

Hermeneutical Injustice and Form of Expression Bias

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Form of Expression Bias

Form of Expression Bias (FEB) occurs when a particular style or form of expression is intrinsically (i.e., non-contingently) associated with negative epistemic qualities and/or lacking positive epistemic qualities, and, consequently, is not heard as fully rational (i.e., not credible) irrespective of its content with respect to knowledge

Marge and Greenleaf

When Marge warns Greenleaf about Ripley, Greenleaf dismisses what Marge says with the reply, “Marge, there’s female intuition and then there are facts”

Marge’s suspicions about Ripley, which are in fact correct, are discounted by Greenleaf as non-credible owing to her ‘intuitive style’

The knowledge is presented in an ‘intuitive style’ and is not deemed credible/fully rational because it is, e.g., ‘emotional’, and is thereby excluded or dismissed from consideration

International Development

In evaluation practices, local participants in projects often relay their experiences through stories which the hearers often associate with negative epistemic qualities such as being 'subjective', 'soft' or conversely 'not hard' or 'not objective'

Labeled as 'anecdotal' in its pejorative sense, i.e., 'not necessarily true or reliable because based on personal accounts rather than facts or research', e.g., 'while there was much anecdotal evidence, there was little hard fact'; an account regarded as unreliable or hearsay owing to the form it takes

Rap music

“Are some songs getting more extreme reactions because they are rap songs and not because of the actual lyrics involved?” The answer is ‘yes’ → the same lyrics in a song when labeled ‘rap’ as opposed to ‘folk’ or ‘country’ received more negative assessments, ‘it is violent’, ‘offensive’

Rap music may be seen as lacking the potential for positive epistemic qualities, e.g., its status as an art form, more specifically a form of poetry (a credible form of expression)

The mechanism of FEB

The form or style of expression is used by the hearer *as a proxy* for credibility, thereby by-passing an assessment of the content or knowledge itself

The proxy works in one direction: to *discount* the credibility of the speaker's content, which is why it is a negative bias

Speaker's content is discounted/not taken up *because* the form or style in which it is expressed has been associated with the negative epistemic qualities or as lacking positive epistemic qualities

Marge and Greenleaf

Greenleaf takes Marge's intuitive style as a proxy for credibility, and, because an intuitive style is negatively cast, he does not assess the validity of Marge's claims about Ripley

International development

Programme staff take the local participants' use of stories as a proxy for credibility, and, because stories are considered 'soft' or 'anecdotal', they discount the relevance of local participants' experiences to the assessment of the programme

Rap music

People take the use of a rapping style of music as proxy for credibility, and, because rap is seen to lack positive epistemic qualities, they discount the content of the rappers' lyrics

The primary harm of HI

Primary harm of HI “consists in a *situated hermeneutical inequality*: the concrete situation is such that **the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible** something which it is particularly in his or her interests to be able to render intelligible”(162)

Central to this primary harm is the significant wrong associated with the harm: “the prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge” (162)

What is the case with FEB?

Is the speaker rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in her interests to be able to render intelligible?

Marge?

Local participant?

Rapper?

What is the case with FEB?

No -- the key point is that what they are saying is in some sense intelligible -- it is just given low or no epistemic value owing to FEB

Greenleaf does literally understand what Marge is saying → he understands that she is saying Ripley is dangerous

People can literally understand the lyrics
→ rap artist is rapping about her experience

Organization staff literally understand what local participants are saying → their story makes sense

The primary harm of FEB

The primary harm of FEB is more akin to that of testimonial injustice: where the hearer discounts *what* the speaker is saying on the grounds of a bias and thus the speaker is wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge

Wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge *not necessarily* because of their social identity (who they are) but because of the form of expression they use (the way they are saying it)

Is FEB just TI?

No -- but it is likely that TI and FEB are strongly related because the identity prejudice could be the source of the FEB itself → it is an empirical question

FEB need not track identity prejudice, particularly where a form of expression is more widespread, so anyone using the form is theoretically subject to the FEB

FEB is likely a mechanism through which identity prejudice can operate and may even come to be a primary expression of the identity prejudice

Symmetrical FEB

There is symmetry in the way the bias operates with respect to the speaker and the hearer such that they (variably?) share in the association of that the form of expression or style with negative epistemic qualities or as lacking positive epistemic qualities

Follows that, as in all cases of HI, this situation of FEB meets the criterion of non-culpability owing to its structural character

Asymmetric FEB

But what about the situation where only the hearer holds the bias and not the speaker?

There is an asymmetry in the way the bias operates with respect to the speaker and the hearer such that they *do not* share in the association of that style or form of expression with negative epistemic qualities or as lacking positive epistemic qualities

Marge takes her intuitive style, and the rapper takes her rapping style, to be epistemically credible forms of expression
→ the form of expression may even be *intrinsically* associated with their understanding of their experience, and their social identity

Asymmetric FEB

Given there is an asymmetry, is the hearer responsible or even culpable?

The hearer is directly presented with a counterexample in the speaker's belief in the credibility of the form of expression they are using

In contrast with TI cases, where it is not possible for the speaker to convince the hearer of their own credibility precisely because they are in a situation of TI, under FEB, it is theoretically possible to convince the hearer

A dialogue between the speaker and the hearer could have the upshot of revealing the grounds of the bias or revealing another bias

How the hearer addresses that counterexample will be a further question for any given individual interaction and will help determine whether or not responsibility, possibly culpability, enters