she notes that to some degree all Asian Americans can understand what it means to fail as an “Asian American”. There is a “kinship” or “resonance” with the decisions that the criminals made and why they made them, pointing towards a shared identity that all Asian Americans seem to understand in being model minority (Khuê Ninh 2021, 5). As Khuê makes her case that Asian Americans are suffering amidst looking “perfect” on the outside, she begins with the model minority stereotype as a way for Asian Americans to understand themselves and their ethnic peers. She writes:

I define the model minority as an identity: a set of convictions and aspirations, regardless of present socioeconomic status or future attainability...To be model minority is to “know” (even as one may hate it) that success means hitting each of the achievement checkpoints in sequence, because everyone knows this. What qualifies are not the achievements themselves, mind you, but the shared sense of them. Which means, as this book draws the set, to be a model minority is not a matter of income bracket or GPA (nor is generation a guarantee). The litmus test is not whether an Asian American meets “success frame²⁰” standards per se. Only the few do (my English major exempts me, right?), while some of us toil daily at such a far cry from its lofty requirements that surely we have been excused? But that, my friends, is too easy. It lets the vast majority of us off on technicalities. Because this book holds that the model minority is coded into one’s programming— racialization becomes feeling and belief—its litmus test is whether an Asian American feels pride or shame by those standards. If you have enjoyed what Tiger parenting memes say about you (laughed ruefully, maybe, but knowingly): Congratulations, you have tested positive. With your click, like, and share, you affirm an identity set apart from other racial groups: a feeling that our bar is higher. Or, equally, if communal judgment can pith you, and you have needed to walk yourself back time and again to remember that your life has real worth: Your affliction can be managed, but it never leaves your system.” (2021, 5-6)

This “knowing” is not just knowing facts about something. It is “common sense”—a “everyone knows this” feeling—about what it means to be a model minority. It is a racialized concept where certain characteristics seem to be encoded into what it means to be Asian and American. The model minority stereotype affects and shapes individuals as persons.

²⁰ Lee and Zhou (2015, 6) note that the “success frame” is a “cultural frame that [Asian immigrants] import [as] a strict definition of achievement and success...The frame entails earning straight A’s, graduating as the high school valedictorian, earning a degree from an elite university, attaining an advanced degree, and working in one of four high-status professional fields: medicine, law, engineering, or science”.

Lee and Zhou also emphasize the internalization of the stereotype where Asian Americans become the stereotype as a self-fulfilling prophecy. They say, it is not only teachers who hold the perception that Asian American students are high achievers—Asian American students themselves have internalized this perception, as reflected in Julia²¹'s earlier comment that 'all the Asians at our school, you know, they did well, and we broke academic records and all that.' So pervasive is the perception among Asian Americans that the interviewees admitted that they worked hard in order not to disconfirm the perception. In their view, disconfirming the stereotype would set them apart as ethnoracial outliers. (2015, 125-126)

Lee and Zhou also provide the example of a second-generation Chinese American named Nancy who states herself that she was not great at math before entering high school. But based on assumptions that her teachers made about her math ability and being Asian, Nancy tried harder, had math tutors, did extra work, and eventually became good at math and the stereotype promise placed on her became a self-fulfilling prophecy (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 125).

In dominant narratives, the internalization of the model minority stereotype is often seen as something good and helpful, but it can be detrimental to an individual. There are positive and negative aspects that we need to delineate when looking at stereotypes and evaluating internalization. The benefit Nancy received in being viewed as a good student helped her become successful and go on to pass the AP Math exam. The negative aspect, however, is that Nancy does not get to voice her own views about what she is good at, bad at, and what she likes and doesn't like. Thus, when looking at her individual experience through an epistemic lens, although there was disconfirming evidence that Nancy was not good at math based on her self-testimony, Nancy's teachers and parents did not accept the testimony. Nancy was evaluated through a (positive) prejudice based on the normative nature of the model minority stereotype. Although Nancy materially benefited from the positive perception of being a model minority, we

²¹ Julia is "a twenty-three-year-old, 1.5-generation Vietnamese woman who recently graduated from a University of California school" (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 117).

could ask: at what epistemic cost? Nancy's epistemic agency is undermined when she stifles her self-testimony, which Goguen categorizes as a type of testimonial injustice (2016, 88).

Furthermore, "threats" that come through stereotypes, even "positive" ones like the model minority stereotype, coerces Nancy away from an identity that she might feel more in tune with and thus, access to other sources of self-knowledge is foreclosed. Again, following Goguen, anything that undermines our epistemic agency can count as an epistemic injustice and thus, being restricted from certain epistemic resources to choose who we become through the self-knowledge that we have access to also counts as an epistemic injustice (2016, 87).

Kristie Dotson in her paper, "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression", defines epistemic agency as "the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production, and, if required, *the revision of those same resources*" (2012, 24, emphasis mine). Epistemic agency is not only about creating knowledge within a community through access, but also about being able to change and shape knowledge within society and the self. Asian American individuals must give up their epistemic agency in choosing who they become due to dominant society (Asian Americans included) not being willing to disconfirm dominant perceptions (even though there is evidence that would disconfirm the narrative just like in the case of David in Chapter 1). But this is not an innocent "choice"; it is coerced. Asian Americans must weigh the costs of what it means to give up a positive prejudice that confers material benefits and helps them survive in racist and capitalistic nation, at the cost of limiting their epistemic agency. I will take this up further in the next section when evaluating additional epistemic injustices that Asian Americans encounter.

This sociological data reveals that the internalization of the model minority stereotype runs deep into the identity of Asian Americans affecting even those who do not live out the

model minority stereotype. Lee and Zhou interview others who do not fit the typical model minority stereotype, but still associate their life choices based on a normative racialized identity that achievement and success is what is expected of their racial group. For example, Michelle, who is Taiwanese American, decided not to attend college because “unlike other ‘Asian kids’” she didn’t like school and studying (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 151). We see that even when Asian Americans choose paths that deviate from the model minority stereotype, due to internalization of what it means to be an Asian American (model minority), these individuals perceive themselves as abnormal Asian Americans. Lee and Zhou also mention that Michelle felt like the “black sheep” of her family, revealing that the model minority stereotype as internalized identity reinforces self-understanding that an individual is a “bad” Asian American (2015, 152). Michelle and other Asian American “outliers” think they are “bad” Asians who have chosen a darker path. Khuê mentions that it’s not about the actual grades or how much money one makes, but it is about feeling “pride or shame” by the standards set for Asian Americans (2021, 5-6). The internalization of the model minority stereotype constructs Asian Americans as a certain type of person with essentialist qualities. We can also see that we are dealing with a cultural stereotype that has become normative.

Reflecting back on the sociohistorical formation of the model minority stereotype, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act “led to preferences for foreign-born applicants with high levels of education and skills” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 6). Lee and Zhou write that this specific selection of,

Asian immigration leads Asian immigrant parents and their second-generation child to create and adopt a specific cultural frame about achievement and success that is supported by public and ethnic resources, reinforced in institutional contexts, and buttressed by social psychological processes. (2015, 8)

Specific Asian Americans were chosen to enter the US, and their particular construction has been reinforced not only by the model minority stereotype, but by institutions of education and schooling, mentors, and sociopsychological processes like stereotype promise, creating a cultural image of who Asian Americans should be *professionally*. The model minority stereotype creates a cultural understanding, prejudice, and perception that Asian Americans are high-achieving, successful citizens who have achieved the American Dream of socioeconomically thriving in the US. But this credibility excess is domain specific that is based on racially motivated credibility that is epistemically wrongful and harmful to Asian American individuals.

2.3 “Model Minority” Constructed Identity and Epistemic Injustices

In this section, I situate Asian Americans within the paradigmatic epistemic injustice framework that was initially offered by Fricker and others that have modified and built on her seminal work. This will allow us to see the range of epistemic injustices Asian American experience when constructed by the model minority stereotype, not only testimonial and hermeneutical injustice as articulated by Fricker. First, the generalization of the stereotype could be constructing a certain type of knower who can epistemically participate in one way, but not in another (i.e., domain specific). Second, the positive stereotype itself serves to keep in place broader injustices of racism and capitalism, hence preventing hermeneutic shifts. Each of these require elaboration.

Regarding the first point, living out a constructed identity via the internalization of the positive model minority identity prejudicial stereotype allows for some level of privilege in being given credibility excess in cases involving testimony. This credibility excess, I want to argue, is problematic due to the epistemic positions that Asian Americans occupy within society. When evaluating cases of epistemic injustice, recall we must identify the epistemic *positions* that

knowers occupy based on (social) identity prejudicial stereotypes. Tom and Carmita were positioned as epistemically marginalized based on their racial and gender identity, respectively, and that is why they were given a deflated level of credibility. When Fricker evaluates cases of credibility excess, however, she looks at speakers who are in epistemically privileged positions where their professional career or job is to give and share knowledge as a doctor and professor. This ensures that the credibility excess does not lead to epistemic injustice (2007, 18-19). Fricker states that those who are given credibility excess do not suffer large epistemic disadvantages (and therefore, no epistemic injustice) because their epistemic agency is not hindered. If we want to remain consistent with Fricker's account of epistemic injustice, however, we must evaluate a speaker who is in a marginalized position, like that of Tom and Carmita, in comparison with the hearer. Asian Americans are a racial minority in social identity, like Tom, compared to the dominant and hegemonic racial category of whiteness. But rather than a credibility deficit, Asian Americans are given a credibility excess due to the identity prejudicial stereotype associated with the marginalization (Davis 2016, 485). I bring up this point to highlight how being constructed as a "model" minority places Asian Americans in epistemic authoritative positions, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. But they remain a "minority" as a racial group, and hence, are marginalized. Furthermore, because achievement and success are emphasized by the model minority stereotype (i.e., domain specific), which often comes in the form of elite professional positions, the epistemic injustice that Asian Americans face is obscured and difficult to capture. The academic and professional success of Asian Americans obscures the fact that credibility excess is tied to the specific professions that Asian Americans occupy *as the model minority*, not to Asian Americans *individuals* (who are more than just their racial identity). Thus, the

credibility excess is domain specific—Asian Americans have credibility excess only in the professional realm, and not in others.

One could argue, however, that there does not seem to be anything truly problematic going on as Asian Americans find themselves in spaces of privilege, especially compared to other minorities. It even seems like Asian Americans are doing well for themselves. Recall that Nancy’s experience of stifling her own experiences and testimony to become what others expected of her is evidence that there is something epistemically problematic going on. Also, recall that Asian Americans who deviate from the dominant cultural understanding that Asian Americans are high achievers and good at math are considered outliers and “black sheep”. These examples reveal that Asian Americans are only allowed to share knowledge that coincides with how they are constructed as knowers by the dominant model minority stereotype. The *type* of knowledge they are allowed to share is limited and epistemic agency is undermined (Davis 2016, 490). In fact, what knowledge they possess and share is socially controlled. This reflects Medina’s comparative and contrastive method of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from sharing, shaping, and changing the epistemic resources within society due to mechanisms not reflected in Fricker’s exclusions.

Regarding the second point, being limited to utilize only some (positive) hermeneutical resources (e.g., stereotypes, etc.), although beneficial in some (materially significant) ways, perpetuates broader race and class ideologies due to what must be “let go” to survive in a racist, capitalistic society. Being a tracker injustice, the model minority identity prejudicial stereotype also keeps larger social injustices in place. When Nancy experienced epistemic injustice by being cut off from access to self-knowledge, she was also cut off from becoming a critic within society about oppressive systems and ideology. Here the credibility excess obscured the undermining of

her epistemic agency. Thus, we could say that Nancy was prevented from changing the hermeneutical resources available for knowledge production in society. The credibility excess given to Asian Americans as the “successful” model minority allows the group to attain certain levels of power, but at the same time epistemically marginalizes them by restricting the domains they can epistemically participate in. This exclusion from participating in sharing, changing, and creating knowledge when Asian American experience epistemic injustice has far-reaching effects.

Not being able to offer critiques allows for the perpetuation of ideology and broader social injustices. Evaluating the epistemic positions that people occupy reveal that knowers aren’t static individuals who embody only one social identity or experience only credibility excess or only credibility deficits, but rather, are dynamic knowers who experience a whole range of positive and negative experiences. Thus, Asian Americans continue serving as a racial wedge to keep the wheels of white supremacy and anti-Black racism turning while keeping Black and brown bodies subordinated as “bad races”. Mayella leaned into her whiteness in the courtroom to save herself from being a target of hate in loving a Black man (which was inconceivable), but this was at the cost of being able to choose who she could love and be with as a woman. Additionally, leaning into her whiteness perpetuated anti-Blackness sentiments in society. Similarly, Asian Americans leaning into their model status as the “good race” perpetuates anti-Black messaging indirectly (and directly) that Black and brown people are part of the “bad races”.

2.4 Asian Americans and Four Types of “Intrapersonal” Epistemic Injustice

In keeping with the internalized construction of becoming the model minority, in the next section, I will argue that the model minority stereotype creates situations where Asian Americans

do not need any outside “help” to experience epistemic injustice. I call these “intrapersonal” epistemic injustices. Once an identity is internalized, and especially when it comes with material benefits and credibility excess that allows one to survive in a racist and capitalistic nation, epistemic injustice might be chosen (willfully or unwilfully) by the agent. Asian Americans draw from the knower/person-constructing epistemic resource of being the model minority to perpetuate epistemic injustice against themselves in “choosing” to undermine their own epistemic agency. They must constantly weigh the cost and benefits of living in a racist and capitalistic society, and often the material good over the epistemic good wins out.

2.4.1 Silencing and “pre-emptive testimonial injustice”

One type of intrapersonal epistemic injustice that Asian Americans experience is “pre-emptive testimonial injustice”. Fricker notes that this type of testimonial injustice,

occurs when hearer prejudice does its work in advance of a potential informational exchange: it pre-empts any such exchange...The credibility of such a person on a given subject matter is already sufficiently in prejudicial deficit that their potential testimony is never solicited; so the speaker is silenced by the identity prejudice that undermines her credibility in advance of a potential informational. Thus purely structural operations of identity power can control whose would-be contributions become public, and whose do not.” (Fricker 2007, 130)

When a speaker is excluded from sharing information due to identity prejudice and credibility deficits, “by the same token [they] tend simply not to be asked to share their thoughts, their judgments, their opinions” (Fricker 2007, 130). We can look back at the example of Marge Sherwood to make this point clearer.

Marge could have decided not to speak up about Dickie to her soon to be father-in-law because she believed that she had nothing important to offer. Thus, Marge’s negative identity construction as a woman could have pre-emptively silenced and in turn epistemically wronged her. Noting also that testimonial injustice is structural and connected to hermeneutical injustice,

pre-emptive testimonial injustice highlights the fact that the hearer is only open to receiving what is already entrenched in the hermeneutical system in use. In pre-emptive testimonial injustice it is “purely structural operations of identity power [that] control whose would-be contributions become public, and whose do not” (Fricker 2007, 130).

In Asian American populations, identity power is at work through the dominant model minority stereotype, but rather than a negative identity prejudice causing credibility deficits, here a positive identity prejudicial stereotype undermines the range of one’s epistemic contributions. Nancy (from Lee and Zhou’s sociological study) is given credibility excess based on a prejudiced view of her social identity in being Asian and is trusted to live up to the positive expectation that is placed on her. Thus, the positive construction of Nancy as a good student, could pre-emptively silence and in turn epistemically wrong her. Although Nancy is given credibility excess, as I’ve shown previously, her own self-testimony is silenced and she does not speak up. It would actually be to Nancy’s disadvantage if she were to speak up and disconfirm the stereotype because she might then lose out on the material benefits through what seems to be a normatively “good” opinion from others. This disadvantage, however, as we can see through Nancy’s self-silencing, comes at an epistemic cost.

On a broader scale, Nancy’s self-silencing prevents her from being a critic of society who pushes back against the stereotype to potentially create a more just society. Given that the model minority was designed to perpetuate anti-Blackness, this silencing of critique of the stereotype has far reaching consequences. Since Asian Americans are positively stereotyped and given credibility excess in areas of achievement and success, which are intimately connected to their survival and existence in a capitalistic and racist society, they often do not deviate from the ways

that ensure this security. The type of silencing that involves weighing these risks leads us to the next form of intrapersonal epistemic injustice.

2.4.2 “*testimonial smothering*”

The second type of intrapersonal epistemic injustice is reminiscent of another type of silencing: Kristie Dotson’s “testimonial smothering”. Dotson characterizes “testimonial smothering” in her paper, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”, as a situation where one truncates “one’s own testimony in order to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one’s audience demonstrates testimonial competence” (2011, 244). Testimonial smothering occurs in instances where (1) the content of the testimony of the speaker is “unsafe” and “risky” because (2) the audience is incompetent with respect to the content of the speaker’s testimony (Dotson 2011, 244). Dotson goes on to say that “this silencing should be seen as a type of coerced silencing. Many forms of coerced silencing require some sort of capitulation or self-silencing on the part of the speaker” (Dotson 2011, 244).

The example of testimonial smothering that Dotson uses is that of Cassandra Byers Harvin, a black woman who encounters a white woman while Harvin is researching how to raise black sons in the US (Dotson 2011, 247; Harvin 1996, 16). After Harvin tells the white woman what Harvin is researching, the white woman proceeds to ask: “how is that any different from raising white sons?” with a certain tone revealing that the white woman thinks that Harvin is “making something out of nothing” (Harvin 1996, 16; Dotson 2011, 247). Harvin then smothers her testimony and proceeds to get out of the situation as quickly as possible. This example fulfills the two conditions of testimonial smothering that I mentioned where the white woman was clearly incompetent with respect to the content of Harvin’s testimony that harmed Harvin in feeling invalidated and hurt. We can also see that the content of Harvin’s testimony is delivered

in an unsafe and risky (to her as a person) space that could contribute to more harm and thus, Harvin smothers and truncates her testimony to get out of the harmful situation.

We can map this onto the example of Asian American knowers through Nancy's self-silencing. I have argued that there are risks involved in Nancy going against the assumptions of her teachers. She could risk losing her positive standing and the material benefits that come with that standing and status (such as a scholarship). Dotson herself mentions that "unsafe" testimony "runs the risk of leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm" (2011, 244). If Nancy were to disconfirm the stereotype, she could risk material harm whereby not achieving a certain class status wouldn't allow her to do well in a capitalistic nation.

In Nancy's case the audience who is incompetent to the knowledge that Nancy might want to share is society-at-large. Since dominant culture views Asian Americans as the model minority anything that deviates from this narrative is met with suspicion and questioning. Asian Americans know that disconfirming reasons might not be taken well and so they self-smother testimony that might go against the dominant understanding of how Asian Americans are to act in society.

Testimonial smothering is an epistemic injustice because it is coerced. Dotson reinforces her argument by stating that oftentimes people can't choose otherwise without being harmed in some way. She gives an example from Kimberlè Crenshaw's work of black women needing to "choose" between voicing abuse suffered from domestic partners or risking the reinforcement of dominant, negative stereotypes of the "violent" Black man, putting the Black population in a bad light (Dotson 2011, 244-245). Crenshaw notes that one must "weigh their interests in avoiding issues that might reinforce distorted public perceptions against the need to acknowledge and

address intracommunity problems” when considering what to share and what should be kept under wraps (Crenshaw 1991, 1256; Dotson 2011, 244). To speak out against their abuser, who is often a Black male, would put Black people in a bad light, but to stay silent means that Black women continue to suffer abuse. Black women find themselves in what Sukaina Hirji calls “oppressive double binds”, where “because of the way an agent’s own prudential good is bound up with their ability to resist oppression, double binds are choice situations where no matter what an agent does, they become a mechanism in their own oppression” (2021, 645). Black women ultimately contribute to their own oppression (and continue suffering domestic violence) when they “choose” to remain silent for the good of the entire Black population. Hirji goes on to say that “in the case of [oppressive] double binds, there is something necessarily self-undermining about the character of the choice available to an agent: whatever they do, they are forced to act against themselves, becoming a mechanism in their own oppression” (2021, 653). This also happens with Asian Americans who choose their prudential well-being through what it means to live and exist in the US, over their epistemic well-being, and thus, knowledge of the self is undermined.

2.4.3 “pre-emptive hermeneutical injustice”

Asian Americans also experience hermeneutical injustice. Recall, Falbo arguing that hermeneutical resources can serve both “productive as well as interpretive value” (2022, 353). She also states that “[hermeneutical resources] organize members of society and cast them into certain roles and relations with expected behaviors” (Falbo 2022, 348). Thus, for Asian Americans it is the presence of hermeneutical resources that causes hermeneutical injustice, rather than a lack of a concept. Hermeneutical inequality comes into play when the productive function of certain identity prejudicial stereotypes skews social reality and reinforces dominant

concepts in use. When evaluating hermeneutical injustice in relation to Asian Americans we need to look at how dominant hermeneutical resources are functioning within social relations to inform self-understanding and shape self-identity. Asian Americans experiencing hermeneutical injustice involves the epistemic agent who is constructed by the dominant conceptual resources available, their positionality within the structure, and functions completely on its own without any other agent's input.

Due to being organized in specific ways by the productive functioning of hermeneutical resources, epistemic agents might be pre-emptively coerced or limited in what resources they have to understand themselves and the world they live in. Paradigmatic hermeneutical injustice (Fricker's model) deals with the phenomenon of not being able to make sense of one's experience to oneself and to others due to hermeneutical marginalization (i.e., a lack of concepts). If we take Falbo's argument—the concepts that we use in the hermeneutical resource pool shapes and informs our experiences—we can articulate another type of hermeneutical injustice that occurs not due to absence of concepts (like sexual harassment in Fricker's example), but due to the presences of existing concepts. The dominant resources that are available can cause hermeneutical injustice by forcing one's experience into conceptual boxes that are inadequate. I call this "pre-emptive hermeneutical injustice". We often filter our experiences through the dominant and productive conceptual resources that are available in society. People could be pre-emptively excluded from participating in sharing knowledge or understanding a situation differently due to the entrenched hermeneutical resources in the form of identity prejudicial stereotypes that are shaping individuals as well as their interpretation of experiences. When utilizing dominant resources to understand and interpret one's experiences,

people are cut off from other ways of attaining, identifying, and exploring through self-knowledge, and experience epistemic injustice.

In the Asian American context, the model minority stereotype as an entrenched hermeneutical resource often places certain essentialized identities onto Asian Americans from birth or a young age. And because Asian Americans have been formed by this hermeneutical resource, they might not think that they can or do not even think to explore other ways of being, such as travelling around the world hopping from job to job and living a more nomadic kind of lifestyle. Thus, they are cut off and limited from seeing themselves differently than what the model minority stereotype has painted them as. Moreover, they might not even see a problem with this type of living.

2.4.4 “hermeneutical smothering”

Like testimonial smothering, Asian Americans experience “hermeneutical smothering”, which I argue is the suppression of one’s own *experiences* due to risks involved. Risks could include material, psychological, and/or physical harms. Following closely Dotson’s definition of “testimonial smothering”, I define “hermeneutical smothering” as a situation where someone smothers their own experiences because it would be unsafe or risky to go against the normative hermeneutical system.

The two conditions I offered for testimonial smothering map well onto hermeneutical smothering where one smothers their experiences because (1) it is unsafe or risky to share about certain experiences because the (2) dominant hermeneutical system cannot account for divergent experiences. I will take up the second condition first, articulating how willful ignorance forestalls different hermeneutical resources being utilized to understand experience. Then I will show how the dominant system makes it unsafe to share different resources.

Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. in her paper, “Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of ‘Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance’” focuses on how the dominantly situated are willfully hermeneutically ignorant of the epistemic resources that are formed within marginalized populations (Pohlhaus 2012). I want to modify Pohlhaus’ theory slightly, revealing how “willful hermeneutical ignorance” contributes to hermeneutical smothering in Asian American populations. Pohlhaus states that “willful hermeneutical ignorance” is the “dismissal and the [dominantly situated] knower’s continued engagement in the world while refusing to learn to use epistemic resources developed from marginalized situatedness” (2012, 722). She goes on to say that these can also be “instances where marginally situated knowers actively resist epistemic domination through interaction with other resistant knowers, while dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world” (Pohlhaus 2012, 716). Thus, Pohlhaus concludes that “willful hermeneutical ignorance does not describe a thwarted epistemic agent who is not believed or cannot make sense of her world”, but is still epistemically wronged (2012, 716). This last point is significant because Asian Americans are epistemic agents who can make sense of their world, but are still epistemically wronged. It’s the fact that Asian Americans often make sense of their experiences and the world through hermeneutical resources that have been created by dominantly situated knowers that is problematic. Recall that the model minority stereotype was constructed and reinforced by social, economic, and political motivations.

Since the model minority stereotype brings with it material benefits and seems “positive” there doesn’t seem to be a need for other hermeneutical resources to be part of the epistemic pool. But this is misguided and wrong. Asian Americans might “willfully” refuse or be unable to access epistemic resources from their marginalized situatedness because of the additional negative consequences that come with choosing to stand up against dominant ways of knowing

or knowledge systems. Therefore, I argue that the willful hermeneutical ignorance exercised by dominant society as well as by Asian Americans themselves is coercive and involves hermeneutical smothering. Asian Americans must smother other ways of understanding their experiences or other ways that they might want to articulate their experiences from their marginalized standpoint. They “choose” not to speak up in order to keep the material benefits that “guarantee” a source of livelihood in a racist and capitalistic society. If they were to share another way of living and knowing, they run the risk of living as outliers and being seen as “black sheep”.

Although Asian Americans are marginalized in their racial status compared to white Americans, they are in a dominant position racially compared to Black populations. The simultaneous marginality and dominance place Asian Americans in the same oppressive double bind that was articulated with testimonial smothering. The model minority stereotype places Asian Americans in a position as epistemic authorities by way of academic and professional success, but this is due to coerced positioning that restricts or prevents Asian Americans from learning or acknowledging other epistemic resources that have been formed through their marginalized position. This creates a coerced willful ignorance about what minority experiences Asian Americans can utilize to understand what they are experiencing and the world they live in. Asian Americans end up viewing themselves and the world through a distorted and narrow lens to the detriment of being cut off from offering different epistemic resources that come with being Asian American. We can see that hermeneutical smothering also reinforces the model minority stereotype as the dominant resource that keeps in place the broader injustices of racism and capitalism by acting as a “protective” mechanism that allows Asian Americans to survive in a white supremacist, capitalistic nation. Epistemic injustice (intrapersonal and interpersonal), in

general, also perpetuates and exacerbates a host of other harms that are unique to Asian American knowers.

Chapter 3. Beyond Epistemic Injustice - Expanding Harms through Asian American Experience

3.1 Introduction

When looking at the harms knowers experience as a result of epistemic injustice, Fricker argues that knowers experience a primary, intrinsic harm of not being able to exercise their rationality, which is a basic human right (2007, 44). Although Fricker is not explicit in the use of the term, I would argue that being harmed in one's ability to exercise one's rationality is like being harmed in one's ability to exercise one's epistemic agency. Recall from Chapter 2 that Kristie Dotson defines "epistemic agency" as "the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources" (2012, 24). The distinction between exercising one's rationality and exercising one's epistemic agency is slight, but important and I hope will become clear as we go along.

Dotson's definition of epistemic agency involves not only participating in knowledge production (i.e., rationality), but being able to *change* epistemic resources (i.e., epistemic agency). Thus, the intrinsic, ethical harm that knowers face when experiencing epistemic injustice is that sometimes they cannot participate in knowledge producing practices, but other times, due to their participation being conditional, limited, and constrained based on the construction of their social identity. Furthermore, the harms of epistemic injustice bleed into other harms affecting epistemic agents as persons. I have noted how intrapersonal epistemic injustice limits and undermines an Asian American knower's epistemic agency through internalization of the model minority prejudicial stereotype. Additionally, the wrongs of intrapersonal silencing and smothering re-enforce and (re)create epistemic agents into certain

types of knowers and ultimately people. In this chapter, I go beyond Fricker's paradigm framework and widen the scope of harms that are a result of epistemic injustice. I argue that Asian Americans face ethical, practical, ontological, and affective harms.

In section 3.2, I first articulate Fricker's notion of primary and secondary harms of epistemic injustice, and explicate Fricker's account of "epistemic objectification" as the deeper primary, intrinsic harm that a knower experiences. In section 3.3, I offer Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. and Emmalon Davis's combined notion of "truncated subject", which I argue is better suited for describing the primary, intrinsic harm that Asian American epistemic agents face. In section 3.4, I broaden the scope of harms that Asian American individuals endure in connection with epistemic injustice. Finally, in section 3.5, I analyze the group-level epistemic injustice of "persistent unknowability" that contributes to the group-level epistemic harm of "hypervisibility/invisibility" that Asian Americans encounter.

3.2 Fricker's Primary and Secondary Harms of Epistemic Injustice

Fricker distinguishes between primary and secondary harms that are a result of epistemic injustice. She makes a distinction between the "purely epistemic harm" and the ethical harm a knower experiences (Fricker 2007, 43). The pure epistemic harm focuses on the actual knowledge that is not taken up due to prejudicial stereotypes distorting credibility judgments. The ethical harm involves an intrinsic harm done to the speaker who is trying to share knowledge as a rational and trustworthy *agent*. When addressing the primary, intrinsic harm that knowers experience, Fricker notes that it is intrinsic because being wronged in one's "capacity as a knower [means being] wronged in a capacity essential to human value." (2007, 44) The primary, intrinsic harm is *ethical* in nature because being wronged as a knower means being wronged as a person who is left worse off through a type of dehumanization (Fricker 2007, 133).

In the case of testimonial injustice, the primary, intrinsic harm involves “a subject [being] wronged in her capacity as a *giver* of knowledge” (Fricker 2007, 44; emphasis mine). The speaker is cut off or excluded from trustful conversations due to their social identity, and they are worse off because they cannot share knowledge. Furthermore, not being able to share in trustful conversations is an ethical harm because all people should participate in this practice within a healthy community. What Fricker calls secondary harms, on the other hand, are both practical and epistemic in nature (Fricker 2007, 46). These are secondary because they are “extrinsic to the primary injustice in that they are caused by [the primary injustice] rather than being a proper part of it” (Fricker 2007, 46). For example, a Black man being excluded from trustful conversations (primary, intrinsic harm of not being able to give knowledge), might experience further practical, secondary harms such as going to jail or needing to pay a fine (Fricker 2007, 46). Epistemic secondary harms include the diminishment of self-confidence and/or increase of self-doubt due to exclusion from participating in sharing knowledge (Fricker 2007, 48-49). Another helpful example involves Black students experiencing stereotype threat. Practically, they might lose the opportunity for a scholarship that would prevent them from attaining a better job in the future. Epistemically, Black students might lose confidence in themselves and doubt their abilities due to continual underperformance (Fricker 2007, 47, 162-163).

For hermeneutical injustice, knowers suffer both primary and secondary harms where “some groups can suffer an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their own social experience” because the hermeneutical resources available in the social milieu are skewed by dominant voices (Fricker 2007, 145-146). The primary harm is a “situated hermeneutical inequality”, where “the concrete situation is such that the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in his or her interest to be able to

render intelligible” (Fricker 2007, 162). In other words, the primary, intrinsic harm involves a situated inequality of discriminatory harm to the epistemic agent who cannot articulate and participate in knowledge formation due to a prejudiced societal structure. Fricker also notes practical and epistemic secondary harms that occur from the situated inequality. Practically, people (like Carmita Wood) may develop physical signs of stress and lose their job (Fricker 2007, 162). Epistemically, there could be loss of confidence as well as loss of knowledge through not being able to acquire new knowledge due to lack of hermeneutical resources (Fricker 2007, 163).

Fricker takes a deeper look at the primary, intrinsic harm from a psychological perspective, which I want to highlight since Asian Americans experience intrapersonal epistemic injustice. Recall that intrapersonal epistemic injustice occurs through the internalization of stereotypes directly acting on the Asian American epistemic agent. Due to the dominant influence and internalization of the model minority stereotype conferring credibility excess and epistemic privilege (which also informs identity construction), Asian Americans cause epistemic injustice upon themselves. Evaluating the psychological dimensions of the primary, intrinsic harm for both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice allows us to see that the epistemic agent who is (re)created when experiencing the intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice, is also the epistemic agent who can or cannot resist the injustice they face. Therefore, we must identify the epistemic agency that is curtailed in order to know how the epistemic agent might resist the harm.

Fricker begins identifying the knower who is dehumanized by first invoking Bernard Williams’ notion of “steadying the mind” (Williams 2002, 192). She states that steadying the mind is “the process of settling the mind [and] is the most basic mechanism whereby we come to

be *who we are*” via the relational interdependence on others through trustful conversations and the hermeneutical resources that we utilize (Fricker 2007, 52-53; emphasis mine). Fricker notes that when someone is cut off from trustful conversations “the subject of the injustice is socially *constituted* just as the stereotype depicts her (that’s what she counts as socially), and/or she may be actually *caused* to resemble the prejudicial stereotype working against her (that’s what she comes in some measure to be)” (2007, 55; emphasis in original). For testimonial injustice she gives the example of stereotype threat, where Black students become the stereotype that is placed on them (Fricker 2007, 56-57). For hermeneutical injustice, she gives the example from Edmund White’s book, *A Boy’s Own Story*, where a young boy is constructed by and struggles with the concept of homosexuality that is limited and narrow in scope in 1950s America (White 1983; Fricker 2007, 163-164). The prejudiced structure makes it difficult for the boy to articulate and validate his feelings when he sees himself as a “vampire-like creature” (White 1983, 169-170; Fricker 2007, 163-164). Thus, experiencing epistemic injustice (re)constructs the epistemic agent in stereotypical ways that harm the knower. We are not dealing with knowers who cannot participate in knowledge sharing, but knowers who are *limited* (stereotypically) in how they can interact with the world.

Fricker also draws from Edward Craig’s “State of Nature” construction, which is a state that represents a “minimal human society—a society of minimal social organization—in which people live in groups and therefore share some basic needs” (Craig 1990; Fricker 2007, 108). This State of Nature framework allows one to see how knowers operate within societies, which includes *who* gets to inform how a society grows and forms. Fricker goes on to outline the epistemic dimensions of this State of Nature where knowers function with each other and importantly articulates that:

social perception and judgement in the State of Nature will involve social categorization, which means that in the making of credibility judgements there will be some reliance on stereotypes. Once we consider that there must be some significant division of labour (without committing ourselves to any division in particular), it becomes even clearer that stereotypical social perceptions will inform credibility judgements in the State of Nature. Indeed, given my account of testimony, this is a proper part of how people in the State of Nature succeed in meeting the need...of Craig's construction—the need to discriminate good from bad informants. (2007, 115-116)

Stereotypes are a normal part of society that involves categorization between “good” informants and “bad” informants²². Additionally, since stereotypes influence who is seen as a good informant or as a bad informant, we need to interrogate the impact that stereotypes have on epistemic agents and knowledge production. For Fricker, epistemic injustice and the primary, intrinsic harm against the epistemic agent comes into the picture when a knower who suffers epistemic injustice (i.e., prejudicially excluded from knowledge practices due to stereotypes) is not deemed an informant, but a “source of information”, or an object (2007, 132). Fricker maintains that the “intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice [is] *epistemic objectification*: when a hearer undermines a speaker in her capacity as a giver of knowledge, the speaker is epistemically objectified” (2007, 133). More specifically,

the subject is wrongfully excluded from the community of trusted informants, and this means that he is unable to be a participant in the sharing of knowledge (except in so far as he might be made use of as an object of knowledge through others using him as a source of information). He is thus demoted from subject to object, relegated from the role of active epistemic agent, and confined to the role of passive state of affairs from which knowledge might be gleaned. He is ousted from the role of participant in the co-operative exercise of the capacity for knowledge and recast in the role of passive bystander — a role in which, like objects, he can exercise no greater epistemic capacity than that of featuring in potentially informative states of affairs. (Fricker 2007, 132)

²² Fricker also mentions that “the explanation of why we have the concept of knowledge is that it arises from our fundamental need to distinguish good informants: originally, knowledge is what good informants can be relied on to share with us” (2007, 129-130). Although it's not the main point of my project, I want to push back against the strict dichotomy of good and bad informants. I think Fricker would agree that what is “good” and “bad” is contextual and situated within larger structures and systems.

Epistemic objectification involves treating someone as a means and not as ends in themselves; as an “object of knowledge” or a “source of information” rather than an epistemic agent who can exercise their rationality or epistemic agency more broadly (Fricker 2007, 133-134; Jenkins 2017, 282). Scholars have refuted and also attempted to redeem Fricker’s notion of “epistemic objectification”, arguing for different ways to understand what epistemic objectification means and what it points to²³. The passive epistemic object Fricker is referring to someone who is not allowed to change epistemic resources because the knowledge they have is taken as information devoid of any specific agential association. In other words, the epistemic object cannot offer information that’s *freely chosen* by the epistemic agent. This is why it is more helpful to look at epistemic agency rather than rationality. The intrinsic ethical harm more often is about the knower not being able to exercise their human right of choosing what kind of knowledge to contribute, not contribute, and/or change, even if (and oftentimes in spite of) the epistemic resources challenging the dominant resources. When looking at being wronged as a knower in the ethical sense, not all knowers are just passive sources of information, but are active knowers who are coerced to “choose” specific knowledge to share because of oppressive structures that normalize certain ways of knowing and being²⁴.

Lastly, although Fricker argues that epistemic objectification is the intrinsic harm of testimonial injustice, we can apply this to hermeneutical injustice as well. Looking at the example of Carmita Wood again, Wood attempted to articulate her experiences to get the help

²³ See Aidan McGlynn’s “Objects or Others? Epistemic Agency and the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice” (2020) and “Epistemic Objectification as the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice” (2021); Kirsty Hardwick, “Where’s the Harm in It?” (2019).

²⁴ Sally Haslanger in “Objectivity, Epistemic Objectification, and Oppression” (2017) offers a different account of epistemic objectification that looks at how objectivity and epistemology connects more broadly to structure and systems.

she needed, but was treated as a passive object that didn't deserve or require help while suffering sexual harassment because of structural prejudice against women.

3.3 Primary, Intrinsic Harm - The Asian American as “Truncated Subject”

Now that we understand that Fricker's primary, intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice involves the creation and dehumanization of knowers as epistemic objects, we can further diagnose what type of *knower* Asian Americans become when experiencing intrapersonal epistemic injustice. Following Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. and Emmalon Davis, I offer that the primary, intrinsic harm involving the creation of a “truncated subject” is more apt than “objectification” when describing Asian American epistemic agents.

Fricker touches on the fact that the primary, intrinsic harm of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice involves the “very construction (constitutive and/or causal) of selfhood” and states “testimonial and hermeneutical injustice have this identity-constructive power in common, then, as a possible feature of their primary harm” (Fricker 2007, 168). Recall, Fricker argues that identity prejudicial stereotypes affect not only whether someone can share knowledge or understand their experience, but shapes who someone becomes. Recognizing that harms linked to epistemic injustice have much more far-reaching consequences to someone's personhood is especially important when thinking about the broader impact that epistemic injustice has on individuals and social kinds.

Epistemic injustice reinforces the wrongful “constraints and enablements” that Asian Americans are subject to as a member of the social kind “Asian American”. Katherine Jenkins calls this “ontic injustice” and writes that “an individual suffers ontic injustice if and only if they are socially constructed as a member of a certain social kind where that construction consists, at least in part, of their being subjected to a set of social constraints and enablements that is

wrongful to them” (Jenkins 2020, 191). If we apply this to the situation of epistemic injustice where the construction of the knower in being a particular social kind can lead to the primary, intrinsic harm of becoming a *certain* type of knower (i.e., limited knower), the constraints and enablements allow for epistemic agency in some ways, but the tension also causes pressure to become the features of the social kind in question. For Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype is the dominant feature of the social kind “Asian American”. Furthermore, being constructed as the model minority involves wrongful constraints and enablements through the productive presence of a “positive” dominant identity prejudicial stereotype. Although we have a “positive” stereotype, this creates a limited knower and “truncated” epistemic subject.

Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. introduces the notion of the “truncated subject” in her paper “Discerning the Primary Epistemic Harm in Cases of Testimonial Injustice” identifying the primary, intrinsic harm that marginalized epistemic agents suffer when experiencing testimonial injustice (2014, 99). Rather than a “subject/object” relation between hearer/speaker, Pohlhaus describes a “subject/other relation” following Beauvoir, who notes that “other” describes a “semi-subject whose sole purpose is to recognize the class of persons deemed fully as subjects” (Pohlhaus 2014, 105; Beauvoir, Borde, and Malovany-Chevallier 2010). Pohlhaus argues that the “other” who has some subjectivity as a “semi-subject” is a better description of the speaker in testimonial injustice because the speaker is not necessarily a passive object that does not get to participate in knowledge practices at all (2014, 105). Recall that the distinction between rationality and epistemic agency is important in identifying who can suffer epistemic injustices. Marginalized knowers can and often do participate in knowledge production, but it is based on terms defined by larger systems of power that dictate what knowledge is and who gets to inform what knowledge is. Recognizing that knowers often have some level of agency and subjectivity

in what knowledge they share, allows us to tease apart what is going wrong when some epistemic agency is exercised, but in a limited and controlled manner.

Pohlhaus expands her work further following Ann Cahill who states that “the derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject’s existence” (Cahill 2011, 32; Pohlhaus 2014, 105), which is a “relation that circumscribes the subjectivity of its victim within the confines of the perpetrator’s subjectivity” (2014, 99). Ultimately, Pohlhaus argues that the truncated subject (speaker) is derived from the derivatizer’s (hearer’s) subjectivity, and so words that are different from the dominant perspective are not considered (2014, 105). More specifically, Pohlhaus states that knowers are “not capable of contributing to our understanding of the world beyond (and in ways that might change the shape of) the scope of the derivatizer’s experienced world” (2014, 106). Being derived from someone else’s subjectivity reveals that one’s epistemic agency is limited and controlled. Recall the example of Marge Sherwood. Greenleaf understands and accepts that Marge is a woman who can speak and share (which she does in giving her opinion), but because her words are outside of the dominant ways of knowing Greenleaf considers them irrelevant. Marge’s words must cohere with Greenleaf’s patriarchal ideology for Marge’s words be considered knowledge. Pohlhaus goes on to state that the derivatized subject is treated as if they have “nothing unique to contribute to the intersubjective relations that maintain epistemic practices, even while [the derivatizer] does recognize [the derivatized] as capable of some sorts of epistemic labor” (2014, 106). Once again, Marge is allowed to speak, but her comments are not deemed unique or valuable enough to be considered.

Emmalon Davis, when evaluating epistemic injustice in cases of credibility excess given to marginalized populations, modifies Pohlhaus’ account and states that rather than epistemic

agents not being permitted to share knowledge that is “uniquely...from her own distinct lived experience” (Pohlhaus 2014, 107), epistemic agents are “*only* permitted (and expected to) contribute in ways that are considered ‘unique’ and ‘distinct’” (Davis 2016, 490; emphasis original). Davis makes this slight modification to Pohlhaus’ account revealing that marginalized individuals can share knowledge, but conditionally based on so called “non-derivable” features that the dominant population does not have access to, such as relying on Asian American students for help on math homework, who stereotypically perform well in STEM fields (2016, 487, 490). Davis claims that this “compulsory representation introduces a unique form of epistemic exclusion” where “hearers do not offer [speakers] full participation in the relevant epistemic community”, but rather speakers can only share knowledge following the normative expectations within society, such as the stereotype that Asian Americans are good at math (2016, 490). Asian Americans being good at math is something that is unique to this population and thus, as a truncated subject they can participate in knowledge practices where they offer only this unique information to the hermeneutical resource pool. The credibility excess given to Asian Americans further limits the type of knower that Asian Americans are and become because if the Asian American student says they are not good at math, other students (and teachers) might think that the Asian American student is joking and/or doesn’t want to help. Further exacerbating the truncated status of the Asian American, although the Asian American student might not be very good at math, they might still try to help anyway because of the pressure they feel to live up to the stereotype. The prescriptive, normative element attached to compulsory representation dominates the interaction, and the knower’s epistemic agency is constricted.

Although Davis states that some people are only deemed credible in certain domains based on specific, unique social features, and Pohlhaus states that people are only deemed

credible when their experience is drawn from and align with dominant hermeneutical resources, I argue that they are both ultimately pointing to the same thing: *one's epistemic subjectivity is limited by dominant norms and narratives*. Being able to share only those things that are unique to a population and being able to share only those things that are derived from the dominant population are two sides of the same coin. Fricker, to be fair, does not completely let go of the fact that people who are oppressed are trusted in some ways and not in others. She writes that,

Tom Robinson might have been relied on and trusted epistemically on certain matters even by the more thoroughly racist white citizens of Maycomb County—matters relating to his daily work, no doubt, and indeed many everyday matters of practical import, so long as there was no challenge to a white person's word... (Fricker 2007, 131)

People are trusted, but only in ways that conform and do not challenge dominant social (white) power. So, marginalized populations can share knowledge, but what they are allowed to share is limited to what the dominant population deems important and are often domain specific, such as Asians being over-achievers or Black people being good at sports.

Both Davis and Pohlhaus' analyses can be applied to the Asian American knower and the primary, intrinsic harm that they suffer in becoming a "truncated subject". Since the model minority stereotype defines what success looks like in the US for Asian Americans, the knowledge linked to this positive identity prejudicial stereotype is limited to this domain. In the domain of racialized class privilege, features that define Asian Americans as unique (being good at math) and features that align with and are derived from white man's subjectivity (filial piety and strong nuclear families) are all imposed onto the Asian American population as a means of control. Asian Americans are seen as "unique" and "exotic" when necessary; "well assimilated" and "honorary whites" when necessary. The constraints and enablements that Asian Americans experience that function in the structure of relations dominated by ideological (social and identity) power, also promotes alignment with whiteness while keeping Black and brown bodies

subordinate. Pohlhaus gives a great description of what is occurring for marginalized individuals who exist within communities of relations that can be mapped onto the Asian American experience. She states that there is a,

set of constraints on the individual knower that may focus one's epistemic attention and cognitive labor in directions that do not begin from one's own subjectivity. This situation may pull one's cognitive labor away from that which one wants to know. Alternately, it may focus one's cognitive attention towards matters concerning which it is in one's interest to keep unknown (to oneself *and* others). (2014, 107; emphasis in original)

The constraints that Asian Americans face in feeling pressured to choose to live into the model minority stereotype come from the systems and structures set in place. Recall that the government decided to look favorably upon Asian Americans, who were once excluded and feared as the “yellow peril”. The birth of the new positive model minority stereotype directed “epistemic attention and cognitive labor” in a direction that dominant power wanted to go in to keep the wheels of racism and capitalism turning. Furthermore, Pohlhaus’ articulation of cognitive attention being directed towards things that should be kept unknown (the bleak and difficult past of Asian Americans in the US) applies to Asian Americans in that it is in their material interest to let the past go. The model minority stereotype obscures past wrongs that Asians and Asian Americans faced (and continue to face) in the US, and hides in plain sight a past that Asian Americans and dominant US society does not want to think about or remember. But this is not a choice that Asian Americans make autonomously—it is coerced. Denying the past is in the interest of Asian Americans who want to keep their class status in a capitalistic US society.

Medina’s analysis involving the “comparative and contrastive method” of assessing credibility is also helpful in illuminating how positive stereotypes keep broader injustices in place (2013, 61). “Positive” stereotypes offer some level of privilege while crowding out

awareness of more pernicious cases of credibility deficits that are also at play due to material, practical, moral, and/or epistemic risks involved. The model minority stereotype allows Asian Americans to gain some level of socioeconomic and class power, just like Mayella being privileged in her white status over Tom in his Black status. Asian Americans, however, are simultaneously marginalized (just as Mayella was in her status as a woman) due to the limited framework of what it means to be a *minority*, i.e., non-white. And thus, Asian Americans are epistemically excluded from participating in sharing and producing of knowledge. They can only participate within the confines that the structure has placed them in. Different from Mayella, however, the same stereotype that privileges Asian Americans also marginalizes them. For Mayella, she was privileged in her race, but marginalized in her gender. For Asian Americans, race privileges them in the domain of socioeconomic class status, but race marginalizes them as knowers who cannot epistemically participate in knowledge production on their own terms. Asian Americans being both privileged and marginalized simultaneously in their racial status as the model minority creates an “oppressive double bind” where they must choose to live within a racist and capitalistic society by either embracing their *given* class status or risk their livelihood by embracing their racial minority status as “other” and being pooled together with Black and brown people (Hirji 2021).

Pohlhaus also notes that people are generally believed in about certain things, but not about other things by utilizing Medina’s “comparative and contrastive” analysis stating that “[Mayella] Ewell’s testimony...is perceived as credible precisely because her testimony does not disrupt, but rather reinforces, beliefs that stem from a white supremacist and patriarchal subjectivity (Pohlhaus 2014, 109; Medina 2011, 26). Credibility excess given to Mayella in this case works to keep ideological systems of racism in place. Mayella’s experience can be mapped

onto the Asian American experience, where Mayella as a white person is used to keep the Black man down. Asian Americans, likewise, are given credibility excess in order to keep the Black man down. Thus, everyone can exercise some level of epistemic agency, but the Asian American experience highlights that marginalized folk are only trusted *to a degree*—to the extent that they buttress white America’s racism against Black Americans. Asian Americans are regarded as model, but also as *minorities*. Due to this marginalization, they are not trusted as full epistemic subjects, i.e., as subjects who can change the dominant discourses of racism. This creates a truncated subject who can share in some ways and not in others. We see that the intrinsic, primary harm of becoming a “truncated subject” reveals the dynamic and pernicious space that knowers often occupy between privilege and marginalization.

Looking again at the example of Nancy (the Asian American student who became a good student through stereotype promise), we can analyze the primary, intrinsic harm of becoming a “truncated subject” because Nancy lives into the expectations of her teachers and ultimately dominant society, drawing from dominant resources on what is materially in her interests and not her own subjective interests. Nancy knows that surviving in the US means attaining a good job and becoming financially successful. Socioeconomic success is the means towards security and stability in the US, and educational achievement as a pathway is emphasized (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 57). Nancy participates in knowledge production in the domain of education and academics (and is given credibility excess). She also internalizes the dominant hermeneutical resources as her own to understand her lived experience. This is, however, evidence of a *truncated subjectivity* where Nancy is only allowed to be a giver of knowledge in ways that dominant society allows.

The truncated subject has some agency, so it is not only exclusions that we are concerned with. Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. in her paper “Epistemic Agency Under Oppression” also reveals the problems of “epistemic inclusions” that can wrong and harm epistemic agents. She argues that epistemic agency can be thwarted through “pernicious inclusions” (Pohlhaus 2020a, 234). For Asian Americans, pernicious inclusions (that also entail exclusions due to constraints and enablements) lead to intrapersonal testimonial and hermeneutical injustices of “smothering” and “silencing”, and a host of other harms other than becoming a truncated subject.

3.4 Additional Harms in Asian American Populations

Recall that Fricker suggests that secondary harms are a result of experiencing the primary, intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice. I agree that secondary harms are “possible follow-on disadvantages, extrinsic to the primary epistemic injustice”, and that secondary harms can be “caused by [the primary epistemic injustice]” (Fricker 2007, 46). But categorizing primary and secondary harms based on cause-and-effect limits how and in what circumstances epistemic injustice and the harms associated with the epistemic injustice occur. Although there might often be a causal relation from primary to secondary harms, this linear causal process forecloses the possibility of evaluating how injustice, oppression, and harms are part of complex, self-reinforcing *systems*. I argue that categorizing harms as epistemic, ethical, practical, ontological, and affective without the primary and secondary distinction is better suited to describe what happens when one experiences epistemic injustice. Troubling the causal distinction also emphasizes that the knower, who is wronged and harmed, is always in flux as truncated subjects. Since experiencing epistemic injustice and suffering the primary, intrinsic harm of truncated subjectivity involves the continual process of being (re)constructed into the truncated subject, experiencing other types of harm can exacerbate and perpetuate epistemic injustice.

I utilize Fricker's framework to look at how epistemic injustice affects knowers persistently over time as well as how it affects knowers at different points in time with compounding factors involved in experiencing epistemic wrongs and harms. Fricker notes that epistemic injustice "track[s] the subject through different dimensions of social activity" and is connected to "the broader pattern of social injustice" (2007, 27). She goes on to say that "'persistent' labels the diachronic dimension of testimonial injustice's severity and significance, whereas 'systematic' labels the synchronic dimension" (Fricker 2007, 29). In cases of intrapersonal epistemic injustice, knowers persistently experience epistemic injustice and harms over time just as Fricker argues. Systematicity, however, not only points towards the specific moments of intersecting "social activity—economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, and so on", but social activity in the sense of interacting ethical, epistemic, practical, ontological, and affective experiences that impact and (re)create the individual knower (Fricker 2007, 27).

For Asian Americans, these harm-producing experiences are systematic in the sense that they occur simultaneously and loop into each other through the model minority stereotype, exacerbating and perpetuating epistemic injustice and harms further in a knower's life. Furthermore, following the lived experience of knowers reveals the systematic nature of how epistemic injustice (and other social injustices) operates through (re)creating the knower and person as *process*. Asian Americans experience interacting and simultaneous ethical, epistemic, practical, ontological, and affective harms when suffering epistemic injustice.

For example, Nancy (who lived into the stereotype promise of becoming a good student based on expectations) most likely experienced additional epistemic harms of self-doubt, loss of confidence, and loss of knowledge at the same time she was experiencing intrapersonal epistemic

injustice. It could be that before (or as) Nancy self-silenced (when given credibility excess by her teacher), she doubted her own experiences and ideas about who she was or wanted to be. She might have doubted whether she knew better than her teacher²⁵ about how to live and do well. The epistemic harm of self-doubt also reinforces the intrapersonal epistemic injustice of self-silencing because self-doubt can further exacerbate self-silencing. Additionally, as Nancy performs well and continues receiving praise, although she might want to pursue other interests, she might smother her own ideas so as not to risk giving up material benefits that come with stereotype promise (recall the intrapersonal epistemic injustice of “smothering”). Furthermore, although Nancy probably gained some confidence from the stereotype promise placed on her by her teacher, she simultaneously loses confidence in herself as an autonomous epistemic agent in choosing her own path. Therefore, we see that the epistemic harm of loss of confidence reinforces the intrapersonal epistemic injustice of “choosing” to undermine one’s own epistemic agency in following the expectations that others have placed on them. Lastly, by following her teacher’s expectations, Nancy lets go of her own ideas about who she is and might lose self-knowledge. She misses out on opportunities to gain different types of knowledge. The missed opportunity of gaining other kinds of knowledge is also a practical harm because Nancy might only have time for academic-related achievements, and cannot take up other activities that would help her physical (and mental) health.

One might argue, however, that Nancy’s case is unique because she has not yet internalized the model minority stereotype as her social identity. But examples exist where internalization clearly affects Asian American experiences as a result of ongoing intrapersonal epistemic injustice and harms. Due to the internalization of the positive model minority

²⁵ This can include mentors and parents as well.

stereotype as normative, Asian Americans often feel that it is their fault and that they have failed as an Asian American person for not achieving in the way that they “should”.

Lee and Zhou offer various examples where the model minority stereotype internalized as the normative expectation of Asian American students cause intrapersonal epistemic injustice and additional harms. Recall Khuê’s quote (from Chapter 2), where there is a “knowing” and a resonance about what it means to be “Asian American”. Khuê writes that the model minority stereotype is “coded into one’s programming”, revealing that even when someone does not live up to the model minority standard, they still feel the effects of the pressure (2021, 5-6). Lee and Zhou share the examples of Carolyn (a second generation Chinese American female) and Michelle (a second generation Taiwanese American female), who went into film and did not attend college, respectively, and are doing well financially, yet they still “feel like the black sheep in their families” and “atypical Asians because they did not excel in school, unlike their high-achieving brothers, sisters, and coethnic peers” (2015, 152). Carolyn and Michelle’s experiences show that the internalization of the model minority stereotype leads to epistemic injustice where one’s epistemic agency is undermined because one is only permitted to participate in society as “good” Asian Americans if they fit the model minority framework. Both Carolyn and Michelle are harmed onto-ethically because in not being “good”, model citizens and feeling like they have “failed” as outlier Asian Americans, they cannot completely enjoy and accept their chosen career paths and their identities.

Although Carolyn and Michelle “chose” the paths that they did, looking at experiences of Asian Americans who have internalized the model minority stereotype and living into the stereotype, then failing, reveals additional harms. Lee and Zhou offer the experiences of Adam and Hung, both second generation Vietnamese American males, who were academically

successful all through high school and had mental breakdowns once they got to college (2015, 141-145). Adam is described as feeling like a failure when he couldn't keep up his grades and meet the expectations of his parents, but Hung's story has much more detail about the epistemic, ontological, practical, ethical, and affective harms he faced for not living up to the internalized standard of who he was "supposed" to be.

At the time of the interview Hung was a middle school teacher in his mid-20s "who earned a bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley and a master's from UCLA" (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 143-145). Hung did well in school up until college and was even the salutatorian of his high school graduating class. But when he got to college, he could not keep up with his stellar grades and entered a deep depression. Like Nancy, Hung "chose" leaning into the dominant Asian American model minority narrative, but the "rewards" of that path came to a halt when he hit some roadblocks. He "began to question his intelligence and ability" and thought he was "stupid", "worthless", and "not very smart or capable" (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 145).

Lee and Zhou go on to mention that,

because Hung's self-esteem rested on performance markers, once he was unable to attain these, his sense of self-worth plummeted, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and the onset of depression. Hung's experience illustrates that when parents and/or teachers focus on performance praise rather than on learning and the enjoyment of tackling challenges, students may become more susceptible to mental health problems, including anxiety, pressure, frustration, and feelings of failure. (2015, 147)

Lee and Zhou's analysis of Hung's experience reveals that external standards and pressures play a large role in who someone thinks they are and shapes their social identity. The construction of the truncated subject as the primary, intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice also exacerbates epistemic injustice (recall feedback-loop) revealing that self-identity, self-worth, self-confidence, and self-knowledge shaped through social knowledge are key features when evaluating the wrongs and harms of intrapersonal epistemic injustice. The various ethical, epistemic, practical,

ontological, and affective experiences influence and are influenced by one's perception of self-identity, self-worth, and self-knowledge. Furthermore, Hung's truncated subjectivity of being able to participate in knowledge sharing as a model minority then feeling like a failure when he could not perform in the way he and others expected probably exacerbated his depression due to the tension of constantly navigating who "Hung really was" and who the world wanted Hung to be. Hung was constantly being (re)created into a truncated subject who lived with constrained enablements. Although Hung's mental health improved through switching majors from the hard sciences to humanities, Lee and Zhou note that Hung only felt better after he started getting better grades again in his new major:

Hung feels successful only when he achieves the high grades to which he had become accustomed, only when he receives praise from others, or only when his middle school students perform well on their tests. Success, in Hung's view, is measured by his performance, results, and external praise, which he believes to be the result of his ability and intelligence. (2015, 145)

This passage shows that even with seemingly autonomous changes (e.g., choosing a different major) and taking time to deal with mental health issues like depression, Hung continued living into his truncated Asian American subjectivity defining his self-worth and self-identity by the narrow model minority stereotype—dictated by external approval and dominant epistemic resources. Hung's experience shows that his self-confidence is contingent on external factors and always up for debate as a truncated subject even after everything he went through because his "self-esteem and self-worth are directly correlated with performance markers" (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 145). Hung continues committing intrapersonal epistemic injustice against himself in being locked into a certain idea of who he must be. This most likely causes additional stress, anxiety, and self-doubt, further exacerbating the lack of confidence in himself—other harms that Hung experiences due to epistemic injustice.

Hung's experience also points to the *ontic injustice* that he faced in being defined by the constraints and enablements of the social kind "Asian American". Recall that the construction of the truncated subject as the primary, intrinsic harm of epistemic injustice also exacerbates epistemic injustice revealing that self-identity, self-worth, and self-knowledge in relation to the epistemic features of confidence and doubt have far-reaching ontological consequences.

Applying Jenkins' ontic injustice of being wronged through the construction as a certain type of person due to one's social kind to Fricker's work on gender helps flesh out the additional ontological consequences of experiencing the epistemic harms including lack of confidence and self-doubt. In the case of Marge and Greenleaf, Marge might already question her self-worth in comparison to Greenleaf (a man) due to differential power status between the social kind "woman" and social kind "man". Additionally, the association of "hysteria" with the category of "woman" as a social kind reinforces and (re)creates a woman who is insecure. Furthermore, when Marge experiences testimonial injustice, she might lose confidence in herself. This loss of confidence might then cause self-doubt that (re)enforces and (re)creates a woman who is insecure. Another example that Fricker shares is that of author and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who lost confidence in herself when interacting with fellow philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. After being intellectually demeaned by Sartre, Beauvoir writes, "*I'm no longer sure what I think, or even if I think at all*" (Fricker 2007, 51; Beauvoir and Kirkup 1959, 344). Fricker goes on to say that "the attack [testimonial injustice] makes on intellectual confidence, can change an intellectual trajectory in one fell blow, whether as a single event or, more likely, as the final straw in an ongoing experience of persistent petty intellectual underminings" (2007, 51). Beauvoir's statement reveals that epistemic injustice can cause a deep shift in doubting one's humanity, where the harm that one faces diminishes one's sense of self-worth as a person and

keeps one in a harmed state. Interestingly, Beauvoir did not identify as a philosopher in her life, but as an author. One might wonder, however, what opportunities might have been stifled or missed because of the epistemic and ontic injustice she faced.

An Asian American professional might one day, like Beauvoir, end up doubting themselves and losing self-confidence to the point where they wonder if they have anything to contribute, not only due to reoccurring epistemic injustice, but the harms affecting someone at such a deep level of personhood that there is no source to draw confidence or self-esteem from. Since self-confidence is based on external motivations and expectations in the Asian American context, an Asian American knower's internal resources are obscured, and the fall from grace could be detrimental, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Although Beauvoir and Hung both bounced back from their suffering, positive prejudice and stereotypes can pigeonhole people into certain ways of being and moving around the world, and thus, when entering new spaces, knowers might not have enough confidence that things will work out and/or doubt that things will work out, compounding the harms they face.

Additionally, although testimonial injustice was the trigger, Beauvoir was already primed by being harmed as a woman who was thought of as lesser in dominant society, and experiences the further harm of losing confidence. Emmalon Davis also notes that when someone “who has internalized [the] message [that she lacks value she] may develop a diminished sense of self-worth, causing her to react in potentially harmful ways—including (but not limited to) self-imposed silencing” (2016, 492). The lack of value that one sees in themselves is the ultimate harm that one can face. Note that Davis argues that self-silencing can occur from a lack of self-worth revealing that the primary, intrinsic harm of truncated subjectivity and having to constantly negotiate the value of oneself in connection with external pressures can also lead to intrapersonal

epistemic injustice. Some other harms that one experiences due to credibility excess include heightened anxiety and stress in attempting to perform well²⁶, embarrassment when not meeting expectations (such was the case for Hung), stress, anger, and fearfulness that one might not succeed and meet expectations (Davis 2016, 492; Goguen 2016, 90; J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 124).

Finally, I want to touch on the practical and affective harm of self-blame Asian Americans suffer in being the model minority. David H. Kim in his paper, “Shame and Self-Revision in Asian American Assimilation” states that when Asian Americans choose assimilation (and thus choose to become the model minority), they experience feelings of shame, self-contempt, and I argue, self-blame when things don’t go well. He writes,

in virtue of...entrenched public stigmata and the conditions that sustain them, [Asian Americans] all potentially experience, to make up some words, ‘shameability’ and ‘self-contemptability,’ that is to say, a distinctive vulnerability to being shamed or undergoing self-contempt” when embracing the model minority stereotype. (D.H. Kim 2014, 120)

As we saw in the narrative description by Khuê and the lived experience of Hung, Asian Americans are susceptible to these self-demeaning feelings due to internalization and an inward resonance of who Asian Americans are created to be. Lee and Zhou also talk about “saving face” due to feelings of shame associated with failing to live up to the model minority stereotype and how the “achievement mind-set can induce feelings of shame, embarrassment, and depression when they are unable to easily surmount new and unforeseen challenges” (2015, 165, 183-184).

Kim goes on to state,

the lowered view of the self is not the result of considerations of flawed agency but of flawed being. In the now familiar story, which has a variety of theoretical articulations, the agent internalizes demeaning images and messages in the course of learning social reality. Importantly, these images and messages do not simply float around in culture. They are politically organized... Therefore, this sort of shame is not the result of failed agency but the *inward resonance of a suppressive social order*. (2014, 116; italics in original)

²⁶ “Ophelia admitted to feeling more anxious about keeping up with her high-achieving peers, overcompensating with more effort, and raising her expectations to meet those of her teachers and peers.” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 124)

The understanding that all Asian Americans know what is at stake in being the model minority and that shame, self-contempt, and self-blame are attached to failing, reveals that we are dealing with epistemic injustices and harms that are problematic in affective ways as well. Kim's work also reveals that stereotypes-in-use are cultural and politically motivated. The resonance that Asian Americans feel when coethnics do not get into a prestigious college or speak about the pressure to achieve shows that epistemic injustice does not only affect individuals. The "suppressive social order" creates feelings and involves social power functioning within systems and structures. Thus, as we address individual epistemic injustice, we must also address broad cultural and group-level epistemic injustice and harms taking place in oppressive systems.

3.5: Group-level Epistemic Injustice and Harms in Asian American Populations

3.5.1 The Group-level Epistemic Injustice of "Persistent Unknowability"

Lee and Zhou state that many of their interviewees "were quick to evoke culturally essentialist explanations, in spite of ample disconfirming evidence" of Asian Americans living into the model minority stereotype. Additionally, following social psychologists they note that "cognitive and social processes enable stereotypes to endure even amid disconfirming evidence" (2015, 172). Both cognitive and social processes are cultural and affect whole groups of people. Three social processes that Lee and Zhou offer and that I argue highlight the group-level epistemic injustice of what I call "persistent unknowability" include: (1) "the presumption of widely held stereotypes about high-achieving Asian Americans leads people, including Asian Americans themselves, to fail to notice Asian Americans who do not fit the stereotype", (2) "disconfirming evidence is not strong enough to dispel the Asian American exceptionalism construct because it is reinforced in gateway institutions such as schools, workplaces, and even the criminal justice system", and (3) "the model minority stereotype and the Asian American

exceptionalism construct are buttressed by the continued circulation of the larger narrative of the American Dream—the idea that anyone who is willing to work hard, delay gratification, and persevere can make it in this country” (J. Lee and Zhou 2015, 175). Accepted in dominant culture, these social processes obscure other ways that Asian Americans can understand themselves and be understood by others. In other words, persistent unknowability is a cultural, group-level epistemic injustice because the social processes that Lee and Zhou mention continue obscuring other ways that Asian Americans might understand themselves and how others might understand the group, ultimately rendering Asian Americans “unknowable”. The assumptions and entrenched ideas about Asian Americans being reinforced by dominant cultural structures and systems hides the epistemic (and social) injustices that Asian Americans face and ultimately who they are.

Kristie Dotson also offers a framework in articulating the unknowability of Black women and girls in her paper, “Theorizing Jane Crow, Theorizing Unknowability”, which we can map onto the persistent unknowability of Asian Americans as an epistemic injustice. Dotson argues that the disappearing and obscuring of an entire group occurs due to epistemic malfunctions or failures in how dominant epistemic resources are understood and utilized for the functioning of society. I want to argue that epistemic failings (which include the three social processes mentioned by Lee and Zhou) also prevent Asian Americans from full participation in knowledge sharing and having access to resources, i.e., epistemic agency to understand and shape self-conception as well as group-conception.

Kristie Dotson offers and articulates an “epistemological story” for the unknowability and invisibility of Black women and girls through looking at “Jane Crow dynamics”. By “epistemological story”, Dotson refers to “an account that centers on identifying features that are

necessary for coming to know anything” (Dotson, 418). Pauli Murray, in her essay, “The Liberation of Black Women”, articulates that Jane Crow refers “to the ‘submerged status’ of Black women within ‘male supremacy’ and ‘white supremacy’”, which represent the clashing caste systems of white supremacy and patriarchy, where Black women are needed to theorize women’s issues and Black issues, but not Black women’s issues (Murray 1947, 4,5; Dotson, 119). This highlights the intersectional status that Black women occupy that is often overlooked and not understood in the dominant epistemic structures²⁷. Murray goes on to theorize that Jane Crow includes “the entire range of assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements [that] have robbed women of a positive self-concept and prevents them participating fully in society as equals with men” (Murray 1970, 186; Dotson, 420). Put another way, “assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements” are hermeneutical resources that shape how one understands themselves. Dotson, thus, highlights that there is an “epistemological engine” that sustains the disappearing, unknowability, and the subsequent invisibility of Black women due to the hermeneutical resources that are available (421).

Dotson draws out that one’s “self-concept” is hindered through the assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements within society, and in turn, these epistemic resources prevent Black women from full participation in society (420). Expanding our notion of what counts as epistemic resources brings into view the robust impact of the hermeneutical structure and system (that includes assumptions, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements) has on marginalized communities. The epistemological reading of Jane Crow subordination reveals that the same epistemic resources cause simultaneous “detection (identification and targeting)” and

²⁷ The classic case of intersectionality, presented by Kimberlè Crenshaw, involves the clashing systems of white supremacy (race) and patriarchy (gender), whereby multiple clashing systems of oppression lead to multiple layers of discrimination of Black women because their experiences cannot be accounted for by the laws in place within the US (Dotson 2017; Crenshaw 1989, 1991).

“submergence (indefensible and untenable)” of whole groups of people (Dotson, 421). This type of disappearing is linked to the cultural epistemic injustice of “persistent unknowability” because the same epistemic resources that one uses to understand the self are those that are disappearing the group.

Persistent unknowability is fueled by what Dotson calls “three imbricated conditions for Jane Crow” subordination: (1) occupation of “negative socio-epistemic space”, (2) “reduced epistemic confidence [in the subordinated person]”, and (3) “heighted epistemic backgrounding” [of subordinated person]” (422-424). Jane Crow subordination, when read through an epistemological lens,

refers to occupying a routinely ‘submerged status’ beneath warring systems of privilege, e.g. white and male supremacy that is caused by unfavorable placement with respect to prevailing epistemically relevant features of our worlds, i.e. assumptions, stereotypes, custom, and arrangements. (Murray 1947, 4,5; Murray 1970, 186; Dotson, 421)

Black women are subordinated in both race and gender, and Dotson argues that Black women are placed in this submerged status due to the shared epistemic resources of assumptions, stereotypes, custom, and arrangements within society. Dotson also notes that there is a “double disappearing” where “there is the initial disregard, i.e., occupation of negative, socio-epistemic space, and then the active ignorance of this disregard, [which is] reduced epistemic confidence” (424).

One comes to occupy a negative socio-epistemic space due to a “paucity of resources within ‘fixed public opinion’ that one can draw upon when interpreting the lives and plights of black women and Black girls” (Williams 2007, 54; Dotson, 423). This points to Fricker’s paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice where there is a lack of conceptual resources in making sense of experience and thus, certain groups of people are unknowable in ways that are harmful. But ‘fixed public opinion’ also reveals that specific epistemic resources are shaping how we

understand ourselves, others, and the world. Thus, it is not only a *lack* of conceptual resources, but the *presence* of productive conceptual resources that perpetuate the unknowability of certain groups. Dotson makes an important note of stating that “what is tracked *and* what is let go by those [epistemic] resources are of utmost importance to this discussion. According to Williams, Black women and Black girls could not be ‘known’ via available prevailing shared epistemic resources because they were trapped in a perpetual state of being ‘let go’ for the sake of comprehension” (Williams; Dotson 423; emphasis mine)

Certain aspects of Asian American identity are also “let go” and tracked to uphold ideological systems that benefit the majority. Nancy let go of her own ideas of who she was and what she liked, while at the same time tracked the expectations and stereotype promise of her teacher in who an Asian American student was supposed to be. In dominant culture this is not seen as problematic because Nancy is given material benefits, but epistemically it is problematic because Nancy is not allowed to exercise her epistemic agency. This is linked to Dotson’s second condition of diminished epistemic confidence, but it is not reduced epistemic confidence in what the epistemic agent has to offer, but an over-confidence in believing that Nancy would perform well. There was overconfidence in Nancy conforming to the norms of the systems and structures that they live in. Reduced confidence is not off the table, however, because there was the epistemic cost that Nancy had to bear: reduced confidence in herself. She was coerced to silence herself and not share what she wanted to do and what she was good at.

“Double disappearing” applies to Asian American as well, but it is not due to the clashing of gender and race (like that of Black women), but rather the clashing of class and race. Asian Americans are overregarded as “model” in the domain of achievement, which causes a disregard in other domains. Furthermore, the active ignorance of the over regard in the particular domain

of achievement creating an overconfidence and overdependence on the model minority stereotype, ultimately puts Asian Americans in a negative socio-epistemic space where their epistemic agency is limited. In other words, over-regard places them in a negative, socio-epistemic space, and the active ignorance of over-regarding that involves heightened epistemic confidence places a harmful expectation that they need to be a specific type of knower and person. Thus, Asian Americans occupy a negative socio-epistemic status that is harmful to them. The active ignorance by teachers, parents, and society at large who over regard the model minority stereotype as a positive generalization can also cause reduced self-confidence of the Asian American epistemic agent in how they view themselves if they fail to live up to the expectations of others. This creates a “robust structure of disavowal” whereby whole groups are continually epistemically backgrounded, in “being placed in the role of serving as the backdrop of some other subject’s contemplation” for the perpetuation of the oppressive systems and powers (424). Dotson goes on to say that “epistemic backgrounding refers to being relegated as a means for framing some other domain without ever becoming the ‘point’ of inquiry”, which applies to Asian American knowers because they are utilized to frame the domain of capitalistic gains and achieving the “American Dream” through academic and financial success. Even the over regard and overconfidence in Asian Americans (in the domain of success based on racialized class privilege) by other groups is problematic because it is based on a limited understanding of the Asian American population. And as I’ve shown this also affects group-knowledge from within Asian Americans coethnic peers, perpetuating the unknowability of Asian Americans.

3.5.2 *The Group-level Harm of “Persistent hypervisibility/invisibility”*

The persistent unknowability of Asian Americans is connected to the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of Asian Americans. I argue that the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility constitutes group-level harm that is caused by unknowability. This group-level harm is motivated by epistemic means through the unknowability of the population. Since the population serves as a tool to keep anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and capitalism productive, the limited understanding of the entire group allows for the highlighting (hypervisibility) and downplaying (invisibility) of certain aspects of the Asian American group depending on the situation Asian Americans find themselves in.

Emmalon Davis argues that being positively prejudiced “does not make the testimony of underrepresented individuals less marginal, rather, marginalized voices simply become *more visible*. All too often, the visibility associated with PCE [prejudicial credibility excess] serves as a distraction from the ways in which marginalized knowers are more generally discredited in dominant institutions. Even worse, this visibility may be (mis)interpreted as a sign that the disparities between the advantaged and disadvantages have largely disappeared” (2016, 493; emphasis in original). Davis’s analysis of prejudicial credibility excess’s impact on visibility also applies to Asian American populations. The hypervisibility of the model minority stereotype downplays the racist and classist problems Asian Americans experience and endure as oppressive double binds. Additionally, the hypervisibility of Asian Americans as unassuming, model citizens who don’t rock the boat further emphasizes the invisibility of the group who seem to be apathetic and uninterested in challenging systems and structures of oppression in our inequitable society. Furthermore, unknowability reinforces what is visible and what is invisible, while hypervisibility and invisibility exacerbate unknowability. The slipperiness and elision between the group-level wrong and harm reveal why Asian Americans are often not at the center

of news, debates, collective action, and/or political transformation. Asian American fly under the radar, through what they are valued/visible for and what they are not valued/made invisible by. This forces Asian Americans into a harmful and wrongful space where others cannot understand them as well as not being able to understand themselves. But all is not lost. By understanding the type of space Asian Americans occupy, one can start to build paths of resistance. Awareness is the first step.

Chapter 4. Conclusion: Towards Resistance

One of the things that I learned from my father is that a crisis is both a danger and an opportunity. That's in the Chinese characters. And how you take advantage of the opportunity of the crisis rather than become despairing because of the danger and fearful is something we're facing all the time, particularly at this time. And it's a philosophical approach I think that is very much needed...

- Grace Lee Boggs, "On Being with Krista Tippett" Interview²⁸

4.1 Resistance and Paths Forward

I ended the last chapter stating that awareness is the first step to resisting epistemic injustice. And relatedly, as stated in the introduction, since this is a work of social and feminist epistemology, it is imperative to evaluate the sociohistorical contexts and genealogies that give rise to stereotypes that perpetuate certain ways of being and moving in society for different groups of people. Resisting epistemic injustice must also address structures and systems even while each individual person suffering injustice deals with the harms they incur. In other words, when looking at how to remedy and minimize epistemic injustice we need to consider specific moments of epistemic injustice as well as the diachronic genealogy that has brought about the dominant hermeneutical resources that shape and (re)create epistemic agents.

Scholars have offered different types of resistance, including Fricker's own virtue epistemological account of "reflexive critical social awareness" (2007, 91). Fricker argues that knowers' awareness of the prejudice that is at play in epistemic injustice and correcting for that prejudice by modifying their credibility judgments of the speaker in a testimonial exchange, is one way to combat epistemic injustice. Linda Martin Alcoff and Elizabeth Andersen, among others, however, argue that individual, virtuous hearing is not enough to remedy or correct for

²⁸ <https://onbeing.org/programs/grace-lee-boggs-a-century-in-the-world/>

epistemic injustice²⁹. Additionally, Fricker focuses on the role of the *hearer* and what they must do to combat epistemic injustice, but what do we do when we have a *speaker* who commits epistemic injustice against themselves?

In this conclusion, I offer that awareness of the Asian American's "liminal" identity status and situatedness in relation to Black, brown, and white racial groups is a path to resisting intrapersonal epistemic injustice. I first draw from social anthropology and organizational management literature to define "liminal" and how it is related to identity (re)construction. I then bridge "liminality" to Du Bois' concept of racialized "double consciousness", theorizing "liminal consciousness" as a process-based awareness whereby Asian Americans can resist intrapersonal epistemic injustice and harms.

4.2 Liminality and Identity (Re)construction

The concept of liminality was introduced by Arnold Van Gennep in his book, *The rites of passage* (1960). Van Gennep notes that liminal rites involve periods of transition, such as from fetus in the womb to child in the world (1960, 11, 53). Others have built on Van Gennep's work, including anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner in his book, *The Forest of Symbols*, and more specifically his chapter entitled, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage", notes that "if our basic model of society is that of a 'structure of positions', we must regard the period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation" (1967, 93). Asian Americans are situated within a "structure of relations" with other racial groups, and thus, identifying the space that they occupy as "interstructural" is helpful. Turner notes that liminality is interstructural because it is "neither this nor that, and yet is both", pointing towards the fluidity and process

²⁹ See Alcoff's "Epistemic Identities" (2010) and Anderson's "Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions" (2012) who offer arguments that offer solutions that take structural aspects into account.

involved in *becoming* while occupying a liminal space (1967, 99). Interestingly, Turner also notes in his example of neophytes³⁰ (i.e., novice, beginner) that,

we are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss liminality but with the essentially unstructured (which is at once destructured and prestructured) and often the people themselves see this in terms of bringing neophytes into close connection with deity or with superhuman power, with what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless. Since neophytes are not only structurally “invisible” (though physically visible) and ritually polluting, they are very commonly secluded, partially or completely, from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses. (1967, 98)

Although Turner’s theorizing remains in the realm of rituals and transitions, we can map the experience of the neophyte onto the Asian American experience. Turner argues for the “ritually polluting” metaphor by drawing on Dr. Mary Douglas’s book *Purity and Danger* (1966) where she writes “what is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean” (Douglas 1966; V.W. Turner 1967, 97). I argue that Asian Americans are a racial group that is “unclear” and “contradictory” depending on what group characteristic one is focusing on and for what reason. For example, Asian Americans are looked upon as smart and hardworking when it comes to education, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, the stereotype of “yellow peril” came raging back and there was much anti-Asian violence. Asian Americans, although not connected to deities and that which is superhuman, exist in a fluid state where their identity is manipulated and shifts depending on the social context they find themselves in, simultaneously destructured and prestructured, and thus, unstructured. The unstructured nature makes Asian Americans “structurally invisible” in being situated in perpetual liminality compared to other racial groups. Furthermore, if structures are relations between

³⁰ Although there are religious associations with the term “neophyte”, Turner uses it in a metaphorical sense to represent something that is coming to be or changing into something else. He writes, “[neophytes are] often expressed in symbols modeled on processes of gestation and parturition. The neophytes are likened to or treated as embryos, newborn infants, or sucklings by symbolic means which vary from culture to culture... Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories.” (96-97)

people, things, etc. then what are the implications of being *structurally invisible*? I suggest that this becomes or is a site of epistemic injustice. The situatedness of Asian Americans living in a clashing “in-between” realm of being the “model” in class status and “minority” in racial status, where they are given class privilege as “model” in the domain of professional, white-collar work, but simultaneously marginalized as a “minority” race, leaves Asian Americans largely undefined and uncharacterizable within very limited understandings of race and class associations. Asian Americans as the model minority leads to hypervisibility as “closer to white” and “definitely not black”, but this in-between causes simultaneous unknowability and invisibility of who Asian Americans are separate from the model minority identity they have inherited in the US.

Living in liminality is not, however, always a bad thing. Van Gennep and Turner argue that liminal rituals mark important transitions from one phase of life to another. Additionally, although Van Gennep and Turner both talk about rituals, I argue that rituals and stereotypes are similar in the sense that both are culture-creating and culture-modifying hermeneutical resources that influence how someone understands who they are and who they are becoming.

Homi Bhabha also offers connections between culture, race, and liminal spaces in his book, *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha articulates how culture is created in liminal spaces when differences mix (1994, 4). He looks at history, genealogy, narratives, and liminal experiences theorizing where to locate culture, which is ultimately made up of social relations. He writes, “these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (1994, 2), offering how the individual who resides within communities of culture is created and changed in liminal spaces. With this in mind, we can now ask: how is identity (re)created in these “in-between” spaces of

constant transition and movement of culture/society creation, which includes stereotypes as culture-creating resources? Who does someone become while living in this space of liminality? What identity is formed? And how can “collaboration” and “contestation” both be helpful?

Nic Beech in his paper, “Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction”, focuses specifically on individuals who find themselves in liminal spaces and the impact this has on identity within work culture. Work organizations are microcosms reflecting the macrocosms of how whole groups of people function at the societal level. Beech’s goal is to “contribute to the understanding of the interaction between an individual and their social structures at the point of identity change” (2011, 286), which fits nicely with my project of articulating how Asian Americans in being constructed as “Asian American” through the structures of social relations creates the dominant Asian American “model minority” identity.

Beech defines liminality as “a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community” (2011, 287). Like Beech, I want to excavate the positive implications of living in a liminal space where identity is (re)constructed and where disruption to one’s sense of self is not a bad thing, but something that can be helpful. Beech utilizes Noble and Walker’s argument that liminality “significantly disrupt[s] one’s internal sense of self or place within a social system” (Noble and Walker 1997, 31; Beech 2011, 287). I argue that the disruption of living in a liminal space is the constant changing, code-switching, and morphing into the person that an Asian American is expected to be. What I want to offer is that living in this space can also involve challenging the categories that are imposed on Asian Americans and is an opportunity to move beyond the social categories in use to define oneself and others. Although Beech also does not talk about stereotypes shaping identities, in drawing from Van Gennep, Turner, and others, he

expands how transitions impact the identity of individuals who are part of a large web of relations or structures. He writes, “liminal practices occur at the intersection of structure and agency and so are particularly well fitted to expanding our understanding of self-identity/social-identity mutual construction” (Beech 2011, 286). Following Beech, I identify practices performed while living in liminality that can help one understand their self-identity as well as *change* their self-identity.

Beech offers three different types of “liminal identity work practices” including “recognition”, “reflection”, and “experimentation”, which I argue can be helpful for Asian Americans resisting epistemic injustice (2011, 289). *Recognition* is the “gradual process of ‘dawning’” and is an “outside-in dialogic orientation” (Beech 2011, 289). This dialogic orientation takes outside information and evaluates it as having an impact on one’s identity. *Reflection* is “a practice that incorporates emphasis on both outside-in and internalized dialogue” and “entails self-questioning and self-change along with reacting to (or absorbing) external influences and perceptions” (Beech 2011, 289). Beech draws from Turner and others³¹ where there is a mixing of different experiences and knowledge (i.e., hermeneutical resources) that shape one’s identity and is a space where one ponders how one could shape their future. Finally, *experimentation* is the practice where “versions of the self are tried out as a new or modified identity is sought” and “occurs in an inside-out dialogic orientation” where a person recognizes who they are and what features make up their identity, but wants to change something about themselves (Beech 2011, 289). All three practices are important while the living in a liminal

³¹ See Victor Turner’s “Liminality and performance genres” (1984). In: MacAloon JJ (ed) *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Performance*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 19–41. Mangham IL (2001) Looking for Henry. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 14(3): 295–304. Cunliffe Ann L. (2002) Social poetics as management inquiry: A dialogical approach. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 11(2): 128–146.

space of identity (re)construction because one needs to recognize what hermeneutical resources have shaped who they are, understanding why and how one has come to be the person that they are, and what hermeneutical resources they might let go of or change. Recognition involves seeing the traits that make up one's identity in the moment. Reflection involves the why and how one comes to be who they are. And finally, experimentation involves action—changing something about oneself or one's circumstances with the tools that one has and/or is (re)creating so that new categories and ways of being can emerge.

These practices do not and cannot occur, however, in isolation. The subject must also consider and understand the sociohistorical categories in use and its impact on identity formation. In order to experiment well there must be an understanding of who one is in relation to others and the structures that have created the individuals that make up society. For Asian Americans, there must be an understanding about how racial hierarchies, ideologies, and power dynamics have played and are continuing to play a role in creating, changing, and molding the current dominant model minority identity in order to resist epistemic injustice.

4.3 Asian Americans and “Liminal Consciousness”

In this section, linking liminality and Du Bois' concept of “double consciousness” ((Du Bois and Edwards, 8), I argue that Asian Americans can develop a “liminal consciousness” to resist epistemic injustice. By bringing Beech's identity work practices in conversation with Du Bois' double consciousness allows one to see that performing identity work practices of reflection, recognition, and experimentation while acknowledging one's liminal status within the structural white/black binary of white supremacy and anti-Blackness allows for the cultivation of a liminal consciousness that can be utilized to resist epistemic injustice. One might ask, however, what epistemic benefit is there to understanding one's positionality as liminal? Asian Americans

materially benefit from *not* resisting dominant structures and understanding their positionality in alignment to what is favorable to them. So, why engage? By remembering that there are harmful epistemic, ethical, ontological, affective, and practical consequences of being a limited knower who lives in the liminal space of the white supremacist/anti-Blackness binary, and influences a person in becoming a truncated subject who cannot exercise their full epistemic agency.

Scholars, most notably Linda Martin Alcoff and José Medina, expand upon Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" serving as a positive upshot and path of resistance to experiencing epistemic injustice³². Orlando Hawkins and Emmalon Davis in their recent article, "The Future of Double Consciousness: Epistemic Virtue, Identity, and Structural Anti-Blackness"(2024), however, articulate problems within Alcoff's and Medina's take on double consciousness as a mode of resistance to epistemic injustice. They argue that Medina's "kaleidoscopic consciousness" and Alcoff's "white double consciousness" apply double consciousness in a piecemeal way that veers too far from the original context of the concept (Hawkins and Davis 2024, 63). Hawkins and Davis show that double consciousness is more robust than philosophers have made it out to be, arguing that Du Bois meant for the concept to define the systems and structures of oppression that forced Black people to gain double consciousness in the first place. They argue that double consciousness is more than a tool for individual resistance or a tool to create virtuous knowers by highlighting Du Bois's intention of *regarding the sociohistorical context* when theorizing double consciousness. Interestingly, the authors end by offering that *anti-Blackness* is an additional structural notion that must be

³² In this section, I won't be drawing directly from Du Bois's work on "double consciousness" as found in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (originally published in 1903) but following recent literature that analyzes the progression of Du Bois's work overtime and how it has been connected to resisting epistemic injustice.

considered alongside white supremacy when evaluating oppression and injustice suffered by Black populations (Hawkins and Davis 2024, 90).

Asian American studies scholars have also pivoted from analyzing only white supremacy ideology and currently theorize structural anti-Blackness as ideology that keeps minorities racially oppressed. Asian American sociologist, Claire Jean Kim, notes that Asian Americans need to approach racism through the lens of anti-Blackness in her book, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*. She offers in her coda what steps Asian Americans can take in recognizing their status as simultaneously privileged and marginalized. She writes,

Asian Americans must take responsibility for generating a misbegotten critique of the so-called model minority myth and correct it in a definitive way. Asian Americanists have made this critique the centerpiece of their intellectual agenda for a half-century (and I include my earlier work here, too), and the result has been a highly consequential mystification of white-Afro-Asian dynamics....Once [Asian Americans] acknowledge structural anti-Blackness, though, Asian Americans are uniquely positioned to advance a different critique, one that cuts through the mystification rather than reinforcing it: *The valorization of Asian Americans as a model minority is not just a myth or rhetorical construction; it reflects a deeply embedded structural favoritism that is the real explanation for why Asian Americans fare better than Black people in an anti-Black society.* (2023, 361-362; italics in original)

Kim reveals that the model minority stereotype points towards “favoritism” of Asian Americans at the expense of the Black person. Recall Medina argues that the credibility excess that Mayella received as a white woman place both Tom, as a black man, and Mayella, as a woman, in a harmful situation. Although Mayella was given credibility excess as a white person, because she was a woman, her true testimony (that she loved Tom) was silenced. She still suffered epistemic injustice while utilized as a tool to perpetuate epistemic injustice against Tom. The success of Asian Americans is not due to being a “better minority”, but rather Asian Americans are given opportunities to keep Black and brown bodies, as well as Asian bodies, marginalized. Thus, the liminal space that Asian Americans occupy between white supremacy and anti-Blackness points

to the problematic tensions that exist in living as a model minority who is neither white nor Black.

However, all is not lost while living in liminality. Liminal consciousness is formed by first acknowledging that one is continually shaped by residing in the in-between of whiteness and Blackness. The next step in developing liminal consciousness and using it as a tool of resistance is by practicing Beech's recognition, reflection, and experimentation. Liminal consciousness can be used as a tool of resistance because it involves understanding the sociohistorical context of how Asian American identity as "model minority" is dominant today, while also incorporating the practical element of recognizing, reflecting, and experimenting with individual experiences that occur within structures of relations. Beech's "experimentation" practice is further bolstered by integrating feminist theories of understanding how resistance can happen, such as in Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderlands" and Maria Lugones's practice of "world-travelling"³³.

Residing in a liminal space allows for growth through struggle. The tension of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of Asian Americans become sites of resistance. Grace Lee Boggs said that crisis is both danger and opportunity, and by being aware of liminality as constant tension and movement, one can shift their perspective to see that although liminality is a potential site of crisis with dangerous and risky situations, it is also a place for opportunity and growth. Additionally, remembering the varied history of how the model minority stereotype came about and (re)awareness of the "afterlife" of yellow peril might awaken Asian Americans to forge new paths of resistance (Hartman 2007, 6; C.J. Kim 2023, 7). Asian Americans are not

³³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987); Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (2003); Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007).

only living the “good life” life as a “model minority”, but events like Covid-19 reveal that the afterlife of yellow peril is very much alive.

4.4 Both/And

Although the term “liminal” has its origins in the Latin term “limen” meaning “threshold”, I didn’t want to emphasize this aspect of liminal. I think of liminal as an always-in-motion process. It is never complete. One might argue that living in liminality causes too much instability, uncertainty, and ensuing anxiety and stress by keeping one in a constant state of cognitive dissonance or some type of psychological turmoil³⁴. But following Fricker and Medina, cognitive dissonance and epistemic friction are not bad (Fricker 2007, 167-168; Medina 2013, 7, 194). Experiencing cognitive dissonance and epistemic friction while living in liminality, which includes the push and pull debate of dialogue, redefining, and reconstructing Asian American identity, is all part of resisting injustice and figuring out how to live. Continuing to question while living in the flux of liminality allows for new identities, knowledge, and solutions to emerge.

adrienne maree brown in her book, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017), drawing from Malkia Cyril, offers that the only constant is change, but I want to add that within that constant change we have “stable grounders” in our lives such as relationships, jobs, hobbies, etc. (2017, 68-69). In other words, we have things that keep us grounded in the moment, but over time we are always changing, and this is the hope for better futures. We are who we are right now, but we are also always becoming. And hopefully the changes that emerge allow for new insights and new identities that challenge oppressive

³⁴ See Noble and Walker’s “Exploring the Relationships among Liminal Transitions, Symbolic Consumption, and the Extended Self” (1997).

structures. Liminal consciousness is about embracing harmonious dissonance—recognizing, reflecting, and experimenting with who we are, the tools we have, as well as the identities and new tools we are creating to better society at large. The beauty of liminal consciousness is the constant both/and. So, let's not run away from the liminal. Let's embrace it. And let us look for inspiration in the Asian American experience to do so.

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