



**Epistemic injustice and epistemic positioning: towards an intersectional political economy**

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Keywords:	epistemic injustice, epistemic positioning, Matthew Effect, citational justice, recognition, 'leaky pipeline'
Abstract:	<p>While access to higher education continues to expand, the participation of women and ethnic minority scholars in the academic profession remains low. This paper theorizes the relationship between identity-based epistemic judgments and the reproduction of social inequalities in the academia. It conceptualizes these judgments as acts of epistemic positioning, which entail the evaluation of knowledge claims based on the speaker's stated or inferred identity. These judgments serve to limit the scope of the knowledge claim, making it more likely speakers will be denied recognition or credit. The paper introduces four kinds of epistemic positioning: bounding, domaining, non-attribution, and appropriation. Given the growing importance of visibility and recognition in the context of increasing competition and insecurity in academic employment, these practices play a role in the ability of underrepresented groups to remain in the academia. The paper discusses the implications of these findings for conceptualizing and addressing the relationship between social inequalities and recognition, to build towards an intersectional political economy of knowledge production.</p>

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**Title****Epistemic injustice and epistemic positioning: towards an intersectional political economy****Abstract**

This paper introduces the concept of epistemic positioning to theorize the relationship between identity- based epistemic judgments and the reproduction of social inequalities, including those of gender and ethnicity/race, in the academia. Acts of epistemic positioning entail the evaluation of knowledge claims based on the speaker's stated or inferred identity. These judgments serve to limit the scope of the knowledge claim, making it more likely speakers will be denied recognition or credit. The four types of epistemic positioning – bounding (reducing a knowledge claim to elements of personal identity), domaining (reducing a knowledge claim to discipline or field associated with identity), non-attribution (using the claim without recognizing the author), and appropriation (presenting the claim as one's own) – are mutually reinforcing. Given the growing importance of visibility and recognition in the context of increasing competition and insecurity in academic employment, these practices play a role in the ability of underrepresented groups to remain in the academic profession.

**Key words:**

Epistemic positioning, epistemic injustice, citational justice, Matthew effect, recognition, 'leaky pipeline'

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**Introduction**

It is no longer controversial to assert that the academia is hardly a meritocracy (Littler, 2017; Nielsen, 2016). Sociological research has been instrumental in drawing attention to how processes of academic selection and recruitment reflect, reproduce, and amplify social inequalities (e.g. Boliver, 2017; Lamont, 2009; Bourdieu, 1984, 1996). Yet, as access to

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3 primary, secondary, and tertiary education continues to expand, the sites and mechanisms of  
4 exclusion continue to shift.  
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7 Among the most extensively documented areas of inequality is the percentage of women  
8 dropping out of academic careers, a phenomenon dubbed the ‘leaky pipeline’ (Rivera, 2017;  
9 Winslow and Davis, 2016; Monroe and Chiu, 2012). Recently, more attention has been paid to  
10 the intersectional character of exclusion (Collins, 2015; Ahmed, 2012, 2017), and specifically  
11 the experience of Black and minority ethnic women in the academia (Rollock, 2019; Williams,  
12 Phillips and Hall, 2015). Multiple policy initiatives at institutional, national, and international  
13 levels address gender- and race- or ethnicity-based discrimination and ‘implicit bias’ in hiring  
14 and promotions. Yet, they miss a key mechanism: informal practices of judgment or evaluation  
15 that link the identity of ‘knower’ with the value of the knowledge they produce.  
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20 This paper develops the concept of ‘epistemic positioning’ to conceptualize these practices.  
21 While experiences ranging from being ‘mansplained’ to having one’s work credited to another  
22 (often male, White, senior) scholar have been the subject of extensive commentary and  
23 discussion, including on social media<sup>1</sup>, this concept is the first to explicitly link the literature  
24 on epistemic inequalities (Fricker, 2007; Dotson 2014, 2013, 2011; Mills 2007, 1999) with that  
25 on forms of e/valuation, recognition and promotion in academic settings (eg. Lamont, 2012,  
26 2009; Hamann, 2019; Rivera, 2017; Schulze-Cleven et al, 2017; Angermüller, 2017).  
27 Extending further the framework for understanding links between epistemic subjects and  
28 epistemic objects (Bacevic, 2019), it aims to lay the foundations of an intersectional political  
29 economy (Folbre, 2020) of knowledge production.  
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34 Epistemic positioning builds on feminist and intersectional theories of positionality (eg.  
35 Harding, 1995; Anderson, 1995, 2011; Martin Alcoff, 1993; Wylie, 2003, 2011; Collins, 1995)  
36 as well as positioning theory (Baert, 2012; Lawson, 2016). Yet, while positionality emphasizes  
37 standpoints as a source of epistemic value, I argue that in contemporary academic contexts  
38 positioning is often used as a practice of *devaluation*. In this sense, I draw on the work on  
39 epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007; McKinnon, 2016; Kidd, Medina and Pohlhaus, 2017;  
40 Dotson, 2014, 2012 a,b; 2011) to develop a typology of epistemic positioning that reduce the  
41 value or worth of certain speakers’ knowledge in ways that make it easier to deny them  
42 recognition or credit, something that has special bearing on the increasingly reputational  
43 economy of academic knowledge production (Bacevic, 2018).  
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49 The paper identifies four types of epistemic positioning: bounding, domaining, non-attribution,  
50 and appropriation. What they have in common is the evaluation of speakers’ knowledge based  
51 on their stated or inferred identity. Positioning most frequently takes the form of speech-acts,  
52 that is, can be spoken (said) or written. Conversely, it can also take the form of silence, in the  
53 sense of *not* being said (cf. Ahmed, 2017). In this sense, epistemic positioning has family  
54 resemblances with practices of testimonial smothering or silencing (Dotson, 2011). Yet,  
55 another kind of speech-act is implied in this silence, one that implicitly or explicitly attributes  
56 the knowledge claim to another knower. In this most apparent form, this is what we call  
57 plagiarism; but, as I argue, not only are many cases of plagiarism never recognized or  
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3 publicized as such, they also rely on interconnected forms of epistemic devaluation that make  
4 plagiarism more difficult to identify, prove, and eventually address.  
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7 The paper proceeds as follows. In the first part, I develop the concept of epistemic positioning  
8 to describe how relational judgments frame certain kinds of knowers as differently capable of  
9 possessing or contributing certain kinds of knowledge. The second part describes four types of  
10 epistemic positioning: bounding, domaining, non-attribution, and appropriation. It draws on  
11 three recent cases from the media, and one from the history of sociology, to conceptualize the  
12 relationship between speakers' (stated or inferred) identity and the valuation of their knowledge  
13 claims, arguing that all these cases use the speakers' identity as a *qualifier* of epistemic worth.  
14 The third part considers the implications of this categorization for further research and  
15 theorization of the relationship between (e)valuation and (in)equality in knowledge production.  
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### 20 **From epistemic valuation to epistemic injustice**

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22 Sociologists have long argued that academic selection processes, from university admissions  
23 through grant competitions to professorial appointments, apply a mix of epistemic, social, and  
24 cultural criteria, often reproducing the cultural standards of those who make the assessment  
25 (Lamont, 2009, 2012; Gross, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984, 1996). However, valuation also takes place  
26 through more 'mundane' elements of knowledge production. These include conferences  
27 (Henderson, 2015), book reviews, citations (Ahmed, 2017), obituaries (Hamann, 2016), and  
28 even corridor talk (Downey et al, 1997). If judgments of similarity or 'homophily' play a role  
29 in formal selection procedures, such as job interviews or admissions, it makes sense to assume  
30 they play a role in other, less formal kinds of evaluation too.  
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35 Quantitative analyses seem to confirm this hypothesis. There is substantial gender bias in  
36 teaching evaluations (Mengel, Sauermann and Zolitz, 2019; Boring, Ottoboni and Stark, 2018;  
37 Boring, 2017; Wagner, Rieger and Voorvelt, 2016). Students of all genders rate teachers  
38 perceived as female systematically lower than teachers perceived as male, even when course  
39 material, content, and delivery are virtually indistinguishable (MacNell, Driscoll and Hunt,  
40 2015). Women's articles spend longer in peer review (Hengel, 2017; Kravczyk and Smyk,  
41 2016; Bransch and Kvasnicka, 2017). This could be contributing to the 'publication gap': the  
42 fact women publish fewer articles in peer-reviewed journals (Bright, 2017; Østby et al, 2013;  
43 Bird, 2011). Hengel suggests "women spend too much time rewriting old papers and not  
44 enough time writing new ones" (2017: 3). A gendered publication gap turns into a gendered  
45 citation gap: women are cited less often than men (Hengel, 2017; Østby et al, 2013; Mitchell  
46 et al, 2013), particularly when 'female-sounding' names are in positions that denote primary  
47 authorship, such as single, first, or last author (West et al, 2013: 3). Men cite themselves and  
48 other men more often (King et al, 2017; Mitchell et al, 2013; Masuoka et al, 2007); however,  
49 women who promote their own work risk being perceived as 'pushy' (Moss-Racusin et al,  
50 2010).  
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58 This strongly suggests the lack of diversity at the top of the academic profession cannot be  
59 explained by historical effects alone. Since 1990, women have been the majority of  
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3 undergraduate (bachelor) and master-level graduate students globally (UNESCO, 2019). In the  
4 EU, women make up 54% students and 58% graduates at B.Sc. and M.Sc. levels (or  
5 equivalent), 48% students and graduates at doctoral level, but only 24% grade A (professorial)  
6 academic staff (EC, 2019: 115). In the UK, women are nearly half (46.8%) non-professorial  
7 academic staff, yet less than 20% of the professoriate (UCU, 2012). The representation of  
8 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) scholars is similarly skewed: in the UK, BME academic  
9 staff make up 13% non-professorial academic posts, yet only 7.3% professorial roles.

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14 Women disproportionately drop out of academia, in all disciplines and across career stages,  
15 regardless of income, parental or marital status (Winslow and Davis, 2016; Monroe and Chiu,  
16 2012). B(A)ME and other ‘minority’ staff face additional challenges related to implicit (or  
17 explicit) racial prejudice, bullying and harassment (Rollock, 2019; Arday, 2021, 2018). The  
18 social nature of scientific knowledge production means success depends not only on  
19 performing certain actions, but on those actions being *recognized* and *interpreted* as worthy.

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23 The concept of *epistemic injustice* was coined specifically to address structural arrangements  
24 where the capacity of certain speakers to generate knowledge claims is substantially impacted,  
25 reduced or denied by the virtue of others’ perception of their characteristics such as skin colour,  
26 gender, or age. Miranda Fricker, who provided the first formalization of the term (2007),  
27 distinguished between two types: testimonial and hermeneutic. In this paper, I will be primarily  
28 building on the first; the concept of hermeneutic injustice will be revisited in the conclusions.

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32 Fricker offered two illustrations of testimonial injustice. One is the testimony of Tom  
33 Robinson, a Black man accused of sexually assaulting a White woman in Harper Lee’s novel  
34 *To Kill a Mockingbird*; the other is that of Marge Sherwood, the girlfriend of Dickie Greenleaf,  
35 murdered by Tom Ripley in the film *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Both Tom Robinson and Marge  
36 Sherwood are in positions where their testimonies are disbelieved because of who they *are*.  
37 Tom’s testimony is disregarded in (his own) trial because his word is pitted against those of  
38 White man and a White woman; Marge’s is discredited because it contradicts that of a man  
39 (Tom Ripley, the murderer), allowing Dickie’s father to discard it as ‘just female intuition’, a  
40 category, in his narrative, opposed to ‘facts’ (Fricker, 2007: 17-33; MacKinnon, 2016: 438-9).

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45 Fricker’s argument is situated at the intersection between epistemology and ethics: who and  
46 what is recognized as a proper or equal creator of knowledge – epistemic subject – is not  
47 separate from who can be recognized as an equal participant in the public realm (Fricker, 2013).  
48 In the context of academic knowledge production, however, the crucial question is how  
49 judgments of this sort situate different kinds of ‘knowers’ *relative to* other knowers and,  
50 further, how this impacts their professional standing. This brings us to evaluation as a practice  
51 of positioning.

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55 Originally developed in ordinary-language philosophy (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1953; Austin, 1961,  
56 1975), ‘positioning’ denotes the social process through which humans and other entities are  
57 situated in specific ‘wholes’ or totalities<sup>ii</sup>. Positions are normally defined by rights and  
58 obligations (Lawson, 2016; Baert, 2012; Haslanger, 2012; Harré, 2012). For instance, being  
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3 positioned as a lecturer at a university entails the obligation to perform certain types of work  
4 (teach students, attend meetings, and so on) and the corresponding rights (e.g. to be paid, to  
5 take holiday leave, to be free from harassment and discrimination). Yet, rights and obligations  
6 are not always formally encoded. For instance, Jane's position as a lecturer in history does not  
7 entail the right to be treated as an authority on mediaeval manuscripts by the Head of  
8 Department, nor the right to be identified as particularly knowledgeable about a certain  
9 historical period by the students. While not *formal*, these perceptions certainly shape Jane's  
10 career. Being recognized as an authority has consequences for grant proposals Jane will be  
11 invited to contribute to; being recognized as an authority in the classroom has consequences  
12 for teaching evaluations, which, in turn, will be used as evidence in Jane's promotion.  
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17 This highlights the role of reciprocity (Hornsby, 1994, 1995) or mutuality in academic  
18 recognition. Being able to (literally *in position* to) evaluate another's epistemic claim reflects  
19 inequalities of status and power. This is not only the case in obviously hierarchical relationships  
20 (student–teacher, interview panel member–job applicant), but also, for instance, in  
21 endorsements on book covers, or book reviews. In other words, the question is not *whether*  
22 someone's identity or social position influences how their work will be judged, but *how*.  
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26 The following part introduces four kinds of positioning: bounding, domaining, non-attribution,  
27 and appropriation. The first two, bounding and domaining, are forms of *epistemic reduction*:  
28 they acknowledge the positioned party as a knower (epistemic subject), but substantially limit  
29 or reduce the value of their knowledge claim. The third and the fourth, non-attribution and  
30 appropriation, are acts of *epistemic erasure*: they deny someone's epistemic subjectivity by  
31 failing to credit them as authors of a specific claim and, in the second case, attributing the claim  
32 to another knower.  
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### 36 37 **From epistemic reduction to epistemic erasure**

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39 Bounding: or, 'grievance studies'

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42 Bounding is a form of positioning where one speaker's knowledge claim is interpreted by other  
43 speakers as constrained – 'bounded' – by the person's perceived identity, social position,  
44 personal experience, or combination of these characteristics. This serves to connect the  
45 knowledge claim to the *personal identity* or *experience* of the subject. This type of epistemic  
46 positioning is frequently levelled at women, whose knowledge claims are interpreted as  
47 'emotional', 'subjective' or 'personal', based on the distinction that associates (default)  
48 masculinity with objectivity and neutrality (Haraway, 1991; Pateman and Gross, 1986; Harding  
49 and Hintikka, 1983).  
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54 What 'bounding' shares with 'regular' testimonial injustice is the evaluation of the reliability  
55 or validity of an epistemic claim in relation to the speaker's (perceived or stated) identity. In  
56 the context of this paper, however, what is more relevant is how this type of valuation positions  
57 certain people – and whole disciplines – vis-à-vis the field of academic knowledge production  
58 *as such*. Maria do Mar Pereira describes how opponents to the institutionalization of gender  
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3 studies in Portuguese academia framed knowledge claims in the field as “musings of sexually  
4 frustrated women” or “rants of lesbians” (Pereira 2019: 349). Related framings include the  
5 pejorative designation of certain vocational and arts and humanities programmes as “Mickey  
6 Mouse courses” (eg. BBC, 14 January 2003).  
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10 This kind of reframing does more than just insult or belittle scholars associated with fields such  
11 as cultural or gender studies. Reducing the knowledge claims of those working in this field to  
12 a personal or emotional experience (‘frustration’) serves to argue that it does not count as  
13 ‘proper’ academic knowledge. Positioning certain forms of knowledge as ‘personal’ rather than  
14 ‘academic’ can be seen as a form of boundary-keeping. Traditionally, boundary-keeping in  
15 science was used to exclude things like conspiracy theories or homeopathy (Gieryn, 1983;  
16 Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Yet, bounding only exceptionally denies certain speakers’  
17 epistemic subjectivity *in toto*, or tries to exclude them from the epistemic community *a priori*.  
18 Rather, by seeking to reduce the value of what is being said, bounding positions speakers and  
19 fields as not *sufficiently* scientific, thus casting doubt on their academic validity as such. This  
20 has obvious implications for status and position within the field.  
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26 A recent illustration of bounding is offered by the “grievance studies” controversy. Drawing  
27 inspiration from the ‘Sokal hoax’, the controversy revolved around scholars who had submitted  
28 articles they considered short of academic standards to peer-reviewed journals in fields such as  
29 cultural studies or critical theory, and a few subsequently got published. In an article ‘revealing’  
30 the ‘affair’, they argued that these fields are “corrupting academic research”, and that “open,  
31 good-faith conversation around topics of identity such as gender, race, and sexuality (and the  
32 scholarship that works with them) [wa]s nearly impossible”, so their intention had been to “give  
33 people—especially those who believe in liberalism, progress, modernity, open inquiry, and  
34 social justice—a clear reason to look at the identitarian madness coming out of the academic  
35 and activist left” (Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian, 2018).  
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40 In this excerpt, Pluckrose, Lindsay and Boghossian clearly position themselves as the arbiters  
41 – or, at the very least, defenders – of (good) academic research. They do this despite the fact  
42 the said journals have formal peer review (in fact, reviewers rejected or required major  
43 revisions for most of the nonsense they had submitted). But they do more than just call out  
44 certain journals or editorial practices. As they state, “(...) we call these fields ‘grievance  
45 studies’ in shorthand because of their common goal of problematizing aspects of culture in  
46 minute detail in order to attempt diagnoses of power imbalances and oppression rooted in  
47 identity” (ibid.).  
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52 There is hardly anything odd in problematizing aspects of culture in minute detail to offer  
53 diagnoses power imbalances and oppression. Quite a bit of contemporary sociology,  
54 anthropology, political philosophy, and economics would probably qualify for this description.  
55 The “rooted in identity” element, however, suggests that the problem with these fields is that  
56 they associate oppression *with* identity. This serves to position whole fields and objects of  
57 research as *nothing but* reflections of personal concerns or ‘grievances’. Furthermore, the  
58 association of these fields with “identitarian madness...coming out of the left” (Lindsay has  
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3 since branched out into similar attacks on Critical Race Theory) suggests they frame these  
4 'grievances' as motivated by politics, rather than by 'genuine' scholarship.  
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7 Of course, standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1991) and intersectionality  
8 (Collins, 2015) have long argued that marginalized individuals and groups have specific insight  
9 into mechanisms of power and oppression not normally accessible to those whose epistemic  
10 position aligns with the 'majority', dominant group. This would be the inverse of bounding –  
11 *grounding* one's claim in elements of identity or experience. Yet, for grounding to work – to  
12 'succeed' as a speech-act – other conditions need to obtain: most obviously, an academic  
13 culture that privileges first-person epistemic positions and subjective accounts, or at least  
14 considers them as valid as objectivist accounts. But even in contexts where this could be said  
15 to be the case, equal validity does not necessarily mean equal value. This brings us to the second  
16 type of epistemic positioning: domaining.  
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21 Domaining: must Black scholars write about 'race'?

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23 Domaining consists of limiting a person's epistemic claim to a particular *domain* of knowledge.  
24 In academic knowledge production, 'domains' are usually coextensive with disciplines  
25 (Abbott, 2001; Becher and Trowler, 2001) or *fields*: relatively organized spheres of  
26 recognition, valuation, and exchange (Bourdieu, 1993; Fligstein and McAddam 2012). Fields  
27 are embedded in other fields; however, whether certain products can circulate between fields,  
28 or capital accrued in one translated to another, depends on general – and not always explicit –  
29 forms of valuation.  
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34 The history of human and social sciences can be read through the centering the White,  
35 Occidental, male epistemic subject, and relegation of all other epistemic subjects and forms of  
36 knowledge to 'the periphery' (Spivak, 2003; Connell, 2007; Mills, 2007; Santos, 2014). While  
37 this perspective has been extensively challenged, in part thanks to indigenous, post- and  
38 decolonial, and epistemologies from the South, certain knowers are still routinely associated  
39 with certain domains of knowledge.  
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43 As Jennifer Chisholm recounted in an article in *The Guardian*, Black academics are often  
44 encumbered by the expectation they should focus on 'race':  
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47 I know that my previous research qualifies me to talk about race regardless of my  
48 racial background, but I also know that studying race hasn't been entirely my own  
49 choice – social pressures have led me to this route. On my undergraduate courses  
50 in the US, I was urged to bring my unique perspective to my essays. I realised that  
51 my instructors often wanted and expected me to provide a so-called black  
52 perspective (Chisholm 2018).  
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54 As Chisholm argued, she was not opposed to writing on race, but found the expectation  
55 epistemically limiting. It was predicated on the assumption that the type of knowledge she can  
56 generate is pre-emptively bounded by her identity – or, rather, the identity that she was *seen* as  
57 embodying. Black and minority ethnic scholars in White-majority institutions are often seen as  
58 'embodying diversity' (Ahmed, 2012), which not only places additional expectations on the  
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3 kind of work they are expected to perform – from membership on committees to supporting  
4 other minority scholars and students – but also pre-emptively frames the contributions they are  
5 able to make. As Chisholm framed it: “The assumption that minority students in the social  
6 sciences should research race severely restricts our scope – and what we’re expected to be  
7 knowledgeable about. It’s as damaging as the assumption that women naturally affiliate with  
8 gender studies.” (ibid).  
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12 Domaining, of course, can be seen as a consequence of the structural differentiation of the field  
13 of knowledge production (Abbott, 2001). Most academics position their work in relation to  
14 specific subfields, paradigms, or problems; furthermore, successfully carving out a ‘niche’ can  
15 bring not only recognition, but also funding, followers, even fame (Lamont, 1987). Yet, *who*  
16 is in position to carve out such domains is not independent from existing hierarchies of both  
17 scholars (epistemic subjects) and fields of research (epistemic objects). This hierarchy is visible  
18 in the distinction between ‘general’ knowledge and specialized subfields. The former is usually  
19 defined by the generic term, while the latter by their epistemic object in the form of ‘theory X’:  
20 feminist theory, theories of race, decolonial theory, and so on (Lugones and Spelman, 1983;  
21 Lutz, 1995; Connell, 1997, 2007; Bhambra, 2014; Halvorsen, 2018).  
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27 This shows bounding and domaining are contiguous. Bounding consists of qualifying an  
28 epistemic claim based on the speaker’s (asserted or inferred) identity; domaining frames it in  
29 relation to the speaker’s (asserted or inferred) positioning within a field, subfield, or discipline,  
30 itself often predicated on their identity. Being positioned as ‘sociologist of race’ or a ‘feminist  
31 academic’ signals not only specialization, but also limitation. A ‘sociologist’ can, obviously,  
32 teach a range of sociology courses; a ‘sociologist of race’, however, primarily teaches on race.  
33 Similarly, someone who specializes in theory can contribute to a range of theory-related  
34 programmes; someone who specializes in ‘feminist theory’, however, requires space in the  
35 curriculum dedicated to feminist theory. As Dotson (2013) shows, this itself is a form of  
36 boundary-keeping: conceptualizing a distinction between eg. ‘philosophy’ and ‘feminist  
37 philosophy’ makes it more difficult for certain knowers to be recognized within the discipline,  
38 and thus easier to confine them to a single domain, subdiscipline, or field – what one academic  
39 described as ‘stay in your lane’.  
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46 Domaining, however, is not only epistemically limiting. The decline of public funding for  
47 social sciences and humanities at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century has had  
48 a particularly severe impact on precisely the fields with greater numbers of women and  
49 minority ethnic academics. In the US, there has been a longer-lasting trend of defunding or  
50 closing down departments of ethnic, minority, and women’s studies. These trends are picking  
51 up in Europe, where the UK government has been vocally opposing Critical Race Theory, and  
52 the French government criticizing it as an ‘ideology imported from the US’. Regardless of the  
53 eventual outcome of this most recent iteration of ‘culture wars’, bounding and domaining has  
54 the potential to seriously limit the participation of women and other underrepresented groups  
55 in the academic profession.  
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3 Even when knowledge claims of women and ethnic minority scholars are not reduced to  
4 'personal grievances' or constrained to specific subfields, they do not always get credit. The  
5 next two sections address practices of epistemic erasure: non-attribution and appropriation.  
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8 Non-attribution: 'we regret the omission'  
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10 Non-attribution entails invoking a knowledge claim while omitting to credit its author. Of  
11 course, not all knowledge claims are followed by references; many elements of disciplinary  
12 knowledge are routinely invoked by practitioners without the need to append a specific  
13 paragraph, page, or even the item where it appears. Examples include the unconscious, habitus,  
14 Cartesian dualism, or Foucauldian concept of power<sup>iii</sup>. For many other authors, however,  
15 attribution not only increases the circulation of their work and their own recognition: it also  
16 has direct consequences for employment and promotion.  
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21 A recent case of non-attribution in the US academia offers a good illustration of the intersecting  
22 effects of gender, seniority, and job security. Sarah Milov is an assistant professor of history at  
23 the University of Virginia, and the author of *The Cigarette: A Political History* (Milov, 2019).  
24 In July 2019, shortly before the book was scheduled to come out, Milov heard two male  
25 historians, Nathan Connolly and Edward Ayres, discuss the topic on public radio – without  
26 crediting the book, or the author. As Milov said in an interview: "Every single word they said  
27 was from my book. Then I got to the end of [listening to] a nearly 10-minute segment and did  
28 not hear myself credited at all." (Kitchener, 2019).  
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33 Milov's story is hardly unique. In this case, it was possible to precisely reconstruct the process  
34 through which her work was 'omitted'. The two historians, Connolly and Ayers, have their  
35 own history podcast, 'BackStory', funded by University of Virginia Humanities – the same  
36 school where Milov works. The researchers for the show helped them prepare their appearance  
37 on public radio, relying on Milov's book in the process. After Milov's reaction began making  
38 rounds on social media, the BackStory team Tweeted: "On this week's Here and Now, Ed and  
39 Nathan used the work of Sarah Milov...However, neither Sarah's name nor book were  
40 mentioned. We regret the omission". The public radio show's producers also chimed in, saying  
41 it was "unfortunate" they didn't "credit the author largely responsible for much of the content"  
42 (Fleming, in Kitchener 2019).  
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47 While Connolly and Ayres apologized to Milov, they also attributed the 'omission' of her work  
48 to the constraints of time on air. The editor and digital strategist for 'BackStory' explained 'the  
49 accepted practice': "If I read five books on the subject, I'm not going to say on air that I read  
50 these five people's books...Historians are distilling the scholarship that's available to them"  
51 (Williams, in Kitchener, 2019).  
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55 It is certainly true that scholars do not always cite every source. However, who gets cited and  
56 credited has consequences. Under conditions of increasing competition for a declining number  
57 of permanent positions in the academia, appearances in the media are increasingly relevant as  
58 indicators of public engagement, service, or 'academic citizenship'. They also lead to further  
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3 indicators of esteem – for instance, invitations to give public lectures, or consultancy  
4 opportunities. At the time the show was produced, Milov was coming up for tenure and had  
5 recently become a mother. The public radio show on which Connolly and Ayres appeared is  
6 syndicated to 5 million viewers. Yet the producers never considered inviting Milov to the show,  
7 despite the fact she was working at the University of Virginia and had just published a book  
8 on the very subject they were addressing – the book the producers themselves used to prepare  
9 the segment.  
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13 Drawing on the distinction between ‘active commission’ and ‘passive omission’ (Scott, 2018),  
14 non-attribution can be considered a form of ‘active omission’: deciding to omit crediting  
15 someone’s work distributes value (or academic capital) in ways that reflect and reproduce  
16 inequalities of gender, race, seniority and security. In the case of ‘The Cigarette’, Milov’s  
17 knowledge claim – the epistemic *object* – was clearly deemed valuable enough to merit a  
18 mention. The author – the epistemic *subject* – was not. Regardless of whether it was Milov’s  
19 gender, age, parental status, or position, that ‘made’ the producers, the professors, the script  
20 writers and the editors ‘forget’ to credit her, these acts amount to cumulative disadvantage  
21 (Merton, 1979): they make it less likely certain knowers will achieve recognition, promotion,  
22 or job security.  
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28 Of course, the tendency for recognition or reward to accrue to the most senior or established  
29 scientist in the field is a well-established phenomenon in sociology of science. It is known as  
30 the ‘Matthew Effect’ (after the parable of talents in Gospel according to Matthew, “For to every  
31 one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even  
32 what he has will be taken away”, 25:29). Yet, possibly the most astonishing example of this  
33 effect in sociology is, precisely, the ‘Matthew Effect’.  
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37 Appropriation: or, the Matthew Effect

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39 Appropriation takes non-attribution one step further: it combines the failure to attribute the  
40 claim to its original author (or co-author) with its attribution to someone else.  
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43 Like non-attribution, appropriation is rarely the achievement of a single party or act of  
44 positioning. It rests on a series of interconnected judgments about ‘originality’, ‘contribution’  
45 or ‘relevance’, performed by colleagues, peers, mentors, reviewers, editors, intellectual  
46 biographers, and the public. Erasure, in this sense, often happens retrospectively: yet, it is  
47 equally perpetuated through mutually reinforcing assumptions concerning what kind of  
48 persons or bodies possess what kind of knowledge, and how they should (or should *not*) be  
49 acknowledged in virtue of that. Plagiarism is the most extreme form of appropriation; however,  
50 not all forms of epistemic erasure are plagiarism in the strict sense of the term – or, at least, are  
51 never revealed as such.  
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56 The concept “Matthew Effect in science” first appeared in a study published in the journal  
57 *Science* under the name of Robert Merton (Merton, 1968). Yet, the concept was jointly  
58 developed by Merton and his then-wife, Harriet Zuckerman, later professor of sociology at  
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3 Columbia (Zuckerman, 2011). Zuckerman's research on Nobel Prize winners (Zuckerman,  
4 1977) provided key empirical material for the study; as often the case with husband-and-wife  
5 collaboration, it is difficult to establish which partner played a more decisive role in the  
6 construction of the concept.  
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9 Merton, in fact, explicitly acknowledged this. In the second printing of the article, he stated:

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12 "It is now belatedly evident to me that I drew upon the interview and other materials of the  
13 Zuckerman study to such an extent that, clearly, the paper should have appeared under joint  
14 authorship" (Merton 1973: fn. 1, 439); in the third version of the article, he added: "A sufficient  
15 sense of distributive and commutative justice requires one to recognize, however belatedly,  
16 that to write a scientific and scholarly paper is not sufficient grounds for designating oneself  
17 as its sole author" (Merton 1988: fn 2). For the remainder of his career (and life), Merton would  
18 refer to the article under their joint authorship (Zuckerman, 2011: 131-2).  
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22 However, this did not change how the concept is remembered. To this day, 'Matthew Effect'  
23 is widely attributed to Merton, not to Merton and Zuckerman. The end of the first paragraph of  
24 the Wikipedia entry on 'The Matthew Effect', for instance, mentions that Merton credited  
25 Zuckerman as the co-author, but further on reverts to crediting Merton only.  
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29 Zuckerman insisted that she never felt 'shortchanged' by the omission. In a (very Mertonian)  
30 footnote, though, she added:  
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32  
33 Would joint authorship have made any difference in my own "credit rating"?  
34 Probably not in the short run if the Matthew Effect is a valid depiction of the  
35 allocation of credit among senior and junior authors. Robert Merton was famous at  
36 the time and would very likely have been credited with the paper any way. Perhaps  
37 later, when I did work on my own, some measure of credit might have come but  
38 there are no guarantees of retrospective recognition. (Zuckerman, 2011: 132, fn.  
39 15).  
40

41 Margaret Rossiter coined the term 'the Matilda Effect' to describe the tendency for scientific  
42 recognition to be awarded to men, rather than women, including in collaborative discoveries  
43 (Rossiter, 1993). 'The Matilda Effect' deliberately builds on the concept of the 'Matthew  
44 Effect'. In this sense, Zuckerman may have been the victim of both 'Matthew' and 'Matilda';  
45 her success later in life, if anything, came *in spite of* the misattribution.  
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49 What stands out in this particular case is that the 'omission' of Zuckerman continued despite  
50 the (alleged) author himself (foot)noting that credit should have, in fact, been shared. Another  
51 famous 'footnoter' is Slavoj Žižek, who credited his first wife, philosopher Renata Salecl, for  
52 the original development of quite a few concepts that he is currently famous for<sup>iv</sup>. Yet, while  
53 Žižek attributes a great deal of ideas he engages with to philosophers from Hegel to Marx to  
54 Heidegger, Salecl's ideas seem to have become 'subsumed' under his, that is, her name does  
55 not appear among the philosophers Žižek considers worthy enough to name in the main body  
56 of the text.  
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3 This tells us something important about the mutually reinforcing dynamics of bounding,  
4 domaining, non-attribution, and appropriation. ‘Omitting’ to credit Milov as the author of the  
5 work her senior, tenured, male colleagues used on public radio and ‘forgetting’ to credit  
6 Zuckerman as the co-creator of the term ‘Matthew Effect’ results in credit going to senior,  
7 male, and White scholars. Even when women, ethnic minorities, and other differently  
8 constructed ‘Others’ are credited as knowers, their contributions often appear in footnotes,  
9 acknowledgments or, as it were, brackets. In some cases, their knowledge claims are reduced  
10 to empirical illustrations (‘drew upon the material’) of more general concepts. Alternatively,  
11 women are reduced to providing a ‘female’ perspective on ideas (whose origin is often  
12 attributed to men), while ethnic minority scholars are reduced to providing a perspective on  
13 ‘ethnicity’ or ‘race’. The bounding and domaining of these contributions makes it easier to  
14 ‘disembed’ them from their original context and use without attribution, thus redistributing  
15 epistemic value in ways that reproduce inequalities of gender, race, seniority, and class.  
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## 21 **Conclusions**

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24 Despite formal commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in contemporary of knowledge  
25 production, knowledge claims are still evaluated in relation to knowers’ (stated or inferred)  
26 identity characteristics. This paper introduced the concept of epistemic positioning through  
27 which knowledge claims made by women and ethnic minority scholars are devalued in  
28 different forms of academic interaction, from citation to book reviews to appearances in the  
29 media. While growing attention has been dedicated to correcting for implicit or explicit bias in  
30 situations of formal evaluation, like hiring or promotion practices, the paper argued that  
31 *informal* judgments of epistemic ‘worth’ play a significant role in creating leaks in the  
32 academic pipeline.  
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37 The typology of epistemic positioning introduced in the paper – bounding, domaining, non-  
38 attribution, and appropriation – shows how these acts reduce the value of knowledge produced  
39 by certain kinds of speakers. The first two constitute practices of epistemic reduction, the last  
40 two practices of epistemic erasure. Intersecting and often implicit nature of these judgments –  
41 ‘forgetting’ to credit authors for work used by other speakers, ‘dropping’ coauthors’ names,  
42 crediting them only in footnotes – make them more difficult to identify.  
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46 While authorship, originality, innovation, or ownership are highly contested in social sciences  
47 and humanities, where a great degree of knowledge production revolves around reworking and  
48 discussing ideas of other scholars. This ‘moral economy of openness’ (Bacevic and  
49 Muellerleile, 2017), however, can obscure other inequalities. As the cases presented in this  
50 paper show, inequalities of gender, ethnicity/race, and seniority work in ways that deprivilege  
51 certain knowers and make it less likely their ideas will be recognized or credited. In the context  
52 of increasing competition and increasing job insecurity in the academia, these forms of  
53 devaluation have direct consequences for their ability to achieve promotion or job security.  
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58 The typology introduced in this paper has several implications. One is for the project of  
59 decolonizing sociology (eg Connell, 1997, 2007; Bhabra, 2014; Brunsma and Padilla Wyse,  
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2  
3 2019; Go, 2017; Puwar, 2020). The concepts of bounding, domaining, non-attribution, and  
4 appropriation allow the tracing of processes through which certain authors and epistemic  
5 perspectives were included in, or excluded from, the disciplinary ‘canon’. Equally, however,  
6 they point to the need for an ongoing critical analysis of how citation, recognition, and  
7 attribution of authorship intersect with the longer-lasting inequalities in higher education and  
8 research.  
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12 If epistemic injustice is seen as an individual ‘vice’, the discussion inevitably leans towards  
13 individual culpability and individual solutions (Anderson, 2012) – e.g. practices such as  
14 imploring scholars to exercise diligence when relying on or citing others’ work, checking for  
15 plagiarism, etc. But not only are women and people of colour less likely to be recognized and  
16 credited as knowers: they are also less likely to be believed (Dotson, 2011) when they assert  
17 their authorship of knowledge claims or draw attention to acts of ‘appropriation’. This also  
18 allows these forms of devaluation to continue, with an occasional *mea culpa* or footnote *à la*  
19 Merton.  
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23  
24 This at last brings us to the other kind of epistemic injustice: hermeneutical. By offering a  
25 systematization and a typology of these practices, this paper aims to contribute to ‘conceptual  
26 engineering’ (eg Haslanger, 2012; Diaz-Leon, 2020) in ways that would make these practices  
27 easier to name and identify. But it goes beyond that. Emphasizing the relational and  
28 performative nature of forms of positioning highlights the need to rethink our own practices,  
29 and how they relate to the complex intersections between recognition, promotion and  
30 inequality in the context of increasing precarity and competition in knowledge production’.  
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35  
36  
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43 March 2020; and at the American Sociological Association’s conference (online) in August  
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46 happened to me”. Your names and experiences are too many to list, but this paper is just the  
47 start of a larger project to study how intellectual contributions are bounded, domained, non-  
48 attributed and/or appropriated.  
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### 54 **Funding information**

### 55 **Notes**

<sup>i</sup> Like other forms of inequality and injustice, some of these practices have for years been criticized in concepts such as ‘mansplaining’, ‘White ignorance’, ‘more-of-a-comment-than-a-question’, and ‘patronizing’ to describe experiences of being silenced or positioned as epistemically less capable. Similarly to some other concepts that have ‘migrated’ from activist to general discourse, these practices are routinely dismissed as denoting a particular social group’s experience (of victimhood, devaluation, oppression), rather than a general(izable) social trend (see Manne’s analysis of ‘misogyny’, 2018). This form of dismissal (in this paper, ‘bounding’) serves to reinforce the boundary between diagnostic terms that can be considered ‘proper’ objects of sociological analysis (for instance, ‘positioning’) and those that are considered ‘lay’ (such as ‘mansplaining’).

<sup>ii</sup> While ‘positioning’ can refer to inanimate objects – for instance, we can talk of ‘positioning’ a rock as a boundary stone between two fields – the process itself inevitably requires some degree of community agreement. Searle (2010) framed positioning as the key constitutive process of human reality: in other words, there are no ‘objects’ in the social world that are not positioned.

<sup>iii</sup> As is evident in the latter two examples, these concepts in disciplinary parlance are, in fact, attributed to specific thinkers or schools of thought. In some cases, the association between a thinker and a concept is so strong that practitioners would need to specify use of the concept diverging from this association (eg. ‘Kleinian unconscious’ or ‘habitus as developed by post-Bourdieuian scholars’).

<sup>iv</sup> Thank you to Mark Carrigan who drew my attention to this.

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