

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND THE LEGITIMIZATION OF FEMINIST  
EPISTEMOLOGY

PEACE YAWA AVORNYO

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EPISTEMOLOGY

BY

PEACE YAWA AVORNYO

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## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it or whole has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date: .....

Name: Peace Yawa Avorny

### Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature..... Date: .....

Name: Husein Inusah (PhD)

Co-Supervisor's Signature..... Date: .....

Name: Eromosele Eric Usifoh (PhD)

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of epistemic injustice and how it legitimizes feminist epistemology. The argument is that the prevalence of epistemic injustice in mainstream epistemology has a positive implication for the legitimization of feminist epistemology as a sub-field of study. Epistemology, conventionally, has been construed as a discipline that deals with inquiries about knowledge devoid of social dimensions. These scholars hold the view that political power and other social constructs have no role to play in the conceptualization of knowledge. What that means is that, gender, place, time and historical factors have no impact on knowledge production. However, in this thesis, employing the normative approach, I argue that epistemic injustice exists in mainstream epistemology and that, these forms of injustice are perpetuated by the use of social factors contrary to the mainstream epistemological position that there is no social dimension to knowledge. I also argue that an attempt at minimizing epistemic injustice would call for a consideration of the arguments in defense of social epistemology. This consideration calls for a revision of some core-tenets of mainstream epistemology which legitimizes feminist epistemology, as revisionist social epistemology.

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**DEDICATION**

To my mum, Christiana Coffie

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Background to the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	6
Purpose of the Study	6
Thesis Statement	7
Delimitation	7
Research Approach and Sources of Information	8
Literature Review	8
Organization of the Study	15
CHAPTER TWO: EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND MAINSTREAM EPISTEMOLOGY	
Introduction	16
Epistemic Injustice	17
Mainstream Epistemology and Epistemic Injustice	23
Conclusion	34
CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY	
Introduction	36
The Social Dimensions of Knowledge	36

Preservationism	36
Expansionism	39
Revisionism	42
A Case for Revisionist Social Epistemology	43
Objectivity	43
The Nature of the Epistemic Agent	47
Conclusion	49
CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS OF EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE FOR FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY	
Introduction	50
Revisionist Epistemology	52
Feminist Standpoint Epistemology	52
Postmodernism	56
Feminist Empiricism	63
Feminist Epistemology	67
Implications of Epistemic Injustice for Feminist Epistemology	67
Conclusion	74
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	
Summary	75
Conclusion	85
REFERENCES	86



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

If knowledge production has a standard criterion and a female engages in the production of knowledge based on this standard, then why must her findings be rejected or why must she be epistemically oppressed? Many scholars, especially social epistemologists have argued that there is epistemic oppression of the female in philosophy, and this can be found in mainstream epistemology. Baber (1994) shares the same opinion when she asserts that mainstream epistemological theories of knowledge are male-biased in so far as they fail to account for the features of women's experiences which are different from the characteristic experiences of males (Baber, 1994, p. 403). For instance, due to the devaluing of feminine nature, the knowledge that mothers have of children is not greatly appreciated. Also, research done by females is taken less seriously than that done by males.

According to Anderson (1995), "laboratory, field and natural experiments alike show that the perceived gender of the author influences people's judgement of the quality of research, independent of its contents" (p. 60). The case of Babara McClintock is a good example of a scientific discovery made by a woman which was not taken seriously. It took more than three decades for biology academics to recognize the significance of her discovery of genetic transposition (Anderson, 1995, p. 60). Cases of this nature are all instances of epistemic injustice against females and it shows how there is an existing bias against women when it comes to inquiries about knowledge. Male bias or the bias against women then

becomes the dominant epistemology (knowledge claims) underlying scientific research and other areas of inquiry which are contributing factors to the slow progress of inquiries about conceptualizations of knowledge.

The motivation for this research stems from the generally held perception that women who are high on the academic ladder mostly got there not because of how knowledgeable they are but because they are “females” and as a result mostly climb up not by the studious means men would have used (Fricker, 2007, p. 47). This perception seems so widespread to the extent that studies show how researches conducted by females are viewed and considered as less significant to those of males. However, if there are generally accepted standards of knowledge production, what has the sex of the epistemic agent got to do with that which is produced as knowledge? The impression one may get is that there is an existing injustice against women with regard to knowledge production.

Also, since mainstream epistemology strongly rejects the idea that social constructs such as gender, race and class have a role to play in knowledge production, one would begin to wonder what the justification for the epistemic oppression against women might be. Hence, it is important to investigate why there exists epistemic injustice and its implications for other social epistemologies which strongly criticize the standards of knowledge set by mainstream epistemology. If the implications of epistemic injustice on mainstream epistemology leads to the recommendation of other social epistemologies, then the understanding that knowledge can be situated and that social constructs have a major role to play in conceptualizations of knowledge, will better enable us to appreciate why feminist

epistemology is a legitimate sub-field of study. For the purposes of this research, the epistemic injustice under investigation will be one that is suffered by the female sex. The study seeks to find answers to the following questions: Why the female or feminine gender is denied access to contribute to knowledge production even when the normative standards for producing knowledge are met by such epistemic agents? Has the sex of the epistemic agent anything to do with that which can qualify as knowledge? If there are standards for knowledge production then females must not suffer the epistemic injustice that is observed in academic research, philosophy and specifically in epistemology. A piece of writing or a claim on knowledge must be either accepted or denied based on the standards for the assessment of knowledge claims and not because the author of such a knowledge claim is of a particular gender.

In this study I investigate the concept of epistemic injustice and its implications for feminist epistemology. Miranda Fricker, who is recognized to have introduced the concept of epistemic injustice opines that epistemic injustice occurs when a person is wronged in their capacity as a subject of knowledge and thus in a capacity essential to human value. According to Fricker, there are two kinds of epistemic injustice; testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Testimonial injustice, for Fricker occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word. This has to do with the activity of classifying a person's words to a lower grade of credibility just because of the circumstances or socialisation of the person. It is prejudice in the economy of credibility which leads to someone being wronged in their capacity

to give knowledge. An example is when the contribution made by a female on a panel discussing football is not given much value like the contribution made by a man due to the prejudice or stereotype in most parts of Ghanaian homes that football is a thing for men. Hermeneutical injustice on the other hand occurs as a result of an existing gap in collective interpretive resources which puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. When a society lacks the understanding of particular concepts and as a result tend to defend or support actions which have inherent injustices. An instance given by Fricker is when a person suffers sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept of explaining what sexual harassment is and what it constitutes (Fricker, 2007, p. 1).

It is caused by structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources which wrongs an epistemic agent in his/her capacity as a subject of social understanding (Fricker, 2007, p. 9). For instance, a culture that lacks knowledge on freedom of speech or expression would be propagating an injustice when people who would like to share their opinions on issues are denied the opportunity. In fact, it should be stated that this work will be concerned with both testimonial epistemic injustice and hermeneutical epistemic injustice because I am more concerned with how prejudice leads to the suppression of the female in her attempt to convey knowledge to others or contribute to the production of knowledge. This can take either the form of devaluing knowledge produced by women or how the lack of resources to account for women's experiences which can

contribute to knowledge production has become an epistemic injustice against women.

Kristie Dotson also holds the view that epistemic oppression is the persistent exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production (Dotson, 2012, p. 32). Following these scholars, I hold the view that epistemic injustice/ epistemic oppression is when a person or an agent is denied access to make claims to knowledge production and its justification and also when a person or a group is unable to account for their experiences just because of a lack of shared societal concepts on these experiences. Just as people suffer injustice based on their class, race, tribe, sexuality and functionality, there are also instances where people especially the female sex is denied the opportunity to contribute or have access to knowledge production and that is what I describe as epistemic injustice. Some scholars use epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression interchangeably. Others think injustice is a type of oppression however, this research will consider epistemic injustice as different from epistemic oppression.

Epistemic injustice could simply mean epistemic discrimination in the evaluation of knowledge produced by a female whilst epistemic oppression will refer to the act of suppressing females' effort for churning or producing knowledge which may involve placing impediments on the path of the intellectual /knowledge generation effort of women. In this sense, hermeneutical epistemic injustice will fall under epistemic oppression. So, epistemic injustice in this study will refer specifically to testimonial epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression will be used to refer to hermeneutical epistemic injustice which occurs as a result of the lack of

a shared social understanding of certain experiences of women or marginalized groups and so leads to the practice of denying their specific experiences the opportunity to form knowledge.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The generally accepted mainstream view of epistemology holds that knowledge is objective, universal and that there is no relation between political power, social constructs and knowledge (Hartsock, 1996, p. 41). Also, mainstream epistemologists are of the view that differences among the knowers are irrelevant and therefore a knower is in a position to posit human universality and homogeneity with respect to knowledge. However, there is a glaring problem of epistemic injustice and oppression largely rooted in the relation between social constructs, political power and knowledge. The question worth asking is: if social and political dimensions are not relevant to the production and evaluation of knowledge, then why is there epistemic injustice and oppression grounded in social and political factors. I take epistemic injustice and oppression in this study to have a positive implication on the legitimization of feminist epistemology. This is a digression from scholars who construe epistemic injustice and oppression as emerging from the attempts by adherents of mainstream epistemology to denounce feminist epistemology.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to critically examine why there is epistemic injustice in epistemology and its implication on feminist epistemology. This aim would be achieved by examining the following study objectives;

1. To establish that there is epistemic suppression and to inquire into the nature of such suppression or the forms of these epistemic injustices.
2. To discuss instances and cases of epistemic injustice in mainstream epistemological practices.
3. To examine how social constructs such as gender impact on knowledge production.
4. To also assess the effect of social constructs on the integrity of knowledge and its implications on the legitimization of feminist epistemology.

### **Thesis Statement**

I intend to show in this thesis that political power and social constructs, specifically gender, plays a role in the production and evaluation of knowledge and its justification contrary to the mainstream epistemological claim that there is no relation between political power and knowledge. I argue that the prevalence of epistemic injustice and oppressions are indicators that legitimize feminist epistemology rather than its denunciation.

### **Delimitation**

The study will be restricted to the area of epistemic injustice in epistemology. Here, I will emphasize specific cases of epistemic injustice and why they occur. This study will not focus on the various waves and types of feminism and their political agenda but rather it would be limited to the influence and role of gender in the way knowledge is conceptualized.

## **Research Approach and Sources of Information**

The study is purely normative and the approach involves conceptualization, interpretation, explanation, analysis and inference. Materials such as philosophical books, journals, articles, electronic books and any other relevant literary work that is related to this study will be reviewed and relevant contents used in the development of the work. Works of prominent feminist epistemologists will be read and duly analyzed and cues taken from their observations, conclusions to enrich this study.

## **Literature Review**

One major theme of mainstream epistemology that seems to be motivating epistemic injustice is the notion of dualisms of mind/body, rationality/irrationality, culture/nature, masculine/feminine and so on which was propagated by Plato in his *Republic*, in the book VI, 509d and 510b. Most critics of mainstream epistemology including feminist epistemologists see this classification or dualisms as a bias and makes mainstream epistemology androcentric. This is as a result of the privileging of the male sex with the notion of rationality whereas the female sex is associated with irrationality. Postmodernists alike, also reject the mainstream epistemological view of privileging of the rational discourse. They also note that there is no discourse abstract from the social, cultural and political contexts as well. Hence, privileging rationality in favour of the male sex is androcentric. Most scholars have argued that these dualisms have been portrayed in certain basic ideas that crosscut the justification for gender, class and racial oppression. For Bell Hooks, one such idea is the either or/ dichotomous thinking (Hooks,1984, p. 29). Either or



dichotomous thinking categorizes people, things and ideas in terms of their differences from one another (Keller, 1985, p. 8). For instance, the terms in the dichotomies of black/white, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/opinion, mind/body and subject/object are all mostly defined or explained in terms of their opposites, one is always seen as superior to the other instead of being identified as complementary terms. The identification of an existing difference is not the problem but how this difference is perceived; when one is always defined as a lack of the other, that is what makes it problematic and fuels domination, superiority and discrimination. The point is that these ideas gain meaning only in relation to their counterparts. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) makes a very important observation about the basic idea concerning the either or/dichotomous thinking. Collins points out that in either or dichotomous thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its “other”. For instance, Whites and Blacks, males and females, thought and feeling or reason and emotion are seen as complementary counterparts.

They are regarded as fundamentally different entities related only through the definition as opposites. What this means is that feeling cannot be incorporated into thought or even function in conjunction with it because in either or/dichotomous thinking, feeling retards thought, values obscure facts, and judgement clouds knowledge. This idea accounts for the gender discrimination against women in academic writing and research where findings by women are covered up but same findings by men are awarded with the mindset that women are

emotional and that makes them lack rationality since these dualisms are only defined in terms of their opposites. It is in view of these observations that this study seeks to show that based on the existence of epistemic injustices against women even with the presence of generally accepted standards for knowledge production, we can say knowledge is a product of the society and so knowledge claims must be considered together with who and how it was produced. Thus, the place, time and historical antecedents of a knower must be regarded as equally important as the truth, belief and justification conditions for knowledge production in order to avoid or minimize the level of epistemic injustices prevalent in epistemology.

Also, objectification is identified as a central element to the process of oppositional difference. In either or /dichotomous thinking, one element is objectified as the other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled. A Marxist assessment of the culture/nature dichotomy argues that history can be seen as one in which human beings objectify the natural world in order to control and exploit it (Brittan and Maynard 1984, p. 198). This has led feminists to argue that the identification of women with nature, as being central to women's subsequent objectification by men as sex objects. This is evidenced in the societal perception that a woman exists solely for the pleasure of a man. This idea of objectification which is as a result of the dualisms of mainstream epistemology one way or the other has contributed to the increase in sexual harassment cases against women in most parts of the world. This is because women who are abused sexually by men are conditioned to see themselves as lucky for men wanting to have

something to do with them since their sole aim in life is to please men or be explored by men just as humans objectify nature and explore it to their advantage.

Furthermore, the mainstream epistemological position that the subject of knowledge is always one and an individual but is in a position to produce universal knowledge is one of the factors motivating epistemic injustice. This is because the individual knowing subject as identified and established in mainstream epistemology is always a male since rationality is privileged over emotions and the male sex is identified with the former. Due to this, the female suffers what Dotson (2018) describes as an under privilege by occupying a lower epistemic status that renders her claims on knowledge production worthy of disregard while the male enjoys the privilege of an epistemological high ground. Epistemological high ground here refers to contrastive privilege that generates a defense of one's claims and the ability and/or authority to challenge competing claims (Dotson, 2018, p. 141). The male as a result of enjoying the mainstream epistemological position of privileging rationality in his favour, benefits from this epistemological high ground which strengthens the epistemic injustice meted out to the female in the sense that the knowledge produced by the female will always be disregarded and considered inferior to that of the male because emotion is defined in oppositional terms to rationality which is considered the right yardstick for the production of knowledge by mainstream epistemology. One will note that the mainstream epistemological standpoint of privileging rationality in favour of the male sex, creates an epistemological high ground for the masculine gender. Thus, knowledge claims coming from a male is given more credibility and is defended with the authority to

challenge other competing claims from the other sex, female. This explains the existence of credibility excess and credibility deficit in testimonial practices leading to injustices. Fricker (2007) explains credibility excess to mean a situation where an epistemic agent receives more credibility than he/she otherwise would have while credibility deficit describes the situation of receiving less credibility than a person otherwise would have. For instance, a person's accent carries an epistemic charge which can lead to credibility excess or deficit. For instance, in some communities in Ghana, there is the perception that anybody who speaks slangs is knowledgeable or makes a lot of sense which is a clear case of credibility excess if the content of the speech is not examined independently from the accent of the speaker. Also, when a group of people have no other choice but to depend on the information provided to them by an authority in the person of a community nurse who is not a specialist in optometry on a patient's eye condition, then there is a practice of granting credibility excess to this nurse.

The implications of maintaining a subject centered epistemological consideration as observed in mainstream epistemological practices is that one can achieve epistemic power, in the form of an epistemological high ground and hold terrifying views (Dotson, 2018, p. 143). This is evidenced in mainstream epistemology where due to the privileging of rationality to the male, most mainstream epistemologists hold the terrifying view that women are irrational. One other terrifying view of mainstream epistemology is the idea that epistemology "proper" shouldn't consider the social factors of an epistemic agent that contribute to the creation of knowledge. Epistemic power as used here refers to the differing

ranges of privilege and under privilege that are co-extensive with one's epistemic status with respect to knowledge possession, knowledge attribution, knowledge production and/or knowledge creation (Dotson, 2018, p. 130).

These epistemological high grounds which enforce epistemic injustice against women do not emerge from a vacuum. Dotson rightly notes that they become possible due to extra epistemic or structural considerations. Structure here, can be identified as components of our social and political landscapes within which and with respect to which knowledge claims are produced and made (Dotson, 2018, p. 146). Dotson (2018) calls it the situational dependence of knowledge while Jose Medina (2012) refers to it as contextuality. Thus, we cannot deny the fact that we are all dependent on our social and political organizations for the realization of any epistemic relation. For instance, in social situations where women are considered as more intuitive than rational, and also made not to pitch their words against the words of men, there is the use of identity power at work in a passive way (Fricker, 2007, p. 14).

This in every way motivates the injustices in epistemic practices. This is because identity is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange, because of the need for hearers to use stereotypes as heuristics for the spontaneous assessment of an interlocutor's credibility. Scholars who appreciate the need for structure in our inquiries of knowledge explain their ideas with the purpose of showing that structural investigations into knowledge suppose that in order for any *S* to know any *P*, especially in context *C*, there must be persisting conditions that

we are all softly aware of that serve as a backdrop of our knowledge claims and attributions.

More succinctly stated: *S* knows that *P*, in context *C*, given social, political, cultural, and institutional environment *E*. An assumption in, what I call, structural epistemology, is that who *S* is, what *P* concerns, and what contextual features have epistemic impact, are all conditioned by social, political, cultural, and institutional environments (Dotson, 2018, p. 146).

That is to say, *S* knows that *P* does not emerge *ex nihilo*. It emerges and makes sense within social, political, institutional and, indeed, cultural arrangements that, though they may seem extra-epistemic, have epistemic impact. Many structural epistemologists are typically concerned with some range of extra-epistemic features that can be said to condition what is allowed to become knowledge. For example, when thinking through knowledge production in science, some feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science examine ways that funding entities, educational institutions, cultural orientations, and governmental organizations all have impact on “knowledge” produced in “scientific investigation” (Harding, 1991; Douglas, 2009).

We get the idea that there is an active role played by structural conditions of the social and political undertones of our epistemic practices. The point then is, if as mainstream epistemologists suggest, the social factors are irrelevant for epistemology, then there shouldn't be cases of epistemic injustice. Epistemological high grounds should not be created based on the social construct of gender which

seem to favour men, but this seem to be exactly what motivates the mainstream position of epistemology, since knowledge that is privileged in the academy is that which has been labelled by Western societies as “masculine” and women have been prevented from acquiring and producing it, often on the pretext that it would divert their vital energies from their natural reproductive labour (Schiebinger, 1989).

### **Organization of the Study**

This work is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. This chapter consists of background to the study, Thesis Statement, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, methodology and research approach, delimitation, organization and a review of related literature. The second chapter is an examination of why epistemic injustice exists. Here, I examine social conventions that make it possible for epistemic injustice to take place even in the face of available normative standards for conceptualizations of knowledge in mainstream epistemology.

The third chapter is made up of an examination of social epistemology. Such as preservationism, expansionism and revisionism. Here, I investigate the role of gender in the attainment of knowledge, how social constructs influence what we call knowledge and also whether the knower is part of the known or reality is out there waiting to be discovered. The fourth chapter is an evaluation of the findings in chapter three; the various revisionist theories in social epistemology. It also deals with the implications of epistemic injustice for feminist epistemology. The fifth and final chapter summarizes the research and makes some recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND MAINSTREAM EPISTEMOLOGY

#### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to examine why epistemic injustice exists in epistemology. What are the possible motivating factors for the practice of epistemic injustice and oppression in terms of knowledge attribution and creation? There are certain social conventions and mainstream epistemological practices that seem to enforce the existence of epistemic injustice and oppression and this is what I explore in this chapter. I will begin by explaining the concepts of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. This will be made clearer by considering cases or instances of epistemic injustice that qualify as testimonial and hermeneutical injustice respectively. Epistemic injustice as we have already established in Chapter One is when an epistemic agent is denied credibility just because he/she is a member of a social group.

Testimonial injustice is when an epistemic agent's assertions are given less credibility than they actually deserve due to prejudice on the part of the hearer. In other words, when a speaker suffers credibility deficit. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when epistemic agents are unable to explain or describe their own experiences just because there are no available resources with which they can make sense of their experiences. An examination of these concepts brings to the fore some implications on the epistemic agent as a person or a knowing subject and also has some implications on knowledge as a whole. Hence, this chapter will begin by looking at the various forms of injustices and also look at some of the implications



of epistemic injustice on the epistemic agent and knowledge production, attribution and creation. As part of this Chapter, I will examine some of the tenets or claims of mainstream epistemology that seem to support or promote epistemic injustice. A realization that mainstream epistemology in any way supports epistemic injustice will require a revision of the terms of mainstream epistemology and also demand a consideration of the arguments in defense of other social epistemologies in the next chapter. The arguments of these social epistemologies will then be examined to see if they help eliminate epistemic injustice and give us an equally robust definition of knowledge.

### **Epistemic Injustice**

The two forms of epistemic injustices identified for this study in Chapter One are testimonial epistemic injustice and hermeneutical epistemic injustice. The aim here is to find out how these injustices come about and the reasons or motivations behind them. Epistemic exploitation which is also identified as a form of epistemic oppression, would be considered and its motivations examined to see how or whether it has any relation with the tenets of mainstream epistemology. Instances of these various forms of epistemic injustices would be highlighted to provide a better understanding and appreciation of the facts. One main criterion for conceptualization of knowledge according to mainstream epistemology is holding a true belief with a justification for such a belief. As a result, it would be a gross disservice to any epistemic agent whether male or female if such an agent is denied the opportunity to make contributions to knowledge processes without any reasons when the criteria for knowledge are met by such an agent or knowing subject.

Epistemic injustice arises when somebody as a result of belonging to a social group is wronged in his/her 'capacity as a knower'. This may happen usually in two ways: testimonial injustice, which occurs when a speaker's assertions are given less credibility than they deserve because the hearer has prejudices about a social group of which the speaker is a member; or hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when a social structure rendering social group (women) powerless, members of that social group (women) lack the cognitive resources to adequately make sense of their social powerlessness. With regard to testimonial injustice, it would be helpful to illustrate this with an example used by Jane McConkey (2004), a true story told by Patricia Williams:

I was shopping in Soho [in Benetton's] and saw a sweater that I wanted to buy for my mother. I pressed my round brown face to the window and my finger to the buzzer, seeking admittance. A narrow-eyed, white teenager wearing running shoes and feasting on bubble gum glared out, evaluating me for signs that would pit me against the limits of his social understanding. After about five seconds, he mouthed 'We're closed', and blew pink rubber at me. It was two Saturdays before Christmas, at one o'clock in the afternoon; there were several white people in the store who appeared to be shopping for things for their mothers. I was enraged. At that moment I literally wanted to break all the windows of the store and take lots of sweaters for my mother. In the flicker of his judgmental grey eyes, that sales child had

transformed my brightly sentimental, joy-to-the world, pre-Christmas spree to a shambles . . . I am still struck by the structure of power that drove me into such a blizzard of rage . . . No words, no gestures, no prejudices of my own would make a bit of difference to him; his refusal to let me into the store . . . was an outward manifestation of his never having let someone like me into the realm of his reality (Williams, 1991, p. 44).

Later in the book, Patricia Williams went on:

A rumour got started that the Benetton's story wasn't true, that I had made it up, that it was a fantasy, a lie that was probably the product of a diseased mind trying to make all white people feel guilty. At this point I realized it almost didn't make any difference whether I was telling the truth or not – that the greater issue I had to face was the overwhelming weight of a disbelief that goes beyond mere disinclination to believe and becomes active suppression of anything I might have to say (Williams, 1991, p. 242).

The lesson we draw from this submission shows how the treatment meted out to Patricia by a racist teenager has ended up in propagating an epistemic injustice and a testimonial injustice for that matter against Patricia. This is evident in the fact that most people who heard Patricia's story were inclined to disbelieve it due to their prejudiced mindset. As a result, Patricia didn't have the opportunity to speak about her experience. Also, the readiness with which people disbelieved

her narrative emphasized the nature of the prejudice which seems to enforce the idea that Patricia ‘did not know’ what she was talking about. Thus, Patricia had been denied knowledge of her own experience about which she tried to testify. She suffered a credibility deficit just because she belongs to a particular social group (blacks) and as a result the credibility of her testimony is brought into question. She has been given less credibility than she actually deserves and that is what is referred to as testimonial injustice.

With regard to hermeneutical injustice, it would be helpful to illustrate this with an example used by Fricker from the memoir of Susan Brownmiller:

Carmita Wood, age forty-four, born and raised in the apple orchard region of Lake Cayuga, and the sole support of two of her children, had worked for eight years in Cornell’s department of nuclear physics, advancing from lab assistant to a desk job handling administrative chores. Wood did not know why she had been singled out, or indeed if she had been singled out, but a distinguished professor seemed unable to keep his hands off her. As Wood told the story, the eminent man would jiggle his crotch when he stood near her desk and looked at his mail, or he’d deliberately brush against her breasts while reaching for some papers. One night as the lab workers were leaving their annual Christmas party, he cornered her in the elevator and planted some unwanted kisses on her mouth. After the Christmas party incident, Carmita Wood went out of her way to use the stairs in

the lab building in order to avoid a repeat encounter, but the stress of the furtive molestations and her efforts to keep the scientist at a distance while maintain cordial relations with his wife, whom she liked, brought on a host of physical symptoms. Wood developed chronic back and neck pains. Her right thumb tingled and grew numb. She requested a transfer to another department, and when it didn't come through, she quit. She walked out the door and went to Florida for some rest and recuperation. Upon her return she applied for unemployment insurance.

When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. She was ashamed and embarrassed. Under prodding – the blank on the form needed to be filled in – she answered that her reasons had been personal. Her claim for unemployment was denied. ‘Lin’s students had been talking in her seminar about the unwanted sexual advances they’d encountered on their summer jobs,’ Sauvigne relates. ‘And then Carmita Wood comes in and tells Lin her story. We realized that to a person, every one of us – the women on staff, Carmita, the students – had had an experience like this at some point, you know? And none of us had ever told anyone before.’

It was one of those click, aha! moments, a profound revelation. ‘The women had their issue. Meyer located two feminist lawyers in Syracuse, Susan Horn and Maurie Heins, to take on Carmita Wood’s unemployment insurance appeal. ‘And then . . .’, Sauvigne reports, ‘we decided that we also had to hold a speak-out in order to break the silence about this.’ The ‘this’ they were going to break the silence about had no name. ‘Eight of us were sitting in an office of Human Affairs,’ Sauvigne remembers, ‘brainstorming about what we were going to write on the posters for our speak-out. We were referring to it as “sexual intimidation,” “sexual coercion,” “sexual exploitation on the job.” None of those names seemed quite right. We wanted something that embraced a whole range of subtle and unsubtle persistent behaviors. Somebody came up with “harassment.” Sexual harassment! Instantly we agreed. That’s what it was’ (Brownmiller, 1990, p. 280).

The injustice suffered by Wood which is identified as a form of epistemic oppression in this work is hermeneutical because it has to do with how the specific means by which cognitive resources for interpreting and explaining one’s experience are inappropriately distributed or unevenly distributed in accordance with the underlying unequal power relations concerning social identities. What this means is that Wood did not have the right or appropriate words generally accepted by the community to explain her situation. This happens to be the case because

some social beings are already considered superior to others and that is about the unequal power relations.

For Wood, 'her hermeneutical disadvantage renders her unable to make sense of her ongoing mistreatment, and this in turn prevents her from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it' (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). The lack of relevant literature to explain the experience of these women in the scenario above is the oppression being talked about. A group that lacks the relevant concepts to account for their characteristic experiences and as a result suffer in silence are epistemically being oppressed.

Women, as records have it, have had to endure quite an amount of social powerlessness during the era of second-wave feminism which even still lingers on till date due to the way unequal power relations had structured negative social attitudes and legal precedents. As a result of occupying a socially powerless position, women have been 'hermeneutically marginalized' and that has prevented their access to epistemic resources that they require to help them make adequate sense of their powerlessness. Hence, this hermeneutical marginalization created and sustained a form of propositional paralysis, what Miranda Fricker has referred to as 'cognitive disablement' (Fricker, 2007, p. 153), where for instance, victims of sexual harassment are even not able to account for the features of their experience for their full understanding.

### **Mainstream Epistemology and Epistemic Injustice**

I intend to show that mainstream epistemology which advocates for a universal, objective and value neutral account of knowledge is guilty of promoting

epistemic injustice by promoting existing biases in epistemology. The idea that mainstream epistemology is biased against the female sex in knowledge production is that which has led many scholars, most especially feminists, to conclude that mainstream epistemology is androcentric. It is androcentric because it privileges rationality in favour of the male sex and allows the same sex (male) to enjoy an epistemological high ground.

The first reason why I argue that mainstream epistemology promotes epistemic injustice is that mainstream epistemology privileges rationality in favour of the masculine sex and associates women with emotions which is considered as irrationality. Granting the male sex an epistemological high ground just because the sex in question is associated with rationality is a major way of promoting testimonial epistemic injustice. This is because when it comes to the conceptualization of knowledge women are bound to suffer a credibility deficit due to their sex.

Instances of considerable professional disadvantages that are meted out to women at their work places include; the story of one Egyptian woman, working in Cairo, who has to always write down any suggestions she wants to make in every meeting, on a sheet of paper, quietly pass it on to a sympathetic male colleague and have him make the suggestion as a man, and then after it is well received, the woman can now join in the discussion from there. According to this story, this lady adopted this practice because she had observed that when her ideas were presented as her own, they were met with incredulous reception which shows clearly how she



was considerably disadvantaged by the prejudicial attitudes toward her word as a woman (Fricker, 2007, p. 46).

The point here is that due to the existing prejudice that the words of a woman did not carry much weight as the words of a man, women are often denied credibility. Some of these prejudices are that women do not or ought not to speak when important decisions are being made, which all stem from the mainstream epistemological position on the dualism of rationality as against irrationality, with the woman being associated with the latter, this woman is denied the freedom to express herself and it leads in the long run to the existence and practice of testimonial epistemic injustice in most parts of the world.

Another instance of the presence of testimonial epistemic injustice is one suffered by a woman in the USA. The woman in question told Fricker how she tended not to worry any longer about who got credit for ideas she put forward, so long as the ideas got implemented. So, she never minds if she made a suggestion and it was not taken up until a male team member had verbalized it; for her, getting things done was all that mattered and that gave her job satisfaction. However, she noted that it had probably been an obstacle to the development of her career because her manager had on more than one occasion remarked during her annual performance assessments that she has been extraordinarily 'lucky' to be in the teams she had been a member of since they had been so successful (Fricker, 2007, p. 47). The sad truth, however, is that due to prejudice and the privileging of rationality in favour of the men in the workplace, this woman has been receiving less credibility for her ideas and that is holding back her career. Denying these

women credibility or the promotion they deserve just because you have and still hold the belief that women are over-emotional and have inferior intelligence is wrong and epistemically unjust. Also, thinking that only the male team members have genuine ideas that may account for the team's success is flawed both epistemically and ethically.

This is because one is flawed epistemically and ethically when such a person still holds on to a wrong belief after coming into contact with evidence to its contrary. Such a belief then becomes a prejudice because such a person is not ready to give up the wrong belief in the face of available evidence. Here, the available evidence is that at least some of the ideas discussed in these meetings come from women even though they are presented as coming solely from the men. So, it becomes a testimonial injustice when we deny women the opportunity to contribute to the creation of knowledge or the opportunity to take part in important decision-making processes just because they are women. What must be mentioned is that all these prejudices are social in nature.

The form of prejudice at play here is what has been described as identity prejudice. It is an identity prejudice in the sense that how the society identifies them(women) has now become a barrier to their access to knowledge creation and justification. We can then say that identity prejudice occurs when one person makes an evaluative judgment about another person merely on the basis of some fundamental aspect of their social identity (race, gender, class, etc.). Identity prejudice accounts for most of the instances of credibility deficit experienced in most instances of epistemic injustice. It is a fact worth acknowledging that every

society has an identity for particular people, entities and even concepts and that accounts for what is described by some scholars as identity power.

For instance, Fricker holds that identity power refers to the operations of power which are dependent upon agents having shared conceptions of social identity (Fricker, 2007, p. 14). This has to do with what it means to be a woman, a man or what it means to be gay, or straight, young or old and so on. What this means is that whenever there is an operation of power that significantly depends on a high degree on shared imaginative concepts of a social identity, then identity power is at play. In such instances, how a society perceives a man may place the gender in an epistemically advantaged position or a disadvantaged one. For instance, in the examples we just mentioned, it is evident that the mainstream epistemological position of privileging rationality in favour of the male is the reason why some women are unable to freely express their opinion at work. Also, because women have been associated with irrationality as contrasting rationality of the male sex, even women who are able to contribute to major discussions and decision making body tend to receive less credibility just because they are women and not necessarily because what they had to say was irrelevant.

It is worth noting that gender happens to be one of the common areas for the exercise of identity power just like social power. It must be stated that identity power can be used actively or passively (Fricker, 2007, p. 15). For instance, when a man uses his identity (epistemic high ground) as a man to cause a woman to defer to his words then we can say there is the use of identity power (gender) actively but in situations where the stereotype that women are more intuitional than rational and

so are made not to pitch their words against those of men, then the identity power here is more of a passive one. The point about the identity power and social power is just to show the degree at which prejudice as a result of how we have been conditioned by the society to see things and think about issues leads to the propagation of epistemic injustice, mostly testimonial injustice in our discourses. As a result, knowledge claims made by women have always had deficits or suffered from biases. This is due to the already existing demarcation of epistemological high ground attributed to men and a relative under privilege offered to women by mainstream epistemology.

The second point on how mainstream epistemology supports epistemic injustice is that mainstream epistemology does not make room for the inclusion of women's experiences in the production of knowledge, which leads to the existence of hermeneutical injustice. Baber (1994) shares the same opinion when she asserts that mainstream epistemology or traditional theories of knowledge are male-biased in so far as they fail to account for the features of women's experiences which are different from the characteristic experiences of males (Baber, 1994, p. 403). For instance, due to the devaluing of feminine nature, the knowledge that mothers have of children is not greatly appreciated. I do not mean that women have a special capacity for knowledge production which men do not have. What I mean here is that because the parameters surrounding the epistemic agent of mainstream epistemology only favours the male, whatever knowledge is produced is only limited to the scope and experiences of the masculine sex. As a result, there are no resources available to make sense of the experiences that are peculiar to women.

This indirectly denies women the chance to contribute to the production of knowledge. And the inability to get the required hermeneutical resources to describe what one feels and be confident to say what one knows is a hermeneutical epistemic injustice inherent in mainstream epistemological practices.

The lack of relevant resources to account for the experiences of the female has been misconstrued by the society and mainstream epistemologists as a deficiency of the female which prevents her from making any contributions to knowledge, this in itself is a hermeneutical epistemic injustice as we have already recognized in Miranda Fricker's work (2007). Even though the mainstream epistemologists argue against the impact of social elements on the conceptualizations of knowledge, they cannot deny the fact that the position and environment of an epistemic agent affects knowledge and justified true belief. It also points to the fact that apart from the truth, belief and justification conditions for knowledge, the social factors of an epistemic agent also ought to be taken into consideration in conceptualizations of knowledge. This is because the elements that seem to be motivating the practice of epistemic injustices are all social in nature as shown up. Since, mainstream epistemology appears to promote social conditions in addition to justified true belief, it is prudent to want to pay attention to other social epistemologies in an attempt to address the problem of injustice in epistemology. This is because social epistemologies agree that gender, position and other social constructs play a significant role in the production, attribution and creation of knowledge. Hence, any theory or definition of knowledge that may attempt to do away with epistemic oppression and injustice must first of all be ready to

understand and accept that social factors such as gender, place, time, power, functionality, and others play a major role in knowledge production.

Also, mainstream epistemology normalizes oppressive conditions by promoting biased stereotypes in epistemology. Prejudices and stereotypes have been identified as the most common sources of most epistemic injustices. It must be stated that without doubt, stereotypes and prejudices are products of a socialization, or they are social constructs. Fricker, who is widely recognized in every discussion involving epistemic injustice, also agrees that stereotypes and prejudices are the leading factors in most instances of epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007, p. 30). According to Fricker, stereotypes are widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes (Fricker, 2007, p. 31). Popularly, we describe stereotypes as descriptions of a group of people based on their race, class, geographical location or any particular trait that is common to them. Thus, when a particular group of people are associated with certain attributes by a society, we say there is a case or instance of stereotype at play. For instance, in most parts of Ghana, there is the association of Gas (People who originate from the Greater Accra region) with the attribute of fighting or being very quarrelsome. This stereotype, however, can become a tool to propagate epistemic injustice specifically a testimonial injustice when a Ga who is reported to the police for having assaulted someone is not given the required audience or is denied credibility just because he is a Ga and so it is assumed he cannot be innocent. Thus, the Ga's plea that he is innocent is outrightly disregarded due to the stereotype at play. This is an instance of testimonial injustice and it operates in various dimensions or social

circles by denying people especially women, of credibility due to existing stereotypes.

Fricker (2007, p. 31) gives an instance of how the stereotype that women are more intuitive than rational as a case in point. She argues that in contexts where it is assumed that 'intuitive' suggests irrationality, the stereotype becomes derogatory and as a result it can be used to propagate an instance of credibility deficit against a woman who tries to make a claim with regard to knowledge conceptualization and that becomes an instance of testimonial epistemic injustice.

However, in a context where such a stereotype is regarded as a cognitive asset, the stereotype becomes complimentary and that emphasizes the point that stereotypes can be used to favour a group or an idea just as it can also be used to relegate an idea or a group to the background. Many of the stereotypes of historically powerless groups such as women, black people or working class people variously involve an association with some attribute inversely related to competence or sincerity or both, over-emotionality, illogicality, inferior intelligence, evolutionary inferiority, incontinence, lack of breeding, lack of moral fiber, being on the make etc. (Fricker, 2007, p. 32). For instance, the stereotype that women are irrational has to do with what most have associated with showing too much emotions, and it has also been equated to incompetence, illogicality and even inferior intelligence by mainstream epistemologists. Mainstream epistemologists such as Plato, Descartes, Aristotle and John Lock who privilege rationality in favour of the male sex seem to suggest that the female has inferior intelligence and

as a result cannot engage in any reasonable discourse with respect to knowledge production.

This, they (mainstream epistemologists) believe is true because of the overly emotional nature of the female even though it is out of place and that position makes them (mainstreamist) androcentric and eventually promotes epistemic injustice. My take on the overly emotional nature of women being regarded as irrationality in women which makes them lack intelligence or makes them possess inferior intelligence is that one can infer that there is an indirect case of hermeneutical epistemic injustice at play. The fact that women possess an amount of emotions does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that they(females) cannot be rational beings or intelligent. I think it is the lack of enough hermeneutical resources to explain the role of emotions in women and the role of emotions in men as well that has led to the privileging of the rational discourse in favour of men and also associating emotions to irrationality.

It should be stated that prejudices can serve both positive and negative purposes. It can favour a group or a person just as it can also be used against someone or some group. For instance, the same stereotype that downplays the rationality of women is the same stereotype that places the male sex on an epistemological high ground. For instance, in the example I stated above regarding a Ga who is reported to the police for having engaged in a fight, whoever was involved in the fight with the Ga, automatically enjoys an epistemological high ground by the stereotype which turns into a prejudice that 'Gas love fighting' when he or she is not questioned or suspected to have an equal chance of being guilty of



the charge being leveled against the Ga even though he or she was involved in the crime too. This shows clearly how prejudices can serve both a positive and a negative purpose in motivating epistemic injustices.

The point about stereotypes and prejudices that ought to be made is that prejudices mostly tend to go unchecked when it operates by way of stereotypical images held in the collective social imagination of people. By promoting existing dualisms and always associating women with the supposed inferior versions such as nurture as against nature, emotions as against rationality, objects as against subjects, mainstream epistemology indirectly promotes oppressive conditions in epistemology.

Furthermore, another way by which mainstream epistemology supports epistemic injustice is the mainstream epistemologists' denial of the claim that the gender of an epistemic individual knowing subject is irrelevant in knowledge production and attribution. With that, mainstream epistemologists go ahead to defend the possibility of an objective account of knowledge which is not plausible. This is because one is led to ask the following questions; how can a gendered being produce knowledge that is objective? Can a social being engage in a value-free enquiry? The point is that whatever knowledge is produced will have the fingerprints of the gender and other social factors of the epistemic agent on it. There can be no value free form of knowledge and that is what mainstream epistemologists are unable to grasp. Even the postulations of mainstream epistemology come from a group of epistemologists who are gendered, belong to a community and have individual perspectives. And as such, their contributions stem

from the experiences acquired from these social environments and gendered experiences.

Moreover, because we live in a community where the higher you go, the fewer women you see up the academic ladder and in places where relevant decisions are made, coupled with the societal expectation of women to talk less and be mostly silent, there is also the question of whether women are knowers at all? If women talk less or practice the culture of silencing, then definitely knowledge discourses are deficient of the opinion of the female sex. As a result, there is an epistemological flaw in the structure of knowledge in the society because no matter how good these individual men are, as epistemic agents or knowers, they cannot account for the experiences and known things of the female.

### **Conclusion**

Consequently, the conceptual resources available in the discourse on knowledge are not open enough to capture the experiences of the female. The female suffers an injustice since she is unable to describe her experiences and lay claim to knowledge. It is this inherent flaw in mainstream epistemology that accounts for the hermeneutical epistemic injustices available. Mainstream epistemology encourages injustice by ignoring the social factors (gender) in theorizing about knowledge. Hence, any attempt to address these injustices must begin by correcting the wrongs of mainstream epistemological practices. And this I believe can be achieved by first of all considering knowledge as a social entity most especially for the purposes of this research, realizing that the gender of the epistemic agent is equally important.

A careful investigation into the issues of epistemic oppression and epistemic injustice shows clearly the lapse or gap in the existing mainstream epistemological practice of knowledge creation, attribution and justification. Given the available information, it is clear that mainstream epistemology directly and indirectly seems to be fostering the various forms of epistemic injustice, epistemic oppression that exist in epistemology. It is also evident that mainstream epistemology already employs social elements in conceptualizations of knowledge even though they deny it. As a result, there is the need for an investigation into other theories of knowledge that provide solutions to problems identified with mainstream epistemology. However, I intend and hope to succeed at proving that the involvement of social factors in the creation of knowledge is a step in the right direction towards an attempt to deal with the issues of epistemic injustices, oppressions and exploitations in epistemology.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

I have shown in chapter two that the idea of epistemic injustice prevalent in mainstream epistemology is largely social rather than theoretical. This means that there is a social dimension to knowledge and justified belief. This chapter is a review of social epistemology. It looks at social epistemology from Goldman's point of view while rehearsing the three sub-fields of social epistemology. It discusses among other things the point of convergence and divergence of mainstream epistemology and social epistemology. Focus is largely placed on the role of social factors in knowledge production and its justification. Lastly, this chapter also shows why revisionist epistemology is the one that should be given more primacy in the attempt to define social epistemology.

#### **The Social Dimensions of Knowledge**

Social epistemology is roughly the view that social elements are required for conceptualization of knowledge. According to Alvin Goldman (2010), there are several perspectives to social epistemology. I will discuss the various perspectives in the following pages focusing extensively on their relationship with mainstream epistemology.

#### ***Preservationism***

Preservationism is one of the categories of social epistemology. According to Goldman, theories or philosophers who ask questions that have hitherto bothered

epistemologists, can be considered as social epistemology as long as answers to such questions preserve the core assumptions of mainstream epistemology (Goldman, 2010, p. 5). What this means is that, aspects of mainstream epistemology that concerns itself with the examination of issues and questions that have plagued epistemology historically should be referred to as social epistemology. This is because such issues still have the core tenets of mainstream epistemology in place. And since they maintain the core tenets of mainstream epistemology, they should be regarded as ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ epistemology. Goldman avers that there are three areas of mainstream epistemology which already have social dimensions. These are; doxastic decision-making with social evidence (DDM) and gathering social evidence and speech and communication with an informational purport (debates, assertions and argumentations).

When it comes to doxastic decision-making with social evidence, Goldman admits that there is nothing social about doxastic decision-making. But argues that in instances where the epistemic agent’s beliefs have content concerning what other people have said, other people’s opinions which the doxastic agent may have acquired at second or third hand, then one can say that such an agent uses social evidence. Goldman also argues that testimony and peer disagreement also use social evidence (Goldman, 2010, p. 7). For instance, in testimony, there is the question of when an epistemic agent is justified in accepting another person’s testimony. Preservationists such as Alvin Goldman (2010), Keith Lehrer (1990) and Michael Williams (2001) hold that this happens to be the major question of all social epistemologists. Also, questions on peer disagreement deal with the

epistemic reasonability or justification and as a result can be referred to as social epistemology since they feature social evidence.

Another important activity in addition to DDM is the idea of gathering new evidence. This activity of gathering new evidence is sometimes referred to as ‘enquiry’ or ‘investigation’. In science, it includes the design and implementation of tests, measurements, and experiments. Works in epistemology, narrowly construed, do not display extensive discussion of the theory of evidence gathering, investigation, or experiment.

But there is plenty of discussion in the philosophy of science branch of epistemology. In a memorable phase of philosophy of science Karl Popper (1962) is noted to have defended a falsificationist approach to scientific experimentation over a verificationist approach. Another sample admonition in the theory of testing, endorsed by assorted philosophers of science, is the need or necessity of seeking a variety of evidence. Preservationists hold that the practice of gathering new evidence for the justification of beliefs in epistemology can be social in nature. Scholars such as Feldman (2000, p. 188) have argued vehemently against this approach with the idea that evidence gathering is not the focus of epistemological assessment. The goal of epistemological assessment for Feldman is to have a reasonable belief and not to gather evidence.

The third aspect of the preservationist thesis is the social nature of speech and communication. Preservationists also hold that the normative theory of dialogue, dialectic or argumentation should be viewed as part of social epistemology. Asserting and speech activities for instance ought to be classified

under the heading of social epistemology because they are social in nature. Goldman (1994, p. 11) gives an explanation of the argument in defense of argumentation as part of social epistemology. He argues that even in discussions and debates, some of the arguments that are advanced by an arguer to an opponent require the use of justification standards that have social dimensions and that makes it social. For instance, in the use of enthymemes by an arguer, the missing premises are unconsciously provided by the listener and consequently justified using the available information of the social agent.

Thus, in the presentation of an enthymematic argument, those premises that are left unexpressed, do not pose any challenge to the argument. This is so because of the audience's epistemic circumstances which happen to be rooted in the social surroundings regarding the topic of the argument and their interrelationship with the speaker's epistemic end (Goldman,2010, p. 11). Even though Goldman maintains that the social dimensions to the practices already existent in mainstream epistemology makes it social epistemology, he also admits that it is not enough reason to refer to social epistemology as that which has been described above under the preservationist thesis. Doxastic Decision Making (DDM) with social evidence, gathering social evidence and speech and communication with an informational purpose may be social in nature but can and must be seen as part of the broader spectrum of social epistemology.

### *Expansionism*

Expansionism is that part of epistemology which holds that there should be an addition of three or more topics to the agenda of mainstream epistemology. The

expansionist position just like its name, advocates for an expansion of the scope of traditional epistemological viewpoints. The idea here is that there should be the inclusion of other areas or topics to the already existing mainstream epistemological practices. These topics to be included are not part of the agenda of mainstream epistemology but they should continue with the core tenets of mainstream epistemology and as such ought to be referred to as social epistemology. Any such additions, should be that which qualifies as ‘real’ epistemology (Goldman, 2010, p. 14).

For Goldman, topics that ought to be added to mainstream epistemology should include the epistemic properties of groups or collective doxastic agents and the influence of social systems and their policies on epistemic outcomes (Goldman, 2010, p. 15). It has been observed that scholars in recent years have given endorsement to the idea of holding collective agents or groups as subjects of propositional attitudes. Some of which include; (Gilbert 1989; Bratman 1993; Tuomela 1990; Schmitt 1994). Goldman argues that since we mostly speak of collective entities such as courts, juries and scientific panels as making decisions, there is the need to reflect on the epistemic properties of such intentional attitudes of the collective agents in question. This is because once an individual’s judgement over several propositions can be assessed for their epistemic salience, then it is equally appropriate to assess similar propositions made by a collective group in order to ascertain its rationality. The reason why this argument is advanced is because it can be verified that the epistemic positions of collective agents with



respect to particular propositions are even more important in the society than the epistemic salience of individual propositions. (Goldman, 2010, p. 14).

Based on the above, Goldman thinks it is right to consider groups as subjects in epistemology. The mainstream epistemological positions ought to remain the same but also add to its domain the idea of a collective epistemic subject of knowledge.

When it comes to the second topic of including social systems and policies in determining epistemic outcomes, Goldman argues that many sectors of social life and institutions engage in practices which lead to epistemic ends. As a result, social epistemology should be concerned with these enterprises (Goldman, 2010, p. 18). Goldman admits that even though these concerns of the expansionist projects are not frequently seen in mainstream epistemology, they will nonetheless still be a continuation of some mainstream epistemological practices. They would apply epistemic criteria of evaluation to admittedly non-standard kinds of objects: not individual agents or even collective doxastic agents, but social systems or policies that have a significant causal impact (for good or ill) on society's epistemic outcomes. Thus, for Goldman, expansionist social epistemology can be directed at various social institutions, theories and concepts or methods so long as they continue with the tenets of mainstream epistemology. Such institutions and theories may include; legal adjudication systems, and epistemic rationale for freedom of speech and epistemic approaches to democracy (Goldman, 2010, p. 19).

### *Revisionism*

The third form of social epistemology is revisionism. It is revisionism because it calls for a revision of most of the tenets of mainstream epistemology. It departs from the practices of mainstream epistemology and ventures into new territory and as a result, Goldman claims it is not part of 'real' epistemology since it calls for a revision of the tenets of mainstream epistemology. Hence, it should not be referred to as social epistemology. Postmodernism, deconstructionism, social construction and various social studies of science fall under this heading. Revisionists argue against most of the tenets of mainstream epistemology. For them, knowledge for instance, is not truth entailing but rather an institutionalized belief (Goldman, 2010, p. 3).

Revisionists also deny individuals as epistemic subjects/agents but argue for the acceptance of groups or communities as knowers (Lynn Hankinson-Nelson, 1993, p. 124). Richard Rorty is one of the philosophers identified with this category of ideas. Rorty (1979) is noted to have posited the death of mainstream epistemology by arguing against the search for objective truth. His words are; 'keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth' (Rorty, 1979, p. 377). Also, another strand of social constructionism holds that truths or facts are not in or of the world; they are not 'out there' to be discovered but are mere social fabrications or constructions (Latour and Woolgar 1986). Another scholar and philosopher, Steven Shapin (1994, p. 6) puts it succinctly that 'truth is a social institution'. What this means in effect is that the social elements surrounding an epistemic agent determines what such an agent deems true or false. For the purposes

of this essay, I argue in favour of revisionist social epistemology. I argue that in order to have a robust theory of knowledge, some of the mainstream epistemological practices ought to be revised. This is because as we have already established in the second chapter of this work, most of these mainstream epistemological practices promote the existence of epistemic injustice.

As such, a robust theory of knowledge which will aim at epistemological justice will have to do away with anything that propagates the existing injustice in epistemology. For instance, the issues of objectivity as we know it is not tenable. How to achieve objective knowledge devoid of subjectivity as promoted by mainstream epistemology seems highly untenable. It is based on this reason and others that I argue that revisionism qualifies as real epistemology because it is an attempt to improve on the knowledge practices that has led revisionists to propound theories such as feminist epistemology, postmodernism and so on.

## **A Case for Revisionist Social Epistemology**

### ***Objectivity***

Objectivity may be an ideal case, but it has its shortfalls even though historical evidence apparently supports its epistemological worth. It would have been ideal to obtain objectivity in our epistemological practices because it would be a much more reliable account of knowledge. However, the reality of human organization and institution reveals to us that it is impossible to have objectivity given the subjective perspective of all individuals. This realization has led various scholars including Harding to argue that objectivity in scientific research for instance, is a delusion. Hence, objectivity as it is understood in mainstream

epistemology, has no positive impact on science. Harding talks about what she thinks is wrong with the concept of objectivity in the following words;

[T]he problem with the conventional conception of objectivity is not that it is too rigorous or too 'objectifying,' as some have argued, but that it is not rigorous or objectifying enough: it is too weak to accomplish even the goals for which it has been designed, let alone the more difficult projects called for by feminisms and other new social movements" (Harding, 1992, p. 438).

Harding continues:

The feminist standpoint, like feminist empiricism, clearly asserts that objectivity never has been and could not be increased by the exclusion or elimination of social values from inquiry. . . [I]t is commitment to anti-authoritarianism, anti-elitism, and anti-domination tendencies that has increased the objectivity of science and will continue to do so. (Harding, 1989, p. 196).

Objectivity in mainstream epistemology has always been construed as a product that is devoid of partiality and value-free. That has led some scholars to refer to it as the "god-trick". The "god-trick" because it would have to look like the activity of a god in relation to the rest of the universe. In the sense that this god will look on or partake in the activities of the universe without having a particular perspective. However, insights in social epistemology has exposed the difficulty

with this idea of objectivity since every epistemic agent will always have a perspective. That has led some scholars to argue for a feminist form of objectivity. In contrast to more traditional definitions of objectivity, feminist objectivity is achieved not through transcendence or the “god-trick” of being the Deity in relation to the rest of the universe but rather through a dynamic engagement with partial perspectives that are the “result” of marginalized positions (Bartsch et al., 2001, p. 134). The practice of feminist objectivity is about becoming, in this case, becoming answerable for what we learn how to see. It means taking subjectivity seriously. So, two important insights follow from here: firstly, the acknowledgement of the influence of gender as a category for analysis and organization; and, secondly, the deconstruction (or redefinition) of mainstream commitments to truth, objectivity and neutrality.

The point here is that subjectivity must be taken into account in the quest to attain objectivity. This is because knowledge is not above the level of human activity with all its values, desires, politics, yearnings, machinations and so forth. These elements most definitely have their impact on the knowledge produced by epistemic agents. The question that readily comes to mind is how we are able to justify the claim that even though the epistemic agents have these human values, the knowledge they produce is value-free. This is because, as I have already stated in this essay, firstly, the observer is always “somewhere”, at a certain social location, which simultaneously enables and constrains his or her view. Secondly, it has already been established that the legitimation of knowledge claims is intimately tied to the networks of domination and exclusion (Lennon and Whitford, 1994, p.

1). It is these elements of domination and exclusion that give rise to attribution of excess credibility and the denial of credibility that birth epistemic injustice in traditional epistemology. It is not simply due to bad practice that such imprinting occurs; it is inevitable, as claimed by Lennon and Whitford (1994, p. 2). In other words, knowledge is always rooted in the particular perspective of knowledge producers and it is therefore important that we make transparent the procedures involved (Letherby, 2004, p. 183).

One important observation made by Hankinson concerning the implications of rejecting the claims of feminist epistemology which I totally agree with is that we make knowledge an entity that is not interrogated with the epistemic agent inclusive. That is, we separate knowledge from the epistemic agent. That is also bad for the epistemological discipline because when that happens, traditional epistemologists who argue vehemently against social epistemology even though they haven't taken the time to examine its claims, feel empowered to ignore the insights offered by feminist epistemology. It must be stated that the attempts by several scholars to posit theories that criticize traditional epistemology is to enable scholars arrive at a theory that is better placed to produce knowledge that is free from prejudice and ensure a just epistemic atmosphere instead of the injustice prevailing. That is why it is important we take into consideration the insights of the arguments brought forth by feminist epistemologists that knowledge and theories are always informed by the historical, social and political values and interests of their producers (Hankinson, 1995, p. 41). Thus, the claims of feminist

epistemologists are worth investigating since they have some significant contributions to mainstream epistemology.

### *The Nature of the Epistemic Agent*

One of the central claims advanced in Code's *What Can She Know?* is that there is a need for a "remapping of the epistemic terrain" so as to incorporate what Code calls "subjective factors" in the conceptualization of knowledge (Code, 1991, p. 4). Among the factors Code cites are the particularity of cognitive agents, their embodiment, their "location" in specific and concrete circumstances, and their emotions and interests. In insisting on the need for attention to these factors, Code explains that her point is not to denigrate projects of establishing the best foundations possible or of developing workable criteria of coherence. It is to argue that the questions addressed in the traditional epistemological projects do not exhaust the important questions to be asked about knowledge whose answers matter to people who are concerned to know well. Among them are questions that bear not just on criteria of evidence, justification, and warrant, but on the 'nature' of cognitive agents: questions about their character; their material, historical, cultural circumstances; their interests in the inquiry at issue (Code, 1991, p. 8).

On the basis of these observations, I agree with Hankinson when he poses the following questions:

Could a viable theory of evidence not take into account the material and cultural circumstances of cognitive agents? Not take into account the divisions in cognitive labor and authority that characterize epistemic communities (our largest social

community, science research facilities, academic disciplines, and so on)? Could a viable account of evidential warrant not recognize the 'situated-ness' of cognitive agents including epistemologists, scientists, and philosophers of science? It would appear that questions such as those to which Code draws our attention would need to be addressed within anything purporting to be a viable account of evidential warrant (Hankinson, 1995, p. 42).

The above exposes the limitations of the traditional approach to epistemology which calls for a consideration of claims of feminist epistemologists. Thus, it is important that we take seriously the insights that feminist epistemology offers. This is presented in the following words by Townley.

Epistemologists need to take seriously matters of social position, race, gender, sexuality and the like because social hierarchies can both limit the spheres of action available to agents from non-privileged groups and discourage those from privileged groups from being accountable for their actions when they seek and claim knowledge (Townley, 2006, pp. 39-40).

And when that happens, there is the issue of credibility excesses and deficits, leading to injustices in epistemology. This is because one person feels he or she is socially placed in a privileged position and so would want to decide what another person knows or does not know. It even leads to instances of gas lighting others and denying them access to the production of knowledge.



## Conclusion

With this exposition of the various social epistemologies, I examined why it is important that the social aspects of knowledge be given more attention. In this chapter, I also discussed three social epistemologies and defended the need for one, which is revisionism. I discussed preservationism and its limitations, expansionism and its limitations too. I noted that preservationism and expansionism are not plausible options for social epistemology because they advocate for the preservation of the core tenets of mainstream epistemology. A preservation of the tenets of mainstream epistemology will also mean a preservation of those practices that promote epistemic injustice in epistemology. This is because, as already stated, most of such tenets promote epistemic injustice. Hence, the logical conclusion one would arrive at in the fight for epistemic justice, is to revise these core tenets of mainstream epistemology which already seem to be propagating epistemic injustice. As such any theory which argues for a preservation of such practices, seem not to know what it is talking about. It is based on this, that I argue that revisionist epistemology is and ought to be regarded as a social epistemology.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**IMPLICATIONS OF EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE FOR FEMINIST**  
**EPISTEMOLOGY**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the implications of both testimonial and hermeneutical epistemic injustice for feminist epistemology. I will begin by evaluating my findings of the various social epistemological positions I examined in chapter three in order that I can establish why I chose revisionist epistemology over the other social epistemologies. I will also look at some of the negative effects of epistemic injustice on the epistemic agent and why I argue that epistemic injustice legitimizes feminist epistemology. Finally, the claim of mainstream epistemology that the epistemic agent is and must always be an individual even though the knowledge produced is universal, is equally problematic and also a basis for the existing injustice in epistemology. Making knowledge production an affair of a single individual (who is a male) is that which constrains the mainstream epistemologist from accepting the obvious fact that social elements and conventions play a very significant role in the conceptualization of knowledge. Its implications are also very glaring; the negative effects on knowledge as a whole and its consequences on the very intrinsic value of the epistemic agent. The point about the role social elements play in the production of knowledge or in our epistemic practices is succinctly captured by Giladi Paul (2017) in the following words:

The foundational insight of this area of ‘critical social epistemology’, elegantly articulated by Charles Mills (2007), is the idea that our epistemic practices – from innocuous instances of belief formation to the ways one goes about credibility attribution – involve *social mediation*. In the spirit of Wilfrid Sellars’ (1997) famous rejection of a non-conceptual given acting as the normative foundation for perceptual beliefs and judgements, critical social epistemology argues that social structures and social attitudes permeate our epistemic practices all the way through: an important advantage of the Sellarsian commitment to conceptually mediated intentional states and perceptual judgements is how one can be alert to the ways in which race prejudices or gender biases or many other long-held socio-cultural views ‘can embed themselves in our thinking, distorting even basic instances of empirical claim making, memory, and belief-formation’. Arguably, the most serious distortion involves acts of epistemic injustice (Giladi, 2017, p. 142).

It is the injustice identified in mainstream epistemology that have led social epistemologists to suggest a revision of the mainstream epistemological project. As has already been established in the chapter two of this work, mainstream epistemology promotes epistemic injustice directly and indirectly based on the core tenets it upholds. It was shown that the existence of dualisms in mainstream

epistemology is one of the means by which individuals are given excess credibility or even denied credibility. This is because there is the privileging of rationality in favour of the male sex and an association of the female with that which is considered irrational. It has also been identified that traditional or mainstream epistemology does not make room for the inclusion of women's experiences in the conceptualization of knowledge. Also, traditional epistemologists do not see the relevance of taking into account the social, historical and political environments of the epistemic agent in the production of knowledge even though these same social elements are used in the propagation of epistemic injustice. These and many more reasons called for the various arguments in defense of a social epistemology, and a revisionist one for that matter. The following are some of the positions of revisionist social epistemologies which seek to drive home the point that knowledge is situated and there is the need to take into account the social constructs of an epistemic agent in the production of knowledge. This is because, no matter what we choose to tell ourselves, the social factors surrounding an epistemic agent will always play a role in the conceptualization of knowledge.

### **Revisionist Epistemology**

#### ***Feminist Standpoint Epistemology***

Feminist standpoint epistemology was initially developed in the social sciences, primarily in the works of Nancy Hartsock (1998) in political science and by Dorothy Smith (1974) in sociology. As a methodology for the social sciences, standpoint epistemology emphasizes the ways in which socially and politically marginalized groups are in a position of epistemic privilege vis-à-vis social

structures. The idea is that people who are marginalized are better placed when it comes to knowing. This is because the existing social structures place them in an epistemic privileged position with respect to what they can know. Drawing on Hegel and Marx, feminist standpoint theorists such as Dorothy Smith (1974), Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argue that those on the “outside” of dominant social and political groups must learn not only how to get along in their own world, but also how to get along in the dominant society. Thus, they have an ‘outsider’ status with respect to dominant groups that allows them to see things about social structures and how they function that members of the dominant group cannot see. Thus, standpoint theories emphasize the importance of the perspectives offered to marginalized groups in terms of their understanding of concepts or the formation of knowledge.

In philosophy, this theoretical position was developed most thoroughly by Sandra Harding (1986: 1991: 1998). Harding argues that ‘starting thought out’ or starting any rational thought process from the lives of the marginalized will lead to the development of new sets of research questions and priorities, since the marginalized enjoy a certain epistemic privilege that allows them to see problems differently, or to see problems where members of a dominant group do not. However, Harding emphasizes that one need not be a member of a marginalized group in order to be capable of starting one’s thought from that standpoint. She argues that Hegel was not a slave and Marx was not a member of the proletariat, yet they were able to identify with the standpoint of the slave and with that of the

proletariat. Thereby, they were able to start their thought out from lives very different from their own.

The concept of the ‘standpoint’ of the marginalized is both what sets standpoint epistemology apart from a general pluralism as well as the concept that has provided the most challenges to feminist standpoint theorists. Firstly, the position that one is epistemically privileged just by belonging to a marginalized group totally differs from the position of epistemologists who argue that there can be a plurality of knowers. Scholars who argue in favour of a general pluralism do not accept the position that some people are better placed to know because they belong to the minority or are not part of the dominant group. Secondly, the concept of the standpoint has been challenging because it may have as part of its implications, the idea of eliminating some people from the domain of knowers. This is possible for instance when we say that women are marginalized and as a result are better placed to know as opposed to men.

When this happens, the capacity of a person as an epistemic agent is called into question as long as such a person is not a woman and is deemed as not belonging to the standpoint in question. However, standpoint epistemologists maintain that one does not occupy the ‘feminist standpoint’ for instance, simply in virtue of being a woman; the feminist standpoint is regarded as an achievement rather than something one is born with. One comes to occupy the feminist standpoint by engaging in critical thought about one’s experiences and how these experiences relate to mainstream social and political ideas.

However, the claim that social marginalization confers epistemic privilege seems to depend on a concept of identity that needs to be grounded in the experience of social marginalization, and this has led to charges that standpoint epistemology cannot avoid assuming a great deal of commonality in the experiences of marginalized groups. The point being established here is that to say that a particular group of people are in a privileged position to know is to suggest that such people have certain experiences in common which give them such privilege. This has also led to criticisms that standpoint epistemology must appeal to an essential women's experience or to an essential marginalized experience. This is because the idea that women have a particular standpoint which is closer to truth seems a little difficult to defend. It is difficult to defend the position of feminist standpoint epistemologists because scholars are unable to identify that particular common ground in the experiences of women.

The position by standpoint epistemology which implies that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for a common ground in the experiences of the marginalized group is considered illegitimate by many feminist and postmodernist theorists because they take it to imply that there is something about experience that is 'natural' or 'given' and that it can serve a foundational role in identity construction. These theorists are suspicious of the claim that there are some experiences that all and only women have that can serve as a basis for identification with that group. They argue that the category of woman or the marginalized group is either too fractured or too regulative to do the work that feminist standpoint theorists and identity theorists need it to do.

On the standpoint theory, although there are different standpoint epistemologies, they all claim that certain positions produce better, less problematic or even correct and true understanding of the world. Precisely because there are so many different feminist standpoint approaches to epistemological problems. Wylie, for instance, argues that the only solution to most of the problems in feminist epistemology can be dealt with by what is identified as a “diffusion of power” or by an attempt to have a collective view or position with respect to the creation of knowledge claims (Wylie, 1995, p. 353). The idea here is to engage in the activity of taking subjective views into consideration when it comes to the formation of knowledge claims. The power or ability to contribute to the creation of knowledge will be given to every individual so they can contribute to the pool of resources used in the conceptualization of knowledge. It must be mentioned that this position of Wylie, I think is closely linked to the view in support of a community of knowers instead of individual knowers.

### *Postmodernism*

The second position in feminist epistemology is feminist postmodernism. It emerged within the field of social epistemology as a critique of feminist standpoint theory. This strand of feminist epistemology takes the relevance of perspectives of epistemic agents intimated by standpoint epistemologies seriously too. What it means is that they equally agree with the idea that perspectives of epistemic agents are relevant to the conceptualization of knowledge. Postmodernists also use the ‘situatedness’ of each finite observer in particular sociopolitical, historical context



to challenge the plausibility of claims that any perspective on the world could escape partiality (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 536).

The inability of a historically and socially situated epistemic agent to produce knowledge which can be described as free from partiality has remained the core concept of all social epistemologies and postmodernist theories also emphasize strongly its importance. Since the Cartesian project has been widely abandoned or largely criticized in the mainstream epistemology and by postmodern thinkers and feminists as well, I believe that it is possible and even more prudent to redefine epistemology and not to pronounce its death as some scholars have done. It is better to not treat epistemology as Descartes' creation or as "the study of knowledge acquisition that was accomplished through the opposition of a knowing subject and a known object" (Hekman, 1990, p. 9). The point here is that the mainstream epistemological position of dualisms ought to be revised since they serve as the beginning of most of the androcentric tendencies in epistemology. For instance, the subject as against the object of knowledge in traditional epistemology ought not to remain the same or considered in oppositional terms according to postmodernist theories. Postmodernists argue that we are not obliged to follow Descartes' and other Enlightenment philosophers' recommendation that epistemology should be kept at a safe distance from political, social and cultural influences.

Therefore, on one side, epistemology should not be understood any more as a "foundationalist, antiskeptical project. Epistemology should be understood as the theorizing about knowledge" (Alcoff, 2008, p. 4). However, on the other side, and for this essay even more importantly, epistemology should and must be seen as

inseparable from social power or politics. This is because there are no epistemological inquiries that are not at the same time social and political. And that has been precisely the position of feminist epistemologists.

There are a number of similarities between feminist and postmodernist critiques of the mainstream epistemological projects, so it may appear that feminist epistemologists and postmodernists could be allies in their critiques of the Enlightenment thought. First, feminists and postmodernists see the Enlightenment project as based on some hierarchical dualisms, such as those already mentioned above between subject and object of knowledge, or between rational and irrational. However, feminists assert that dualisms at the root of the Enlightenment thought are products of the fundamental dualism between male and female. In each of the dualisms on which Enlightenment thought rests, rational/irrational, subject/object, and culture/nature, the male is associated with the first element, the female with the second. And in each case the male element is privileged over the female (Hekman, 1990, p. 5).

Therefore, although feminists agree with some of the arguments made by postmodernists against mainstream epistemology, their attack on its dualisms is even more radical: all the dualisms of mainstream thought are defined by the basic masculine/feminine dualism, and this dualism is not symmetrical. Woman is always defined as that which is 'not man' She is a 'minus male' who is identified by the qualities that she lacks (Hekman, 1990, pp. 30-31). That has led most postmodernists and social epistemologists to conclude that traditional epistemology is androcentric as has already been established in the previous chapters of this work.

For feminists, the problem with the mainstream/traditional epistemological projects is not only in their privileging of abstract rationality, but in the fact that the privileged 'abstract rationality' is connected with men, while women are excluded from the domain of rationality and put within that of the irrational. Also, and similar with the previous one, another problem for feminists with the traditional epistemological framework is not only that the subject is defined as transcendental subject, or as a generic man, but the fact that that subject is a gendered man. The man-centeredness of that project entails epistemology that is exclusive of women which has grave implications for the credibility of claims produced by males who already enjoy an epistemological high ground. This position of traditional epistemology still emphasizes or highlights the way and manner in which traditional epistemology promotes the existence of epistemic injustice. Women are not defined as subjects/knowers, only as objects of knowledge. As has already been established in the previous chapter, the position of traditional epistemology of considering women only as objects of knowledge instead of subjects or knowers constitutes an intrinsic harm and an injustice to the human person as a rational moral agent.

It seems, therefore, that feminist critique of traditional epistemology as masculinist adds the missing component in the critiques of postmodern thinkers, and that has led some scholars to say that "feminist theory properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy" (Flax, 1987, p. 625). However, despite some important similarities between feminism and postmodernism, there are even more important differences which influence some feminists to be more than suspicious

about the appropriateness of postmodern projects for feminists needs. There is “at best an uneasy relationship between postmodernists and feminists” (Hekman, 1990, p. 2), especially because of the very complex relationship between feminism and the Enlightenment’s tradition. In other words, all feminisms, despite their differences, challenge the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in traditional epistemological thought, but at the same time, certain strands in feminism, such as liberal and Marxist/socialist feminisms, have the Enlightenment roots in their emphasis on some of the following concepts: autonomy, rights, liberation and emancipation. Certain strands in feminism criticize the Enlightenment’s dualisms but refuse at the same time to embrace postmodern proposals for dissolution of all dualisms of the traditional project. Therefore, there is no consensus among feminist theorists about how to react to and theorize about the exposed dualisms of traditional epistemology.

For example, although the concept of reason in the Enlightenment thought has been associated with men, not women, and although “since Greece, rationality has been defined as a masculine mode of thought exclusive of women” (Hekman, 1990, p. 47), feminist reactions to this problem have been very different. For instance, Liberal feminists believe that the Cartesian conception of reason could be opened up to include women, while Marxist/socialist feminists argue that the masculine mode of knowing includes distortion of knowledge and truth, and that rationality/reason should be redefined and reformulated so that it could be applied to women. Radical feminists want to keep the rational/irrational dualism and to reverse the privileging.

And, finally, postmodern feminists try to avoid the Enlightenment's 'trap' of keeping dualisms because they believe that the only solution for feminism is precisely captured in the following words by Hekman.

deconstruct and transform the ... [traditional] epistemology in which dualism is rooted. This involves ...rejecting unitary language for a plurality of languages that does not strive for the creation of a new orthodoxy, a unitary 'truth' (Hekman, 1990, p. 47).

The similar problem, as it may be assumed, appears in feminists' reasoning about the traditional dualism between subject and object of knowledge. 'What should we do with the subject of knowledge/knower?' or 'what must be the nature of the subject of knowledge?' is a question that has no one answer in feminism. Although the history of the western thought is the history in which only men could be subjects of knowledge while women are always and only objects, what would be a 'right' solution for feminism regarding this dualism? Are we going to turn women into Cartesian subjects, or are we going to reject that subject and reconceptualize it? Are we going to reconceptualize the traditional subject with or without the adoption of the postmodern options? All these questions are of immense importance for feminist epistemologists and they give different answers and possible solutions depending on their theoretical and political commitments. However, all these differences and contentions among feminists have not resulted in any kind of theoretical 'despair'. On the contrary, these differences and contentions have been

very productive for the heterogeneous field of inquiry we call feminist epistemology.

In the previous chapter, we established how traditional epistemological practices promote epistemic injustices. On that score, while Fricker (2007) focus on the responses of individual agents as correctives to testimonial injustice, others have expanded on the breadth and depth of the problem. For example, Elizabeth Anderson argues for the need to develop large-scale structural remedies such as ensuring broadly inclusive epistemic institutions in order to fully correct the systemic biases that result in testimonial injustices (Anderson, 2012). Kristie Dotson (2011) points to the difficulties of even identifying such practices of silencing and distinguishes two different kinds of silencing practices: testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. While testimonial quieting characterizes the failure to recognize the speaker as a knower and thus the failure to offer the speaker appropriate uptake, Dotson describes testimonial smothering as a coerced truncation of one's testimony. In testimonial quieting, one does not recognize his or her audience as having the capacity of a knower. Testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker recognizes her audience as unwilling or unable to give the appropriate uptake to her testimony, and in response, limits and shapes her testimony in order to "insure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). What this does is to withhold information from such audience because one deems them incompetent of relating or grasping the testimony in question. But Dotson argues

that it is a form of injustice in epistemology to treat one's audience that way and that is how testimonial smothering occurs.

Dotson characterizes both of these silencing practices as forms of epistemic violence, and holds the position that both testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering have dramatic epistemic effects for the epistemic pursuits of individuals and communities alike and most importantly for knowledge in general. This is because, there are difficulties with even identifying these practices of epistemic injustice that are prevalent in the epistemic terrain. Individuals are silenced in their attempt to contribute to knowledge and are sometimes perceived as lacking the necessary or relevant skills to contribute to knowledge formation based on wrong reasons. It is based on these problems and more already mentioned in this research that several social epistemologies emerged with various philosophical views in an attempt to suggest procedures that can be used for a better conceptualization of knowledge.

### *Feminist Empiricism*

The third position I examine is feminist empiricism. When the term 'feminist epistemology' was first used, it did not refer to a recognizable body of work. Rather the term referred to a set of theoretical and political problems concerning accounts of knowledge (Campbell, 2004, p. 7). From the mid-1980s when the term was introduced until now, feminist work in the field of epistemology has created not only a distinct area of research, but also various, heterogeneous, and complex feminist approaches to epistemological problems. Although feminist work in epistemology began as a critique of traditional epistemology, understood as one

of the core philosophical disciplines, its further development has led some scholars to argue that we cannot confine feminist epistemologies to a single academic discipline such as philosophy. Feminist epistemology is necessarily political and interdisciplinary because it asks questions of epistemology which philosophy traditionally excludes from a theory of knowledge, or which conventional philosophy does not wish to answer (Campbell, 2004, p. 8).

Therefore, the aim of feminist epistemology is not only to provide critiques of masculinist accounts of knowledge, traditional or contemporary ones, but to produce and develop alternative epistemological accounts and theories in plural, which take women not only as objects of knowledge, but primarily as subjects/knowers. In 1986, feminist philosopher and epistemologist, Sandra Harding, introduced for the first time a classification of feminist epistemologies into three general approaches: *feminist empiricism*, *feminist standpoint theory/theories*, and *feminist postmodernism*. At that moment, she understood these three positions as essentially contrasted frameworks. However, further development of feminist epistemologies has contributed to more fluidness of at least some of the boundaries on one side, and to acknowledge that the classification itself cannot grasp all the varieties in feminist approaches to epistemological problems, on the other side. Although it seems that this classification should be seen as provisional and tentative at best, it is still widely accepted by most feminists. Feminist standpoint theories and feminist postmodernism have been discussed above, and their proponents see these three positions as having a lot of differences as we have discussed above.



For Harding, feminist empiricism in feminist epistemology deals with the epistemological problems as long as they are relevant for philosophy of science and scientific methodology. Feminist empiricism works more or less within the framework of mainstream philosophy and methodology of science, and maybe that is the reason why mainstream epistemologists, when they do acknowledge the importance of feminist epistemology, usually have in mind feminist empiricists. Harding describes this position in 1986 as a kind of epistemology which realizes that androcentric science is ‘bad science’ which can be avoided by more scientific rigour and with strict application of traditional scientific norms. For Harding, while certain scientific areas are distorted by gender biased ideology, the methods of scientific inquiry are unquestionable. Thus, the methodology of science is not the problem of feminist empiricism but rather how biased ideologies are used in the promotion of the scientific process. Harding, unfortunately, offers in 1986 a simplistic account of feminist empiricism, which she corrects in the latter book, published in 1991, where she realizes that the leading theories in feminist empiricism do not explain the examples of sexism and androcentrism as ‘bad science’ and do not accept traditional scientific norms as acceptable correctives. Current feminist empiricist theories claim that the scientific process is primarily a social process and that the subject of knowledge cannot be an individual of traditional epistemology but communities, or in some versions, scientific communities.

Standpoint feminism, feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism have been considered by some scholars as representing at least in Anglo-American

feminism, “the most developed example of the construction of feminist models of knowing” (Campbell, 2004, p. 16). These theories equally serve as the most controversial proposals within the field of feminist epistemology. The main thesis of these thinkers is that knowledge is always mediated by a number of factors, such as a particular position of the knower/knowers in specific social, political world at the specific moments of history. Main sources for feminist standpoint theories are Hegel’s (1979) ‘Story of Master and Slave’ from *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Marx’s and Lukacs’ theory of proletariat. Based on the Marxist claim about the epistemic privilege of proletariat’s standpoint over the core economic, sociologist and historical questions, different versions of feminist standpoint theories have also established the claims of epistemic privilege of different features of women’s social situation. For instance, class, race, gender and sexuality necessarily structure and set limits to knower’s understanding of reality and, therefore, inform all knowledge claims. The argument here is that one’s social position determines to a large extent what one can know. For instance, the knowledge claims of a slave will definitely differ from that of a free man. Injustices are thus expected to originate from such social privileges bestowed on particular social classes and that leads to the epistemic injustices present in epistemology. This is because social classes that enjoy epistemological high grounds are very likely to commit the injustice of either attributing excess credibility to an epistemic agent or denying an epistemic agent credibility in terms of knowledge attribution. It is based on this claim that social classes confer epistemic privilege on particular people based on their social

standing, that I argue in this thesis that epistemic injustice has grave implications on epistemology.

## **Feminist Epistemology**

### ***Implications of Epistemic Injustice for Feminist Epistemology***

Feminist epistemology has been defined as an epistemology or a theorizing about knowledge from the feminine perspective. Theorizing about knowledge from the feminist perspective closely brings us to the idea of a peculiar feminine standpoint with respect to knowledge creation and attribution. However, scholars such as Helen Longino (1993), have argued that feminist epistemology should not be identified with theories of knowledge that presuppose the existence of a distinctive female or feminine experience or an essentially unique feminine way of knowing, a ‘feminist standpoint’. Longino argues this way but also acknowledges that there could be the possibility of feminine experiences affording a perspective that may be essential or relevant to the production of knowledge (Longino, 1993). Longino also maintains that there should be what is regarded as ‘equality of intellectual authority’ in theorizing about knowledge. Equality of intellectual authority should be regarded as a principle that favours inquiries in which the power and conceptual resources are widely distributed and evenly accessible to epistemic agents regardless of their gender, race or sexuality.

Alison Wylie argues that the point of Longino which talks about equality of intellectual authority has a way of supporting the position that knowledge creation, production and its justification cannot be solely an activity engaged in by a single individual but rather is a pluralistic affair (Wylie, 1995, p. 353). I think that

by conceiving knowledge as a pluralistic enterprise, there will be less to worry about in terms of how credibility is assigned or attributed to epistemic agents. This is because every epistemic agent will be required to provide their own perspective on knowledge claims and these individual perspectives when appreciated equally, will become the available knowledge of the society. When that happens, knowledge will then be the product of the collective individual perspectives. Hence, instances of credibility excesses and deficits will be minimal since there will be nothing like a social group enjoying an epistemological high ground against another group that is likely to suffer credibility deficits.

Most scholars have argued that the idea of a feminist epistemology itself is an oxymoron and a contradiction in terms. This is because, epistemology, an aspect of philosophy which is concerned with the study of knowledge in general ranges from the scope, limitations and nature of knowledge. Epistemology as a branch of philosophy does not seek to examine the knowledge of any specific or particular group of humans and as a result, the attempt of feminists to argue for the study of knowledge of females or the study of knowledge from the perspective of feminists seem flawed and should not and cannot be the focus and goal of any good epistemology. However, feminist epistemologists have debunked such arguments by maintaining that traditional epistemology in itself has always since its beginning considered knowledge as that which is from the perspective of the male sex even though it claims to be producing knowledge that is universal, general and unbiased. Feminist epistemologists then began contributing to epistemology, by challenging the philosophical premise that a general account of knowledge, one that uncovers

justificatory standards is objective and is purely through reasoning (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 1). It is this position defended by feminist epistemologists that led to the arguments in support of a social dimension to knowledge.

Feminist epistemologists then argued that even though ‘human beings’ as a concept seem to include all persons irrespective of their gender, race or functionality, in traditional epistemology, ‘human beings’ as a concept has been historically treated as an androcentric concept which represents only the male perspective. Due to this, some feminists have argued that it is possible to also have a feminist epistemology since the supposed general epistemology has always been male biased or androcentric. This is the reason why feminists hold that a critique of traditional epistemology ought to come first or be established in order that there can be space created for a reconstruction, a construction or deconstruction of work in epistemology. Thus, any attempt to suggest alternative definitions or approaches to knowledge production must be able to establish the pitfalls existent in traditional epistemology. Such an approach will make it easier to identify theories that provide the necessary and right solutions to the problems in traditional epistemology. Several scholars have contributed arguments to defend the position that the female, girl/woman has always been excluded from the concept of ‘human beings’/ ‘mankind’ and is now treated as the ‘other’ in Western philosophy. Based on this, the argument has also been established that the female has equally been excluded from the discourse of epistemology especially in terms of knowledge creation and its justification. As a result, there is the need for a robust theory of knowledge that

will be better placed to address these concerns of androcentrism and bias already existent in traditional epistemology.

As has already been discussed in the previous chapters, feminists argue that one of the underlying elements of androcentrism in epistemology is the divisions, dichotomies and dualisms which exist in traditional epistemology. They are knower/known, mind/body, subject/object, reason/emotion, rationality/irrationality. Hence, an attempt to address the problem or a critique of androcentrism in traditional epistemology may propose a deconstruction of these existing dichotomies or reverse the privileging of the rational discourse in favour of men depending on the version of revisionist approach being used.

However, scholars have argued for a holistic approach to these elements/concepts in epistemology and philosophy as a whole and that means a reconsideration of these dualisms that lie at the heart of traditional epistemology. Also, still on the notion of androcentrism in traditional epistemology, it is demonstrated in the way traditional epistemology treats the subject of knowledge. For instance, the subject 'S' in the relation S knows that P is minimalized and devalued. This is because the social and historical background of the epistemic agent is not considered or given primacy in the relation S knows that P. This is because traditional epistemology considers the subject 'S' as a neutral agent that could represent anyone even though historical findings suggests that the subject of traditional epistemology has always been of the masculine sex. That tells us that there is the need to revise most of these existing assumptions in traditional

epistemology in order to avoid the propagation of epistemic injustices in epistemology.

Lorraine Code (1987), a feminist philosopher, has argued that not taking epistemic knowing subjects into account when we are talking about knowledge, leads to some epistemological conclusions. One of such conclusions is:

that knowledge properly so-called is autonomous in that it is of no epistemological significance whose it is; that knowledge acquisition may be of psychological interest but it is irrelevant to an epistemologists' quest for criteria of justification, validity and verification; and that knowledge is objective in the sense that discussion of the character and epistemic circumstances of subjects has nothing to contribute to the proper epistemological task of assessing the product (Code, 1987, p. 25).

The passage above shows that there are grave implications for the knowledge that is produced and generally accepted if the epistemic agents' historical, political and social backgrounds are not taken into consideration. As a result, feminist epistemologists argue in favour of the idea that there should be a consideration of social factors when it comes to the production of knowledge. The point that is being established here is that if we dismiss or diminish the importance of the knower, the subject or the epistemic agent as traditional epistemology has always done, then we can pretend to offer a neutral and general theory of knowledge, when what is being offered in the actual sense is nothing but

androcentric epistemology. This male bias is obvious in the objectification and neutralization of the subject of knowledge.

Most scholars particularly feminist epistemologists hold that a critique of philosophy and of epistemology in particular, is a precondition for the consideration or suggestion of a more adequate theory of knowledge. This suggests that feminism especially feminist epistemologists require a revolution in epistemology. This revolution must happen in the traditional epistemological practices or positions since and for the purposes of this work, traditional epistemology has been identified as promoting the existence of epistemic injustice in epistemology, both testimonial and hermeneutical. One would agree that a better theory of knowledge should be one that improves on the tenets of traditional epistemology and also solves the problem of epistemic injustice prevalent in traditional epistemology for that matter.

As part of the problems with traditional epistemology, John Chandler (1990) identifies three kinds of male bias existent in traditional epistemology alleged in feminist writings. The first is the idea that philosophy is said to be masculine in the cultural or conventional sense; it conforms to a cultural ideal of masculinity. This means that philosophy has been culturally associated with masculinity. For instance, reason as a western cultural ideal, is male in this sense (Lloyd, 1984). As a result, maleness has been identified with superiority. Lloyd expresses this view in the following words:

What is valued - whether it be odd as against even numbers, 'aggressive' as against 'nurturing' skills or reason as against emotion - has been readily identified with maleness. Within the



context of this association of maleness with preferred traits, it is not just incidental to the feminine that female traits have been construed as inferior - or more subtly, as 'complementary' to male norms of human excellence. Rationality has been conceived as transcendence of the feminine (Lloyd,1984, p. 104).

It is due to the above and other problems associated with traditional epistemology already discussed that I argue that feminist epistemology is a legitimate sub-field of study in epistemology. This is because feminist epistemologists raise serious questions regarding the nature of inquiry. These questions concern the nature of the epistemic agent when it comes to knowledge production, the political, historical factors surrounding the agent, the existence of dualisms in epistemology and the existence of injustice in traditional epistemology. As a result, any attempt at arriving at a robust theory of knowledge cannot be complete if the insights given by social epistemologists, especially feminist epistemologists are not taking into consideration. Thus, a working definition of feminist epistemology should be theorizing about knowledge by taking the social, political and historical factors of the epistemic agent into consideration. Feminist epistemology should not be limited to theorizing about knowledge from the feminine perspective since such a definition will end up privileging a particular standpoint above the other. A practice which will definitely lead to epistemic injustice. So at the heart of feminist epistemology should be the idea of including social factors in knowledge conceptualization.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined four revisionist approaches to social epistemology. I began by establishing why there is the need for a revisionist theory in social epistemology. It was observed that due to the prevalence of injustice in traditional or mainstream epistemology, a revision of those tenets of mainstream epistemology which led to the propagation of these injustice was the best bet in the quest for an epistemic justice. I discussed the feminist standpoint theory and its shortcomings, feminist postmodernism, feminist empiricism and feminist epistemology. The implications of epistemic injustice for feminist epistemology was also discussed. In that regard, we have come to the realization that the presence of epistemic injustice in mainstream epistemology is a confirmation that social constructs and factors come into play in the formation of knowledge. This is because testimonial or hermeneutical injustice which comes about as a result of either attributing excess credibility or denying credibility employs social factors even though mainstream epistemology argues against the presence of social factors in the conceptualization of knowledge. Hence, the implication of epistemic injustice for feminist epistemology is that feminist epistemology is worth theorizing about since its claims are legitimate.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary

This study has been an investigation into the existence of epistemic injustice and how it legitimatizes feminist epistemology. This study was motivated by the position that social factors such as gender, race and class one way or the other has a way of influencing the knowledge that is produced by society. This is because place, time and even historical as well as political inclinations of an epistemic agent affect knowledge. However, mainstream epistemology downplays these social dimensions to knowledge and this has attracted several arguments in defense of a social epistemology. At the heart of these various social epistemologies is the idea that knowledge is situated and that social elements contribute to the conceptualization of knowledge.

Mainstream epistemologists hitherto have argued that knowledge is a justified true belief, without mentioning the importance of the nature and role of the epistemic agent involved in the formation of knowledge. It is from this premise that I show how mainstream epistemology has directly and even indirectly contributed to the existence of epistemic injustice. This is because these social factors (sex, gender, race, class, etc.) turned out to be the very things that make room for the existing injustice in mainstream epistemology especially in terms of the attribution of credibility to an epistemic agent. On this showing, I argue that a theory of knowledge which includes the social dimensions of knowledge in its theorizing, is worth investigating since the insights offered by social epistemology

of which feminist epistemology is a part, cannot just be overlooked especially in an attempt to deal with the existing injustice in epistemology.

I have argued that epistemic injustice is a wrong that is committed against a person in his/her capacity as a knower. An epistemic agent's capacity for rational deliberation is called into question. That is the person's ability to be referred to as a subject of knowledge is brought into question when he or she is unduly denied credibility or given undeserved credibility. Even though there are several forms of injustice, I focused on the two forms of epistemic injustice identified by Miranda Fricker (2007). These are Testimonial epistemic injustice and hermeneutical epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 5). Testimonial injustice as explained earlier is when the testimony of a person suffers a denial of credibility or benefits from an undeserved award of credibility. This comes in the forms of an epistemic agent's claim to knowledge being considered as more credible than it actually is or being deemed less credible than it is supposed to be. An epistemic agent is said to have suffered a testimonial injustice when he or she is denied of credibility. Thus, testimonial injustice is largely a matter of credibility deficit than excess credibility attribution.

Hermeneutical injustice refers to the injustice committed against the person as a result of the lack of conceptual resources to explain the experiences of the individual. When an epistemic agent is unable to make knowledge claims just because there are no words or concepts through which his or her experiences can be expressed, then we say such an agent is suffering an injustice known as hermeneutical epistemic injustice. I mentioned that an instance of hermeneutical

injustice can be found in a community that does not have the understanding of what sexual harassment is. In other words, a victim of a sexual harassment who lacks the linguistic tool to express her grievance suffers epistemic injustice and there are no linguistic tools to nail or prosecute her oppressor. When that happens, such an environment will be promoting an epistemic injustice against its members who are experiencing any activities that can be deemed as sexual harassment but because there are no concepts with which to describe these experiences, such people cannot be deemed to know what sexual harassment is.

In the second chapter of this work, I delved into an examination of epistemic injustice and traditional epistemology. I examined the nature of the various epistemic injustices. Using examples, I showed how testimonial injustice comes about and how hermeneutical injustice also occurs. It was further established that mainstream epistemology supports the existence of epistemic injustice in some ways. The four ways traditional epistemology encourages epistemic injustice as mentioned earlier are: privileging rationality in favour of the male sex, also present in how traditional epistemology does not seem to make room for the inclusion of women's (minority) experiences in the conceptualization of knowledge, the practice of normalizing oppressive conditions by promoting biased stereotypes especially in the existing dualisms and the traditional epistemological denial of the relevance of the gender or social factors of the epistemic agent in knowledge formation. The existence of these positions in mainstream epistemology which support epistemic injustice gives reason to want to enquire into other positions which seek to defend theorizing in support of a robust definition of knowledge.

Social epistemologies concern themselves with the theorizing about the social dimensions to knowledge. At the heart the arguments in support of social epistemology is the position that there is a social dimension to knowledge. As a result, knowledge should be seen or considered as a product of the society. As a result, we examined Goldman's classification of the nature of social epistemologies. The classifications of social epistemology by Alvin Goldman (2010) gives a better insight into the various approaches and perspectives to how and what has been considered by various scholars as that which qualifies as a 'real' social epistemology. Based on that, we examined preservationist epistemology, expansionists epistemology and the revisionist epistemology.

It was established that preservationists were of the view that traditional epistemology already had a social dimension and as a result they argued for the preservation of the tenets of traditional epistemology even in an attempt to talk of an existing social epistemology. So, the name preservationism came from the idea that the tenets of the mainstream epistemology ought to be preserved in the quest to promote the social dimension of knowledge. Proponents of this position maintained that the practices of doxastic decision making which involves the use of social evidence, the epistemic act of gathering social evidence as well as the social epistemology of speech act and communication were some of the social dimensions of knowledge that already exist in traditional epistemology. The expansionist thesis is the idea that the attempt to create a social epistemology should just be an expansion of the tradition. Alvin Goldman admits to belonging to this group of social epistemologists. For Goldman, social epistemology must be any

theorizing about the social dimensions of knowledge that already stems from the perspective of mainstream epistemology. However, there should be an attempt to expand the scope of mainstream epistemology to include matters like the epistemic properties of groups or collective doxastic agents and also an inclusion of the influence of social systems and their policies on epistemic outcomes. The final position on social epistemology that was examined in this work is the revisionist position. Revisionism is the position that a social epistemology is an epistemology which calls for a revision of most of the tenets of mainstream epistemology. Scholars who defended this position argued against concepts like truth and objectivity which exist in traditional epistemology.

For such scholars, truth is not out there waiting to be discovered but rather is a social institution. In this work, I situate feminist epistemology in revisionism because I first acknowledge that knowledge is situated and that the position, place and gender of the epistemic agent plays a major role in that which is accepted as knowledge. And if that is the case, then it has such implications as calling for a revision of the concepts of objectivity and truth entailing principles already existing in traditional epistemology. More so, since these tenets in mainstream epistemology help promote the existing injustice in epistemology, there was the need for a consideration of alternative theories of knowledge which address the problems raised by mainstream epistemology in the quest for epistemic justice. Hence, there was the need to examine the various revisionist theories which sprang up as an attempt to provide alternative perspectives to the implications of the existing injustice in traditional epistemology.

The revisionist theories which were examined in this work are; standpoint epistemology, postmodernism, feminist empiricism and feminist epistemology. We examined the position of feminist standpoint epistemology which holds that politically and socially marginalized groups are always in a position of epistemic privilege. It was also uncovered that the tenets of this revisionist theory was insufficient to defend the existence of peculiar women's experiences because it is difficult to establish that common ground to all marginalized persons despite individual differences.

Postmodernism was also discussed as a theory which emerged as a reaction to standpoint epistemology. It exhibited its revisionist trait by arguing vehemently against objective knowledge. It emphasized the position that knowledge is situated and as such no knowledge of the world can escape partiality. Hence, advocated for the need for a revision of these tenets of mainstream epistemology. Feminist empiricism even though a revisionist theory was largely concerned with epistemological problems which were related to the philosophy of science. They defended the position that there was the need for a community or collective group of epistemic agents since the scientific process was nothing but a social process.

Lastly, feminist epistemology was examined also as a revisionist epistemology. As we observed in the earlier chapters, feminist epistemology just like postmodernism argues for a revision of most of the tenets of traditional epistemology. Feminist epistemology noted that the existing dualisms of reason as against emotion leads to the existing epistemic injustices in epistemology and as a result there was the need to call for a revision of these positions. Feminist



epistemology also claims that the social dimensions of knowledge must be embraced and duly investigated since it has been established that the nature of the epistemic agent is equally relevant to the production of knowledge. Furthermore, it has been uncovered and proven that the position of traditional epistemology that social constructs have nothing to do with knowledge production is untenable because even in traditional epistemology, it has been investigated in this research that social factors already play a role in terms of how credibility is assigned and that leads to testimonial epistemic injustice in traditional epistemology. As a result, this research establishes that feminist epistemology qualifies as a legitimate sub-field of epistemology. This is because the insights presented by feminist epistemology is worth investigating in the quest for a more robust theory of knowledge.

In order that one can appreciate the need for alternative solutions suggested by the various revisionist social epistemological theories to the problems identified with traditional epistemology, I will like to briefly mention some of the negative effects of epistemic injustice. Miranda Fricker identifies two major wrongs or implications of testimonial injustice suffered by speakers which I have mentioned briefly above but considering some vivid instances she uses makes it easier to appreciate the details of the discourse and also brings to the fore the gross disservice that is meted out to people as knowers. The first wrong is the denial of humans/people the capacity to know. Fricker calls this an intrinsic injustice because it is a wrong in a capacity essential to human value. This is because the capacity to contribute to knowledge or give knowledge to others is one side of that many sided

capacities so significant in human beings; namely the capacity for reason. As is popularly known, rationality is that feature that distinguishes humans from other creatures. Thus, suffering an injustice in this regard is very deep and disturbing. The second form of epistemic wrong is that which causes people who have suffered consistent and persistent testimonial injustice to lose confidence in their general intellectual abilities to such an extent that such an epistemic agent is genuinely hindered in her educational or other intellectual developments (Fricker, 2007, p. 47).

Instances of such nature (testimonial and hermeneutical injustice) which we describe as epistemic injustices and oppression have a lot of grave implications. One of the implications of epistemic injustice is that it has negative effects on the epistemic knowing subject. The individual's capacity for rational deliberation is brought under attack. Based on this, when someone who claims to know something is denied the necessary credibility due to whatsoever reason, the essential nature (rational capacity) of the person is then going to be questioned. As a person, being denied the capacity or ability to know has negative implications on the essence of the human being with an intrinsic value. The value of the individual as a rational moral agent is under attack. By saying the individual as a rational moral and epistemic agent is under attack, I mean the capacity of such a human being to have rational deliberations is taken away, even when we agree that rationality is the essential feature that distinguishes all human beings from other creatures. Secondly, the epistemic confidence of such a person is also shattered. Here, a person whose knowledge claim is rejected or given less credibility, lacks the desire and enthusiasm to make any contribution to any relevant discourse on knowledge.

Also, any form of epistemic injustice; whether testimonial or hermeneutical injustice also has a negative impact on knowledge as a whole. By knowledge as a whole I mean it has consequences on any epistemological inquiry and its final product. This is because, if the contributions of the female always suffer an injustice or the female is oppressed by a lack of available resources to account for the experiences of the female while the male sex enjoys an epistemological high ground, the total or sum of knowledge claims that will be accepted as general knowledge, will only reflect the characteristic experience of the male sex. It must be stated that a person who suffers an identity prejudice can and is most likely to lose his or her intellectual confidence for being denied credibility. Thus, denying the female gender of credibility based on identity prejudice can lead to women losing their intellectual confidence and once that happens the consequences are diverse.

If we consider how credibility deficit against women begins at home, schools and even religious spaces and how the idea that masculinity is the norm is promoted, then we have no other choice but to conclude that knowledge in the general term of it becomes knowledge produced by the male sex. Thus, the position of mainstream epistemologists that the gender of an epistemic agent is not relevant in the conceptualization of knowledge is now called into question. One other interesting effect of testimonial injustice is that a victim of such injustice can easily lose knowledge. Fricker, (2007, p. 49) also argues that absolute confidence in one's belief is one of the necessary conditions for knowledge as asserted by Plato in the tripartite definition of knowledge. According to Fricker, one can argue out this

position by saying that the confidence in question can be either part of the belief condition or the justification condition. She states the relevance of this position in the following words:

The significance for the present discussion is that on any confidence-including conception of knowledge, the implications for someone who meets with persistent testimonial injustice are grim: not only is he repeatedly subjected to the intrinsic epistemic insult that is the primary injustice, but where this persistent intellectual undermining causes him to lose confidence in his belief and/or justification for them, he literally loses knowledge (Fricker, 2007, p. 49).

The point here is that an epistemic agent who suffers testimonial injustice may lose her epistemic confidence and consequently lose knowledge entirely. The epistemic agent will lose knowledge because the necessary conditions generally accepted for knowledge are belief, truth and justification and when a person is unable to provide reasons or justification for holding a belief due to the fact that the person's confidence in the belief as a true belief has been shattered, then such a person cannot be deemed to have knowledge. These and many more negative implications of epistemic injustice identified in traditional epistemology calls for a reevaluation of most of the tenets of mainstream epistemology if only we aim at achieving epistemic justice. Thus, one major advantage of choosing feminist epistemology over traditional epistemology is that it will lead to the attainment of an epistemic justice. The restoration of the epistemic confidence of epistemic

agents. Also, there will be nothing like privileging one standpoint above the other. Furthermore, this work is significant in the sense that it advocates for a social epistemology and not a particular standpoint.

### **Conclusion**

As already stated in the various chapters of this work, the varieties of injustices and oppressions in terms of knowledge attribution and production have greatly affected knowledge that is accepted by the community and as a result there is the need to correct these wrongs in epistemology by revising the generally accepted practices of mainstream epistemology that directly or indirectly promote epistemic injustice and epistemic oppressions of all kinds as discussed earlier. Thus, the tenet of privileging rationality in favour of the male sex ought to be revised or deconstructed if any attempt at curbing these injustices will see the light of day.

Also, this study has been able to establish that the social factors or constructs such as sex, race, class and even politics has a role or plays a part in the production of knowledge contrary to the mainstream epistemological position that knowledge is not a product of social interactions. This was further proven when we identified how social factors are already being used by mainstream epistemology to promote epistemic injustice. Thus, it is beyond doubt that the differences in the knowers as epistemic agents is very important when it comes to the production of knowledge. As a result, the prevalence of epistemic injustice in mainstream epistemology has shown to have a positive implication for the legitimization of feminist epistemology as a sub-field of epistemology.

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