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Systemic Disbelief in Women: Is the Gender Credibility Gap a Form of

Epistemic Injustice?

by

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Abstract

Across the board, women are perceived to be less credible than men. Especially women's testimonies of rape and sexual harassment are widely trivialized and disregarded, even though reports of sexual abuse are not more likely to be false than reports of other crimes. This thesis explores the gender gap in credibility and examines where it stems from by means of a variety of literature on credibility, communication styles and gender stereotypes. I show that this literature suggests that gender differences in communication are not as pronounced as they are often thought to be, and that they are not significant enough to account for the credibility gap. I also show that according to many studies, women are *perceived* as less trustworthy due to stereotypes about men and women. Furthermore, I draw attention to studies that show that if women want to be perceived as credible, they have a much smaller range of communication strategies available to them than men. From this, I conclude that women are much more likely to be sanctioned in the form of diminished credibility than men, even when they are being truthful. I argue that this constitutes an epistemic injustice, a concept introduced by Miranda Fricker. In line with Fricker's theory, I explain how women suffer from two forms of epistemic injustice when their experiences of sexual abuse are disregarded, and that this injustice is the foundation of the gender credibility gap.

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Introduction

In the wake of the 'Me Too movement', the mass movement against sexual harassment, a discussion about credibility opened up. An increasing amount of women spoke up, many for the first time, about their experiences with sexual harassment. ''Believe Women'', the movement's slogan, emphasizes the importance of taking women's testimonies at face value. This emphasis is important because while it encourages victims of sexual harassment to open up, it shifts responsibility to those on the receiving end of these testimonies. There seems to be a tendency to trivialize the experiences of victims who come forward, as many of them are dismissed, doubted, or outright disbelieved (Epstein & Goldman, 2019). Allegations of rape and sexual harassment conventionally go together with questions of credibility. When two parties offer contradicting accounts of the same situation, the odds are often stacked against the accuser (which, in these cases, are often women) (Tuerkheimer, 2017). Deborah Tuerkheimer coined the phrase 'the credibility discount' to refer to ''an unwarranted failure to credit an assertion where this failure stems from prejudice'' (Tuerkheimer, 2017, p.3).

Disbelief in women's testimonies also exists outside the realm of harassment allegations. Research by Kang, Hubbard, and Hong (2019) has shown that when a man speaks, perceived authoritativeness by his audience predicted their receptivity to the message. For a woman, however, the audience's evaluation of her character predicted the credibility of her message. This suggests that people are receptive to a man's message as long as they perceive him to be authoritative, regardless of whether or not they like him. For a woman, however, her likeability is key to her credibility. Other research has shown that successful female leaders in typically male tasks are often disliked by other women, more so than male leaders in the same position (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). According to the results from Kang et al. (2019), this could, in turn, be detrimental to the credibility of these female leaders.

As long as we maintain different criteria to judge men and women's credibility, there is no such thing as objective, genderless credibility. The question that remains is *why* we judge men and women's testimonies differently. Could it be the case that men and women generally communicate differently, and that we perceive one communication style to be more credible than the other? There is a wealth of research into gender differences in

communication styles. Simultaneously, there are also widely held stereotypes about how men and women communicate. Needless to say, it is important to distinguish these from one another. While our perceptions might differ widely from the truth, the way we perceive these differences can still have implications for the way we view men and women. For example, some common stereotypes that are held about men is that they are competitive, unemotional, logical, and ambitious (at least, more so than women). Women, on the other hand, are perceived to be more emotional and passive in their interactions with others (Brownell, 1993). As a result of these perceptions, whether or not they are in accordance with reality, could it be that we judge men and women's claims with these stereotypes in mind? Could this in turn lead to us ascribing less credibility to a woman's word?

Similar to Tuerkheimer's 'credibility discount', Miranda Fricker introduced the term 'epistemic injustice', which is unfairness in relation to knowledge. One form of epistemic injustice, for instance, is 'testimonial injustice', which ''occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word'' (Fricker, 2007, p.1). When a speaker is credited with less credibility than they deserve as a result of prejudice on the part of the hearer, the speaker suffers a credibility deficit. A woman, for example, might be deemed less credible by a hearer that holds prejudice against her based on her gender. When someone suffers a credibility deficit, they are violated in their role as a testifier and a knower, and Fricker deems this as both an epistemic and an ethical violation. Fricker duly claims that when a woman is not respected as a testifier and a knower, she is not respected as a human being.

In this research I will explore the gender credibility gap, and analyze studies on gender communication styles and stereotypes held about men and women as communicators. More insight into how men and women communicate, or are *perceived* to communicate, might provide an understanding of where the gender credibility gap originates from. Moreover, I will go more into depth about epistemic injustice and what its implications are for women who testify about rape and sexual harassment. Can the gender credibility gap be explained by gender differences in communication styles, is it a form of injustice done to women in their capacity as knowers, or are these two phenomena more closely tied together than we think?

Chapter 1. The Gender Credibility Gap

In this chapter, we will delve into the gender credibility gap, which is the central concept of this thesis. In order to better understand what the credibility gap entails, we will first look into which factors constitute credibility and which attributions play a role when people determine the trustworthiness of others (paragraph 1.1). I will discuss its broadness but also home in on how the credibility gap is rooted in the justice system specifically (paragraph 1.2) In the last paragraph (1.3), I will examine which effects credibility discounting has on women's testimonies about rape and sexual harassment.

Anyone who seeks to convince others is more likely to succeed when they are deemed to be trustworthy, as a message is more likely to be accepted when the speaker and their intentions are trusted. The gender credibility gap suggests that across the board, women are perceived as less credible sources than men, and are thus lower in 'source credibility'. Source credibility is generally believed to have two dimensions: character (likability) and authoritativeness (expertise) (Kang et al., 2019). A speaker is deemed authoritative when they are perceived to be qualified, experienced, knowledgeable and skilled. Likeability is perceived in a speaker who is agreeable and pleasing (Stanley, Clow, & James, 2011). Generally, men are often ascribed competence and credibility, ascriptions that are not extended to women (Johnson, 2006). Women are stereotypically viewed as less competent, less logical, and less confident, and whereas men are automatically awarded authority, women must prove their competence and expertise in order to earn that same level of respect (Acker, 1990). Perceived competence is generally a strong predictor of how credible a person is deemed to be (Brann & Himes, 2010), and many studies have found that men are often perceived as more competent than women (Wood & Karten, 1986; Canetto, Kaminski, & Felicio, 1995; Conway & Vartanian, 2000). Kang et al. (2019) found that male and female leadership are not evaluated by the same criteria. When male leaders spoke, it was their perceived authoritativeness that predicted receptivity to their message. For female leaders, however, it was their character that most significantly influenced their credibility. Thus, regardless of her authoritativeness, people will be less receptive to the words of a female leader when they do not find her likeable. With a male leader, however, it does not matter whether or not people find him likeable, they will find him credible as long as they perceive him to be authoritative. More generally, women are found less likeable than men when they

thrive as leaders in typically 'male-gendered' tasks (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). If women's credibility is dependent on their likability, and if women leaders tend to be disliked, they are probably often unduly perceived to be untrustworthy. I say unduly, because the credibility of these women is determined by factors other than whether or not they speak the truth.

1.1. The effect of gender cues on credibility

Determining who we deem to be trustworthy is a mental process that initially takes place quickly and unconsciously. When we process information, we rely upon certain mental shortcuts, which are often called schemas or stereotypes (Armstrong & Nelson, 2005). One of the stereotypes that is tapped into most often is gender (Deaux & Lewis, 1984), so gender cues are likely to have a rather large influence on the processing of information. Armstrong and Nelson (2005) found that when people process news and informational content, they often rely on gender cues (e.g., personal pronouns like ''he'' or ''she'') in the text. These cues are relied on in order to make quick judgements about, for example, the credibility of the information that is processed. This process is demonstrated by the finding by Armstrong and Nelson that readers read a text more thoroughly when no official source was provided, which meant that the readers had to determine its credibility for themselves. When an official source was provided, however, they were less likely to thoughtfully analyze the text, which implies that the quick judgments they made about credibility were based on the source that was (or was not) provided. Interestingly, when an official or 'expert' source was quoted, most participants relied on their gender stereotype shortcut, and assumed the source to be male (Armstrong & Nelson, 2005). Similarly, another study found that blog posts that were written by an author with a male name were judged to be more credible than posts written by a perceived female author (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). The study found that blogs that were actually written by a woman were awarded more credibility when participants were under the impression that it was written by a man. On the other hand, blog posts that were written by a male author were perceived to be less credible when it seemed like they were written by a woman. These results are striking, because they suggest that regardless of its form and content, the perceived credibility of the message is largely dependent on the gender of the sender.

1.2. The credibility gap in the justice system

The 'gender credibility gap' suggests that we tend to judge women (and their claims) to be less credible purely because of the fact that they are women. With the gender credibility gap in mind, I will now consider the testimonies of victims of rape and sexual harassment, crimes that are largely committed against women. Responses to allegations of rape and harassment have long been embedded by disbelief (Tuerkheimer, 2017). There is a stereotype of women as unreliable testifiers that is rooted in the justice system, as a result of which women tend to be perceived as less reliable witnesses than men (Epstein & Goodman, 2019). Research has shown that so-called 'credibility raters', who assessed actual witnesses who were testifying in court, rated the female witnesses less credible than their male counterparts. (Nagle, Brodsky & Weeter, 2014). This tendency has also been found to be true for judges, who perceive men as more credible witnesses than women (Swent, 1996).

In a 2015 study by Salerno and Peter-Hagene, the participants were a group of students who were asked to play mock jurors. The participants reviewed a transcript of a murder trial, and were asked to make an initial decision to vote 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. Then, they went on to electronically deliberate with their fellow jurors. These jurors, however, were in fact the researchers, who made sure there was always a 'holdout'. This person would send increasingly angry messages throughout the deliberation. The study showed that if this holdout had a male name, the participants started doubting their preliminary decision. If the holdout had a female name, however, the participants became increasingly confident in their opinions (Salerno & Peter-Hagene, 2015). These results demonstrate that the gender credibility gap has also permeated the legal system. Once a listener has judged a woman to be unreliable, they will be even more vigilant for inconsistencies and irrationality in the woman's story (Nagle, 2014). In this way, an initial discounting of credibility opens a gateway to further discrediting on the speaker's behalf. While it is outside the scope of this thesis, it should be noted that people of color, black people in particular, often have similar experiences. Courts in the United States, for example, have long discredited the testimonies of African Americans on account of their race. This discrediting stems from stereotypes of African Americans being deceitful, unreliable, and less intelligent than white people (Carlin, 2016). Women of color, who live on the intersection of these identities, are thus at an even higher risk of being disbelieved.

Women are deemed to be less worthy of belief solely because they are women in general, but particularly in the realm of the law. Women experience barriers to belief in particular when they testify about rape. Allegations of rape are often met with suspicion, as the incident is expected to be reported immediately, sexual history of the victim is taken into account, there is a necessity of force or another form of resistance (mainly in the US), and there is a need for corroboration (Mack, 1993). As for the first condition, delays in reporting are often delayed because of hesitation, fear, and shame felt by the victim (Jordan, 2004). These delays might cause the reports to be taken less seriously. Previous sexual encounters and the context in which the incident has taken place can also contribute to the discounting of credibility. Take, for example, this quote from a Sussex police officer: ''(There are) few cases of genuine, very genuine rape''. Genuine rapes, according to this same officer, are ''off the street, didn't know the victim at all'' rapes, as opposed to ''we went out for the evening sort of rapes'' (Temkin, 1997, p. 516). This implies that some rapes reported by women are not taken seriously because their cases do not meet the specific conditions that need to be met before police offers even consider it as rape. In a 2004 study by Jan Jordan, 48 women were interviewed about their experiences of reporting rape to the police. Some of the participants said that they felt like the police officers distrusted them from the beginning, and that they were actively trying to catch them in a lie. Others felt like they were disbelieved because they did not conform to the police officers' expectations of what a rape victim should act like, for example because they acted calm rather than emotional. Some women suggested that distrust by police stemmed from moral judgments made about their sexual history or level of intoxication (Jordan, 2004). Rather than condemning perpetrators for taking advantage of an intoxicated person, intoxication on behalf of the victim is often perceived to contribute to the rape. It seems as if women who are drunk are somehow deemed more responsible for their behavior, whereas men are absolved of their responsibility for their behavior when they are drunk (Jordan, 2004).

Lastly, the requirement of corroboration in rape cases is especially challenging because these cases often boil down to the accuser's word against the word of the accused, which greatly increases the importance of individual credibility. Since women are usually the accusers in such cases, and women's testimonies are often not taken at face value, we can conclude that the odds are often stacked against them. It remains to be the case that

disbelief is deeply rooted in the justice system. The Law Commission, in outlining the law of England and Wales in 1991, stated that judges should emphasize to the jury the danger of convicting based on uncorroborated evidence provided by the complainant. On this matter, Lord Justice Salmon said: ''Human experience has shown that...girls and women [in these courts] do sometimes tell an entirely false story which is very easy to fabricate, but extremely difficult to refute. Such stories are fabricated for all sorts of reasons, which I need not now enumerate, and sometimes for no reason at all.'' (Mack, 1993, p.7).

These measures and requirements that need to be met before a rape allegation is taken seriously foster the impression that somehow, rape charges are much more likely to be unfounded than claims of other crimes. However, research has shown that generally, around 2 percent of reports or rape are established to be false (Graycar & Morgan, 1990). If anything, rape charges are less likely to be unfounded than charges for other crimes. For instance, the Police Department of Portland, Oregon declared that, 2.6% of reports of a stolen car prove to be false, whereas this was only 1.6% for reports of rape (Schafran, 2012). As a result of low reporting, and because many rape allegations are not investigated, let alone prosecuted, many rapists are not even faced with charges at all. Even when a case does go to trial, convictions are rare, particularly in cases where the accuser and the defendant were acquainted, and where no other injuries were inflicted (Mack, 1993).

The belief that the percentage of fake rape accusations is higher than most other crimes is very prevalent. In a survey where around 900 police offers were asked what percentage of reported rape accusations are false, more than half responded that they believed 10 to 50 percent of accusations were false, and another 10 percent of respondents even believed that 51 to 100 percent of reports were false (Dellinger Page, 2008). This skepticism explains the treatment of rape reports by police, as they are often unwilling to investigate, resulting in high unfounding rates (Tuerkheimer, 2017). Research has shown, however, that such skepticism is unjustified. A study by Spohn and Tellis (2012) in collaboration with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) studied a random sample of sexual assault complaints that were deemed to be unfounded by police. Of 81 cases that policed judged to be false, the researchers found that only 55 were actually unfounded. When comparing these numbers to the total amount of sexual assault reports made to the LAPD in that year, the study suggested that only 4.5% of all cases were unfounded. These figures show that the

number of actual false reports is much lower than the estimations of police officers regarding false reporting. These numbers once again show the misperceptions of women's credibility, in particular when they are testifying about rape and sexual harassment. Acknowledging the fact that many women who allege rape or sexual harassment are disbelieved does not imply that all rape allegations are true. It does imply, however, that there is a severe disconnect between the amount of women who tell the truth and the amount of women who are actually believed.

1.3.   The vicious cycle of disbelief

The widespread disregard for the experiences of women might stem from a 'willful hermeneutical ignorance', a term coined by Gaile Pohlhaus (2012, p.716). The term refers to how the asymmetry in our systems of authority demotes women to be less competent 'knowers' than men. Pohlhaus says that men develop a sort of 'epistemic arrogance', because our culture encourages them to, which leads them to think their view of the world is generalizable to reality. Moreover, it leads them to dismiss the possibility that others (those who face oppression, for instance) might experience reality differently from them. Thus, Pohlhaus states, epistemic arrogance leads to the development of epistemic laziness. In a world that is stratified socially, these persons' experiences are more salient in the world and thus contribute more to the shaping of the standards for knowing the world (Pohlhaus, 2012). When applying this to rape allegations, this means that non-survivors, who are predominantly male, and whose view on sexual harassment is thus inexperienced and underinformed, value their own view over the perceptions of survivors. When they notice that their views are incompatible with the stories of survivors, who are mostly female, this often results in them doubting the survivors' account of their experiences (Epstein & Goodman, 2019). I will discuss the idea that rape is often doubted because of misconceptions that are due to hermeneutical injustice more in depth in the third chapter.

When a woman's testimony is met with skepticism, a vicious cycle of further discounting can be triggered. When the credibility of a survivor is questioned, this might well cause her to feel upset, destabilized, or possibly even (re)traumatized (Epstein & Goldman, 2019, p. 424). Consequently, she might display more emotionally 'inappropriate behavior' (Epstein & Goldman, 2019), which might further decrease her credibility. The discounting of women's credibility when they testify about their experiences of rape and abuse might over time

cause them to internalize this portrayal of women as unreliable testifiers, turning the stereotype into a self-fulfilling prophecy. This concept is known as 'stereotype threat', which occurs when an individual feels like they might conform to an existing stereotype about the social group they belong to. These (negative) stereotypes can cause an individual to feel anxious and can be detrimental to how the person functions, regardless of whether or not the individual accepts the stereotype (Steele, 1997). Negative stereotypes about women's credibility, then, can cause women to worry about conforming to them, which could negatively impact their ability to clearly convey her experience to others.

Conclusion

Women are thus often disregarded when they report on their experiences, across many different social settings, and regardless of the specific content of their story. We have seen that reports of rape and harassment are *deemed* to be false much more often than they actually are. Moreover, when initial distrust occurs, many women then suffer from further credibility discounts, operating in a vicious cycle. This widely held perception of women as unreliable narrators raises the question of where this belief stems from. Is it mere prejudice? Or could it be that women communicate differently from men, and does their communication style somehow make what they say seem less credible? According to popular opinion, men and women communicate vastly differently, and differences have also been found in previous studies. Are these claims justified, and could they perhaps (at least partially) explain the credibility gap? Or are these communication differences merely part of widespread stereotypes about men and women? The next chapter will address these issues by analyzing gender communication differences and will try to examine if and how these differences contribute to the gender credibility gap.

Chapter 2. Gender-based Communication Differences

In the previous chapter I have discussed how women are often perceived as less credible testifiers than men. We have learned that women's testimonies about rape and sexual harassment, for instance, are often disregarded because women are generally regarded as less reliable witnesses than men. In this chapter, I will explore this credibility gap a bit further and search for possible factors that might cause women to come across as less trustworthy. In order to learn more about where the gender credibility gap stems from, we might look to differences between men and women in how they communicate. It might be the case that some communication styles can make a speaker seem more credible than others, and if men exhibit these styles more often than women, this might account (at least in part) for the credibility gap between the genders. There is a wealth of research into how men and women communicate, and the focus has mainly been on finding differences. Men and women are generally believed to communicate in different ways, and the communication between them has even been likened to cross-cultural communication (Tannen, 2001). Tannen claimed that women ''speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy'', whereas men speak a language of status and independence (Tannen, 2001, p. 42). It has been said that even the very purpose of communication differs for men and women, as women communicate in order to create and enhance their social connections, while men exert dominance through their language use, and use language in order to achieve tangible outcomes (Mason, 1995). It might thus be the case that the gender credibility gap results from the fact that men and women use different communication styles, and that improving communication between the genders could close the gap. In this chapter, we will first look into these gender differences and assess how influential they really are (paragraph 2.1). In the next section (paragraph 2.2), I will discuss theories that attempt to explain gendered communication differences. Research has suggested, for instance, that expectations about behavior differ for men and women. Then, I will discuss commonly held stereotypes about communication behaviors in paragraph 2.3. In the next section (2.4), I will look into how men and women are generally expected to communicate, and how the negative consequences of deviating from these expectations are higher for women than they are for men. In the last section, paragraph 2.5, I will discuss commonly held stereotypes about how men and women communicate, and how these stereotypes affect credibility. It is important to take these perceptions of men and women into account when discussing the gender credibility gap

because it might be the case that stereotypes are equally as influential as actual differences in behavior.

2.1. Gender differences in communication

Let me start with discussing communication differences between the genders. Communication behaviors consist of many different aspects. One important, but often overlooked, aspect of communication is non-verbal communication. Judith Hall (2006) deemed non-verbal communication cues the 'front lines' of contact, as non-verbal cues emit information to other people before we even speak to them. Non-verbal cues are relied on to form impressions about people's emotions, character and intentions (Hall, 2006), for instance through facial expressions, gestures, and the presence or absence of eye contact. Although results are mixed, gender differences in non-verbal communication have indeed been found. For instance, when sitting down, men have been found to sit in an open-leg position and to lean back, causing them to take up more space than women. This type of posture communicates status and a sense of control over the environment (Brownell, 1993). Moreover, it was found that women made more eye contact than men in face-to-face encounters. However, women also tended to avert their gaze more often, specifically in an encounter with a man or someone with a higher status, which can be interpreted as a lack of confidence (Brownell, 1993). LaFrance, Hecht and Paluck (2003)'s meta-analysis showed that women smiled more than men, a result that Hall (2006) also found. Not only do women tend to smile more, they are also attracted to smiles in others (Frances, 1979). However, this difference in smiling was larger when men and women were aware that they were being observed, and it was also especially large for adolescents. This is interesting, because the gender difference for children was non-existent. It seems as if the differences are largest at a time when boys and girls start becoming aware of gender norms, which might suggest that the differences in smiling are caused by stereotypes (stemming from culture or upbringing) about smiling in men and women, rather than any innate gender differences.

When discussing gender differences in communication, we ought to pay attention to the size of these differences. Often when differences are found, their size is overestimated, and they are often attributed to gender too quickly, leaving little room for nuance. Hall (2006) found that not much of the variance in the behavior that she studied could be explained by the participants' gender, as the correlations she found were in the range of 0.2 to 0.4, explaining

only about 4 to 16 percent of the variance. Moreover, when examining the distributions for both genders, she found that the distributions overlapped for the most part. Only 30% of the distributions did not overlap, which means that the differences are not as pronounced as they seem at first glance. This means that many men will display behavior that is typically deemed 'female' and vice versa. For instance, there are undoubtedly many men that tend to smile more than a woman does on average. What we can conclude from this is that overall, gender differences are often smaller than they seem when taken at face value, and they can often be attributed to factors other than gender.

Apart from actual differences, many studies have also focused on how men and women are *perceived* to communicate, and how men and women describe their own communication behaviors. A study by Briton and Hall (1995) provided interesting insights about how male and female communication styles are perceived. Over 400 college students were asked to rate both men and women on a scale of 1 to 10 on a range of 19 non-verbal behaviors. The results were as the researchers had predicted: the students thought that men were louder, smiled and gazed less, used less gestures, were less emotionally expressive, and that they were less skilled in encoding and decoding non-verbal cues than women. The researchers had made these predictions based on general stereotypes that are held about men and women's communication styles (Briton & Hall, 1995), which suggest that women are perceived to be more warm and expressive, and that they are more skilled than men at non-verbal communication. These stereotypes also correspond with the way men and women usually describe themselves. Fischer and Manstead (2000) asked men and women in 37 different countries to rate themselves on nonverbal expression of emotions and found that women rated themselves higher than men rated themselves. What we can infer from this is that stereotypes about the non-verbal communication of men and women are thus broadly held, also by men and women about themselves. These stereotypes and their implications will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

2.2. Theorizing gender differences in communication

In scientific literature, there are some competing theories as to where differences in communication stem from and what they imply. Nancy Henley (1977) claims that gender differences in nonverbal communication stem from differences in dominance, power, and status. She argues that men behave the way that strong people of high status do, whereas

women tend to behave the same as 'weak', low-status people. Nonverbal cues can thus serve as subtle and nonconscious displays of power and status. Henley's claim that communication differences between men and women are the same as those between people of high and low status, power, and dominance has not remained undisputed. Hall, Halberstadt, and Obrien (1997) took to testing this claim by analyzing the relations of non-verbal communication to power. It was found that not all gender differences parallel power differences. In fact, some non-verbal behaviors prevalently displayed by those who are high in power also tend to characterize women's behavior. Think, for example, of high facial expressiveness, better encoding and decoding skills, and small interpersonal distance (Hall, 1995). This lack of parallelism implies that Henley's power-based theory is not very viable.

There is another influential theory, however, that also relates communication differences between men and women to power and status. Similar to Henley, Robin Lakoff (1975) claimed that there are two speech styles, namely a powerful and a powerless style, and that the use of these styles is gender dependent. Lakoff originally developed a list of fifteen powerless or 'feminine' variables, which have over time been narrowed down to four main significant variables: hedges (''sort of''), intensifiers (''so'', ''really'', ''such''), hesitations (e.g. pauses), and tag questions (adding phrases like ''isn't it?'' or ''don't you think?'' at the end of sentences) (Brandau-Brown, 1999). Lakoff posited that women tend to use hedges in order to downplay their authority, and that they use tag questions when making statements in order avoid coming across as overly assertive. Moreover, intensifiers are deployed to diminish the strength and directness of statements. According to Lakoff, men and women speak different communication 'dialects'. The style that women tend to use, which includes the 'feminine register' of variables mentioned above, is known as the 'powerless' style. On top of these variables, the female register also consists of variables such as extremely polite and grammatical language, and less profanity (Brandau-Brown, 1999). Lakoff claimed that these variables characterize female speech, rendering it a 'powerless' speech style. Moreover, she argued that women's language is generally guided by three rules. Firstly, and according to Lakoff, most prominently, the rule of formality. Formality in communication creates a distance between the sender and the recipient. Secondly, there is the rule of deference. Using hedges while speaking is a form of deference, as it invites the listener to determine how serious the message is. Thirdly, there is the rule of camaraderie, as women

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often express friendliness and interest in the person they are communicating with. As opposed to women, men do not apply these rules when communicating, as they use the 'powerful speech style', which does not include any of the variables from the feminine register, according to Lakoff (1975).

This theory of powerful and powerless speech styles has gained much attention from other researchers. Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978) researched the effects of speech styles on impression formation by the listener. According to the authors, listeners have more favorable reactions and are more attracted to speakers who use the powerful speech style. The powerless speech style, on the other hand, could decrease speaker attractiveness because this style requires more cognitive effort from the listener to process the message (Erickson et al., 1978). Use of these styles could also affect speaker credibility. The researchers claimed that speakers who employ the powerful style appear more confident and assertive, while using the powerless style makes a speaker look uncertain. "Since acceptance of a communication is affected by both the attractiveness and the credibility of the communicator, speech style should also affect subjects' beliefs about the issues addressed in the communication" (Erickson et al., p. 268). The results of their study showed that speech style did indeed affect both speaker attractiveness and credibility. Similarly, research by Wright and Hosman (1983) found that speakers were rated lower on credibility and attractiveness when they used a lot of hedges. Messages that were low in hesitations and hedges were found to be more attractive and authoritative (Hosman & Wright, 1987). Bradac and Mulac (1984) found that tag questions, hesitations, and hedges were perceived as decreasing authoritativeness. Erickson et al. (1978) thought that the effects of speech style on credibility were caused by attributions regarding the speaker's own beliefs about his message. Thus, if a listener attributes the use of the powerless style to the speaker's lack of confidence in the message, the speaker's credibility decreases. Use of the powerful style, then, could be interpreted as confidence in the message, which consequently increases the speaker's credibility. Erickson et al. suggested that the powerful speech style made the speaker appear not only more credible but also more attractive and of higher status. Another explanation they offered was that messages that were delivered using the powerless style required more cognitive effort to process (Erickson et al., 1978).

Interestingly, their results showed that neither style was associated with feminine or masculine traits.

Other research has also built upon the notion that processing different speech styles require different levels of cognitive effort. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) introduced the Elaboration Likelihood model to examine the persuasive effect of speech. This model posits that persuasion can occur via two routes: central and peripheral. Message processing via the central route requires a lot of cognitive effort from the listener. The peripheral route, however, does not require this much effort because the listener accepts or rejects the message based on other cues than argument quality (Brandau-Brown, 1999). Gibbons, Busch, and Bradac (1991) suggested that speech style has three potential functions in persuasion. First of all, they posited that a powerful style could establish credibility and possibly be a heuristic for decision-making. Moreover, a powerless style could be distracting and consequently obstruct message processing via the central route. Lastly, they suggested that speech style could stand alone and function similarly to an argument. Gibbons et al. found that speech style did not have an effect on persuasion, yet it did affect impression formation. According to the authors, speech style ''indicated to message recipients something about the communicator but not about the soundness of the position the communicator advocated'' (Gibbons et al., 1991, p. 129).

So far, we have seen that many studies have built upon Lakoff's assertion that gender differences in communication parallel differences between individuals high and low in power. Nevertheless, issues with Lakoff's theory have also been raised. Firstly, there was little empirical basis for her work, rendering it largely speculative. Rather than reflecting actual differences, Lakoff's hypotheses might merely reflect widely held, perhaps inaccurate, stereotypes about gender differences in communication. Other research has provided mixed support for Lakoff's hypothesis (Aries, 1996). Aries suggested that gender differences are largely dependent on aspects of the context of the interaction and specific methodological features of particular studies. Another criticism on Lakoff's model is that it magnifies gender differences in communication, thereby essentializing them. More specifically, Lakoff has received criticism for claiming that the majority of women use tentative language, whereas men rarely do (Leaper & Robnett, 2011). Critics have argued that in doing this, Lakoff amplified gender differences and ignored all the similarities that also exist between men and

women's communication behaviors, leaving little room for nuance. Finally, researchers have claimed that relative status and power determine the use of tentative language more than gender does (Henley, 1997; LaFrance, 2001). This would mean that use of tentative language is not inherently tied to women's communication styles. Instead, tentative language is deployed by someone who is in a 'subordinate' position, irrespective of their gender. O'Barr and Atkins (1980) thus point out that powerless language should not be considered synonymous with 'women's language'. This implies that if women tend to deploy the powerless style more often when they communicate, this might indicate that women tend to be in positions where they lack power more often than men, and not that powerless language is innately female.

Erickson et al. (1978) also tested Lakoff's hypothesis. They claimed that both gender and ethnic background could influence speech style, but that situational variables also had a significant effect on speech style selection. For instance, people tend to use different speech styles when they are in a job interview as opposed to a social setting. After analyzing 150 hours of courtroom recordings, the researchers found that several linguistic variables tended to vary not with gender, but with social status. Hedges, intensifiers, gestures, tag questions, hesitations, and polite forms (variables which Lakoff assigned to the 'female register') were used more by individuals with low status and power, such as inexpert witnesses. More high status individuals, such as expert witnesses, judges, and attorneys, deployed a more straightforward speech style. This study thus suggested that speech style depends more on social status than on gender, as Lakoff had claimed.

2.3. Stereotypes about male and female communication styles

Thus far, we have seen that research into gender differences in communication has yielded mixed results. From this we can conclude that we cannot simply assume that credibility differences between men and women are caused by communication differences. In order to look further, we need to take stereotypes about men and women's communication styles into account. While the magnitude of communication differences remains controversial, the existence of widespread stereotypes about men and women's communication styles has remained relatively undisputed. Berryman and Wilcox (1980) analyzed the relationship between objective communication differences and gendered expectations about communication behaviors. They found that many of the 'gendered' characteristics that

Lakoff assigns to men and women correspond with stereotypes about both genders, rather than their actual behavior. They argued that ''regardless of whether these stereotypes do or do not correspond to actual behavior, they deserve investigation because of their possible prescriptive power for actual sex-role related speech behavior'' (Berryman & Wilcox, 1980, p. 52). Widely held stereotypes might cause a self-fulfilling prophecy when they exert pressure on individuals to exhibit the behavior that is generally expected of them. Berryman and Wilcox asserted that ''beliefs about sex-related language may be as important as actual differences'' (p.52) because these stereotypes do indeed exert pressure to conform to them, and because these stereotypes might reveal attitudes that are held about men and women. In order to test their hypothesis that some linguistic variables are selectively judged to be male or female, Berryman and Wilcox created an experiment in which participants were shown two messages about the same topic. The gender of the speaker was not known to the participants. One message contained variables from the 'female register', such as intensifiers, questions, and tag questions. The second message included slang, profanity, and incorrect grammar. The researchers found that the participants judged the first message to be female and the second to be male, which supported their hypothesis that certain language styles are perceived to be either male or female, even when the speaker's gender is unknown.

Sometimes men and women behave the same, yet they are perceived differently. Even when there is no objective difference between their status, experience, or intelligence, research has found that men and women are often still perceived differently. Many studies have found that when gender is the only available variable for evaluation, and when performance and behavior is held constant, men and women are rated differently (Deaux, 1985; Wallston & O'Leary, 1981), and that expectations for women are higher. Bradley (1981) found that when women used tentative language (e.g. tag questions like 'don't you think?'), they were judged to be less knowledgeable and intelligent than men who used the same tentative language. According to Aries (1987), certain linguistic features are attributed to men and women, respectively. It seems that women are more negatively affected by these attributions, an effect that combines with a tendency to perceive female speakers as less knowledgeable, intelligent, and credible (Aries, 1987, p.166). When reading the same

speech, for instance, men are perceived as more honest and doing a better job in giving the facts than women (Whittaker & Meade, 1967).

Many studies disconfirm a strong link between gender and speech style. Carli (1990) conducted a study that examined speech style and gender, and the persuasive effect of messages that contained hedges, intensifiers, interruptions, and disclaimers. The theoretical framework for her research was the Expectancy Theory, which states that "inequalities in face-to-face interactions are a function of the relative status of participants" (Carli, 1990, p. 941). Carli asserted that in American culture, men generally have higher status than women. This is demonstrated by the fact that masculine traits are valued over feminine traits, and that this positive attitude towards masculine treats transfers over to our language use. While gender differences in communication are real, Carli noted, they are small, and more nuance is needed. Carli pointed out that past research was mainly conducted with strangers who have little information about one another, which might cause them to use gender as a heuristic to infer status. Because participants do not know anything about each other, they could be inclined to attribute language use to an easily accessible feature like gender. Many of the characteristics and behaviors that are attributed to gender in these studies might thus actually be explained by other factors. For instance, Carli argues, research has shown that individuals of 'low status', irrespective of gender, spoke tentatively to higher status individuals, but not to their equals. Moreover, Carli asserted that gender differences that are found do not necessarily imply that women are more tentative. Use of reinforcers and intensifiers might well reflect sociability and emotional expressiveness, rather than tentativeness (Carli, 1990). Other researchers have similarly argued that even if women's speech differs from men's speech, this does not mean that typically 'masculine' speech styles are superior. Fishman (1978), for example, proposed that women's use of tag questions might be an attempt to engage others in the conversation, reflecting interpersonal sensitivity. Thus, rather than implying a lack of confidence, women's use of tentative speech might reflect a larger emphasis on affiliation (Leaper & Ayres, 2007).

A reason for higher 'tentative' language use by women is provided by the findings that women tend to be more relationally oriented than men, who tend to be more task oriented. These differences are more likely to stem from differences in socialization than from innate gender differences (Brandau-Brown, 1999). Carli deemed it therefore reasonable to

conclude that ''gender difference in social-emotional orientation is a function of expectancies and behavior norms that depend, in part, on the gender composition of the group in which subjects interact, and not on the gender differences in personality'' (Carli, 1990, p. 943). Henley (2001) suggested that girls and women are socialized to be sensitive to interpersonal cues because their status in society is generally more subordinate. Once again, this may point to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because women are expected to be more concerned with social relationships and expressing emotions, they might feel pressure to conform to this stereotype, which is reflected in how they communicate with others. Carli's study showed that women used more disclaimers and hedges when communicating with men than when they were communicating with other women, which she attributed to their need to justify themselves in mixed-sex groups. These results demonstrate that gender differences in communication can be attributed to things other than status and power.

2.4. Gendered expectancies for communication behaviors

As we have discussed in the previous section, it seems that we hold men and women as communicators to different standards. What we expect from either gender has a profound influence on how we perceive them, and can also influence how they behave. Expectancy Violations Theory is a theory that is used to explain a broad range of nonverbal and verbal communication behaviors. As discussed before, the theory asserts that individuals are expected to conform to certain norms, and that nonconformity, or violating these expectations, might be sanctioned. These expectations are largely based on societal norms that dictate which behaviors are appropriate in certain interactions (Brandau-Brown, 1999). These expectancies are often filters through which information is processed, and they tend to persist even when presented with disconfirming information (Burgoon, 1993). Burgoon and Le Poire (1993) claimed that targets are evaluated differently when pre-existing expectancies are present than when there are no expectations. Burgoon, Dillard, and Doran (1983) researched how expectancy violation influences persuasiveness. They proposed that if men conformed to the communication strategy that is attributed to men (i.e. expected of them), which is a more aggressive speech style, they would be more persuasive than if they used a more moderate style. Similarly, they proposed that if women were more prosocial and not aggressive, as is expected of them, they would be more persuasive. These predictions were based on past research (Burgoon, Dillard, & Ooran, 1975) that has shown

that men are more persuasive when using intense language, whereas women were less effective when employing such language, as this violated expectancies for how women should present their arguments.

Burgoon et al. pointed out that women are traditionally perceived as passive, timid, and submissive, and that this affects the amount of communication strategies that are deemed acceptable for them to use. For instance, a woman might be perceived negatively when she strongly expresses a viewpoint that deviates from the norm, because her dissent violates traditional expectations. Burgoon and Miller (1985) claimed that women and speakers who are low in credibility are limited in their strategy selection, and that an aggressive strategy would be a violation that inhibits persuasion. Research has found that sources with high credibility are more persuasive when they use intense language, while sources low in credibility are more effective with messages low in intensity (Brandau-Brown, 1999). Despite the emphasis on gender equality, ''most people still accord the two sexes very different roles in the social structure'' (Burgoon & Miller, 1975, p. 209). Burgoon and Miller assert that this fixed view of men and women has created a set of social norms that expects women to complementary, not competitive. These norms carry over into prescriptions for women's communication styles. Particularly, they argue, it is deemed more acceptable and desirable for men to argue with intense language than it is for women. Thus, Burgoon and Miller concluded, not only are gendered expectations still prevalent, the effects of violating these expectations is also gender specific.

Burgoon, Birk, and Hall (1991) found similar results when studying male and female physicians and patient compliance. They found that expected behaviors were very different for women than they were for men. The researchers argued that whether these differences stem from role socialization or are due to credibility explanations, there is a very limited range of acceptable communication behaviors available for women. In order to achieve patient compliance, female physicians were limited to low intensity or non-aggressive messages. Male physicians, on the other hand, were allowed a much wider range of message strategies; in order to achieve patient compliance, both aggressive and affiliative messages were effective. The results of this study by Burgoon et al. are very telling about how men and women are expected to communicate and confirm the link between gender and expectancy violations.

Gender expectancies seem to have a pronounced effect on language, overall. Bem (1981) claimed that a society constructs and imposes prescriptive rules that determine which behaviors are appropriate for individuals, based on their gender. These rules also dictate the appropriate language style and usage for each gender. According to Burgoon and Miller (1985), women are 'programmed' by this socialization process to be submissive and complementary, and men to be dominant and intelligent. Because of these stereotypes, men and women are not only required to behave differently, they are also expected to communicate differently. In persuasive messages, for instance, women are expected to use less intense language than men (Burgoon, Jones, & Stewart, 1975). Intense language use, Burgoon et al. found, made men more persuasive but made women less persuasive. Once again, this demonstrates how violating the expectancy that women do (or should) not use intense language can lead to sanctions, this time in the form of decreased credibility.

Conclusion

What we have gathered so far is that the literature about the link between gender and communication styles has produced mixed results and thus does not provide us with a clear answer. It seems that in absolute terms, differences in communication behavior between men and women are not as pronounced as many people think. Nevertheless, men and women are still expected *and* perceived to communicate very differently from one another. Although such perceptions of behavior are often mistaken for actual behavior, these perceptions nevertheless construct our reality. Because stereotypes connote so much about personal characteristics, they have significant consequences for how men and women are perceived and treated. When women want to establish their authority, or be perceived as credible, for instance, they might be hindered by stereotypes about women as nurturing and affiliative. As we have learned, these characteristics generally do not contribute to authoritativeness and credibility. One the one hand, we expect women to be personable, likeable, and warm, but on the other hand, these same traits might cause women to be perceived as less competent or credible. When women display authoritativeness, however, they violate the gendered expectancies set for them, which results in disapproval. Thus, women are expected to live up to expectations set for women, while simultaneously not living up to the negative stereotypes held about women. The cumulative effect of these factors is that we perceive women as less credible, even when they are communicating with

accuracy and honesty. Indeed, ''both women and men perceive women as being less credible than men in all the senses of the term, and the recent years have by no means eliminated these attitudes'' (Schafran, 1985, p. 16). In the legal context, the disadvantages women face might go beyond diminished credibility. Research has suggested that ''persons, including judges, listening to different accounts of a dispute are more likely to ascribe blame to the party who uses a powerless speech style'' (Mack, 1993, p. 331). In cases of rape and sexual harassment, where testimonies about (lack of) consent are essential elements of proof, this gender bias that might be held by judges or jurors might be conclusive. When a female testifies using the 'powerless' style, even though it is deemed socially appropriate for her as a woman, she might not be believed despite telling the truth. One thing that has become clear from this chapter is that we cannot simply attribute the gender credibility gap to a feminine communication style, and that stereotypes and prejudice also play a part, both in the perception and emergence of communication differences. In the next chapter, I will discuss the systemic discounting of women as testifiers in and beyond the legal context. We will see how rape myths fuel rape culture, and how testimonial and hermeneutical injustice as put forth by Miranda Fricker can explain why women's experiences of sexual abuse are so broadly discounted.

Chapter 3. Systemic Disbelief in Women as an Epistemic Injustice

In the previous chapter, I have discussed communication differences between men and women, and examined if communication styles contribute to credibility. While differences have been found, it seems they are not significant enough to explain why men are widely considered to be more reliable testifiers than women, and that differences that are found might be due to stereotypes. It seems that stereotypes about men and women as communicators are particularly potent in determining how men and women are expected to communicate in order to be perceived as credible. We have seen that women have a much narrower range of communication strategies available to them, and that they are more likely to be sanctioned (in the form of diminished credibility) when deviating from these norms. From this we can conclude that there exists a bias against women as communicators. In this chapter I will further explore this bias by exploring Miranda Fricker's theory about epistemic injustice. I will introduce concepts that Fricker puts forward to help us deepen our understanding of the harm that is caused by the biases from which the gender credibility gap originates, especially in the realm of sexual harassment. In the first paragraph, I will discuss how so-called 'identity power' (gender power in particular) is deployed to silence women, which in turn leads to women suffering from a form of epistemic injustice called 'testimonial injustice' (paragraph 3.2). Then, I will explain how another form of epistemic injustice, called 'hermeneutical injustice', leads women to have a harder time making sense of their experiences, especially in the realm of sexual harassment (3.3.). Lastly, I will discuss how rape myths as a form of hermeneutical injustice further feed into testimonial injustice, and examine what this implies for women testifying about rape and sexual harassment.

3.1. Identity power

As we have seen in the first chapter, women are widely regarded as unreliable, and consequently, they are often disbelieved. Systematic disbelief in women means that women are oftentimes not perceived as competent testifiers. In order to be a competent testifier, one must first and foremost be a competent knower. The tendency to disregard women's testimonies thus exposes a deeper prejudice, namely that women are not perceived as competent knowers. Miranda Fricker (2007) coined the term 'epistemic injustice' to describe this form of prejudice commonly held against women. This injustice essentially consists of a wrong that is done to someone in their role as a knower. Fricker distinguishes between two

forms of epistemic injustice, namely testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. First, I will discuss the former. Fricker uses an example from the screenplay of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* that is a paragon of testimonial injustice. In the screenplay, a man has disappeared, and his wife suggests to his father that a mutual friend of theirs might be responsible for his murder. The man's father tells her ''Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts''. This putdown clearly showcases how a woman is silenced by the exercise of power, specifically gender power (Fricker, 2007). Gender power is one example of a kind of social power inherent in testimonial injustice that Fricker calls 'identity power'.

Fricker explains social power as ''a capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world'' (Fricker, 2007, p.9). There are both active and passive ways in which such power can operate. Consider, for instance, the power that a traffic warden holds over drivers. When the warden fines a driver, they actively exercise their power. However, when the mere possibility of being fined influences the behavior of drivers, power operates passively, which is perhaps even more crucial. This simple example reveals how a power structure can persist, even when it is not actively exercised all the time (Fricker, 2007). Power can be agential, meaning that there is one social agent exercising power over another social agent, or perhaps even a group of agents. However, Fricker notes, there is also a purely structural form of power, which lacks an agent that exercises it. Fricker names the example of an informally disenfranchised group, which, ''for whatever complex social reasons'', tends not to exercise their right to vote. There is no particular agent that excludes them from voting, yet they *are* excluded by an operating social power (Fricker, 2007, p.10). In such cases, power lacks a subject as a consequence of it being so widely dispersed across a given social system. This structural power thus functions to preserve the given social order in the social system.

There are also forms of power that depend on a shared conception of social identity by social agents. Fricker argues that such concepts exist in the collective social imagination, and that they determine, for example, what it means to be a man or a woman. As I have mentioned earlier, one way in which identity power can take shape is gender. Much like other forms of social power, identity power can operate actively or passively. An example of gender power operating actively is the way Marge was silenced in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. In another setting, however, a woman might be silenced even if no one 'actively' silences her.

In this case, when gender power operates passively, she is silenced ''by the mere fact that he is a man and she a woman'' (Fricker, 2007, p. 15). Both active and passive operations of identity power rely on 'imaginative social co-ordination': the relevant collective conceptions of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman must be shared by both parties (Fricker, 2007, p.15), as such conceptions make up stereotypes that determine men and women's authority on specific subject matters. Fricker notes that in order for identity power to operate, it is not required that either party consciously accepts the stereotype and considers it to be true. She explains that such stereotypes can influence our actions, despite our beliefs. Like social power in general, identity power can also take a purely structural form. In order to illustrate this, Fricker refers back to the previous example of disenfranchisement, where the informally disenfranchised group, due to their 'collectively imagined' social identity, tends not to vote because they do not consider themselves to be the type of people that engage in politics. This example shows how a general social conception of a group can have a strong influence on the behavior of that group, and thus reveals how influential structural identity power can be.

3.2. Testimonial injustice

Identity power is an essential aspect of the process of testimonial exchange, as hearers rely on heuristics like social stereotypes to assess speakers' credibility. Relying on a stereotype can be justified, or it can be unwarranted and thus misleading. Particularly if the stereotype is rooted in prejudice against the speaker, two things ensue: the hearer unjustly underestimates the speaker's credibility, possibly missing out on knowledge; and the hearer does something unethical, namely undermining the speaker in their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007, p. 17). This process thus consists of both an epistemic and an ethical dysfunction, and it is what Fricker calls *testimonial injustice*. Fricker deems testimonial injustice to be a distinctive kind of injustice in which a subject is wronged specifically in their role as a knower, as their knowledge is undermined. As opposed to incidental testimonial injustices, systematic testimonial injustices are connected with other types of injustice, as they ''track the subject through different dimensions of social activity—economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, and so on'' (Fricker, 2007, p. 27). According to Fricker, the main type of prejudice that operates in this way is identity

prejudice. When identity prejudice influences a hearer's credibility judgement, identity power is at play.

Many stereotypes about 'powerless' groups in history, such as women, black people, and working-class people, are characterized by attributes contrary to competence and honesty, such as inferior intelligence, illogicality, and over-emotionality. Fricker notes that insofar as such prejudice is false, the stereotype is an unreliable generalization about an entire social group. As mentioned earlier, when determining a speaker's credibility, the hearer perceives the speaker against a background of assumptions about ''how far people like him are trustworthy about things like this in relation to people like her'' (Fricker, 2007, p. 36), which means that identity prejudice can distort a credibility judgement. This effect can be particularly hard to notice because prejudice can influence a hearer's credibility judgment even when it conflicts with the hearer's beliefs. Fricker illustrates this phenomenon with the example of a woman who considers herself a feminist, but remains to be influenced by the stereotype of women as lacking the proper authority required for holding political office, and consequently takes female political candidates less seriously than their male counterparts. Fricker calls this 'residual internalization', whereby a member of a subordinated group continues as host to a sort of half-life for the oppressive ideology, even when her beliefs have genuinely moved on (Fricker, 2007, p. 37). This means that even though certain beliefs are not held by someone (anymore), they still retain their influence on that person's social perception. Ami Harbin (2016) described a similar phenomenon with the term 'double consciousness', where an individual sees themselves through two perceptions at once: through their own, positive self-perception, but also through the negative perception of others. In this case, a feminist woman might consider men and women to be equally competent to hold political office, but the negative (sexist) view of others, even though she does not hold this view herself, unconsciously also exerts influence on her perception of women.

The harm that testimonial injustice inflicts consists of two aspects. The primary harm is that when someone suffers from a testimonial injustice, they are wronged in their capacity as a knower, which is essential to human value, making it an intrinsic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Undermining someone in their capacity to provide knowledge is to undermine their capacity to reason, and essentially undermines them in their humanity. The person not only suffers

from an epistemic violation, but also from what such a violation implies. Such an epistemic insult, Fricker states, is inherently dehumanizing. The second harm is that the recipient may lose confidence in their beliefs, or when persistently experiencing testimonial injustice, in their intellectual abilities in general. A recipient might suffer from a testimonial injustice regarding one particular thing they said, or regarding their authority in a specific context, or just in general. In the case of systematic testimonial injustice, which, as I have discussed earlier, is driven by identity prejudice, a speaker is attacked in their general epistemic authority.

3.3. Hermeneutical injustice

An issue that feminism has been concerned with for a long time is how power relations can curb women's capability to make sense of their experiences. Social power impacts the forming of collective social understanding in a way that relies more on the experiences of certain groups, and thus ignores the perspective of other, marginalized groups. Fricker explained this type of injustice with the case of Carmita Wood. Carmita quit her job after eight years, and was asked the reason for quitting when filling out an unemployment insurance form. She recalled the many incidences where her employer had made her feel uncomfortable, deliberately brushing up against her, cornering her, touching his crotch when he was standing by her desk, which led to her avoiding him, (unsuccessfully) asking to be transferred, and eventually quitting. On the form, she wrote 'personal' (after which she was refused insurance). Carmita had not been able to find the adequate concepts to understand, let alone describe, her experiences at work. She lacked the concept of sexual harassment in her conceptual resources, and was thus not able to explain what had happened to her. Members of groups that are structurally disadvantaged by such gaps in their conceptual resources suffer a structural injustice called hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007). Hermeneutical injustice consists of more than a mere cognitive disadvantage, as it pertains to a collective disadvantage such as the lack of a proper understanding of the sexual harassment that women endure. Fricker claims that the issue stems from certain groups being excluded from the process that in which collective social meanings are determined, such as women who were excluded from participating in the generating of the concept of 'sexual harassment', which determines what sexual harassment really means. Women's social position of relative 'powerlessness' has caused unequal

hermeneutical participation, which is the origin of a hermeneutical injustice. Fricker calls such groups 'hermeneutically marginalized', and says that such marginalization is always a form of powerlessness.

The harm of hermeneutical injustice has multiple aspects. In a way, an epistemic misconception occurs for everyone involved. In the case of harassment, both the perpetrator and the victim might not have an adequate understanding of harassment and thus might not be able to grasp the gravity of the offense, let alone identify it as harassment in the first place. This is illustrated by the fact that repeated sexual propositions are often dismissed as 'flirting', and that someone who speaks out against such propositions is deemed 'uptight'. Hermeneutical injustice can also lead to more tangible damage; think of Carmita, who not only lost her job, but was also denied insurance because she was not able to make sense of and verbalize her experiences. Hermeneutical injustice thus not only causes victims to doubt their own beliefs, it also causes others to be inclined to not take their testimonies seriously. The term 'sexual harassment' was coined by feminist activists in the time of Carmita Wood's case because they wanted to prevent any more women's experiences of sexual harassment to escape their understanding.

3.4. Rape myths as a function of hermeneutical injustice

The systematic disregard of women as reliable testifiers, which I have discussed in the first chapter under the notion 'credibility discounting', is integral to how society responds to cases of rape and sexual harassment. In this section, I will discuss a phenomenon closely tied together with both forms of epistemic injustice discussed in this chapter, namely the existence of rape myths. Rape myths are ''attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women'' (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p.134). Such myths can be grouped into three categories. First, there are rape myths that deny the existence or scope of rape, such as ''women generally lie about rape'', ''once someone gives consent, they cannot revoke it'', and ''a previous sexual interaction between two people implies consent for future interactions''. Second are rape myths that excuse the behavior of rapists, such as ''women who are raped are to blame, because they were intoxicated or dressed 'promiscuously''', ''the perpetrator cannot be blamed for his actions, because he was drunk'' (note the stark contrast with the previous statement), and ''rape is a crime of passion''.

Lastly, there are myths that deny that rape is a grave crime, such as ''most women secretly wish to be raped'', ''only women that are promiscuous are raped'', ''a rapist usually only rapes once'' (Hall, Howard, & Boezio, 1986). Such myths are extremely harmful because they uphold a distorted view of the issue and they can be (and are) used to silence victims of rape and sexual harassment. The myths that present rape as a rare incident trivialize the fear that many women feel and disregard the danger that they face. The myths that downplay the seriousness of the offense encourage minimal punishment, if any. Lastly, the myths that justify the behavior of rapists suggest that the victim is to blame, rather than the perpetrator. In this way, the existence of rape myths cumulatively sustains a culture that denies, trivializes, and justifies violence and harassment against women.

Because rape myths present a distorted view of what rape really is, it has been argued that they should be considered as a form of hermeneutical injustice (Jenkins, 2016). Consider the example of a woman who thinks that rape is a crime that is committed by a stranger and that is always met with physical protest. If this woman were to be raped by her husband, against her will yet not involving physical protest, she would probably not perceive it as such because of the distorted conception of rape that she holds. Because she has a particular (faulty) idea of what rape is, she cannot make sense of what she has experienced as rape. A rape myth obscures her experience, and Jenkins argues that this constitutes a hermeneutical injustice. Not only will this probably result in the victim refraining from reporting the rape, rape myths as a form of hermeneutical injustice are directly tied to the amount of rapists that go unpunished. Much like victims and perpetrators, jurors are also affected by the existence of distorted conceptions of rape. Jenkins claims that acceptance of rape myths by jurors has negative consequence for verdicts in trials because jurors ''who have a faulty…concept of rape will have an inaccurate understanding of what it is they are meant to be deciding on'' (Jenkins, 2016, p. 25). If this is the case, jurors will try to determine if what has occurred meets the conditions for their faulty conception of rape, rather than the conditions for what rape really is. If jurors believe that rape requires violence or physical force, they will dismiss cases that do not involve violence because such cases do not match *their* conception of rape, rather the law's conception of rape (Tilton, 2019). As a result, many verdicts are negatively impacted by the fact that jurors are simply asking the wrong questions.

While Jenkins provides an important analysis of the functioning of rape myths, her account seems incomplete. Jenkins asserts that in the cases that were previously discussed, people do not necessarily doubt that the events happened, but they simply do not perceive them as rape. In many cases of rape and sexual harassment, however, people not only have faulty conceptions of rape, they also often disbelieve the testimony of victims as a whole. As discussed in the first chapter, women are often perceived as untrustworthy, but they are perceived as especially untrustworthy as testifiers about sexual abuse. People think that women lie about experiencing sexual abuse for a multitude of reasons, for instance because they regret a sexual experience, because they have malicious intentions and want to ruin men's lives, or because they think women are just liars in general (Tilton, 2019). Rape myths are thus not only inaccurate, they are prejudicial. Rape myths and hermeneutical injustice contribute to the image of women as unreliable testifiers as they encourage the unduly dismissal of women's testimonies, and thus, they encourage testimonial injustice.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have clarified that the harm inflicted on sexual abuse victims goes further than the physical harm they suffer, as many of them also fall victim to epistemic injustice. Since many victims of sexual abuse are women, their testimony is subject to unjustified doubt, and so they suffer from testimonial injustice. I have discussed how identity power, and gender power specifically, can be deployed to silence women, either on an incidental or a structural level. Furthermore, I have examined how women suffer another form of injustice, hermeneutical injustice, because they are widely excluded from the process of generating collective social meanings. As a result, social conceptualizations are created that do not take the perspective and experiences of women into account. This causes women to have a harder time making sense of their experiences, as they do not have the proper conceptual resources to grasp what they are experiencing. Because of this, many women do not report their rapes. Moreover, I have explained why the existence of rape myths is another aspect of hermeneutical injustice, as those who believe in them hold a distorted perception of rape. Because of this, many women's accounts of rape are either disbelieved or trivialized, which is, again, a form of epistemic injustice. The experiences of many victims of sexual harassment escape our collective understanding because they are obscured by rape myths, creating an excessively narrow conception of what rape 'should be'. Thus, the

testimonies of sexual abuse victims are often devalued because of these forms of epistemic injustice, which can explain the gender gap in credibility assessments, especially in the realm of sexual harassment.

Conclusion

In this research, I aimed to dissect the gender credibility gap and determine where it stems from. With that in mind, I studied a range of scientific literature on credibility, communication styles, and gender stereotypes. Accordingly, I structured this thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter, I have provided an overview of what the credibility gap entails in a wider context, but also in the legal realm specifically. We have seen that women generally have lower source credibility than men, meaning that they are perceived as less trustworthy. Research has suggested that gender cues significantly influence the process of making credibility judgments. It was found, for instance, that a text written by a male author is generally perceived as more credible than the same text when it is written by a female author (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). Moreover, Armstrong and Nelson (2005) found that when an official or 'expert' source was quoted in a text, most people assumed the source to be male. I presented these findings to demonstrate how mere gender cues can be largely influential in credibility assessments.

With this gender credibility gap in mind, I turned to women's testimonies of rape and other forms of sexual harassment. It seems women are perceived as particularly unreliable when they testify about rape and sexual harassment. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the finding that female witnesses are rated as less credible than their male counterparts (Nagle, Brodsky, & Weeter, 2014). Moreover, a lot of conditions need to be met before a rape allegation is taken seriously, which creates an extremely narrow conception of what counts as 'rape'. I argued that this general skepticism regarding rape allegations is unjustified, because research has shown that reports of rape are not more likely to be false than reports of other crimes. I discussed the harms of this widespread disbelief of women and how when a woman is disbelieved, a vicious cycle of discounting is triggered, causing not only others to doubt her, but also causing her to doubt herself.

In the second chapter, I homed in on where the gender credibility gap possibly originates from. Because men and women are often thought to communicate very differently, and because communication behavior influences credibility, it could be that gender differences in communication could perhaps (at least in part) account for the credibility gap. What I gathered from the results of several studies, however, was that research into gender differences in communication has produced mixed results. Generally, it seems that gender

differences are not as pronounced as many people think. It remains true, however, that men and women are expected to communicate differently from one another. I presented findings by Burgoon, Birk, and Hall (1991), which revealed that in order to be perceived as credible, women have less communication strategies available to them than men. This implies that we hold men and women as communicators to different standards, with women being at a disadvantage. As a result, we are much more prone to perceive women as dishonest than men, even when they are being truthful. I argued that these findings expose a bias towards women specifically in their role as communicators, and that the gender credibility gap cannot simply be attributed to gender differences in communication, as stereotypes and prejudice also play a part.

Lastly, I examined this bias against women in their role as communicators and the harm that it inflicts. I discussed several chapters from Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007). As Fricker put forth in her theory of epistemic injustice, the perception of women as incompetent testifiers and communicators implies that they are generally perceived as incompetent knowers. In line with Fricker's argument, I argued that the gender credibility gap stems from a prejudice against women which is especially strong when women testify about sexual abuse. Many victims of rape and sexual harassment, which are mostly women, fall victim to unjustified doubt when they testify, meaning they suffer from testimonial injustice. Moreover, they suffer from another type of injustice, namely hermeneutical injustice. This means that their experiences of sexual abuse escape their understanding because they do not have the appropriate cognitive resources to understand what has happened to them. The collective social understanding of sexual abuse does not take their perspective into account, creating a very narrow understanding of what sexual abuse really means. Rape myths further feed into hermeneutical injustice because they create a distorted perception of sexual abuse, leading people who believe in rape myths to dismiss cases of rape and sexual harassment that do not match this inherently faulty perception of sexual abuse. I have argued that these forms of hermeneutical injustice encourage testimonial injustice because they lead to the dismissal of many women's testimonies about sexual abuse. These forms of epistemic injustice can account for the gender credibility gap, at least in part, because they reveal a bias against women, particularly in their roles as knowers and testifiers.

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