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ARTICLE

Zetetic Exclusion

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of inquiry under conditions of oppression. It presents an account of *unjust zetetic exclusion*, which arises when prejudice limits access to inquiry and the epistemic goods it yields. Unlike other forms of epistemic injustice, unjust zetetic exclusion need not result from a prejudicial credibility attribution. Instead, it may manifest even if one is perceived to be a highly competent and trustworthy inquirer, or even if one makes no judgment whatsoever regarding one's zetetic capabilities. Unjust zetetic exclusion may result from prejudicial evaluations concerning who *belongs within* specific communities of inquiry and who should have access to, or possess knowledge about, a particular domain. Theories of epistemic injustice must account not only for how prejudice impacts credibility attributions but also how it regulates access to inquiry and shapes the conditions under which knowledge and other epistemic goods are acquired in the first place.

Keywords: inquiry; zetetic; epistemic injustice; prejudice; exclusion; epistemic gatekeeping

1. Introduction

It's no secret that Ludwig Wittgenstein wasn't a fan of women in academia. Surprisingly, one of his most accomplished students was a woman – Elizabeth Anscombe. Wittgenstein was obviously aware of Anscombe's gender, though he treated her as though she was a part of the boys' club. In his biography on Wittgenstein, Ray Monk describes Anscombe's relationship with Wittgenstein after she had attended his classes at Cambridge in 1946. He writes:

> By the end of the year she had become one of Wittgenstein's closest friends and one of his most trusted students, an exception to his general dislike for academic women and especially of female philosophers. She became, in fact, an honorary male, addressed by him affectionately as 'old man'. 'Thank God we've got rid of the women!' he once said to her at a lecture, on finding, to his delight, that no (other) female students were in attendance. (Monk 1990: 498)

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This article is about how Anscombe had to become an "old man" or an "honorary male" in order to learn philosophy in the 1940s at Cambridge. Well, not really. This essay isn't about Anscombe per se, though her story is relevant.

This article explores the dynamics of inquiry under conditions of oppression. It presents an account of *unjust zetetic exclusion*, which arises when prejudice limits one's access to inquiry and the epistemic goods it yields.[1] While there are many important similarities between cases of unjust zetetic exclusion and more traditional conceptions of epistemic injustice, especially testimonial injustice, there are also crucial differences. One important point of difference concerns the role of credibility judgments in sustaining forms of unjust zetetic exclusion.

Zetetic exclusion need not result from a prejudicial credibility attribution, that is: unjust zetetic exclusion may manifest even when one is perceived to be a highly competent or trustworthy inquirer, or even if one makes no judgment whatsoever regarding one's abilities as an inquirer. Instead, one may face unjust zetetic exclusion as a result of prejudicial evaluations concerning who *belongs* within specific communities of inquiry or who should have *access* to information and knowledge about a domain in the first place.

When theorizing about how one might be wronged as an epistemic agent, as a knower as well as an inquirer, we must account not only for how prejudice impacts judgments of credibility but also how it regulates access to inquiry and shapes the conditions under which one is able to meaningfully exercise their epistemic agency. This selective gatekeeping of participation in inquiry, and so too access to relevant epistemic communities wherein epistemic goods are acquired, I argue, constitutes a distinctive form of zetetic injustice.

Here is the plan. I will start by giving some background on inquiry and epistemic injustice (§2). From there, I develop an account of *unjust zetetic exclusion* and explore the different ways prejudice can give rise to this form of injustice (§3). One important way this injustice manifests is through *epistemic gatekeeping*, which occurs when a domain is identity-coded as not being "for" people like the inquirer. I further explore this species of zetetic exclusion and connect it to related accounts in the literature (§4). I conclude by considering future directions for further work on zetetic injustice, including forms of zetetic injustice which go beyond exclusion (§5).

2. Zetetic injustice

Inquiry is a central part of day-to-day life. We often take active steps to learn information that we may want or need. Most of the time, our inquiries are mundane and monotonous. You need to find your keys, so you rummage around the house and, lo and behold, they are on the kitchen counter. Other times our inquiries may be much more serious or urgent. You experience sharp pains in your chest, so you rush to the hospital to figure out what is wrong. Or a single mother, struggling to make ends meet, may seek guidance on how to apply for a loan. In these cases, if inquiry goes awry, if one is unable to gain access to crucial information, the negative consequences can be significant.

The ability to productively inquire is fundamental to the flourishing of any good life and any good society. However, inquiring environments – the spaces where we put forth

[1]The word "zetetic" comes from the Greek word *zētētikós*, meaning proceeding by inquiry or investigation. This terminology follows Friedman (2020), though uses of "zetetic" trace (at least) as far back as the Pyrrhonian skeptics. For an overview, see Falbo (2025).

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questions, seek out evidence, and look to others for advice, guidance, and support – can be sites of hostility, distrust, and outright injustice. Not all inquiries, and not all inquirers, are treated equally or with the appropriate degree of respect and concern. Some inquirers face serious barriers to the successful pursuit of inquiry. When these barriers result from prejudice, they give rise to cases of *zetetic injustice*.

An injustice is *zetetic* when one is wronged distinctly in their capacity as an inquirer. Zetetic forms of injustice contribute to sustaining and reproducing epistemic injustice, while maintaining unjust social arrangements and material conditions, more broadly. This results in a range of further harms that extend well beyond the realm of the epistemic and the zetetic, that is, well beyond considerations having to do with knowledge and inquiry.

Is zetetic injustice *epistemic*? We can properly classify zetetic injustice as epistemic to the extent that inquiry is an activity with an epistemic goal – knowledge, understanding, true belief, or epistemic improvement more generally (Archer 2021; Falbo 2023a). The activity of inquiry necessarily involves the exercise of one's epistemic agency. So, to the extent that epistemic injustice includes the ways in which one is wronged as an *epistemic agent*, then it plausibly encompasses both how one can function as a source of knowledge as well as one's capacity to participate in the pursuit of knowledge and other epistemic goods by engaging in inquiry.[2]

In the past two decades, there has been an overflow of work on epistemic injustice.[3] This body of scholarship has carefully examined the conditions under which one can be wronged as an epistemic agent, with a focus on wrongs done to one in their capacity as a knower or source of knowledge. One species of epistemic injustice that has received considerable attention is *testimonial* injustice, which has highlighted an important difference between possessing knowledge and being able to share one's knowledge with others. This idea is reflected in Greek mythology, with the Curse of Cassandra (Townley 2003).[4]

> THE CURSE OF CASSANDRA: The god Apollo had become infatuated with Cassandra, a Trojan princess. In an attempt to seduce her, he granted her the gift of prophecy. As a result, she possessed a wealth of valuable and important knowledge about the future. But, when Cassandra rebuffed his sexual advances, Apollo spat in her mouth, thereby cursing her so that nobody would ever believe a word she said.

[2]Notably, there is an ongoing debate regarding whether some or all norms of inquiry are properly classified as epistemic, as opposed to practical or moral (Arpaly 2023; Falbo 2023b; Fleisher 2025; Friedman 2020; Thorstad 2022). I'm not interested in policing uses of "epistemic." Even if one rejects the view that zetetic norms are epistemic, one should still recognize the crucial role of inquiry in our lives as epistemic agents. Carefully analyzing the relationship between inquiry and oppression and injustice is important for understanding the exercise of epistemic agency in nonideal social environments, even if inquiry itself is not governed by epistemic norms.

[3]This work was largely sparked by Fricker (2007); however, various scholars have discussed the phenomena of epistemic injustice prior to the publication of Fricker's book, though not under the banner of "epistemic injustice." For a sample of this work, see, for example, Lorde (1984); Lugones (1987); Collins (1990); Young (1990); Spivak (2003). For a helpful overview of epistemic injustice, see McKinnon (2016); McGlynn (2025).

[4]Also see, (Dotson 2014: 124–125) for discussion of the Curse of Cassandra as it relates to epistemic oppression.

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There is a lot we could say about Apollo, but let's focus on Cassandra. What has Cassandra lost when she is cursed? It's not knowledge – she has lots of that. Instead, what Cassandra loses is her standing or status as a knower. She is robbed of her ability to be a *source of knowledge* for others.

According to Fricker (2007), testimonial injustice occurs when: "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (2007: 1). For example, consider the case of Stephen Rockwell, an Indigenous man whose reports of pain were not believed or taken seriously because medical professionals racially stereotyped him as a "drug seeker" (CBC News 2025). In standard cases of testimonial injustice, a speaker attempts to share their knowledge via testimony, but their testimony is not believed because the speaker is given an *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*.[5] Due to prejudice, the audience views the speaker as someone who is not trustworthy or competent on the topic and thus unable to serve as a source of knowledge.

Central to cases of testimonial injustice are judgments of credibility. Belonging to an epistemic community involves being meaningfully recognized as a source of knowledge or information; it involves the capacity to give or share information with others. Fricker (2015) argues that *epistemic contribution* is fundamental to human well-being and flourishing. And she understands epistemic contribution as: "the capacity to contribute epistemic materials to the shared pool of epistemic resources" (Fricker 2015: 81).[6] Importantly, the capacity for epistemic contribution plausibly involves not only one's ability to be a contributor of knowledge or information but also one's standing as an inquirer and the ability to contribute meaningfully to practices of inquiry where epistemic goods like knowledge are pursued.

Consider a twist on THE CURSE OF CASSANDRA (this time without a creepy and lustful Apollo).

> THE CURSE OF ZET(ETIC)ANDRA: Zetandra is granted the gift of being a perfect inquirer. She always asks the most relevant, interesting, and probing questions. But this gift comes with a curse! Whenever Zetandra attempts to inquire, her inquiries are systematically shut down: her questions are ignored, misinterpreted, or not taken seriously.

What does Zetandra lose when she is cursed? It's not her skills as an inquirer – she has that. She is still perfectly able to ask the most probing, relevant, and interesting questions in all circumstances. What she is robbed of is her *status* or *standing* as an inquirer. She is not taken to be capable of meaningfully participating in, or productively contributing to, inquiry.

While literature on epistemic injustice has widely discussed how prejudice impacts evaluations of credibility, less attention has been paid to how prejudice limits and shapes meaningful access to, and participation within, practices of inquiry. How might one be wronged distinctly in their capacity as an inquirer?

Hookway (2010) identifies two perspectives from which we can evaluate epistemic agents. On the one hand, we might evaluate whether someone is a competent or trustworthy *source of information*. Or, on the other hand, we might evaluate whether

[5]There have been various challenges to this definition of testimonial injustice. An important objection identifies cases of testimonial injustice that involve *surpluses*, opposed to deficits, of credibility. For discussion, see, for example, Medina (2011); Davis (2016); Yap (2017); Lackey (2018, 2021).

[6]Also see related argument in Dotson (2012) on contributory injustice.

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one is a skilled or competent *inquirer*. For instance, we may consider whether someone is able to meaningfully contribute to inquiry by asking relevant or interesting questions.

These two dimensions of evaluation are related. Presumably if someone is an excellent source of information on a topic, then they will likely be a good inquirer on that topic as well. Similarly, if one is a skilled inquirer on a topic, then it's plausible that they may serve as a good informant on that topic too. So, we might expect judgments about one's skills as an inquirer to be roughly in lockstep with judgments about their credibility as a testifier or source of knowledge. That said, these judgments can, and often do, come apart – sometimes drastically.

A separation of these perspectives is salient during the early stages of inquiry into a topic. For instance, a young child who is learning about animals for the first time might ask really perceptive and thoughtful questions (e.g., "If penguins are birds, then why don't they fly?" or "How can fish breathe under water?"), yet we wouldn't consider the child to be a credible source of knowledge on the topic, given that they are just beginning to learn about it.

We could also imagine a passionate philosopher who always asks interesting, creative, and stimulating questions, guiding inquiry in productive and interesting ways. However, when it comes to being a source of knowledge – especially regarding the most challenging and deep philosophical questions – they tend to fall short. Philosophy is difficult, and while this individual is an expert investigator, they often don't manage to gain knowledge or settled answers to longstanding philosophical questions. As a result, while they are highly valued as a participant in inquiry, they are not considered to be a credible source of knowledge, at least when it comes to big philosophical questions.[7] So, you can be an excellent inquirer while failing to be a credible source of knowledge.

The reverse is also true: someone might be an excellent source of knowledge about a topic while nonetheless being a poor inquirer on that topic. This sort of person might routinely conduct inquiry in haphazard ways by using flawed methods or asking irrelevant or misguided questions, yet when it comes to sharing the knowledge they do possess, they're highly credible. Imagine a retired physicist who has a great amount of knowledge about physics, yet, being out of practice and not up to speed on recent technological developments, lacks the ability to conduct experiments or engage in meaningful inquiry into the topic. Or imagine that – by sheer luck – a stranger stumbles upon the diary of a criminal. The diary includes several detailed confessions to various crimes. After reading the diary, the stranger now possesses a wealth of knowledge about the crimes. However, if the stranger were to investigate the crimes directly, they would be completely lost. While they know a lot of detailed information about the crimes, they don't know the first thing about how to conduct a criminal investigation. Again, we find that one can be regarded as a credible source of knowledge on a topic while failing to be viewed as a competent or skilled inquirer on the topic.

Considering both perspectives – evaluating agents as *sources* of knowledge and information as well as *inquirers* – can help us gain a fuller picture of epistemic agency and how it can be threatened or undermined across these two distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions.

[7]Compare this to one of philosophy's most notorious inquirers: Socrates. He's known for his ability to ask his interlocutors challenging questions, pushing them to critically evaluate their views and to question their assumptions. However, despite being regarded as someone who is an incredibly sharp inquirer, Socrates is often not taken to be a credible informant or source of knowledge (instead he is an aporia inducer).

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3. Zetetic exclusion

What is it to wrong someone in their capacity as an inquirer? We will focus on one important kind of zetetic injustice: *unjust zetetic exclusion*, cases where prejudice causes one to be excluded or significantly limited in their ability to engage in zetetic activity.

3.1. Prejudice and judgments of zetetic skill

Let's consider some cases. First, consider the following case adapted from (Hookway 2010: 155).

> SEMINAR ROOM: Misty is the only woman in Professor Oak's philosophy seminar. Whenever she needs clarification or help understanding a difficult part of the text, Professor Oak readily responds to her questions. However, other times, when Misty attempts to ask more critical questions, with the goal of contributing to the ongoing debate in the class, Professor Oak either ignores her questions, treats them as irrelevant, or misinterprets them as mere requests for clarification. As a result of sexist prejudice, Professor Oak assumes that Misty is incapable of asking critical philosophical questions which may productively contribute to the class discussion.

Yikes! Professor Oak is a bad teacher. When Misty's questions take the form of mere requests for clarification, he readily provides her with the information she seeks. However, when her questions have more bite to them – when she attempts to make a more substantive contribution to the philosophical discussion – she is not taken seriously. Due to sexist prejudice, Professor Oak takes Misty to be incapable of making meaningful contributions to inquiry, and, as a result, he limits her zetetic participation.[8]

Consider a related case from Whitcomb (2025). This case comes from the ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes. The plot is as follows. The women are on a mission to end the Peloponnesian war. Their strategy: they will withhold sex from the men in order to force them into peace negotiations. In one scene, Lysistrata gets into an argument with a magistrate. Their argument unfolds as follows:

> All along we kept our silence, Acquiesced as nice
> wives should — or else! — although we didn't
> like it. You would escalate the war; we would ask
> you so politely, even though it hurt inside,
> 'Darling, what's the latest war-news?
> What did all you men decree?
> Anything about a treaty?'
> Then you'd say, 'What's that to you?
> Shut up!' And I'd shut up . . . Then we'd hear some
> even worse news, so we'd say, 'How stupid, dear!'

[8]Goetze (2021) discusses the related phenomenon of *anticipatory zetetic injustice* in educational contexts, which occurs when a student withholds or truncates their questions because they anticipate that a teacher will prejudicially misconstrue them. We might understand such cases as a form of *preemptive* zetetic exclusion. Also, see Dotson (2012) on testimonial smothering for related discussion.

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> Then you'd give us dirty looks and say, 'Go mend my cloak or else! War is strictly for the menfolk.[9]

Lysistrata is attempting to ask a series of questions about the war ("What's the latest war news?" and "Anything about a treaty?"), but her questions are repeatedly rejected due to sexist prejudice. More specifically, Whitcomb argues that Lysistrata's questions are rejected because women are prejudicially evaluated as being unfit to inquire into the war – they are given an *identity-prejudicial inquiry deficit* (2025: 39). In developing his account, Whitcomb draws a close parallel between testimonial injustice, which applies primarily to the speech act of assertion, and what he calls *interrogative* injustice, which applies to interrogative speech acts or the asking of questions. Whitcomb argues:

> Whereas Fricker's (2007) identity prejudicial *credibility* deficits stereotype *asserters* as bad *sources* of knowledge, identity prejudicial *inquiry* deficits stereotype askers as bad *seekers* of knowledge (Whitcomb 2025: 28).

In cases of testimonial injustice, a speaker attempts to share her knowledge yet receives an identity-prejudicial *credibility deficit* and is undermined as a source of knowledge. Similarly, the thought goes, in cases of interrogative injustice, an inquirer asks a question, but their question is rejected due to an identity-prejudicial *inquiry deficit* – the speaker is taken to be an incompetent or untrustworthy inquirer. As a result, they are undermined in their ability to participate in inquiry. Compare Hookway (2010):

> We may do someone an epistemic injustice by treating them as if they do not have the capacities to ask interesting or relevant questions . . . when this is influenced by stereotypes or when there is no reason for treating them in this way, they are treated as lacking a sense of relevance. In that case we treat the person as a non-participant, not just a non-knower (Hookway 2010: 158).

These accounts identify important dimensions of zetetic injustice; however, they tend to focus on cases where prejudice causes one to be stereotyped as an incompetent or untrustworthy inquirer. Professor Oak rejects Misty's question because prejudice causes him to view her as incapable of asking good philosophical questions, and similarly, the magistrate rejects Lysistrata's questions about the war because sexist prejudice causes him to view her as incompetent or unfit to inquire on the topic.

This picture of zetetic exclusion is incomplete. It is modeled too closely off the standard model of testimonial injustice found in Fricker (2007), on which credibility judgments are central to one's status as a knower. However, some forms of unjust zetetic exclusion occur even when there are no doubts or prejudicial judgments made regarding one's competence as an inquirer. Indeed, it is possible for someone to experience unjust zetetic exclusion even when they are accurately evaluated as being a *highly skilled* inquirer, or even when one makes *no judgment at all* regarding one's zetetic competence.[10]

[9]Henderson (1988: 115–116), as quoted in Whitcomb (2025).

[10]Note: Hookway (2010) and Whitcomb (2025) don't present their views as exhaustive accounts of zetetic injustice. Instead, they offer an initial framework for understanding forms of zetetic injustice. I'm not disagreeing with their accounts; rather, I hope to further expand upon their work by identifying further ways that prejudice can limit participation within inquiry.

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Credibility judgments are indispensable to cases of testimonial injustice. This is because to be a source of knowledge, one's testimony must be *believed*, and to be believed, one must be viewed as someone who is *believable* – they must be taken to be a credible informant or source of knowledge.

If you give a speaker a credibility deficit, then you typically should not believe what they say. This would be irrational or even akratic. It's tantamount to believing that a report isn't credible and thus shouldn't be believed, yet believing it anyways. Relatedly, if you know that a speaker is a trustworthy source of knowledge, then you should generally believe what they say, assuming that you have no defeaters. Failing to believe the testimony of a trusted informant seems epistemically irresponsible or negligent to the extent that one is failing to update their beliefs in response to their evidence.

In standard cases of testimonial injustice, failures to believe the speaker's testimony go hand in hand with attributing a *deficit* of credibility to the speaker. Testimonial injustice occurs *because* prejudice causes the speaker to be viewed as untrustworthy or incompetent. Inquiry is different: judgments regarding whether someone is a good inquirer can – and often do – come apart from judgments about whether one ought to be included or excluded from participating in inquiry. One need not judge a person to be an incompetent inquirer to commit a zetetic injustice against them. So, while cases of testimonial injustice characteristically involve one's being evaluated as an incompetent or untrustworthy source of knowledge, cases of zetetic exclusion do not analogously or characteristically involve one's being evaluated as an incompetent or untrustworthy inquirer. While there is important overlap here, being included in inquiry is one thing, and being viewed as an incompetent or unskilled inquirer is another.

3.2. Exclusion beyond – or despite – zetetic competence

An individual can be unjustly excluded or significantly limited in their capacity to investigate a question for reasons other than their being perceived to be bad at inquiry. Consider the following case:

> IMMIGRANT: Padma is an Indian immigrant who has recently moved to Toronto. She is trying to figure out how the transit system works. Politely, and speaking with an Indian accent, she approaches a stranger near the train station and asks: "Excuse me, do you know where I can buy a train ticket? How much does it cost?" The stranger knows how to answer her questions, and he isn't in any rush, so he could easily help her—but doesn't. Due to racist and xenophobic prejudice, he refuses to give her inquiry the time of day. He gives her a dirty look and walks past.

Intuitively, Padma experiences zetetic injustice. Her inquiry fails to gain uptake because of prejudice, but the prejudice in this case is blunt and direct. It is not mediated by an assessment of Padma's zetetic abilities. Indeed, it would be incredibly awkward for the stranger to evaluate Padma's skills as an inquirer, given that she is asking such basic questions. Instead, prejudice directly blocks the uptake of her inquiry. So, unjust zetetic exclusion can occur without a prejudicial inquiry deficit, that is, without having evaluated the individual's zetetic capabilities.

Mallory (2026) has recently defended related cases of *inquisitive injustice*, which occur when members of marginalized groups lack the social power required to meaningfully steer or guide the direction of discourse. Here is an example adapted from (Mallory 2026: 147).

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SEXUAL ASSAULT: Crystal reports her sexual assault to a police officer. Instead of the conversation taking up questions that she takes to be the most relevant and important (e.g., *Can she have a sexual assault evidence kit administered?* or *What did the culprit look like?*), the officer fixates upon a line of questioning that reinforces sexist rape myths (e.g., *What were you wearing?* or, *How sexually active are you?*). Crystal tries to redirect the conversation to her questions but is unsuccessful.

Plausibly, Crystal experiences unjust zetetic exclusion: her questions fail to gain appropriate uptake due to prejudice. There is a clear asymmetry in conversational authority: the officer has the power to influence the topic of conversation and to determine which questions are given priority and uptake – Crystal does not. (Mallory 2026: 157) argues that one experiences inquisitive injustice when "their attempts to frame the topic of a conversation fail to be accommodated in virtue of their membership of a marginalized social kind."

Importantly for our purposes, SEXUAL ASSAULT also illustrates that one can suffer a zetetic injustice without any corresponding assessment of one's zetetic competence. The officer need not regard Crystal as an incompetent inquirer (though he might also believe this); rather, due to sexist prejudice, the officer does not give her any degree of authority over the conversation. The officer possesses greater social power and influence and, as a result, his questions dominate the discourse, while Crystal's questions are sidelined and crowded out.

Consider a different case where one faces unjust zetetic exclusion because of *who* they are and *what* they are inquiring about. In this case, unjust zetetic exclusion results from what I will call *epistemic gatekeeping*.

MAN OF THE HOUSE: On his eighteenth birthday a father says to his son, Baron: "Son, you're a man now. It's time for you to learn how to manage household finances." The father opens his laptop and begins to teach Baron about how to pay bills, file taxes, invest, and so on. Overhearing this conversation, the father's daughter, Hazel, who is several years older than Baron, says: "Dad, I want to learn too. How do you budget? When do you file taxes? Is it too early to start investing?" The father replies: "Oh, you don't need to worry about these things, sweetheart. Your husband will take care of the finances when the time comes."

Intuitively, Hazel experiences an unjust zetetic exclusion. She is undermined in her ability to inquire, not necessarily because prejudice causes her to be regarded as an incompetent inquirer, but because her father endorses a sexist ideology according to which women need not, or more strongly, should not, learn about how to manage household finances. It is simply *not her place* to know about these things. In many Western societies, dominant gender norms dictate that men are to be the sole decision makers when it comes to household finances – they are the breadwinners, the head of the household, the providers, and so on. Women and girls are to be *provided for* or *taken care of*, not the other way around.[11]

[11]Consider the recent #GirlMath meme, which has gone viral on TikTok and become popular with Generation Z (Demopoulos 2023). If you return a $50 pair of shoes and then buy a $70 sweater, how much money do you spend? According to Girl Math, only $20. This is clearly meant to be funny, yet the #GirlMath meme reinforces the stereotype that women and girls lack basic math and financial literacy skills, and hence,

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In the MAN OF THE HOUSE, we can imagine that the father believes that Hazel is a much better inquirer on this topic compared to his son, Baron. Perhaps Hazel is highly skilled in mathematics, allowing her to be sensitive to more nuanced details. She is also open-minded, intellectually humble, and deeply curious about the topic, all of which are character traits that positively contribute to her skills as an inquirer.[12] Baron, on the other hand, is none of these things: he is lazy, unambitious, unmotivated, irresponsible, incredibly bad at math, and highly disinterested in the topic. Despite this clear difference in zetetic skill, sexist prejudice causes the father to include Baron and exclude Hazel from inquiry.

Notably, Hazel can plausibly learn about how to file taxes or manage household finances in other ways, which don't rely upon her father.[13] For example, she could easily look up a generic YouTube video or consult ChatGPT, though these methods of inquiry may be less reliable or not as tailored to her personal needs or circumstances. Still, she experiences zetetic injustice insofar as prejudice causes her attempts at inquiry to be impeded. The zetetic injustice she experiences does not require that she be restricted from inquiring into these matters completely.

Compare this to a case of testimonial injustice. Imagine Sydney, a woman whose report of sexual assault is not believed by a police officer due to sexist prejudice. Just because the officer fails to view her as a source of knowledge, it does not follow that she can't share her knowledge with other less prejudiced testimonial recipients (e.g., were Sydney to confide in her close friend, she would be appropriately viewed as credible and would be able to share her knowledge). So, just as testimonial injustice doesn't necessarily undermine one's ability to function as a source of knowledge for other testimonial recipients, so too does zetetic injustice not always render one unable to inquire into the question via other avenues of inquiry, should they be available.[14]

Additionally, just as it can be incredibly important for some individuals to believe your testimony and to regard you as a knower on important matters (e.g., for an officer to believe your report of a serious crime or for a doctor to believe your reports of pain), so too is it important for one to have access to efficient or productive means for investigation. Not all zetetic routes are equal.

If you need to diagnose a medical condition, then it is far better to get expert advice from a certified medical doctor opposed to consulting Google. The former is far more likely to yield superior epistemic outcomes and actionable results. A doctor is in a better position to give a patient information based upon their specific needs, circumstances, or previous medical history. Beyond these clear epistemic advantages, and perhaps most importantly, inquiring in this way can grant one access to crucial material goods and resources. Doctors have the authority to write prescriptions for medications that may be needed to treat patients – Google can't do that. Access to these material resources is often what ultimately motivates one's inquiry in the first place. We want to learn the answer to our question so we can make decisions and determine how to act.

that they shouldn't have any power when making high-stakes financial decisions. There is a well-known gender gap in financial literacy across a diverse range of cultures (Espinoza-Delgado and Silber 2024; Rink *et al.* 2021). For related critical discussion, see hooks (2013).

[12]There is a significant literature on epistemic virtues in the context of inquiry. See, for example, Zagzebski (1996); Baehr (2011); Watson (2015); Battaly (2017); Fantl (2018).

[13]Hazel is lucky in this respect. In other cases, when the topic area is highly specialized or when opportunities to access relevant information are rare or incredibly costly, zetetic exclusion may render inquiry into the topic virtually impossible. Many cases of zetetic exclusion, however, will not have this direct result. [14]Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to discuss this point.

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Relatedly, greater epistemic achievements, such as knowledge, understanding, or certainty, may be unattainable or significantly more difficult to acquire when inquiry proceeds via alternative zetetic pathways. For example, a patient is much more likely to feel confident in, and to gain a deeper understanding of, their medical condition if they consult with a doctor who is able to examine them directly and give them medical advice that is tailored to their specific circumstances, compared to running a Google search. Similarly, a student is more likely to gain a deeper understanding of Descartes' *Meditations* – and will be less prone to common misunderstandings or confusions – if she is able to ask questions and discuss the text with other students in her class or with her professor in office hours.[14]

To clarify, I'm not suggesting that one is always entitled to the most efficient or practically valuable means for inquiry, nor am I suggesting the one must have access to avenues of inquiry that are likely to yield the greatest epistemic achievements. (Indeed, I think the opposite is true for reasons discussed in §4.) Rather, the claim is that one faces an unjust zetetic exclusion when access to avenues for inquiry is restricted on the basis of prejudice. The injustice results from prejudice limiting which opportunities for inquiry are made available to individuals from marginalized social groups. This matters because methods of inquiry often provide differential access to crucial epistemic as well as material and social goods.

Reflection on the previous cases suggests that there are at least three ways that unjust zetetic exclusion may manifest. First, as we saw in IMMIGRANT and SEXUAL ASSAULT, one may face unjust zetetic exclusion due to blunt or direct prejudice. In this case, prejudice does not operate by generating a deficit in one's perceived zetetic competence. Instead, it short-circuits the uptake of inquiry altogether.

Second, as we saw in SEMINAR ROOM, unjust zetetic exclusion may result from an *identity-prejudicial inquiry deficit*. One is unjustly excluded from participating in zetetic activity because prejudice causes them to be viewed as an incompetent inquirer. This kind of zetetic exclusion closely mirrors cases of testimonial injustice. Just as one suffers a testimonial injustice when they receive an identity-prejudicial credibility deficit and are thus unable to act as a source of knowledge, so too does one suffer a zetetic injustice when they receive an identity-prejudicial inquiry deficit and are, as a result, prevented from participating in inquiry.

Third, as we saw in MAN OF THE HOUSE, unjust zetetic exclusion may result from *epistemic gatekeeping*: one is prevented from participating in an inquiry because, given dominant norms that are operative within one's social milieu, the domain of inquiry is unjustly regarded as one that the individual need not, or should not, inquire into. Indeed, the example from Whitcomb (2025) of Lysistrata plausibly involves zetetic exclusion of this form. When the magistrate rejects Lysistrata's questions about the war, he says, "what's that to you?" and "war is strictly for the menfolk," suggesting that she was excluded, at least in part, on account of her being a woman who was seeking information about a masculine-coded domain – the war.

These forms of zetetic exclusion are not mutually exclusive, and when they occur simultaneously, the effects can be compounding. In the next section, we explore these issues further, with a focus on the concept of *epistemic gatekeeping* in cases of unjust zetetic exclusion.

[14]See Matheson and DiPaolo (2025) for further related discussion on the relationship between how one inquires and the kinds of epistemic improvements they may gain from inquiry.

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4. Epistemic gatekeeping

What is the relationship between zetetic exclusion and epistemic gatekeeping? We can gain a better understanding of this relationship by considering practices of (non-epistemic) gate-keeping more generally and their role in upholding and reinforcing unjust social practices.

4.1. It's none of your business

Manne (2017) has defended an ameliorative analysis of misogyny on which it is the "law enforcement" branch of a patriarchal social order (2017: 63). Sexist norms are akin to the "law," and misogyny is the mechanism that operates to uphold the law by punishing violations of it. Misogyny thus targets women and girls selectively. It is those who violate sexist norms (i.e., "the law breakers") who are more susceptible to misogynistic backlash (i.e., "law enforcement"). Accordingly, women and girls who seek masculine-coded perks and privileges are prime targets for misogynistic forms of punishment.

Here's an example. In 2019, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab shared the first ever image of a black hole on their social media page, alongside the smiling face of Katie Bouman, the 29-year-old postdoc whose research on computational imaging was instrumental in developing the algorithm that produced the image. The post said: "Here's the moment when the first black hole image was processed, from the eyes of researcher Katie Bouman" (Maguire 2019). Soon after internet trolls came for Bouman, attacking her credibility and calling her a fraud. Some had even gone as far as falsely claiming that Andrew Chael, a Harvard graduate student, was the scientist whose research was really responsible for the image (Lou and Ahmed 2019). The message was clear: women in masculine-coded fields like computer science – especially women like Bouman who are engaged in cutting-edge research and gaining recognition for their work – don't belong. Such women are prime targets for misogynistic backlash.

Just as oppressive social norms dictate expectations regarding who should occupy positions of power, so too do they set boundaries regarding who should have access to practices of inquiry and to particular epistemic goods. When these norms are violated, when a member of a marginalized group attempts to seek access to zetetic practices or epistemic goods in a domain that is not coded as being "for" them but instead for members of more privileged social groups, then they will be susceptible to various forms of backlash. One important way this backlash may manifest is via *zetetic exclusion*: one is prohibited or otherwise significantly limited in their ability to meaningfully investigate a specific topic.

In these cases, zetetic exclusion is a response to a transgression or violation of dominant social norms which mark the subject as not belonging within the domain of inquiry. Accordingly, zetetic exclusion functions as a gate-keeping mechanism, regulating and policing access to zetetic activity and related epistemic goods. Those who venture into domains that are not identity-coded as being "for" them risk zetetic exclusion – a mechanism that functions to keep members of marginalized social groups *in their epistemic lane*.

Let's think back to the examples from §3. When Lysistrata inquires into the war ("What's the latest war news?" or "Anything about a treaty?"), her questions include content that is coded as *masculine*. War is a domain that is stereotypically associated with men – "war is strictly for the menfolk" (Henderson 1988: 116). So, when Lysistrata, a woman, asks about the war, her questions are promptly rejected – not necessarily because the magistrate thinks she is bad at conducting inquiry on this topic (though that might be part of it) – but because she is inquiring into a topic that is *none of her business*.

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Given a patriarchal social order, the war is a topic that women need not and should not be concerned about.

A similar dynamic is present in the MAN OF THE HOUSE case. In this example, Hazel asks her father about budgeting and how to manage household finances – a topic which he is more than happy to discuss with his son. Her questions ("How do you budget?," "When do you file taxes?," and "Is it too early to invest?") contain content that is identity-coded as *masculine*. A range of sexist norms dictate that men should provide and have control over household finances. So, when a woman or girl inquires and attempts to gain knowledge about these topics, she is thereby trespassing into a domain that is marked as being for men only. It is simply *not her place* to know about these things.

Of course, not all forms of epistemic gate-keeping are unjust. Sometimes one may be excluded from inquiry for completely legitimate reasons. If you ask me an incredibly invasive or private question, I don't do you an injustice by refusing to answer your question. For instance, consider the organization Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a group dedicated to helping alcoholics maintain their sobriety. AA members attend meetings where they share personal experiences about how drinking has impacted their lives. A fundamental rule of this program is that the identity of all members, as well as the information they share in meetings, is kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality is often needed to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and vulnerability, where individuals feel comfortable sharing their stories. Compare this to the kind of confidentiality that forms the foundation of doctor–patient or lawyer–client relationships or, more informally, the close friendships we have with others whom we feel comfortable confiding in or sharing our deepest secrets with. Confidentiality, ensuring that information is kept within a previously specified boundary, can be incredibly valuable, as it allows for the sharing of important information that may otherwise be inaccessible or kept private.

There are various important reasons for limiting access to particular epistemic goods, and so too, the activities of inquiry that are involved in acquiring them. Zetetic exclusion amounts to a zetetic injustice when access to inquiry is limited due to prejudice. Epistemic gatekeeping can give rise to unjust zetetic exclusion when one is excluded from inquiry because, given an oppressive status quo, the domain of inquiry is identity-coded as not being "for" members of certain marginalized social groups. In such a scenario, an inquirer is excluded from inquiry because their identity marks them as someone who does not, or should not, belong – no matter how skilled they might be at inquiry into the topic. Oppressive norms may dictate that they are "stepping out of bounds" or "failing to know their place" should they inquire into a topic that is marked as being *none of their business*.

Next, we will explore important connections between unjust zetetic exclusion and related accounts in the recent literature on epistemic injustice.

4.2. Zetetic exclusion and identity-coded content

The literature on epistemic injustice has recognized cases of epistemic injustice which arise from the content of a speaker's testimony (Davis 2021; Dembroff and Whitcomb 2023). To get a feel for this species of *content-focused* epistemic injustice, consider the following cases:

> HIV: In the 1980s, during the Reagan administration, expert testimony on HIV was dismissed because it was associated with being a "gay disease" and viewed as morally tainted. (Dembroff and Whitcomb 2023: 48–49)

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> FIBROMYALGIA: At the reception of a medical conference, a doctor shares his research on fibromyalgia with colleagues, but is quickly interrupted: "I need to stop you— those patients are just attention seekers. After all, there's a reason why they're mainly women." (Davis 2021: 218)

In these cases, the speaker does not receive a credibility deficit because of *who* they are but *what* they say. Their testimony is about, or is associated with, a marginalized group, and because the audience is prejudiced against this group, the speaker's testimony does not receive serious uptake or consideration. Crucially, this can happen even if the speaker is otherwise regarded as a credible source of knowledge, given their social identity – i.e., they don't receive an *identity*-prejudicial inquiry deficit. In the HIV case, for example, the medical experts might be highly privileged (e.g., educated, upper-class, cis, white, and heterosexual) men – yet their testimony is still not believed due to antigay prejudice. As (Davis 2021: 223) argues: "when a particular identity is socially devalued, this devaluation likewise serves to underwrite the devaluation of the discourses associated with that social identity."

Cases of unjust zetetic exclusion resulting from epistemic gatekeeping also involve identity-coded content. However, a key difference is that the content or domain of inquiry is identity-coded as being reserved "for" members of more privileged social groups. In this way, the domain is not devalued or taken as unworthy of consideration. It's the opposite. The domain of inquiry is highly regarded, so much so that it comes to be identity-coded or associated with, or reserved for, members of more privileged groups – *they* are the ones who ought to participate in relevant communities of inquiry studying these topics, and *they* are the ones who are to gain epistemic goods, like knowledge or understanding, of the relevant subject matter. Accordingly, members of marginalized groups who venture into these domains are prone to barriers and exclusion, or in some cases, even forms of reprimand and backlash for trying to gain access to a domain that is not identity-coded as being "for" them.

Are judgments about which domains are for whom underwritten by dominant conceptions of who is competent in which domain?[15] One might question whether gatekeeping forms of zetetic exclusion are theoretically robust or significant, if they are largely parasitic on, or downstream from, identity-prejudicial inquiry deficits. It is certainly true that domains may become identity-coded as "for" particular groups as a result of prejudicial stereotypes regarding who is competent or "fit" to inquire into particular subjects. For example, women CEOs run only 10.4% of Fortune 500 companies, and only two of these companies are run by Black women (Hinchliffe 2024). At least a part of what explains why women are so severely underrepresented in high-stakes corporate leadership roles is that dominant stereotypes cast them as incompetent or unfit for these positions. However, it also matters that there is a long history of business being portrayed as a "man's world" – women's place is elsewhere, in lower-level positions, or as homemakers or caregivers. Given dominant social norms, men are *entitled* to these positions of authority. The C-suite is reserved for him, whereas the kitchen is for her.

As we saw, this dynamic is present in the MAN OF THE HOUSE case as well: Hazel's father recognizes her zetetic competence. He believes that if she were to engage in inquiry about household finances, she would excel (much more so than her brother Baron). However, dominant gender norms dictate that she need not and should not inquire into this – it's not her place. So, while exclusion from inquiry may often be

[15]Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this question and encouraging me to respond to it.

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motivated by judgments regarding zetetic competence, epistemic gatekeeping can, and often does, operate independently of such judgments.

These causes of zetetic exclusion are distinct, though not mutually exclusive, and they can give rise to compounding effects when they occur simultaneously. For instance, consider the example from Lysistrata (§3.1), it is highly likely that the magistrate not only judges that women ought not inquire into the war ("war is strictly for the menfolk"), but that he *also* gives Lysistrata an identity-prejudicial inquiry deficit. Due to sexist prejudice, he evaluates her as incompetent or unfit to inquire into matters related to the war. Indeed, he might view her as an unfit or incompetent inquirer precisely *because* war is a masculine-coded domain. Hence, though distinct, these two causes of zetetic exclusion may often reinforce each other.

A related idea traces back to John Stewart Mill in "The Subjection of Women" (1869). Mill, an early defender of women's suffrage, argues against the view that women should be denied the right to vote because they are supposedly ignorant about political matters. This ignorance (to the extent that it's real), he argues, is itself a *symptom* of women's exclusion from the areas of social life where knowledge of politics is acquired. Hence, it can't be used to justify even further exclusion from political life.

This point is further developed in Cudd (2006), who argues that the mechanisms of oppression are *self-justifying*. For example, if women and other marginalized groups are systematically denied access to educational opportunities, then this will result in these populations having less knowledge across a variety of domains. This lack of knowledge may then be used to justify further exclusionary practices – creating a vicious cycle.[16]

More generally, if some domains are regularly gate-kept such that certain social groups are never, or only in exceptional circumstances, granted access to them, then this can have a self-fulfilling effect by reinforcing stereotypes that members of these groups are unqualified to inquire into those domains. Recognizing the overlap between these mechanisms is important, though so too is recognizing that they are conceptually distinct and that they can operate independently of one another.

To summarize: there are important species of unjust zetetic exclusion which do not result from prejudicial judgments about one's zetetic competence. Indeed, one may be unjustly excluded from inquiry even when they are taken to be a highly capable inquirer. This reveals an important lesson about the relationship between prejudice and inquiry. What matters is not only one's status as a competent inquirer but also whether dominant social norms unjustly dictate that one should not *belong within* a community of inquiry or that one need not or ought not *possess* information or knowledge about a specific domain.

4.3. Does unjust zetetic exclusion violate zetetic rights?

In this section, I connect unjust zetetic exclusion to recent scholarship on zetetic rights.

What are zetetic rights and does unjust zetetic exclusion ever violate them? Consider the following case from Friedman (2025):

> CRISPR: Emmanuelle and Jennifer are both leaders of a research team studying the nature of CRISPR. While investigating how to create a single-guide RNA (sgRNA)

[16]Note: This is certainly not to say that marginalized groups don't have other important knowledge that dominant groups lack. Of course, a lot of important knowledge is acquired well beyond the bounds of the formal education system, within local communities and families. For a related discussion of how ideology is self-justifying or self-reinforcing, see, for example, Haslanger (2007).

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> to guide where the Cas9 enzyme cuts, Jennifer concludes that sgRNA can be made by fusing two smaller RNAs head-to-tail. Without consulting Emmanuelle, Jennifer instructs the team's research assistant to order more RNA, formalize the procedure in the lab protocol, and begin documenting their work for patent applications. (Friedman 2025: 1322)

If you were Emmanuelle, how would you feel? I suspect you would feel frustrated and as though your contributions to the group's inquiry didn't matter. Friedman (2025) argues that Jennifer *zetetically wrongs* Emmanuelle: she fails to fulfill a duty that is owed to her as a co-inquirer. On this approach, zetetic rights emerge from the duties we have to others when we are inquiring together with them. Friedman defends three zetetic rights that arise in the context of shared inquiry: the right to aid from co-inquirers, the right to avoid unnecessary impediment, and the right to influence inquiry (2025: 1330).

How does this account of zetetic rights relate to unjust zetetic exclusion? Applied to the MAN OF THE HOUSE case (from §3.2), we might say that Hazel's father violates her zetetic rights by failing to fulfill an obligation he has to her *qua* co-inquirer. Perhaps he fails to fulfill his duty to provide her with adequate zetetic aid or to not unnecessarily impede her inquiry. So, if that's right, then unjust zetetic exclusion may sometimes violate the zetetic rights of inquirers.

However, Hazel and her father are not engaged in shared inquiry. Friedman describes group inquirers as having a shared intention to answer a question – an intention that *we* answer the question *together* (Friedman 2025: 1324). In CRISPR, Emmanuelle and Jennifer are members of a research team. They are working together to study the nature of CRISPR. MAN OF THE HOUSE is different: there is no shared intention; Hazel and her father are not inquiring together to determine the answer to a question.

Alternatively, we might understand Hazel as engaged in a failed attempt to inquire together with her father. On this reading, due to prejudice, Hazel is unable to gain the status of co-inquirer, given that she has been unjustly excluded from participating in shared inquiry. Notably, the zetetic rights that Friedman (2025) identifies are not directly applicable to Hazel, given that they emerge from the duties we have to others with whom we are already inquiring. One might expand upon this framework by incorporating zetetic rights regarding zetetic *inclusion*, namely, the right to be included in activities of shared inquiry. If Hazel has a zetetic right to be included in a shared inquiry, then her father may violate this right when he unjustly excludes her from inquiring together with him.

When does one have a zetetic right to be included in shared inquiry? This is a big question that I can't do full justice to here, though we can look to real-life cases for guidance. Consider how the Canadian government has "a duty to consult Indigenous groups when it considers conduct that might adversely impact potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights" (Department of Justice Canada 2026). Indigenous groups plausibly have a zetetic right to be meaningfully included in shared inquiries conducted by the government when they are considering conduct that may infringe upon Aboriginal or treaty rights. If one has a zetetic right to be meaningfully included within a shared activity of inquiry, then one's zetetic rights would be straightforwardly violated if they are unjustly excluded from meaningfully participating.

Lastly, and perhaps most plausibly, we may interpret MAN OF THE HOUSE as involving individual, opposed to shared, inquiry. On this understanding, Hazel is asking her father for help so that *she* can figure out the answer to *her* question (just as a student

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might ask a teacher for help). What zetetic rights (if any) do we have as individual inquirers?

Atkins (2025) has recently defended the view that individuals possess a *degree of inquiry* right against others such that they engage in a sufficient amount of inquiry when coming to have beliefs that risk undermining one's interests. For instance, if coming to have a belief about someone (e.g., that they committed some seriously disgraceful act) would undermine their reputation, then you owe it to them to do your "homework" or your zetetic due diligence prior to closing inquiry and coming to believe negatively about them. Notably, this zetetic right concerns the inquiry of others. But we should also consider whether we possess zetetic rights of our own as *inquirers*. For instance, do others ever owe it to us – as a matter of respecting our zetetic rights – to support our individual inquiries?

Plausibly, given their social roles, parents and teachers may have special obligations to provide zetetic support to their children and students. So, perhaps Hazel's zetetic rights, *qua* individual inquirer, are violated when her father – someone who plausibly owes it to her to support her inquiry – fails to provide her with zetetic aid. If that is right, then in this case unjust zetetic exclusion results in a zetetic rights violation. But how far does this extend? For instance, are we ever obligated to support the inquiries of complete strangers? That's not obvious. Recall IMMIGRANT (from §3.2); one might deny that Padma has a zetetic right to the stranger's zetetic aid. He may not owe it to her to support her inquiry. But even if that's right, it's still plausible that she experiences a zetetic injustice when the stranger refuses to give her inquiry uptake as a result of racist and xenophobic prejudice.[17]

Alternatively, one might argue that we possess a basic zetetic right to not have our inquiries unjustly blocked or hindered because of prejudice. Such a right would not entail that one is entitled to whatever means are necessary to accomplish their inquiries, including the zetetic aid of others (e.g., complete strangers). In this case, given that this basic zetetic right has injustice build directly into it, all instances of unjust zetetic exclusion would thereby violate one's zetetic rights.[18]

The goal of this section is not to establish when individuals have zetetic rights; that's a significant and important project of its own. Instead, the goal is more modest: it's to explore the potential connections between cases of unjust zetetic exclusion and zetetic rights violations. The previous discussion suggests that unjust zetetic exclusion may violate one's zetetic rights as a participant (or would-be participant) in group inquiry and perhaps also as an individual inquirer who may sometimes be owed zetetic support from others. However, it is important, I think, to reserve theoretical space for cases of zetetic injustice that may not involve a zetetic rights violation. More broadly, one need not accept a rights-based account of justice to recognize cases of unjust zetetic exclusion. It is a feature, not a bug, of the account that it can be combined across different theoretical orientations.[19]

[17]See Maitra (2010) for discussion of this dynamic in cases of testimonial injustice, as well as (Watson 2021: 68–70) and McGlynn (2023) for related discussion of the relationship between testimonial injustice and epistemic rights violations.

[18]Compare (Thomson 1971: 57) who argues that: "the right to life consists not in the right not to be killed, but rather in the right not to be killed unjustly." Thank you to Dennis Whitcomb for helpful discussion of this point.

[19]Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to discuss the relationship between unjust zetetic exclusion and zetetic rights.

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5. Zetetic injustice beyond exclusion

Let's circle back to Anscombe, who was investigating philosophical questions in the 1940s, under the guidance of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein openly endorsed a sexist view, fitting for the times, on which women were incapable of conducting serious academic research in philosophy. He – or, if not him exactly, a nearby fictional version of him, which we will consider for the sake of argument – thought of philosophy as a discipline that was primarily *for* men (particularly upper-class white men). If so, then why was Anscombe one of his best students?

One reason for this is that prejudice takes the form of generic judgments, which are known to tolerate counterexamples (Begby 2013; Leslie 2017). So, while Wittgenstein thought that women were not cut out for philosophy, he didn't think of Anscombe as *one of those women*. She was an exception, not like the rest of them. Indeed, Anscombe often conformed to more masculine gender norms, especially in the 1940s: she didn't take her husband's last name, she wore trousers, smoked cigars, and was known to swear and use vulgar language (Wiland and Driver 2025). Had she shown up to Wittgenstein's class at Cambridge in full glam, wearing bright red lipstick, pumps, and a bouncy floral dress, would she have been included or taken seriously? Had she not exhibited an exceptional level of philosophical talent, would he have given her the time of day? We can only speculate, but my guess is no. In addition to her exceptional brilliance and philosophical acumen, her proximity to masculinity, as well as her whiteness and middle-class status, surely helped her to evade unjust zetetic exclusion. However, this is not to say that Anscombe, and other women and minorities who studied philosophy in this context, weren't vulnerable to other forms of zetetic injustice.

It is important to emphasize that unjust zetetic exclusion is just one kind of zetetic injustice – there are various other ways one can be wronged as an inquirer. Indeed, one can still be vulnerable to zetetic injustice when they are *included* or able to participate within communities of inquiry. For example, one might be included in inquiry but only in a very shallow way: perhaps others merely pay lip service to one's questions without seriously engaging them, or they are overly critical or needlessly adversarial towards one's zetetic contributions, providing no constructive or helpful guidance in inquiry or even causing one to doubt the merit of their investigation.[20]

Other avenues for future research on zetetic injustice concern how dominant social norms can generate epistemic expectations for members of particular social groups to have knowledge about specific topics and how this can exert pressure on individuals to engage in inquiry to attain that knowledge. For example, a woman might be pressured to learn about domestic labor (e.g., cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc.), an Asian American teenager might be expected to study math or science in college, or a gay man might be expected to keep up on recent fashion trends. In these cases, zetetic expectations trade on stereotypes regarding who should know what and, in turn, who is expected to pursue opportunities to gain the knowledge they are expected to have. This reinforces the idea that some domains are identity-coded as being "for" some social groups and not others.[21]

[20]For further kinds of zetetic injustice, see, for example, McWilliams (2025) who analyzes a range of ways one may be vulnerable to zetetic injustice before, during, and after inquiry. Also see Johnson (2022), who defends a version of care ethics for communities of inquiry, with a focus on supporting vulnerable epistemic agents.

[21]This also relates to arguments from Davis (2016), who defends cases of testimonial injustice where prejudice causes an individual to be given a *surplus* of credibility: one is type-casted and expected to be a

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Another related topic concerns how one can be wronged not as an inquirer but rather *by* practices of inquiry themselves. How do inquiring practices perpetuate and reinforce unjust social arrangements and material conditions? Take the case of academic philosophy. Many philosophers have drawn attention to how academic philosophy is hostile or otherwise inhospitable to practitioners from marginalized backgrounds. This results in many talented and promising philosophers leaving the profession.[22] Basu (2023) argues that academic philosophy needs a code of ethics, analogous to ethical research practices found in the sciences. Relatedly, Bettcher (2018) argues that philosophers can engage in harmful inquiry when their research calls into question the very existence of entire communities of people. Investigations into the nature of tables or particles arranged tablewise ought to be treated differently from those which concern the lives and identities of actual human beings.[23] So, while the previous discussion has focused upon unjust exclusion from inquiry, this is far from the only way that inquiry can be a site of injustice.

We don't engage in inquiry in a vacuum but against the backdrop of a messy and unjust social world. Theories of epistemic injustice must account not only for how prejudice threatens one's ability to share knowledge but also how it regulates access to inquiry and influences the conditions under which knowledge and other epistemic goods are acquired. To the extent that epistemic *justice* involves rectifying the wrongs done to one in their capacity as an epistemic agent – as an inquirer and as a knower – then it must speak to these concerns.[24]

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source of knowledge on a topic, given their social identity. Also see Berenstain (2016) on *epistemic exploitation* for a related discussion.

[22]This is known as the "leaky pipeline" problem. This is also a known problem in STEM fields. For relevant discussion, see, for example, Thompson *et al.* (2016); Dotson (2011); Davis (2021). Also see Jennifer Saul's blog, *What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/ as well as the zine *Being Trans in Philosophy* https://being.transinphilosophy.org/, edited by Ding and Willow Star, for a range of first-person accounts.

[23]For further detailed discussion also see Bettcher (2019), and for related discussion on the risk involved in inquiring into the lives of marginalized people, see Yap (2021).

[24]Thank you to Anna Brinkerhoff, Julia Smith, and Dennis Whitcomb, as well as audiences at the Arché Feminist and Social Theory Seminar at the University of St. Andrews and the Humility and Inquiry Junior Seminar in Epistemology and Psychology in Arizona, for very helpful feedback. I'm also grateful to an anonymous referee from *Episteme* for constructive comments.

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