

Haslanger's Method for (Un)Warranted Ideology Critique

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Abstract

The conditions of ideology pose a series of challenges for social critics in their attempts to develop warranted ideology critiques. Sally Haslanger's 'epistemology of consciousness raising' (EoCR) seeks to delineate a method that can guide consciousness-raising (CR) groups towards achieving this epistemic feat. This paper advances what I take to be the most forceful objection to Haslanger's EoCR, namely, that it can be appropriated by CR groups with false background assumptions to produce unwarranted ideology critiques. I propose that the fundamental issue resides in an underdeveloped step in Haslanger's EoCR ('testing the hypothesis'), which destabilises the legitimacy of her EoCR as a whole. Drawing on Helen Longino's procedural notion of scientific objectivity, I offer a reconstruction of Haslanger's underdeveloped step, which I suggest provides a successful rejoinder to the objection. However, I conclude by arguing that my reconstructed EoCR is at odds with the spirit of Haslanger's original project, as the locus of legitimate epistemic justification for ideology critique now emerges not from the affective-discursive practices and collective activity of CR groups but from deference to the consensus of a heterogeneously constituted scientific community.

1. Introduction

Sally Haslanger's 'epistemology of consciousness raising' (EoCR) seeks to delineate a method of resistance that can guide consciousness raising (CR) groups toward

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articulating *warranted* ideology critiques and *pro tanto* moral claims against others.² CR groups are collections of people united by shared experiences of oppression who seek to enhance consciousness about their identities by discussing personal experiences with similar subjects.

This paper is divided into four sections. In §2, I summarise Haslanger's EoCR with reference to a fundamental challenge for ideology critique (what Robin Celikates labels 'the normative challenge')—a problem that, on her own account, Haslanger's EoCR overcomes. In §3, I mount what I take to be the most forceful objection to Haslanger's EoCR. The objection begins by outlining two examples of the ways the EoCR's steps can be appropriated by CR groups with *false background assumptions* (e.g., anti-feminist CR groups) to produce *unwarranted* ideology critiques and *pro tanto* moral claims against others.³ I then develop this objection by clarifying the threat that echo chambers (ECs), when paired with bad epistemic content, pose to the EoCR. I conclude my objection by arguing that an underdeveloped step in the EoCR ('testing the hypothesis') is what leads to this weakness in the EoCR as a whole. This step in Haslanger's method fails to account for the possibility that unchecked empirical inquiry can reproduce and legitimise social bias due to false background assumptions held by those inquiring. As such, I suggest that Haslanger's EoCR ultimately fails to overcome 'the normative challenge' of ideology critique. In §4 I evaluate the consequences of this criticism for Haslanger's EoCR. That section begins by offering a reconstruction of the underdeveloped step ('testing the hypothesis') that I suggest provides a successful rejoinder to the objection raised in §2. My proposal draws on Longino's notion of scientific objectivity to suggest that deference to heterogeneously constructed and adequately regulated scientific communities affords *epistemic warrant* to CR groups' ideology critiques and moral claims.⁴ However, I conclude by arguing that the reconstructed EoCR appears inherently at odds with the spirit of Haslanger's original project: the locus of legitimate epistemic justification for ideology critique now emerges not from affective-discursive practices and collective activity of CR groups, but from deference to the consensus of a scientific community subject to certain conditions. While Haslanger's EoCR confronts two other challenges for ideology critique, this paper engages exclusively with 'the normative challenge' because it fundamentally threatens to undermine Haslanger's entire project. Ultimately, it appears that the epistemic warrant of a CR group's ideology critique is dependent on the legitimacy of the epistemic norms used to 'test their hypothesis'. Insofar as the warrant of the epistemic norms themselves relies on a procedural process of intersubjective critical

² Haslanger, Sally (2021) 'Political Epistemology and Social Critique', in David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall, eds, *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy: Volume 7*, Oxford University Press.

³ It's worth noting that although anti-feminist CR groups, as an example, do not explicitly appropriate Haslanger's EoCR, their current CR practices *do* mimic the steps she outlines. Should they encounter Haslanger's EoCR, one might worry that anti-feminist CR groups could appeal to the EoCR to ascribe warrant to their anti-feminist ideology critiques.

⁴ Longino, Helen E (1990) *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*, Princeton University Press.

inquiry, then the goal of Haslanger's EoCR—to instil epistemic authority in CR groups themselves—appears to be both redundant and problematically misleading.

2. Exposition of Haslanger's EoCR

Haslanger's EoCR outlines a method for *warranted* ideology critique in response to scepticism—in particular as articulated by Robin Celikates—about the possibility of such critique given certain conditions of ideology. First, 'ideology' is defined by Haslanger as a 'cultural technē gone wrong'.⁵ A cultural technē refers to a collection of social meanings which are a 'stage-setting for action' and reflect a central component of the 'local social-regulation system'.⁶ Cultural technēs shape the material world and offer us the resources necessary to interpret it.⁷ They 'go wrong' when they distort our ability to value, thereby organising us unjustly in accordance with distorted values.⁸ Individuals shaped by ideology become 'good subjects': their internalisation of the ideology's norms, values, and practices causes them to understand the social mores as binding.⁹ As such, good subjects may not recognise social injustice due to the pervasive naturalisation of certain social practices.¹⁰ Given these conditions of ideology, Celikates proposes three challenges for the possibility of ideology critique.¹¹ This paper focuses on what I take to be the most important challenge, which Haslanger summarises as follows:

The normative challenge: Are there objective moral truths by reference to which we can judge a social arrangement defective or unjust? If so, how do we gain knowledge of those truths?¹²

Responding to this challenge, Haslanger's EoCR delineates the conditions under which a CR group can construct warranted ideology critiques and *pro tanto* moral claims against others. According to Haslanger, CR is a 'collective activity' which provokes a 'paradigm shift in one's orientation to the world' and is not easily reversed.¹³ The shift in consciousness involves a reconsideration of what facts are accessible, how we interpret them, and how we might respond to them.¹⁴ However, the *warrant* for CR groups' paradigm shifts (and resulting moral claims) is 'not guaranteed'.¹⁵ Haslanger focuses her EoCR on the 'hard cases', where individuals have become *good subjects* and are 'fluent' in the social practices of an ideology.¹⁶ The

⁵ Haslanger, 23.

⁶ Haslanger, 23–25.

⁷ Haslanger, 23.

⁸ Haslanger, 23, 25.

⁹ Haslanger, 25.

¹⁰ Haslanger, 26.

¹¹ Celikates, Robin (2016) 'Beyond the Critical Theorists' Nightmare: Epistemic Injustice, Looping Effects, and Ideology Critique', presented at the Workshop for Gender and Philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology.

¹² Haslanger, 55.

¹³ Haslanger, 43.

¹⁴ Haslanger, 44.

¹⁵ Haslanger, 44.

¹⁶ Haslanger, 27.

following procedural developments detail the EoCR method, however, Haslanger emphasises that the order of the sequence is flexible:

1. Desiring negation/gut refusal;
2. Group participation;
3. Developing a hypothesis;
4. Testing (and revising) of hypothesis; and
5. Articulating a moral claim.¹⁷

Warranted resistance, Haslanger argues, begins with 'desiring negation': a 'gut refusal' to comply with being subordinated, along with a yearning for alternative possible norms and ideals free of oppression.¹⁸ 'Desiring negation' can be understood as a particular type of response to oppression known as 'oppositional consciousness' and forms the basis of collective action.¹⁹ Individual displeasure alone, however, is typically insufficient to provide substantive evidence for positional vulnerability in social organisation.²⁰ This is because the harm experienced may occur on an individual (rather than systematic) basis, that is, not as a consequence of group membership. Ultimately, Haslanger holds that it is exceedingly difficult for an individual to interpret whether or not a harm is structurally produced. As such, a crucial moment for Haslanger's EoCR is 'group participation': subordinated subjects articulate their complaints to 'others within the same (affected) social group', testing their responses, and realising through collective activity that 'they are not the problem'.²¹ To facilitate this 'group participation' step, Haslanger recommends that CR groups develop 'counter-publics' in which members of an oppressed group can engage with one another without interruption from members of a dominant group.²² From here, the CR group 'develops a hypothesis' regarding the causes and manifestations of social injustice, specifying which practices reinforce oppression and obstruct change.²³ However, similar to the challenges that an individual faces in interpreting whether oppression is structural in nature, initial evidence supporting CR groups is likely to be limited and grounded in the experiences of those participating. As such, Haslanger argues that in 'testing the hypothesis' it is necessary to evaluate whether the hypothesis is empirically adequate for explaining structural injustice.²⁴ This procedural step is crucial in ensuring the resulting *pro tanto* moral claims are warranted because a moral claim with grounds that are empirically refutable does *not* need to be honoured.²⁵ Revision

¹⁷ Haslanger, 49.

¹⁸ Haslanger, 48.

¹⁹ Haslanger, 48.

²⁰ Haslanger, 50.

²¹ Haslanger, 50.

²² Haslanger, 50.

²³ Haslanger, 51.

²⁴ Haslanger, 50.

²⁵ Haslanger, 50.

of the hypothesis may eventuate here if required. Once the hypothesis has been tested (and revised) the CR group may move to 'articulating a moral claim' (e.g., that x structural practice is unjust and ought to be changed).²⁶ Thus, according to Haslanger, a CR group's moral claim is warranted 'insofar as it moves from a "gut refusal" to a moral claim through a collective examination of shared experience that is guided by sound epistemic norms'.²⁷ It is worth highlighting that for Haslanger a warranted moral claim derived from a process of CR is not necessarily dispositive. Instead, resulting claims advance *pro tanto* contentions which must be evaluated in relation to other moral claims through a process of collective political deliberation.²⁸

Haslanger argues that her EoCR overcomes Celikates' normative challenge for the possibility of ideology critique.²⁹ Importantly, the EoCR does not attempt to offer an objective account of morality.³⁰ According to Haslanger, a complete theory of justice is not necessary to engage in social critique, as we can know that 'a practice is unjust, without knowing why'.³¹ Haslanger observes that one of Celikates' other challenges ('the epistemological challenge') implies that any highly abstracted form of social critique incurs the risk of paternalism.³² As such, the EoCR seeks to guide social change *without* reliance on a 'set of "external" imported values'.³³ Without recommending objective principles or resorting to moral relativism, Haslanger maintains that CR groups can appeal to 'moral truths about the injustice of particular historically-specific practices and structures'.³⁴ As such, cases of 'grotesque repression' can guide ideology critique. The examples she offers are the Holocaust and the Atlantic slave trade, as these injustices 'are not truths we learn from theory; theorizing is guided by these truths'.³⁵ CR groups are encouraged to draw parallels between more obvious cases of injustice and those they take for granted in their pursuit of paradigmatic shifts in the way they perceive the world.³⁶ Thus, Haslanger's ultimate response to the normative challenge holds that 'if the parallels are sufficiently strong' or 'if we agree that the new interpretation better guides our practice' (i.e., by satisfying her EoCR steps) then 'we are entitled—epistemically and morally—to make a claim on its basis'.³⁷ As such, the EoCR offers a template to identify and challenge injustices in historically-specific practices from a situated position *within* the relevant ideological formation.³⁸

²⁶ Haslanger, 51.

²⁷ Haslanger, 51.

²⁸ Haslanger, 51.

²⁹ Haslanger, 53.

³⁰ Haslanger, 54.

³¹ Haslanger, 30.

³² Haslanger, 40.

³³ Haslanger, 40.

³⁴ Haslanger, 55.

³⁵ Haslanger, 55.

³⁶ Haslanger, 56.

³⁷ Haslanger, 56.

³⁸ Haslanger, 33–36, 39.

3. Critique of Haslanger's EoCR

This section develops a critique that demonstrates the ways Haslanger's EoCR can be appropriated by communities who have false background assumptions to produce *unwarranted* ideology critiques and *pro tanto* moral claims. Fundamentally, my objection identifies Haslanger's 'testing the hypothesis' step as underdeveloped insofar as it fails to account for how unchecked empirical inquiry can justify social biases which are concealed by the conditions of ideology. I contend that this objection can be best understood with reference to actual anti-feminist CR groups' appropriation of the EoCR as means of mounting *unwarranted* anti-feminist ideology critiques against women and feminists. Anti-feminist groups (largely composed of men) are generally united in their belief that feminine values and misandry dominate contemporary society and operate to disadvantage men.³⁹ Additionally, they often share the belief that this truth is disguised and perpetuated by feminist ideological social practices.⁴⁰ Examples of anti-feminist groups include: men's rights activists, incels (involuntary celibates), fathers' rights groups, and paleomasculinists (who believe that male domination is biologically determined).⁴¹ Feminist research has documented in depth the multifarious ways in which anti-feminist CR groups have coopted feminist epistemologies in order to pseudo-legitimise the warrant of their ideology critiques.⁴² Here I will outline an appropriation of steps that specifically reproduce Haslanger's EoCR.

First, mirroring the modality of Haslanger's 'gut refusal' step, anti-feminist communities foreground experiences and emotions (regarding their feelings that men are victims of feminism's 'man-hating' project) as the basis from which their moral claims derive warrant.⁴³ For example, Save Indian Families (one of the most popular Indian fathers' rights CR groups) claim that their masculine gender identity is 'the main restriction' in a 'differential treatment between men and women' by referencing their shared experiences of 'shock, humiliation, anxiety, feeling of sadness and shame, mental worry, and fear', which leave them 'very confused' and under 'tremendous stress'.⁴⁴

Second, anti-feminist CR groups create and retreat to online forums ('counter-publics'), collectively known as the 'manosphere', where *group participation* occurs without interruption from members of the apparently 'dominant' group (women).⁴⁵ These communities are characterised by a distrust of mainstream content

³⁹ Allan, Jonathan A (2016) 'Phallic Affect, or Why Men's Rights Activists Have Feelings', *Men and Masculinities* 19, 26; Marwick, Alice and Rebecca Lewis (2017) *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online*, Data & Society Research Institute, 14.

⁴⁰ Marwick and Lewis, 14.

⁴¹ Marwick and Lewis, 13.

⁴² Marwick and Lewis; Rothermel, Ann-Kathrin (2020) "'The Other Side": Assessing the Polarization of Gender Knowledge Through a Feminist Analysis of the Affective-Discursive in Anti-Feminist Online Communities', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 27; Allan 2016.

⁴³ Rothermel, 726–27.

⁴⁴ Rothermel, 730.

⁴⁵ Haslanger, 51.

due to its supposed saturation with feminist ideology. Instead, they grant elevated epistemic credibility to radical manosphere content due to it being 'more authentic, non-hierarchical, and not controlled by the elites'.⁴⁶ The cooption of the EoCR's first steps is neatly summarised by Rothermel: 'these affective-discursive dynamics mirror and appropriate feminist epistemologies of affective dissonance based on experiences of oppression shared in alternative spaces'.⁴⁷

Third, as anti-feminist CR groups perceive their social oppression as originating from 'women in general and feminists in particular', developing their hypotheses generally involves generating propositions that aim to curb the influence of feminism.⁴⁸ This might include targeting feminist-influenced social practices such as political correctness.⁴⁹

Testing their hypotheses—as CR groups should do according to Haslanger's EoCR—anti-feminist CR groups use 'sound epistemic norms' (according to their metrics) to support their contentions.⁵⁰ For example, apparently delegitimising the 'myth' that gendered housework means 'women work two jobs; men work one', Warren Farrell argues that men also work outside of their waged hours (e.g., commuting, 'doing yardwork, repairs, painting').⁵¹ In line with Haslanger's recommendations, Farrell supports his contention with reference to empirical research by the University of Michigan which found that (accounting for housework) 'the average man worked sixty-one hours per week, the average woman fifty-six'.⁵² In his books, *The Myth of Male Power* and *Why Men Earn More*, Farrell verifies both men's victimisation at the hands of feminism and men's natural superiority to women by drawing extensively on empirical evidence, particularly with reference to evolutionary psychologists (e.g., David Buss) who employ scientific methodologies to reproduce sexist stereotypes.⁵³

Similarly, appropriating Haslanger's recommendation to find guidance in 'referring to cases of grotesque repression', Farrell writes,

We acknowledge that [B]lacks dying six years sooner than whites reflects the powerlessness of [B]lacks in American society. Yet men dying seven years

⁴⁶ Rothermel, 726.

⁴⁷ Rothermel, 723.

⁴⁸ Blais, Melissa and Francis Dupuis-Déri (2012) 'Masculinism and the Antifeminist Countermovement', *Social Movement Studies* 1, 22.

⁴⁹ Marwick and Lewis, 14.

⁵⁰ Rothermel.

⁵¹ Farrell, Warren (2005) *Why Men Earn More: The Startling Truth Behind the Pay Gap — and What Women Can Do About It*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 121.

⁵² Farrell, *Why Men Earn More*, 121; Juster, F Thomas and Frank P Stafford (1991) 'The Allocation of Time: Empirical Findings, Behavioural Models, and Problems of Measurement', *Journal of Economic Literature* 29.

⁵³ Buss, David M (1994/2016), *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*, Basic Books; Farrell, Warren (1993) *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*, Simon & Schuster.

sooner than women is rarely seen as a reflection of the powerlessness of men.⁵⁴

'A Voice for Men' (one of the largest websites for men's rights activism in the United States) reproduces similar themes and logic to those in Farrell's books, frequently citing his work, hosting him at conferences, and describing him as a mentor and founding father.⁵⁵ Mirroring the steps of Haslanger's EoCR, these anti-feminist CR groups engender 'paradigm shifts' in their members' interpretations of the world. Members are taken from individualised confusion and helplessness to unified political movements that criticise mainstream feminist claims on the grounds that they are ideological and naturalise men's systematic oppression. Much like in Haslanger's EoCR method, these groups 'articulate a moral claim' which highlights that 'they are not the problem'—but in these cases, the result is anti-feminists legitimising their calls to reverse feminism's influence on society.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, many of the demands of anti-feminist CR groups come from *unwarranted* critiques of feminism—and generate *pro tanto* moral claims which work to oppress women and feminists—because these groups hold *false background assumptions* as the premises from which their inquiry proceeds.⁵⁷

One example of an articulated ideology critique can be seen in a widely circulated article originally posted on 'A Voice for Men'. The author concludes that:

Departments of Gender Studies—as well as the myriad other faux 'identity studies' programs like queer studies, race theory, critical theory, fat studies, sexuality studies, whiteness studies, *ad vomitatum*—do not constitute real subjects; they are centres of radical indoctrination or specimens of academic frivolity.⁵⁸

We might extend this critique by highlighting that such concerns are not unique to anti-feminist CR groups but can equally occur within *feminist* CR groups. For example, a group of cisgendered feminists embarking on a process of CR may fail to discover that their background assumptions and privileges cause them to engage in empirical inquiry which situates 'subjective gender identifications as a dichotomous variable'.⁵⁹ Embedding these biases within the conceptual framework of empirical inquiry 'naturalises, and thereby perpetuates, social inequality'.⁶⁰ Alternatively, Rebecca Hufendiek reveals that Martie Haselton (psychologist and self-proclaimed Darwinian feminist) applies tendentious suppositions of evolutionary psychology to

⁵⁴ Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power*, 101.

⁵⁵ O'Donnell, Jessica (2022) 'Men's Rights Activism and the Manosphere,' in *Gamergate and Anti-Feminism in the Digital Age*, Palgrave Macmillan, 14.

⁵⁶ Haslanger, 49–50.

⁵⁷ Blais & Dupuis-Déri; Marwick and Lewis; Rothermel; Allan.

⁵⁸ Rothermel, 721, quoting a 2018 AVfM article by David Solway.

⁵⁹ Anderson, Elizabeth (2020) 'Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science', in Edward N Zalta, ed, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

⁶⁰ Bem, Sandra Lipsitz (1993) *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*, Yale University Press, 6.

reproduce biological-determinist claims about behavioural and cognitive differences between the sexes in her new book, *Hormonal*.⁶¹ Both examples demonstrate that well-intending feminist CR groups are capable of generating *unwarranted* ideology critiques while nonetheless 'testing their hypothesis' with scientific methodologies.⁶²

The threat that these anti-feminist and feminist CR groups pose to Haslanger's EoCR can be explained through an analysis of how echo chambers (ECs) grounded in *false background assumptions* lead to distorted empirical inquiry. ECs are social network environments in which members' beliefs are robustly reinforced through a regular echoing of consonant beliefs.⁶³ An EC's 'good' or 'bad' nature is distinguished by its content, which itself is determined by the 'presence or absence of truth-conducive [or falsehood-conducive] mechanisms'.⁶⁴ As Benjamin Elzinga points out, false beliefs in epistemic communities are most saliently caused by a lack of mechanisms that constrain echoing beliefs to the factual world.⁶⁵ These communities thus become 'substantively cut off from the truth'.⁶⁶ In turn, *bad ECs* (ECs grounded in false background assumptions) provide fertile grounds for epistemic communities to foster false and harmful beliefs which are exceedingly resilient to both internal dissent and external opposition.⁶⁷

The problems of echo chambers are amplified by the structures of contemporary epistemic environments. An epistemic environment is a complex, dynamic system in which factors of the social and material world influence the production and dissemination of knowledge. ECs are produced by a combination of *internal* and *external* mechanisms. Epistemic agents have numerous *internal* social and cognitive biases which impact their uptake and analysis of information.⁶⁸ 'Selectivity bias' refers to epistemic agents' greater propensity to seek out information which 'confirms and reinforces their preconceptions' (regardless of truth-value) rather than seeking out 'information that challenges these views'.⁶⁹ I use 'conformity bias' to

⁶¹ Haselton, Martie (2018) *Hormonal: The Hidden Intelligence of Hormones — How They Drive Desire, Shape Relationships, Influence Our Choices, and Make Us Wiser*, Little, Brown and Company; Hufendiek, Rebekka (2020) 'Beyond Essentialist Fallacies: Fine-Tuning Ideology Critique of Appeals to Biological Sex Differences', *Journal of Social Philosophy*.

⁶² Anderson.

⁶³ Elzinga, Benjamin (2020/2022) 'Echo Chambers and Audio Signal Processing', *Episteme* 19, 1.

⁶⁴ Elzinga, 12.

⁶⁵ Elzinga, 2.

⁶⁶ Elzinga, 11.

⁶⁷ Elzinga, 2.

⁶⁸ Goldman, Alvin and Cailin O'Connor (2021) 'Social Epistemology', in Edward N Zalta, ed, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

⁶⁹ Benkler, Yochai, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts (2018) *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*, Oxford University Press; Unerman, Jeffrey (2018/2020) 'Risks From Self-Referential Peer Review Echo Chambers Developing in Research Fields', *British Accounting Review* 52, 2.

refer to agents' tendency to adopt group members' values and perspectives.⁷⁰ The tendency to conform can obstruct a groups' formulation of true beliefs, as individual members are less likely to volunteer valuable information that goes against the grain.⁷¹ Agents' informational inputs are also shaped by external forces. Key examples of external mechanisms include state-controlled media, systematic censorship, and internet algorithms that filter online experiences.⁷² 'Algorithmic personal filtering' is a particularly salient mechanism unique to the modern world that significantly reinforces the echoing of anti-feminist beliefs on the manosphere and makes it extremely difficult to 'successfully evaluate and epistemically compensate for such filtering'.⁷³

Collectively, these mechanisms impose self-reinforcing epistemic filters: they filter information uptake by omitting countervailing facts and arguments, thus preventing people from seeing evidence necessary for sufficient evaluative discourse.⁷⁴ Such filters create a dearth of dissenting perspectives which greatly increases the likelihood of coverage gaps and makes the 'discovery of mistakes significantly less likely'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, an overabundance of corroboration magnifies the epistemic convictions of EC members, thereby illegitimately over-inflating the epistemic credibility of certain ideas or group members while depreciating the credibility of others. As such, EFs forcefully subdue potential barriers to the reinforcement of consonant beliefs and false background assumptions.⁷⁶

Condensing these epistemic worries, I suggest that Haslanger's step of CR groups 'testing their hypotheses' is underdeveloped and destabilises the cogency of her EoCR. Ultimately, Haslanger's assumption—that a claim's epistemic warrant can be legitimated by CR groups' empirical inquiry—fails to account for CR groups testing their hypotheses from a basis of *false background assumptions* and over-inflated epistemic self-confidence. Drawing on Quine, feminists have stressed the theory-laden nature of observation.⁷⁷ The central concern is stressed by Carol Lee and Christian Schunn when they say that there is 'nothing intrinsic to the data or its relationship to a hypothesis that establishes an evidential relationship between them'.⁷⁸ In turn, the gap between hypothesis and data must be bridged by

⁷⁰ Asch, S E (1951) 'Effects of Group Pressure Upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgments', in Harold Steere Guetzkow, ed, *Groups, Leadership and Men: Research in Human Relations*, Carnegie Press; Goldman and O'Connor.

⁷¹ Weatherall, James Owen, Cailin O'Connor, and Justin P Bruner (2018) 'How to Beat Science and Influence People: Policymakers and Propaganda in Epistemic Networks', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 71.

⁷² Goldman and O'Connor; Nguyen, C Thi (2020) 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles', *Episteme* 17, 144.

⁷³ Nguyen, 144; Rothermel.

⁷⁴ Nguyen, 150.

⁷⁵ Elzinga, 14; Nguyen, 144, 150.

⁷⁶ Elzinga, 6.

⁷⁷ Anderson.

⁷⁸ Lee, Carol J and Christian D Schunn (2011) 'Social Biases and Solutions for Procedural Objectivity', *Hypatia* 26, 352.

background assumptions.⁷⁹ Given that empirical verification depends on a range of implicit assumptions of which the group conducting empirical investigation is typically unaware, it is not usual that a group will be incapable of assessing and addressing their implicit biases.⁸⁰

As seen in the above examples, these biases in agents' background assumptions skew research questions, conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and interpretations of data in various ways. Empirical inquiry itself is thus vulnerable to being distorted by the conditions of ideology. The implications of this can involve empirical knowledge production which, for example, may undermine feminist values, impair scientific understanding, and reinforce oppressive gender norms under the auspices of scientific authority. As such, it appears that amorphous and underdeveloped conceptions of 'objectivity' and 'sound epistemic norms' impede Haslanger's EoCR from truly overcoming Celikates' normative challenge for ideology critique. Ultimately, an EoCR sensitive to the problems that come with conducting empirical inquiry from within an ideology must acknowledge that scientific standards of evaluation can be applied in ways that either intentionally or unintentionally produce and maintain harmful manifestations of social bias.⁸¹

4. Reaffirming an EoCR

To respond to this objection, I suggest that Haslanger should concede that deferring to expert consensus from a relevant (heterogenous) scientific community is the most epistemically legitimate means of grounding an ideology critique.⁸² Given the concerns of scientific inquiry, the new challenge for Haslanger means that she needs to delineate the specific tools and methodologies that amount to 'sound epistemic norms' that can safeguard ideology from epistemically detrimental forms of social bias perverting the conduct of empirical inquiry.⁸³ Haslanger might address this issue by drawing on Helen Longino, who maintains that through a procedural process of intersubjective critical scrutiny, the (appropriately structured) scientific community can collectively achieve epistemic warrant and approach scientific objectivity.⁸⁴ Longino argues that, due to the *socially* achieved nature of objectivity,

⁷⁹ Lee and Schunn, 352.

⁸⁰ Intemann, Kristen (2010) '25 Years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where Are We Now?', *Hypatia* 25, 781; Longino, 71–74.

⁸¹ Lee and Schunn, 352.

⁸² Offering a precise definition of a 'scientific community' or its 'consensus' is beyond this paper's scope. These terms are particularly complicated within the social sciences, which use a variety of methods and instruments to gather and analyse evidence. Generally speaking, the 'scientific community' can be understood as a collection of experts of a relevant (scientific) field. Here, 'experts' broadly refers to people who hold better knowledge in a specific domain than others. While my argument is incomplete as long as it lacks an explicit guide or criteria for a 'scientific community', these comments are the most I can achieve in this paper. Martini and Boumans more closely read these terms: Martini, Carlo and Marcel Boumans, eds, (2014) *Experts and Consensus in Social Science*, Springer International Publishing; Goldman and O'Connor.

⁸³ Lee and Schunn, 353.

⁸⁴ Longino.

epistemically flawed biases are progressively eliminated by scientists holding each other accountable, irrespective of the fact that a bias-free position is unattainable for any individual scientist.⁸⁵ Deference to scientific consensus establishes an ongoing demand for open dialogue, justification of argumentation, disclosure of inconsistencies, and the procurement of new information.⁸⁶ This ensures that a process of 'vigorous contestation and testing of arguments' has established a claim's warrant.⁸⁷ Lee and Schunn aptly summarise this sort of social notion of objectivity: 'Procedural objectivity is achieved when communities cultivate and maintain social structures that promote attention and responsiveness to the background beliefs licensing inferences from data to hypotheses.'⁸⁸

An important caveat is that the threat that problematic biases pose to empirical inquiry can extend to homogenous scientific communities at large. As Longino suggests, 'when, for instance, background assumptions are shared by all members of a community, they acquire an invisibility that renders them unavailable for criticism'.⁸⁹ Haslanger's EoCR might accommodate for this danger (which applies to CR groups too) by emphasising the importance of a heterogeneously constructed scientific community. Here, 'diversity' and 'heterogeneity' refer to a scientific community composed of people with a variety of demographic characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender, disability, etc.). Personal experiences stemming from demographic characteristics influence people's perception and understanding of the world.⁹⁰ Groups of people possessing different demographic characteristics or social positions will thereby have diverse experiences of oppression, providing 'access to evidence that has implications for the plausibility of background assumptions, models, and methods'.⁹¹ Thus, *ceteris paribus*, a scientific community constituted by members with diverse demographic characteristics will apply relatively more divergent perspectives to a claim than a homogenous community would. In turn, subjective perspectives which reign hegemonic could be, and more likely would be, opposed by others for inappropriately influencing evidential reasoning.⁹² Ultimately, the conditions of ideology can only truly be overcome through the procedural strategy of intersubjective critique (what Longino calls 'transformative interrogation') because this process alone is capable of ensuring that false background assumptions are methodologically eliminated from empiricism.⁹³

⁸⁵ Longino.

⁸⁶ Moore, Alfred (2017) *Critical Elitism: Deliberation, Democracy, and the Problem of Expertise*, Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁷ Moore, 54–8.

⁸⁸ Lee and Schunn, 366.

⁸⁹ Longino, 80.

⁹⁰ Oreskes, Naomi (2019) 'Getting Unstuck: Social Epistemology', in Stephen Macedo, ed, *Why Trust Science?* Princeton University Press, 50.

⁹¹ Intemann, Kristen (2010) '25 Years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where Are We Now?' *Hypatia* 25, 750.

⁹² Oreskes, 52.

⁹³ Oreskes, 52.

The foundations of my argument here could be inferred from Haslanger's own claims, for example when she writes:

But the process of epistemic validation is not foundationalist. The best that any inquiry—empirical or not—can achieve is a holistic balancing of considerations. And scientific inquiry has managed to weather paradigm shifts before without giving up all standards.⁹⁴

Here, although Haslanger doesn't develop this thought, she may be interpreted as referencing the procedural strategy of scientific objectivity, although she does not directly refer to scientific consensus as *the* means of achieving 'a holistic balancing of considerations'. If so, Haslanger's claim that the task of CR groups is to 'engage in epistemically responsible practices that push us beyond what is taken to be common sense, while also *affording some degree of objectivity*' is better understood with explicit reference to the demand that the empirical inquiries of CR groups be verified by consensus from a relevant (heterogenous) scientific community.⁹⁵

One might object that an emphasis on diversity may itself engender epistemic bias within a scientific community's consensus. Critics may suggest that diversity in scientific communities could cause oppressed scientists to either remain quiet or to be ignored by the dominant group. Following Miranda Fricker, this could occur due to different forms of epistemic injustice which arise out of economies of credibility related to social position *within* scientific communities themselves (e.g., testimonial injustice, white ignorance, or hermeneutical marginalisation).⁹⁶ For instance, within a heterogeneously constructed scientific community, scientists of a minority racial group may experience forms of racism that the broader community do not recognise as racism by virtue of either (i) never having experienced it, or (ii) having benefited from the institutions which perpetuate it.⁹⁷ Where a scientist suffers a credibility deficit due to an identity prejudice in the broader scientific community, they experience a form of testimonial injustice that may lead to biases in the scientific community's consensus at large.⁹⁸ Alternatively, without the formation of CR groups, individuals of a racially discriminated subgroup of scientists may lack the collective hermeneutical tools needed to comprehend, formulate, and express a viewpoint that conflicts with the dominant attitudes of the scientific community.⁹⁹ In both cases, one might suggest that diversity *within* scientific communities may work to obscure, rather than raise, consciousness about certain social problems.

However, the development of certain norms of interaction can be incorporated by heterogeneous scientific communities to minimise the likelihood of bias in group

⁹⁴ Haslanger, 54.

⁹⁵ Haslanger, 54.

⁹⁶ Fricker, Miranda (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press, 20; Elzinga, 7; Nguyen, 149.

⁹⁷ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this objection to my attention.

⁹⁸ Fricker, 28.

⁹⁹ Fricker; Grasswick, Heidi (2018) 'Feminist Social Epistemology', in Edward N Zalta, ed, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

consensus arising from epistemic injustices. Again, Haslanger could refer to Longino, who recommends governing protocols to ensure that intersubjective scrutiny and 'transformative criticism' between diverse peers occur justly.¹⁰⁰ First, scientific communities should incorporate 'publicly recognised avenues for criticism', such as peer review forums, journals, conferences, and more.¹⁰¹ Longino suggests that this entails critical research activities receiving 'equal or nearly equal weight to original research'.¹⁰² Second, science must incorporate norms that encourage uptake of criticism, in that the community must heed the intersubjective critical discussion and ensure their governing assumptions remain logically sensitive to the developments taking place within it.¹⁰³ Finally, scientific communities must ensure an 'equality of intellectual authority': intellectual authority cannot be unequally distributed across qualified practitioners.¹⁰⁴ This criterion seeks to disqualify scientific communities that allow a tendentious assumption to remain hegemonic due to the social and political power of its proponents.¹⁰⁵ Collectively, introducing these norms as institutionalised protocols creates robust mechanisms which ensure that open debate and criticism take place so that heterogeneous perspectives can be voiced, heard, and suitably responded to.

It is worth adding that my argument does not seek to undermine the political and epistemic significance of CR groups and their practices generally. Should a subgroup of scientists experience some form of epistemic injustice, there may be strong grounds for individual members of the oppressed subgroup to engage in CR practices to formulate a critique of the scientific community's dominant assumptions. Instead, more modestly, I want to emphasise that the locus of legitimate epistemic justification for social critique cannot emerge *solely* from the affective-discursive practices of the CR group themselves. To suggest that a CR groups' social critique is warranted does not authorise us to affirm that the critique is true without doubt, but rather that it is widely perceived as compelling through a rigorous process of intersubjective critical scrutiny. Without the privilege of direct access to the objective world, it is unclear that we could aspire for anything more.¹⁰⁶

My final comment on Haslanger's EoCR is that while the proposed modification of her method appears to successfully overcome the objection that some CR groups (like bad ECs) could (and do) develop unwarranted ideology critiques using a similar methodology to the one Haslanger outlines, the resulting EoCR appears inherently at odds with the spirit of her original project. The threat of bad ECs causing sectors of society to become systematically disengaged from a shared reality instils the need to defer to objectivity by some metrics for a claim to have epistemic warrant. This appears to require an appeal to the reliability of scientific consensus as

¹⁰⁰ Longino, 76.

¹⁰¹ Longino, 76.

¹⁰² Longino, 76.

¹⁰³ Longino, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Longino, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Longino, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Longino, 79.

a basis for the 'fact-regarding' demand of epistemic warrant. If what I have argued above holds, it seems that the only means of distinguishing and delegitimising epistemically *bad CR groups* (e.g., anti-feminist CR groups) from epistemically *good CR groups* is identifying the illegitimacy of bad CR groups' *epistemic norms*. Bad CR groups fail to defer to the relevant (heterogenous) scientific community's consensus regarding their foundational epistemic assumptions. Distilling this further, the only way to epistemically distinguish false background assumptions from true ones is by determining whether the assumptions have survived heated scientific contestation or whether they were rejected by the scientific community. If this is true, it follows that the locus of epistemic warrant derives not from a CR group's use of Haslanger's EoCR, but from a CR group's deference to an epistemically credible scientific community. While such a reading could potentially be extrapolated from Haslanger's article, it simultaneously appears entirely at odds with the apparent overarching intention of the text: namely, to instil epistemic authority for ideology critique in CR groups themselves. In light of this, Haslanger's contention that 'the resulting claim is made on behalf of a social group and *warranted through their collective efforts*' seems misguided.¹⁰⁷ An inherent tension appears to exist between Haslanger's claim that epistemic warrant can be derived from subjective shared experiences yet must appeal to 'some degree of objectivity'. Ultimately, the underdeveloped account of objectivity risks reducing her EoCR into a roundabout way of arriving at the same conclusions that Longino did in the 1990s (with added steps).

A more forceful construction of this critique might argue that Haslanger's EoCR is not only destabilised by its failure to specify 'sound epistemic norms' but this very omission also encourages an interpretation of her EoCR as an active endorsement of a methodology that leads to epistemically *unwarranted* claims. If anything has been extracted from the evaluation of bad ECs, it is that narrowness and homogeneity in groups and scientific communities appear to reflect a design feature that significantly increases the likelihood that these groups will produce epistemically *unwarranted* claims. Haslanger's persistent legitimisation of the relationship between 'marginalised' or 'narrowed' communities and *epistemic warrant* seems to encourage the construction of ECs and perhaps pseudo-legitimises the practices of epistemically bad CR groups. Although Haslanger's claim that 'the aim of consciousness raising is not to reach certainty or to offer evidence that would be compelling to all who consider it' may be true, her theory would still benefit from the explicit clarification that moral claims nonetheless *must be compelling* to a relevant heterogeneously constructed scientific community in order to be epistemically validated.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, critical theorists—like Haslanger—seeking to instil epistemic authority in relatively homogenous groups ought to have heightened vigilance in their accounts of empirical justification, so as to safeguard their contentions from being coopted by epistemically bad CR groups seeking to justify harmful moral claims.

¹⁰⁷ Longino, 21, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Longino, 20.

5. Conclusion

This paper opened with an exposition of Haslanger's EoCR as a method for CR groups to develop *warranted* ideology critiques given the challenges which arise from the conditions of ideology. I proceeded to offer the most forceful objection to her EoCR, articulated by Celikates. I demonstrated the ways CR groups with *false background assumptions* can appropriate Haslanger's EoCR and nonetheless produce *unwarranted* ideology critiques. I clarified the danger that bad ECs pose to Haslanger's EoCR and explained why anti-feminist CR groups' moral claims remained unwarranted in the face of their cooption of her methodology. Fundamentally, this objection argues that the 'testing the hypothesis' step in Haslanger's EoCR is underdeveloped, in that it fails to consider how unchecked empirical inquiry can legitimise false background assumptions and social bias which are disguised by the conditions of ideology. In §2, I offer Haslanger's best rejoinder to the objection, which holds that the 'testing the hypothesis' step must be substantiated by CR groups' deference to the consensus of a relevant, heterogeneous, and appropriately constituted scientific community. This, I argue, is because, through a process of intersubjective criticism, these scientific communities can methodologically account for the conditions of ideology as a social achievement over time. While I suggest this rejoinder reaffirms the cogency of an EoCR, I proceed to argue that this reconstruction appears at odds with Haslanger's intended EoCR. This is because the resulting EoCR places the locus of epistemic warrant of a CR group's moral claim in their deference to a specifically constructed scientific community, rather than in the CR group's collective activity itself.

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