Kine Aarvik Fjeldheim

# From Dissonance to Credibility

## The Role of Trust and Experience in Epistemology, a Feminist Philosophical Inquiry

**Master's thesis**

**◨ NTNU**
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

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# Abstract

This master's thesis aims to investigate experience and trust and their role in epistemology, through the tools of black feminist epistemology and care ethics. I aim to argue in support of the two following claims as suggested by Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding; one, that experience integrated as a criterion of epistemic credibility yields a stricter demand for knowledge, in the sense Sandra Harding defines strong objectivity. Second, I support the claim that experience integrated into the epistemic framework as a criterion of epistemic credibility can unveil knowledge otherwise unavailable. I offer two analyses in support of the claims listed. One is a case study of a discussion supplied by Eva Feder Kittay, in which I argue that experience directly affects the philosophical conclusions reached by each respective philosopher engaged in the case study discussion. Second, I turn to bell hooks' definition of the concept of patriarchy, where I argue hooks exemplifies through her analysis of patriarchy that experience unveils the harm that is caused by patriarchy as a system through experience. Consequentially, I build on established feminist epistemology by redefining experience as *experience with* and *experience of absence*, in contrast to *experience with* and *non-existent experience*. Following, I argue in support of Anette Baier and Miranda Fricker that ethics and moral philosophy have a direct influence on our epistemic meeting with philosophy, which is expressed and identified in traditional philosophy through an appearance of unjustified mistrust. I explore the concept of trust and mistrust through the moral philosophy of Anette Baier and conclude that a care ethical approach to trust enlightens the negative consequences of a neglectful epistemic approach, by highlighting how the harm of excluding experience from being a criterion of epistemic credibility can follow from unjust patriarchal mistrust. In conclusion, this thesis argues for explicit reasoning of mistrust to reduce harm and cultivate a trusting environment to be able to reap the epistemic benefits that I argue can be yielded from reflections from experience.

# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

This thesis originates from a feeling of dissonance between my own experience of existence and the academic and scientific readings I have encountered that attempted to verbalize that existence. It has since then revealed itself to be a common experience among several group identities and personal identities to encounter this dissonance when interacting with philosophical theories of their own experience of life. When your life depends on knowledge being more than theoretical, as it has been for many vulnerable groups such as the queer, poor, women, or any other ethnicity than the majority of your nation, one starts to wonder why experience and trust is lacking as a topic in the majority of philosophical epistemology. Seemingly, a well-understood social common sensical premise states that a person with experience and theoretical knowledge on a topic has a stronger epistemic standing than someone with only theoretical knowledge. I say seemingly, as my impression of this being a concept of common sense was deterred and contested the longer I spent trying to understand philosophy. Security and soundness of knowledge developed to be concepts that had as little as possible to do with anything that could muster uncertainty, and experiences became a part of that uncertainty. The dissonance lingered throughout my studies, where I then found the community and the questions I were looking for through feminist philosophy. With the proper time and thesis length available, I now wish to address my findings and underline the gravity of this topic. *Philosophia*, the love for wisdom, is perhaps a victim of self-deprecation from the wisdom it loves. However, a love for wisdom fuels the passion to address this topic, as seen with the articles and philosophers I will base this thesis on. The field of epistemology seems concerned with finding a footing in a world of mistrust, as trust is seemingly an uncertain and non-measurable concept that risks the integrity of the knowledge provided. However, taking a closer look at this mistrusting world shows that our reasons for mistrust might not be as sound as they seem at first glance. It might seem like an unnecessary risk to trust someone when the alternative is the same knowledge from purely secure theoretical universal principles. However, I claim that the knowledge provided from an epistemic framework that neglects the potential of experience has repeatedly shown itself to risk being either severely lacking or untrue. Diving deeper into what we claim fosters mistrust, is the key to understanding and accessing the knowledge that experience can provide. This is what the thesis aims to argue in support of, ultimately by identifying and counteracting unjustified harm, to the benefit of knowledge.

# Chapter 1: Context, Methodology & Theoretical Framework

In *Theaeteus* (1914), Plato offers a dialogue where he considers the notion of knowledge as true judgement, plus *logos* (Plato, 1914, 209d-210b). Although the conclusion of the dialogue is still discussed in modern classic philosophy, it provided the groundwork in epistemology for the more familiar interpretation: knowledge as justified true belief. Famously, through Edmund Gettier in his contribution *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* (1963), the definition is contested in a two-page paper where Gettier challenges the logical structure, sparking major discussion in the field of epistemology that is still ongoing. We are highly invested in how we define good knowledge, with good reason. Our justification, our process of evaluating the soundness of a knowledge claim, is essential. The more sound a knowledge claim is considered to be, translates into a more sustainable and independent knowledge claim. Safe to deem as knowledge even. This is to ensure that anything regarded as knowledge meets criteria that render claims to be sustainable and fool-proof. We take the knowledge that fulfils these justifications and build on it, creating new knowledge. Thus, we are deeply dependent on the previous knowledge we build on to be sustainable. Experience, then, at first glance seems like an unstable source on which to base philosophical knowledge. There seems to be little incentive to trust the reflections and accounts of people, horribly slower than a computer at rational logic and, even worse, capable of lying and ethical wrongdoing. Still, for as long as we have existed as social beings, we have trusted the accounts we each bring of existence, and still claim these accounts bring knowledge in some way. It might seem horribly risky to depend on trust when we have a set of rules to ensure that we don't need to. I ask, then, what if there is a need to understand trust to reach the knowledge that experience unveils, because trust has *always* been a part of our epistemic consideration. If our hunt for soundness in knowledge production has not protected us from "unsustainable" knowledge but has rather walled us out from the knowledge we seek to unveil, it seems to follow that an exploration of how it has come to be that mistrust and experience became related topics. Through this exploration, we will see how cutting the definition of knowledge so thin, in fear of something like "trust" (that we perhaps do not understand well enough), we have cut ourselves off from knowledge that is not otherwise gained without it.

The thesis resides within the field of feminist philosophy, in particular building on feminist epistemology. From a feminist epistemological standpoint, I will consider contributions from

two fields of feminist philosophy, namely care ethics and black feminist philosophy. I will argue in this thesis that both fields regard experience as an important source of epistemic credibility, particularly that it has resided in these fields of philosophy as an integral part of its epistemic framework. I will show that the presence of experience within their respective epistemic frameworks can be reasoned through the history of the respective fields. It is through this historical account the object of criticism in this thesis becomes apparent. These two areas of feminist philosophy have critical theories and philosophers who identify the harm that can result from unjustified or uncritical mistrust, neglect of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, as well as provide essential theories to the thesis of how considering experience and trust in epistemology is a stricter demand to efficient knowledge production. In summary, the thesis question will explore Black Feminist Philosophy and Care Ethics having a particular aspect of their epistemic framework in common, namely experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. This criterion allows philosophers in these respective fields to grasp knowledge otherwise unavailable without the epistemic consideration of experience, as well as provide examples of a case and a definition where we are able to identify how experiences directly influence philosophical takes. To be able to grasp how experience and trust have been considered threatening to the epistemic integrity of knowledge in some fields of philosophy and essential to the epistemic integrity of knowledge in other fields, we need to look to the history of the field of epistemology and ethics to establish where the differing approach to experience and trust might originate.

## 1.1 The Epistemic Challenge

The problem I am addressing in this thesis is, in large, an epistemic one. This also means I am operating with some assumptions within the epistemic field before delving into the core issue of the thesis. Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding provide both an angle of critique as well as a sustainable vocabulary to move forward with the problem of trust and experience. This part will address terms such as credibility, epistemic framework, experience, criterion, and knowledge. These terms are essential to both properly explain where the issue takes place in epistemology. I will argue in support of Collins and Harding's view that experience should stand as a stricter criterion of epistemic credibility, and that it consequentially allows for an extended conceptualization of philosophical concepts, as well as reduces a harm that is implicit without this stricter demand for epistemic credibility.

1.1.1 Terminology

Both the object of critique and the following terminology that will be used to address several of the concepts that arise in this thesis are found and sourced from Patricia Hill Collins's epistemological contribution. Collins is an active American academic covering topics of interest such as race, class, gender, sociology, social anthropology, and black feminist philosophy. Her work in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000) is where she provides both terminology and analysis of the environment of epistemology where we find the epistemic challenge that this thesis will address. The understanding of epistemic credibility in this thesis must be understood through several other terms as provided by Collins. One such term is that the *epistemic credibility* of a conclusion provided through arguments is drawn from methodology and previous knowledge claims, and is based on an *epistemic framework* (Collins, 2000, p.252). This implies that it is the epistemic framework that determines what is considered as a criterion of epistemic credibility in a field of philosophy, and thus will be a reoccurring concept in the thesis. To what use any ensuing knowledge is provided is determined by the epistemic credibility the theory holds regarding the epistemic framework of a field. Epistemology in this thesis is understood as addressing knowledge claims, and this thesis will explore the strength yielded from experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. To claim that experience holds any kind of epistemic credibility is synonymous with asking how experience can produce a type of knowledge that is relevant to philosophical and political debate. This is explored through works that are grounded in black feminist philosophy and ethics of care.

I explore the claim of how experience is relevant to the epistemic credibility of someone stating a knowledge claim, and how it affects said knowledge claim. The frameworks I will be operating under, meaning black feminist philosophy and care ethics, have an *epistemic framework* that I will argue helps disclose how experience has relevance in epistemological theory and knowledge production. *Epistemic credibility,* influences that deem something as producing relevant and sound knowledge in accordance with the epistemic framework of a field, are in feminist philosophy like care ethics and black feminist philosophy, influenced by a history of oppression and knowledge production based on lived experience that conflicts with traditional philosophical theories. This origin means that experience and its relevance to epistemology and feminist theory is not a new concept within feminist philosophy, providing

me with several works on which to base the analysis of my thesis. As said by Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka in the introduction of their essay collection *Discovering Reality* (1983), the common belief of *all* their contributors is the importance of exploring the intimate relationship between experience and knowledge. We find in this collection contributions from academics from varying fields, such as Evelyn Fox Keller, Kathryn Pyne Addelson, and Naomi Scheman, and respective essays from Harding and Hintikka themselves, where although philosophical ideologies differ, the focus on articulating and expanding on the concept of insight by experience is their common interest. Diana Mulinari and Kerstin Sandell also provide a history of the topic of experience in feminist thought in their article "Exploring the Notion of Experience in Feminist Thought" (1999), where they challenge the notion that political commitment provides dogmatic texts, instead arguing it has resulted in responsible and critically powerful feminist analysis (Sandell, K, Mulinari, D., 1999, p.289) in direct reference to experience and its role in feminist theory. Although their article is mainly a defense of feminist politics having a place in scientific research, their article underlines how experience has a tight connection to the origin itself of feminist philosophy and the field of general science. In summary, critical feminist philosophy has drawn attention to how different fields of theory seemingly operate with differing epistemic frameworks, which introduces the question of what separates them.

1.1.2 Affinity to the Creator's Power

I must clarify what it entails when claiming a system of securing sound knowledge is faulty, and another is beneficial. Patricia Hill Collins provides the relationship between the terms listed, and epistemic credibility is drawn from her proposition that epistemological bases (frameworks) are a *choice* and provides differing conclusions on what version of truth will prevail (Collins, 2000, p.252). This means considering experience as a possible source of knowledge that is relevant to the epistemic framework of care ethics and black feminist philosophy has implications for the conclusions reached within each respective field. Collins provides an insight into this discussion and points to the consequence of some traditional epistemic frameworks in the same chapter, where she gives perspective on the knowledge validation process in academia and how it neglects valuable knowledge (Collins, 2000, p.253-256). This is also where we find the object of critique that will be addressed in my exploration, which would be any epistemic framework that uncritically excludes experience. In addition, these dominant frameworks have a tendency to justify their approach as a way of

overcoming the epistemic challenge of mistrust, without considering trust as a solution in of itself.

Collins states, sourcing late professor of sociology Karl Mannheim, that tracing the origin of any body of specialized knowledge reveals its affinity to the power of the group that created it (Collins, 2000, p.251 ; Mannheim, 1936). Tracing the history of black feminist philosophy or care ethics, for example, would show the affinity it serves for social critical theory. In turn, Collin states, this also reveals the affinity that the Western structures for knowledge validation such as what garners credibility and what entails as sound knowledge, will have an affinity for the Elite White Man (Collins, 2000, p.251). If differing frameworks have a direct influence on what knowledge is sustained, and western knowledge validation frameworks have an affinity for the elite white man, this should be reflected in the respective knowledge that is sustained. Thus, the experiences and knowledge produced by subjugated groups have routinely been excluded or distorted within what counts as knowledge (Collins, 2000, p.251). Collins also sources feminist philosopher Sandra Hardings' work in *The Method Question* (1987), where Harding uses the work of care ethics philosopher and psychoanalyst Carol Gilligan to explore the tendency of method criticism in feminist thought, sourcing the many attempts made to theorize on women's biological nature and life that have been based on the universalized experience of the elite white man (Harding, 1987, p.20). Harding criticized how Lawrence Kohlberg duplicated the practice of Freud, Piaget, and Ericson, and continued the practice of universalizing the experience, actions, and nature of men as the human model (Harding, 1987, p.20). All listed as influential characters in the fields of psychology and philosophy, whom Gilligan and Harding point out to be apparently blind to the methodical faults they duplicate and commit. The feminist activity of being critical to methodology, as mentioned by Harding, is explained by Collins to be a product of a history of subordination. She states in the context of lived experience as wisdom in contrast to *knowledge without wisdom* that lived experience provides credibility to knowledge claims through a history of *wisdom* being essential to the survival of the subordinate (Collins, 2000, p.257-258). This has resulted in what Collins deems as a stricter demand for knowledge for subordinate groups, in particular on account of experience in addition to theoretical knowledge, as subordinate groups have experience with theory violently neglecting them. This neglect, as Collins, Harding, and Gilligan argue in their work, is due to an affinity to the elite white man's power of defining the human as primarily man. This neglect is *experienced* by subordinate groups and is shared through testimony, but never properly integrated into a theoretical domain, knowledge that is considered sustainable

and we can build from, as the subjugated group's knowledge production is systematically excluded or distorted by dominant epistemic frameworks.

An epistemic framework that does not account for experience, labeled synonymously with the praxis and development of systems that show affinity to the elite white man, is what needs to be analyzed and compared against the suggested integration of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. Feminist theory sometimes simplifies and summarizes systems with an affinity for elite white men, or similar concepts of elite affinity, as critiquing what is often called the 'traditional approach' (Harding, 1991, p.140), 'traditional research' (hooks, 2004, p.36) or 'Traditional Western approach' (Collins, 2000, p.251). These terms will both be applied and repeated by philosophers throughout this thesis and will often refer to the contributors that usually apply a non-feminist epistemological approach. This often includes some historically major influences in respective fields, that either uncritically duplicate methodology and praxis established under heavy patriarchal influence or contribute to an expansion of said praxis. When philosophers who fall under these terms are named by feminist philosophers in their critique when I cite their theories, I will state who. Concrete examples found with philosophers who are considered to have contributed or were actively using a "traditional" approach will be named in the relevant segments throughout the thesis. The object of critique that this thesis is trying to grasp is a system (that will show itself to be a patriarchal one) that is rarely a topic of mention by the agent of interest and is executed without clarification or further justification. Philosophers who can be said to have established the theoretical development of hurtful practice is not the main focus of this thesis other than their respective mentions that will be named, as the focus of the thesis is to argue in support of Collins and Harding, building on their preestablished critique. An individual is perhaps never guilty for the totality of the systemic fault, but it is necessary to view cases to be able to understand the particular consequences of the abstract epistemic fault that is occurring in traditional philosophy. This will be particularly relevant in Chapter 2 of this thesis where I will be looking at a case study. To build on the discoveries of Collins and Harding, this thesis is both an effort to underline the harmful consequences of a particular traditional practice, as well as contribute to the unveiling of the potent potential of feminist analysis. The pre-established critical work of Gilligan, Collins and Harding is included in the foundation that the thesis builds on.

1.1.3 Experience, Knowledge, and Wisdom

Collins states that lived experience, particularly in marginalized communities, can provide a deep understanding or *wisdom* that goes beyond factual knowledge (Collins, 2000, p.257-258). She talks about linking *knowledge to lived experience as wisdom* as opposed to knowledge alone. Thus, wisdom to Collins is equivalent to knowledge as at least something *more* than knowledge alone. She writes how lived experience, particularly in marginalized communities, brings a deep understanding or wisdom that goes beyond 'theoretical' or 'factual' knowledge. This wisdom is gained through the challenges and struggles faced by these communities and is used to judge and confirm the validity of knowledge claims, either their own or others. *Criterion of epistemic credibility* is therefore understood as in of itself a way to *assess* a knowledge claims' credibility. *Epistemic credibility* in the context of this thesis, is defined and used about something that needs to be accounted for to provide soundness to a knowledge claim. Looking at *experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility*, I will only address this one criterion, and not the totality of the criterions that a knowledge claim may be judged after. However, I believe it is important to remember that all knowledge claims, including those based on lived experience, must be subject to critical evaluation.

Collins statement and her work as the primary ground for this thesis engages an old but relevant topic, namely the terms wisdom and knowledge and their respective definitions. Her reference to lived experience draws from a phenomenological origin. As well as using a term familiar with the phenomenological tradition (*lived* experience), she has a chapter contribution in the book *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (2020). In its introduction, Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon state that a mark of phenomenology is the faith that experience "*can disclose the most basic structures of human existence*" (Weiss Et al., 2020, Introduction), and a commitment to "[...] *the refusal to accept the taken-for-grantedness of experience*" (Weiss Et al., 2020, Introduction). Professor of philosophy Duane H. Davis writes in his chapter "The Phenomenological Method" That Lived experience, in the sense of *Erlebnis* in Edmund Husserls intent, "*is transient, fleeting, and not intrinsically reliable as a form of understanding. Yet this is the kind of understanding that prevails in our everyday ways of acting and interacting in the world*." (Davis, H. D., 2020, p. 5). Interpreting this, experience is a complicated phenomenon that can serve as insight into the intrinsic structures of our existence and should not be dismissed or reduced to simplicity. If we align this general understanding with Collins' statements, a knowledge claim

made by someone with lived experience relevant and in addition to knowledge on the topic they are addressing will be more in line with seeking intrinsic truths about what they are discussing. Elevating knowledge to wisdom, then, becomes a constant preferable to just knowledge alone. Alternatively, seeking knowledge needs to include the topic of experience in some form to be able to reach a type of insight not otherwise gained without its consideration. This introduces an interesting question of whether *all knowledge* should be understood in the context of experience, for it to strive for the status of wisdom, as opposed to knowledge alone.

There are, of course, several other interpretations of the relationship between wisdom and knowledge in the field of philosophy. Discussions on wisdom and knowledge is found all the way back in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, where wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*episteme*) were often discussed as separate but interconnected concepts. *The Dictionary of the Untranslatable: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014) states the following when defining wisdom; although antique language defined wisdom as a two-fold conjunction between the greatest possible wisdom in an epistemic sense (knowledge), and the greatest possible wisdom in a practical-ethical sense, "[...] modern languages generally distinguish between theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom and retain for wisdom only the practical-ethical meaning [...]" ("Wisdom", 2014). Following this definition, Collins' approach to wisdom mirrors the ancient approach then, where wisdom is not retained to its modern translation of adhering to only the "practical-ethical" meaning, but rather a combined understanding. Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1999) distinguishes between theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Aristotle, 1999, 1139b15-30). The former refers to general, abstract truths, while the latter involves practical judgment in particular situations, emphasizing the importance of applying knowledge in a context-specific manner. Eastern philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Taoism offer perspectives on wisdom and knowledge as well. Confucius in *Analects* (ap. 200 BCE/1992) emphasized the cultivation of wisdom through moral virtues and the proper conduct of individuals within hierarchical social relationships (Confucius, 1992, 1:2, 2:17). Knowledge, in this understanding, seems intimately tied to ethical behavior and social harmony.

The complete philosophical discussion on wisdom and knowledge and whether it incorporates experience in either is, in its totality, unfortunately outside the scope of the thesis. I break with the traditional epistemic approaches and sources such as listed above, in favor of a feminist

epistemological approach, foremost because I am approaching the topics within this thesis from a period of time where minority voices have broken through the academic influential grounds. As argued by Gilligan, Collins, Harding, and later shown in this thesis chapter on historical context by Uma Taylor, accumulated throughout all this time is a vast amount of knowledge claims produced using a traditional Western methodology about minority or subordinated groups, which have been continuously challenged by these subordinate groups. I favor Collins statement of how experience can serve as something that might elevate a knowledge claims epistemic credibility due to the history of knowledge exclusion of subordinates. As covered, the theoretical groundwork done by Harding and Collins provides me with an opportunity to explore what previous distinctions might not yet have grasped. This thesis will explore how Feminist epistemology can provide the epistemological perspective or groundwork to explore the phenomena of how these major mistakes on knowledge about minority groups have occurred. Harding categorizes knowledge produced under a traditional theoretical framework as *weak objectivity*, where our alternative framework that considers experience as a criterion of credibility as providing *strong objectivity* (Harding, 1991, p.151-152). To understand why I will progress through the thesis mainly referencing Harding's terminology, we need to clarify what is meant by experience in the thesis.

1.1.4 Experience

To clarify the relation knowledge has to trust and experience, I will make the basis of the connection that experience functions as an epistemic criterion of credibility clear. When I speak about experience in this thesis, it is not used as an obscure term. I am using it in its everyday sense of meaning, where an experience is a processed event or a processed series of events. Some examples provided by Collins bring clarity to what is meant by experience outside of our biologically functional senses. She picks several examples that highlight important features of the function of experience in black feminist epistemology. The first feature is that every person's speech is highly *personal* and is *weighed* by an inherent right to both express and be heard, as she states the process of objectifying and producing distant statistics cannot weigh up to the account of the experience someone has with any grave matter (Collins, 2000, p.257). The second feature is that experience offers a type of knowledge that makes "three words out of thirty-three". What is meant by this is a critique of the process that obscures truth in favor of words, resulting in both unavailable and poorer expression. Experience, then, can provide the knowledge necessary to convey meaning in limited

expression (Collins, 2000, p.258). Word count does not become a convincing matter on its own if experience can provide knowledge that grasps a concept more comprehensibly. In addition, Collins points out the tendency among black woman scholars to continuously invoke lived experience when approaching a topic of interest. Examples include referencing the importance of parental figures, the insight of an upbringing outside of the cultural norm, and how it provides unique insight and imaging that cement experience as a fundamental tool for imagery and expression in respective thought systems (Collins 2000, p.258). When we invoke examples from our lives to symbolize, argue, visualize, or otherwise deconstruct concepts, Collins argues it provides an efficient epistemological tool of re-defining and interaction with said concepts, that differs from the existing protocol and tradition (Collins, 2000, p.258). She argues that for someone to efficiently regard experience as a criterion of credibility, both as speaker and hearer, it requires a telling, as well as *trust* in the telling (Collins, 2000, p. 258). Here, we find our first notion that trust is essential for experience to be applied as an epistemic criterion of credibility. An environment of trust, as well as an understanding of how experience can convey knowledge, is stated as dependent on each other to be able to extract the knowledge experience can provide and communicate. This is where we find the clue to expand on the concept of experience as an epistemic criterion of credibility. Trust, then, and its relationship to experience through sharing and speaking, is a concept that demands further attention if it is essential to efficiently apply experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility.

The experience that this thesis refers to is that found in a critical phenomenological sense, through Collins. She uses the words 'lived experience' and 'personal experience' when speaking of the importance that experience has had as a criterion of epistemic credibility in African-American culture (Collins, 2000, p. 257-258). Both of these terms have a connection to experience as understood phenomenologically. This entails that experience, in the sense she speaks of it, is perhaps inseparable from the experienc*er*, and makes it possible for retellings to function as an efficient epistemological tool. This means that to understand what experience is, and to interact with retellings of the experience, it must be understood as something that is not able to be stripped from its teller without it risking being altered. I can have experience with going to the store a hundred times, and not every time makes it an experience, but rather just a series of events. When suddenly someone brings it up as an example in a philosophical thesis, I start to reflect on these events, turning it into something I can perhaps base a knowledge claim on, about visiting the store. These types of examples are often used as a reference to *common* experiences, as I just did. The intent here is that the

experience the example is based on, is intended to be something that everyone who reads it can relate to. This is a common way to use experience when making knowledge claims in philosophy. In this thesis however, I will be mostly referring to the experience that supplements knowledge claims (such as defined and applied by Collins), or is even a basis for knowledge claims, and are unique or otherwise generally unavailable to a majority. The reason for this limitation is that the way in which I want to argue experience as able to contribute to unveiling knowledge as well as be accounted for as a criterion of epistemic credibility, I want to show as evident through examples that reach the *complexity* that is highly present in social life. I want the examples provided by philosophers I will analyze later in the thesis to clearly show, despite its complexity, how they use experience in their philosophical theories and how sharing these experiences and reflections has philosophical implications in their work. Their experiences are shared with the assumption that their readers do not necessarily have access to these experiences or have had the opportunity to reflect on them in the way they do. However, this does not mean that as a reader we cannot achieve a sense of understanding, or that the fact that some arguments are based on reflections on experiences are unreachable or not understandable by people who do not have the same exact set of experiences. I claim in this thesis that there exists a benefit from sharing and making experiences that are otherwise unavailable for many, accessible.

1.1.5 Objective Knowledge

If experience is a continuous presence in epistemic consideration, and experience requires trust, knowledge becomes the next term that needs to be clarified further. Sandra Harding provides us with a theory to build on. It perhaps follows from the account of Collins that we also ask the question: Will not all knowledge provided through experience have a risk of deceit and bias? How can we demand trust in a field of science focused on truth? An answer to that question is to look to Harding's text *"Strong Objectivity" and Socially Situated Knowledge* (1991). Perhaps badly disguised in the approach of my thesis lies a critique and rejection of the traditional interpretation of the concept of "objective knowledge". By critiquing the concept of the human as universalized man, it engages a discussion on what can be considered 'objectively true', as has often been a synonym for established knowledge claims that have passed the traditional epistemic framework as defined by Collins. The question is even more critical if experience as a suggested criterion of credibility hints that subjectivity lies at the core of every human who engages in any form of knowledge claim or

exchange. The spark of this stance lies in its critique of principles, which is to assume that 'objective' knowledge is obtainable at all without addressing experience. Harding states the following about the concept of *strong objectivity*: demanding acknowledgement of all human beliefs as socially situated and demanding critical evaluation to determine what knowledge these situations produce is considered a demand for *strong objectivity* by feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991, p. 142). On weak objectivity, the object of standpoint feminism critique, Harding states "[…]*research prescriptions called for by a value-free objectivity only mimic the purported style of the most successful scientific practices without managing to produce their effects*" (Harding, 1991, p. 142) and:

> Objectivism results only in semi- science when it turns away from the task of critically identifying all those broad, historical social desires, interests, and values that have shaped the agendas, contents, and results of the sciences much as they shape the rest of human affairs. Objectivism encourages only a partial and distorted explanation of why the great moments in the history of the natural and social sciences have occurred (Harding, 1991, p.143).

Harding's statements entail that analyzing the value of experience and truth as critically relevant to the field of epistemology does not propose a fragility to the concept of objectivity but is rather a form of strong objectivity that can be said to demand a stricter criterion for evaluating knowledge claims—at least if we follow the notion of Harding and Collins. 'Weak' of weak objectivity comes from the partial analysis it engages, rendering the knowledge it yields as distorted and uncritical. Thus, if experience has been excluded as a criterion of epistemic credibility, it would serve closer to the goal of a more critical, stronger 'objectivity'. 'Experience' as a general concept in this thesis is understood as experiences from your life, as distinct from a general birds-eye view or third-person description of what an experience can entail. It is personal, due to my point of view when stating an experience I have lived. It is considered *situated,* as a knowledge claim is always situated, as we cannot remove our methods or approaches from its cultural heritage, according to Harding. We can, however, provide critical attention to the influence of what situates us, providing an opportunity to achieve strong objectivity, in contrast to the alternative 'total relativity'. Neither Harding, Collins, nor I want to claim that relativism is the immediate result of rejecting what Harding names "weak objectivity", as I believe Harding and Collins make a good case for feminist epistemologies resulting in stricter criteria for epistemic credibility. A close case study to understand how it strengthens a knowledge claim will be made through Chapter 2 of this thesis.

As an example, we can then take a step further and categorize our experiences relative to a category of identity, for example: woman. "Experiences as a woman" becomes a type of knowledge that provides lived experiences that have a certain uniqueness to the category of woman. This experience you categorize as relevant to your identification as a woman, holds a situated perspective. Another example that engages experience when seeking knowledge could show how situating shapes the same topic of interest. If I were to ask someone for marital advice, I would perhaps be inclined to seek knowledge from someone in a long-lasting happy marriage. I would perhaps also be inclined to seek knowledge from a marital counsellor. I would, however, evaluate their knowledge claims based on their differing experience. The first example I might evaluate their knowledge claims based on their apparent wisdom through experience with the situation I might seek counselling on. The second example, I might be inclined to evaluate their knowledge claims based on experience with counselling people in the situation I might seek counselling on, and their scientific credibility through their job title. Both examples make assessments of knowledge claims based on experience. As another example, if I were to apply for a job, I would certainly be looking through my previous experience to see if any yield is relevant. I am, in that scenario, considering my own competence based on experience.

What separates Harding's foundation from Collins's is the additional account of trust addressed in Collins's philosophical approach. As trust between the sharer and teller is essential in the process of exchange of experience (Collins, 2000, p. 258), Collins's theory demands an extended conception of trust. This particular extension will prove important for conceptualizing at least one category of harm that results from methods of weak objectivity, namely *mistrust*.

1.1.5 Harm

As much of this thesis (with some exceptions) will be dedicated to a case and a definition clarification where the presence of experience and how it affects philosophical and epistemic credibility is analyzed in depth, I want to clarify the intent behind the limitation of the thesis. Although I have chosen to focus on black feminist philosophy and care ethics, I wholeheartedly believe the claims made about experience and its neglect, as well as the integration of trust and experience epistemically among subordinate groups epistemic

framework, is possible to extend beyond the two fields I will address. I mention this to underline the gravity of why feminist epistemologists such as Collins continuously make efforts to underline the real consequences of these theoretical systems: the *survival* of the subordinate, as said by Collins, has been dependent on stricter demands for knowledge claims. That suggests the alternative has resulted in *harm* to the subordinate. The possibility to extend the arguments made in this thesis beyond the two fields it will focus on, such as critical disability theory or queer philosophy, is due to the accounts of harm, a harm that challenges survival for minority groups, which is not exclusively addressed in the fields of care ethics and black feminist philosophy.

This harm is what provides the gravity to the topic at hand in this thesis. How can neglecting to account for experience epistemically result in a real moral consequence for the people who reference this neglecting epistemic framework? The undermining of experience, the experience of the subordinate, has a complicated history of documentation, as suppression of this history is often part of the exertion of power. As covered by Collins, prominent throughout the history of any minority, and present when finally breaching the academic bubble, is the neglect of their experiences with the discrimination within the academic knowledge validation process as having epistemic credibility (Collins, 2000, p.255-256). This harm mainly experienced, is a difficult task to abolish or critique when experience does not hold value in an academic establishment, or the experience already present is misidentified as a universal perspective. There are several instances that have taken the challenge of experience being considered seriously in academic settings. Black Feminist philosophers have explored and developed theories for alternative epistemologies to include lived black experience and philosophy into the sphere of academic consideration: such as Patricia Hill Collins providing explicit alternative frameworks for philosophy and sociology (Collins, 2000), Audre Lorde for exploring personal narratives as sources for knowledge (Lorde, 1984), and bell hooks for writing extensively about the need for alternative ways of thinking and knowing (hooks, 1994). Moreover, experiences that contradicted the claims of traditional theories within philosophy, either by claiming existing traditional theories were insufficient to cover moral topics present in the lives and experiences of women or contradicting claims as a whole, were often disregarded on the grounds that experiences from women were often tainted by 'emotions', and not 'rationally' sufficient to support any knowledge claims

(Antony, M., L. 1998)[1]. Care ethics functioned as a foothold into the academic sphere regarding critiquing traditional ethical theories, as care labor was often considered a "women's labour" or a "woman's virtue" (Antony, M. L., 1998, p. 64). This was used to female philosophers' advantage, by them claiming insight into the field they were considered experts in by stereotypical gendered norms of the current society. When theories on queerness could finally be challenged by openly queer individuals in the academic sphere, queer philosophy similarly began its position as rebutting the previous traditional theories on subjects such as sexuality and gender, heavily critiquing the limited language provided to describe their experience of their own existence[2]. Critical disability theory is a field that is similarly on the rise, finally starting to have access to academia despite a tiresome history of being discriminated against based on "apparent capacities", and are similarly to the other fields focusing on the previous harmful attempts to describe, hypothesize and theorize on their own conditions and existence (Hosking, D., L., 2008). When subordinate groups of society finally have the opportunity to address these concepts that concern their identities, existence or general lives, it almost always includes accounts of experience that directly contradict what someone without access to these experiences has written before their own entrance. Covering all these fields is unfortunately outside of the scope of this thesis, but is relevant enough to mention in regards to the extent of presence that experience has in philosophy. It is clear that the general tools that philosophy has considered to be universally applicable have shown to have failed habitually and frequently, and the importance of considering alternative options is critical. However, a general and short summary does not underline the gravity or content of the harm that is referenced earlier. To understand the severity of existence that has demanded stricter criteria of epistemic credibility, we need to look to the history of black feminist philosophy and care ethics.

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[1] Also known as the feminist critique of the concept of 'rationality and emotions' as dichotomies and gendered. Among others, Louise M. Antony, in her article ""Human Nature" and Its Role in Feminist Theory" (1998), touches on the topic of how women's experiences were, and are still, considered something other than the experience of a 'human'".

[2] LGBTQ+ and its scientific introduction to the academic sphere came in the form of being understood as a mental illness (earlier as juridical crime or moral, religious sin), with the most recent declassification being done by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2019, when being transgender was declassified as a "mental disorder" in favor of "gender incongruence" in the IDC-11 (International classification of Diseases).

# 1.2 Historical Context

In this chapter, I will show how both care ethics and black feminist philosophy, fields based on addressing both oppression and moral reasoning, are invested in the topic of experience and its neglect throughout philosophy and society.[3] This thesis wants to explore the epistemic effect of experience being taken into account in philosophy. Here, I will show its already existing presence in particular philosophic fields. At the core of this thesis lies the question of how we value experience, and I will show both how harmful neglecting experience has been to subordinate groups, as well as provide a historical context to how each field has contributed to argue for the necessity of a stricter epistemic framework for black feminist philosophy and care ethics. I wish to underline how it is not a privilege to have had to structure an epistemic framework with a heavy weight on survival, despite this thesis arguing for philosophical epistemic frameworks in general to incorporate it to combat harm.

## 1.2.1 The Experience of Oppression from Multiple Fronts

To understand the concept of experience and its already integrated appliance in black feminist philosophy, I believe it is highly relevant that black feminist philosophy sprang from a history of having their collective experiences oppressed. Ula Y. Taylor is a professor at California Berkley with an area of specialization covering African American History, Black Feminist theory and Civil Rights and Black Power (among other areas as well). She provides a comprehensive insight into the historical evolution of black feminist theory and praxis up until the 2000s. She identifies key instances where black feminist theory establishes a defining and differing presence. This history will provide insight into how oppression of experiences can take form, and I believe will show where its importance stems from in black feminist philosophy, historically. In the article "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis" (1998), she begins by quoting Adrienne Rich, by stating feminist theory suffers from the concept *white solipsism- "to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world"* (Rich, 1978, p. 299). The opening quote provides the thematic approach

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[3] There is a point to mention about the limitations of a Eurocentric history recount of feminist philosophy and care ethics. One consequence of containing the discussion of this thesis within the frames of Eurocentric history is that the conclusion provided by this thesis does not necessarily provide a transnational understanding of care ethics, black feminism, and epistemology. This limitation is based on the main philosophers to be addressed in this thesis not being representative of views beyond an American or European context, or a Western philosophical tradition, if you will.

to the historical article. From the beginning of black feminist thought, the black feminist movement and anti-slavery movement were and still are tightly interlocked. During the abolitionist movement in the 1830s to 1865, black women sought to unite for equal rights within a period of *sexism, slavery, and racism* (Taylor, 1998, p.236). They quickly realized the collective goal of freedom was unreachable within the borders of one movement, many women fighting on multiple fronts to liberate both black men and women, and women from their respective but interlocked oppression. This consciousness manifested and developed in many campaigns for equal rights through and within the abolitionist movement.

Taylor underlines that the union between black women and white women in America in the feminist movement is a turbulent one, as white women in the early presence of the movement were reluctant to acknowledge black women as women at all, still upholding the racist and dehumanized association to black women that followed from slavery (Taylor, 1998, p.236). There are multiple points that created tension and separation between white and black women within the American feminist movement. One such point is the reluctance of white women to acknowledge the interconnected relationship between oppression based on race, and oppression based on gender (Taylor, 1998, p.246). This reluctance to recognize the necessity for an expanded understanding of liberation for some to liberation for all upheld the need for separated groups despite the seemingly corresponding fighting cause. An example of how this tension could manifest within the movement was the white feminist movements focus on liberating women from "kitchen work". Black women and poor women were not privileged enough to have the choice to *be* liberated from the kitchen, as their situation required them to be outside of the home. I am referring here to work such as house cleaning and nannying and other types of labor that provided the groundwork for white women to be liberated at all. Racism was highly present in white women's feminist movement in America at the time. This group of women, not only white but mainly middle and upper class, had lived comfortably in the presence of slavery throughout many generations. They did, and were not afraid to show, that they fought for an exclusive right for white women to vote, essentially fighting for a white constitutional dominance (Taylor, 1998, p.237). As retold and underlined by Taylor, the political and social movements of black and white women as groups in America were long separated and inflamed. I believe it follows, then, that both political and social gatherings for group identities of black women were not only necessary to orient, engage and act in the political scene for the sake of justice but were also a place to share, empathize, and form a collective support for their unique experience of exclusion. The *experiences* are different

based on what form of oppression one is facing. Experiencing this combined oppression from multiple fronts as a black woman in America built a necessary demand for its own movement, forum and space to gather and even just process the unique reality. As was the case for the overarching feminist movement in general, and the ever-present demand for spaces to be able to relate and discuss matters of shared unique experience of oppression.

Throughout this historical summary, the presence and development of a certain black feminist theoretical theme becomes prominent. Due to Black women's activism having to engage on multiple fronts, the union of these causes became evident and profoundly centric to the notion of liberation. In addition, political engagement and activism became central to the Black feminists who broke through in academia, providing literature to the academic sphere. They did not abandon the activism and political engagement as they broke through, rather arguing for an interlocked relationship between the personal, political, and philosophical. Building on their multipurpose activism and theories on oppression, the field known as Black Feminist Philosophy was established and is continuously developed in the present day. Understanding the history of the field of Black Feminist philosophy provides us with a perspective on the distinction between the fields being addressed in this thesis. The necessity for black feminism to form a system that could account for their experiences of oppression, racism, sexism, and slavery, was one that was dependent on survival. The harm that is referenced when considering neglect of experience is not one of lightweight; it is a historical heritage of times when sexism and racism were committed openly, legally and without hesitance. Harm and violence that were promised to be inherited by the coming generation solidified the necessity for personal and political engagement. Thus, perhaps a distinct epistemological framework in which protection from violence was necessary, as well as a vision to address knowledge claims in relation to the experience of this violence, developed.

1.2.2 Historical Context of Care Ethics

We see similarities to the necessity to address harm through the field of care ethics. It is here we find the direct focus on trust and mistrust, particularly in how it emerges through other ethic frameworks. Care ethics emerged out of feminist philosophy and feminist psychology, and it emphasizes the importance of relationships, emotions, and empathy in moral reasoning. One of the earliest and most influential figures in the development of care ethics was philosopher and psychoanalyst Carol Gilligan. In 1982, Carol Gilligan published *In A*

*Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development,* where she raised a central critique of traditional ethical theories for, among other points, being male-centric, harmful and insufficient in accounting for the complexity of ethical reflection and consideration (Gilligan, 2003) Through thorough studies, she introduced the concept of care-based reasoning found among women, in addition to a justice-based reasoning that had already been extensively theorized (Gilligan, 2003, p.172-174) For a long time, the academic scene and access to theoretical philosophy were both made by and ascribed to men who were both economically well-off enough to pursue education and legally privileged (as in, were allowed to attend a university). The focus on universality, theories being universally applicable, was standard practice in these fields. However, as women, people of color, and other minority identities broke through into the theoretical field, an overarching masculine presence was quickly identified in the proposed "universality" of the existing traditions. This is something care ethics philosophers have extensively addressed in the field of ethics.

Gilligan argued that women's moral reasoning was different from men's because it was based on care and relationships rather than abstract principles, introducing the terminology for "justice-based reasoning" and "care-based reasoning" (Gilligan, 2000, p.172-174). Gilligan's work challenged the dominant view that morality was based on individual autonomy and rationality. Other important early contributors to care ethics include Nel Noddings and Eva Feder Kittay. Noddings argued that care was a fundamental human need, and that care and relationships were central to moral development. In addition, she criticizes how principles of ethics can function as "liberation" from ethical problematic actions, rather than nurture and promote the right and good actions through her book *Caring* (1984). Kittay emphasized the importance of dependency relationships and argued that care work was undervalued and under-compensated in society, as well as introducing ethics as an existing entity within close relationships and disproportionate relationships through her writing in *Love's Labor* (1999). The field of care ethics has gained significant attention in recent decades as an alternative to traditional monistic ethical theories that focus on universal principles and abstract reasoning, such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Care ethics emphasizes the importance of relationships, dependency, and vulnerability in ethical considerations, and it has been used to address a wide range of issues, including healthcare, social justice, global politics, environmental issues, education, and so on. The field has since expanded to include forms of oppression beyond sexism, such as race and disability, and has been used to critique dominant power structures and advocate for social justice.

A common view within feminist critique is to argue that experience has been unjustly and unreasonably undermined and undervalued in traditional theory and method. The epistemology and morality of experience in feminist philosophy and care ethics have a rich history, emerging in the spotlight in the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Eva Feder Kittay, bell hooks, Luce Irigaray, Sandra Harding, Martha Nussbaum and Patricia Hill Collins (to name a few) have argued that traditional philosophical methods and theories have failed to properly account for the experiences and perspectives of women and other marginalized groups. They argued that the exclusion of women's experiences from philosophical discourse perpetuated systemic oppression and reinforced patriarchal power structures morally, epistemically, metaphysically, politically, and even logically. As we can see, both care ethics and black feminist philosophy, fields based on addressing both oppression and moral reasoning, are invested in the topic of experience and its neglect throughout philosophy and society. In conclusion, to address the role of the moral significance that is consequential of a harmful epistemic framework, care-ethics offers an approach to the topic of trust and mistrust that is rooted in an attempt to challenge sources of similar tribulations to black feminist epistemology.

# Chapter 2: Experience; Present and Profound

This chapter aims to analyze the two following claims: when accounted for in an epistemic framework, *experience has a profound impact on knowledge claims* and *can unveil knowledge otherwise unavailable without it*. Chapter 2.1 will do this by taking an extensive look at a case where experience as a criterion of credibility makes, arguably, an extensive impact on the philosophers' involved conclusions. Moving on, chapter 2.2 will argue the necessity of experience as a criterion of credibility to achieve knowledge about the concept of patriarchy.

## 2.1 The Presence and Absence of Experience in an Epistemic Framework

### 2.1.1 Introduction

To identify exactly how experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility affects philosophical knowledge claims compared to a framework that does not consider it the same way, I will analyze an article written by Eva Feder Kittay, found in the compendium *Cognitive Disability and Its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (2010). Kittay is a distinguished professor of philosophy at Stony Brook University, with years of publications on topics such as feminist philosophy, care ethics, moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, and monumental contributions to philosophy on the topic of cognitive disability and moral philosophy (among them, the compendium I will be using in this thesis). In addition, Kittay has often shared her experience as a mother of a cognitively disabled child, stating a focused philosophical interest in the topic of cognitive disability as a result. The article "A Philosopher and Mother of a Cognitively Disabled Person Sends Notes from The Battlefield*"* (2010) will be used as a case study to show how experience can be utilized and give arguments for why a consideration of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility is impactful to philosophical conclusions. This analysis helps answer the thesis question of the impact experience has as a criterion of epistemic credibility for several reasons: It provides a philosophical example of rejecting experience as an epistemic criterion of credibility, the consequence this rejection can have for understanding philosophical concepts that are highly understood in the context of existence, and how the opposite (considering the epistemic credibility of experience) also affects an understanding of those philosophical concepts. In addition, Kittay provides a meta-discussion on her own experience and her use of her experience. This article, as I will show, functions as an example of both reflecting on events to achieve experience and how it can be both used to

strengthen philosophical claims as well as used as a critique of others' philosophical claims.

In the article "A Philosopher and Mother of a Cognitively Disabled Person Sends Notes From The Battlefield*" published by Kittay in the meta-philosophy series *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (2010), Kittay writes with heavy weight on her experience and knowledge regarding being the mother of a cognitively disabled child, and a philosopher. The article is in direct reference and as a response to a philosophical workshop, referencing a transcript between Kittay, and moral philosophers Jeff McMahan and Peter Singer. Throughout this article describing a panel occurring at the workshop, experience is both the topic of interest and a method used by Kittay to support her arguments. Her experience of being a mother of a disabled child is both the topic that is addressed by Singer and McMahan in the transcript of the panel and is, in addition, discussed, used, and reflected upon by Kittay in the article itself. In addition to considering experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, we have Kittay's own reflections on her experience from intersecting roles as both a mother and a philosopher. She writes about her thoughts regarding the challenge of sharing these reflections, and the emotional labor of facing someone where your processed experiences and their philosophical implications are disregarded in the discussion. Thus, we are given a chance to look at an example where we can see the consequence of disregarding experience as having epistemic credibility, on a topic within ethics. This entails an application of a negative understanding of experience that results in conclusions that may be lacking in depth or understanding. More importantly, I will show how this transcript also contains a disregard of experience as a criterion of credibility, which calls for what I argue is a need to consider absence of experience, as *experience of absence*.

2.1.2 The Panel Discussion

Kittay begins with an anecdote. She describes how they were present at a panel (The Stony Brook Conference) in Atlanta, Georgia, following Jeff McMahan's release of *Ethics of Killing* (2003), where she found herself in a discussion where she attempted to explain how one of his arguments in the book has *severe and harmful* consequences to a vulnerable minority, and how his writing expresses a harmful lack of experience with the same minorities he is addressing (Kittay, 2010, p.394). Kittay here references *his lack* of experience as a point that weakens McMahan's epistemic grounds, where it is explicitly expressed by Kittay in this panel discussion that he is lacking something *essential* to the understanding of what he is

writing about. The argument she is contesting is the claim by McMahan that there is no moral status difference between non-humans (animals) and the cognitively disabled. Initially, McMahan's argument is part of a grander argument to denounce moral superiority based on belonging to a certain species (anthropocentrism). However, Kittay points out that both he, and his acquaintance Singer who enters the discussion in support of McMahan, have severely underestimated and misunderstood the capability of the cognitively disabled, and in turn their use of the cognitively disabled not only fail to support their initial point, but results in a harmful strengthening of a stereotypical view of an already vulnerable minority.  The claims made by McMahan about the cognitively disabled that Kittay is referring to are the following: lacking a strong continuity of self, lacking the capacity for future planning, lacking the capacity for enjoying higher pleasures associated with being human, and lacking capacity for deep emotional relationships (Kittay, 2010, p.394). A panel discussion follows, where Kittay, Peter Singer, and McMahan discuss around the consequences of their definition of the cognitively disabled. McMahan expresses that he believes they are arguing past each other, that Kittay fails to show where his arguments go wrong, and that she has misunderstood his position (Kittay, 2010, p.395). The others in the conference are silent, and the few who speak up are criticizing Kittay for making the claim that McMahan exemplifies how the method of bioethics can be unethical in and of itself (Kittay, 2010, p.395). On the last day of the Stony Brook Conference, a direct transcript is provided where Peter Singer asks if Kittay can provide a list of morally significant capacities that her daughter have that separates her from a pig, or a dog (Kittay, 2010, p.408). Kittay reacts with disbelief at first, then rejects his simplification on what it entails to be human to a list of cognitive capacities. McMahan then interjects the conversation to support Singer;

> [sic] And the fact that you, Eva, have a relation with your daughter doesn't necessarily give other people the same set of reasons that you have to respond to your daughter in certain ways and to treat your daughter in certain ways. The question is what is it about people like your daughter that makes moral demands on other people that nonhuman animals cannot make on any of us. (Kittay, 2010, p.408)

Singer and McMahan are communicating in agreement that they believe her argument is steering away from the relevancy of the content of their premises. They have interpreted her critique or rebuttals to mean that she has misunderstood their intent and repeat their question of how her daughters' cognitive capabilities are truly separable from those of an animal, in the sense of arguing in favor of an elevated moral status of animals. They also communicate clearly that they reduce her experience as a mother of a cognitively disabled child to nothing

but that, a relationship. She is granted intimate *irrelevant* knowledge about her daughter, but nothing else that they acknowledge to be relevant to their discussion.

Interpreting his comment, albeit with a gracious charitable reading, McMahan is confusingly establishing that Kittay's experiences from her life that she invokes during the discussion following her relation to her daughter are valuable in *some* way, and gives her ground for reaching reasons and conclusions otherwise not available to others without that type of experience. However, as he suggests this type of experience and the reflections that follow are unavailable to others, he believes the conclusions that Kittay have reached based on these experiences are also unavailable to others. He therefore concludes that Kittay's experience is irrelevant to the question whether her daughter has a higher moral status than an animal. Simplified, McMahan is essentially saying "You have experience with your daughter that gives you reason to believe she is of a higher moral status than animals. I do not have this experience, and therefore I disregard your knowledge following this experience. You must convince me on reasons that you separate from your experience, rather than share reflections on your experiences with me, because they give you an emotional partiality rather than disinterested impartiality". Thus, he not only disregards the relevance of experiences in this discussion, but deems it a source of possible weakness to Kittay's claim. Although Kittay attempts to communicate there is an epistemic disagreement that is occurring, Singer states, following Kittay's refusal to answer how her daughters' capacities are any different than that of a pig or dog: "*It's a factual question. You can't just shake your head. You have to put up or stop saying that*" (Kittay, 2010, p. 408). Note here that neither Singer nor McMahan does not seem to consider his stance of 'experience as irrelevant' as an epistemic consideration, even though he establishes a skepticism to involving reflections based on experience to the discussion. McMahan here communicates that experience is a threat to the epistemic integrity to Kittay's claim, but also communicates that experience is irrelevant to philosophical knowledge claims in the field of moral philosophy. Experience then, is established by Singer and McMahan as *only* a negative influence.

To clarify, neither Singer not McMahan intend to argue that people with varying cognitive capacities should have a denounced moral status. They are, in the grander picture, arguing for an elevated moral status for non-human animals, and they claim our treatment of people with cognitive disabilities is a clear example of how society currently base our moral statuses on unfair premises, as they are considered by Singer and McMahan to be in a practical essence

'as capable as any rat or pig'. Thus, they are asking for other reasons that Kittay's daughter should have a moral claim on anyone else, other than her capacities that they believe are that of an animal. Their purely theoretical interaction with the topic in addition to their disregard and discouraging of Kittay's intimate experience with it, unfortunately communicates that experience is nothing but a risk of blindness to the goal of soundness. Kittay attempts to communicate the reason for her disagreement and reaction, although they are seemingly inseparable for McMahan and Singer:

> It's not that I'm not able to answer it intellectually, it's that I can't even get to the point emotionally, where I can answer that question. (Pause.) Most of the time. When I say you can't just wave your hand and say "and so on," it's because there is *so much* to being human. (Kittay, 2010, p.408)

Kittay is referencing their reduction of her daughter's capacities, her experiences of life, as well as her apparent emotional capacity, when Singer and McMahan are asking her to list something that to Kittay demands much more than a general "wave of the hand" as if they are under the same impression of what experience can entail. This quote shows Kittay is telling them to clarify what "and so on" entails, as their reduction is not sufficiently justified. Kittay's understanding of the content that experience holds, is here clarified to us as something entirely reduced in her understanding by McMahan and Singer. This short discussion is what I would call a severe but effective example of a seemingly total disregard of experience as an epistemic credibility within philosophical debates, in particular on the topic of relationships and ethics. As a result, they are in a position where they can define capacities of people they have never interacted with, all the while resting on a "safer" epistemic ground than those who might have concrete relationships to draw experience from. Consequently, they contribute to the view that experience is nothing but a disturbance to the quest for knowledge, this view in turn perhaps *excluding* vital knowledge from being considered. However, this disagreement also echoes Collins words on what is at stake when fighting for the consideration for experience, namely *harm* as Kittay pointed out being the result of their train of thought. We have here a distinct disagreements between Kittay, McMahan, and Singer that are shown through the transcript so far: Kittay as valuing invoking experiences from lived life, as something that should yield or impact knowledge claims based on defining capacities of humans, as opposed to Singer and McMahan stating it as irrelevant to their discussion. Singer and McMahan demand impartialness, insinuating that is the stance they themselves approach with.

### 2.1.3 False Neutrality

I claim Singer and McMahan's "neutral" epistemic stance, the suggested impartialness, is a false one. Experience in the panel discussion is fully present as something irrelevant to McMahan and Singer, but it is clearly not explicitly addressed as to what it can entail. McMahan and Singer reference it as her 'relation with her daughter', which entails some different forms of 'responses' and 'actions' from Kittay. This relationship, and what I assume they mean it entails (the experiences that follow from these relationships), they claim to have no moral significance on the collective. By disregarding 'relationships' in totality from even being able to lead to morally significant knowledge outside of anyone but the participants in the particular relationship, they are excluding, in essence, any experiences that are produced in relationships between subjects to yield nothing relevant to a discussion on universal moral principles. I don't believe their stance is synonymous with neutrality in the way they assume it to be because they are not arguing for experience being irrelevant, but rather arguing it has a negative impact on Kittay's epistemic integrity. They are not rejecting Kittay's role as a mother as a possible positive source of knowledge, they are actively viewing it as a *negative influence*. Kittay is not only regarded as a philosopher by McMahan and Singer, but she is also regarded in the context of a mother, who is inclined by them to try to ignore her relationship and subsequent experiences for the sake of a stronger philosophical take. As they underline, the question of her daughter's moral status is not related to her relationship as a mother. But clearly, to Kittay, it is. She is asked to circumvent something that is regarded by Singer and McMahan as a possible cloud of judgement.

Singer and McMahan attempt to clarify what they are asking for through ethical premises, when their true difference takes place epistemically. In addition to rejecting Kittay's experience as containing philosophically relevant points to the issue of moral status, they also make no note of addressing their own lack of experience. This is confusingly what establishes their negative epistemic view of experience; If you have it, you need to work to circumvent it. If you don't have it, you are less likely to cloud your judgement with it. They only ask Kittay to disregard her existing experience and do not address the consequence of their own lack of experience. This creates the mentioned negative assessment by McMahan and Singer, where experience only creates a negative influence on philosophical claims, but a lack of experience leads to what they consider a lesser risk of bias and emotional clouding of philosophical

reflection.

Kittay reflects on this coupling made by Singer and McMahan of the emotional response being synonymous with the inability to reflect sufficiently. Throughout her recollection of the panel weekend, Kittay gives reflections on her reactions, feelings and thoughts about the discussions that happened. Firstly, her work with the compendium *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (2010) is motivated by her decision to critique philosophical discourse *based on her knowledge and experience as a mother* (Kittay, 2010, p.393). Kittay also confirms that the instigation of this interest originates in her personal engagement with the care for her entirely dependent daughter, and the dissonance she experienced when reading topics attempting to define humans (Kittay, 2010, p.393). This dissonance is what I refer to as an instigator in many other feminist fields of philosophy, as the stated motivation for the thesis, and as Kittay confirms, was also her own call to challenge the standpoints that she states "*did not at all match what I learned in caring for and loving my daughter*" (Kittay, 2010, p. 393). She also underlines that although it has been challenging for her to philosophize on a matter that is so personal, she firmly believes there exists an overarching benefit for the community, for the profession, and for herself (Kittay, 2010, p.393-394). She underlines her motivation for this task in her belief that the personal, political, and philosophical have an inextricable relationship[4], and will support this through her work on justifying her claims based on her experience (Kittay, 2010, p.394).

I want to underline here how Kittay directly opposes McMahan and Singers' relationship with how experience interferes with philosophical reflection, as opposed to it engaging, inspiring and informing philosophical reflection. This dissonance Kittay addresses, I reference as the mentioned dissonance in chapter one, where many minority groups find their justification for correcting previous existing works based on their experience, or even choosing altogether not to discuss, write or engage with philosophy as it seems so misguided or alien. Her experience would, for her, directly reject McMahan and Singers definition of 'cognitive capacities'. In addition, her experience provides her with an acute awareness of the dire consequences of viewing cognitive disability the way they express it. It becomes more than just a logical disagreement, as her experience provides her with the knowledge of the real violence and pain

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[4] This builds on the existing feminist notion of the personal being political. Here, Kittay extends the interconnected relationship to philosophy as well, insinuating stances in the respective fields have deep connections and consequences for each other, and cannot be understood in totality outside of each other.

that ensues from these views on the cognitively disabled that McMahan and Singer provide. Unsurprisingly, this is what motivates Kittay to demand an epistemic consideration of experience to the theoretical knowledge they provide.

## 2.1.5 Experiences Shared by Kittay, Post Panel

As stated, Singer and McMahan's epistemic stance is not one that is neutral. There are several experiences Kittay shares that are of interest in the article where she gives way to how one can justify approaching philosophical concepts critically on grounds not related to just pointing out logical fallacies in arguments or set definitions. This is where Singer and McMahan's false neutrality becomes apparent. She shares her immediate thoughts after the Stony Brook conference:

> Where were my defenders? As I left the meeting, I thought, "What am I doing in this profession?" What, I wondered, was I doing in a discipline that thought it appropriate to question the full worth of a portion of humanity, one that happened to include my own daughter? […] By the time I got on the plane, I was determined to resign at the semester's end (Kittay, 2010, p.395).

The intense emotional reaction to both the methods that were used to address her daughter and the lack of these same reactions by fellow practitioners (Kittay, 2010, p.395) didn't just cause frustration compared to reading something you deem wrong or as a weak argument. It was, for Kittay, violent enough to make her consider resigning. Her use of experience here invites us to reflect on the emotional labor associated with participating in philosophical discourse that has experience involved. It also introduces that dissonance between attempting to define something universally, and the experience of that same something. Kittay directly invites us to imagine her situated perspective. This is not done to only provide a ground to understand where she is coming from, but it also gives ground to understand her arguments about experience-based descriptions later on in the article. She invites us directly to imagine reading philosophical texts where your child is stated as having a weak moral claim to everyone else (Kittay, 2010, p.396), and shares:

> How can I begin to tell you what it feels like to read texts in which one's child is compares, in all seriousness and with philosophical authority, to a dog, pig, rat, and most flatteringly a chimp; how corrosive these comparisons are, and how they mock those relationships that affirm who we are and why we care? (Kittay, 2010, p.397).

Kittay confirms that her experience is, to a degree, unavailable to the general person. However, she still invites us to empathize, and underlines that these reactions are not dependent on her specific situation, and her description allows us to gain insight into the experience of this dissonance. This directly impacts the way we process her philosophical arguments when she critiques Singer and McMahan's' understanding of the cognitively disabled. For example, she argues that Singer's thought experiment of "*the community for retarded people*"[5] itself *depends* on the ignorance of what cognitive disability actually looks like in people, and his error is embedded in his empirical claims (Kittay, 2010, p.403). Her experience then, directly provides her with the ability to identify what area she should focus on in his philosophy to identify his mistake. She quickly finds several descriptions of the cognitively disabled by Singer that are just seriously misinformed (Kittay, 2010, p.403), where, interestingly, his only source of this understanding of the cognitively disabled could have been based on his own *lack of* experience. She also criticized McMahan for the same epistemic mistake, when one of his definitions is as follows: "*The profoundly cognitively impaired are incapable … of deep personal and social relations, creativity and achievement, the attainment of the highest forms of knowledge, aesthetic pleasures, and so on*" (McMahan, 1996, p.8). Interestingly, I believe it would be correct to identify that all of these capacities listed by McMahan are at least *connected* to lived experience and relationship interaction to define. Attempting to address the phenomena of deep personal and social relations without engaging lived experience as a part of the consideration, will duplicate the dissonance as mentioned earlier. These topics appeal to our experience of the complexity of deep relations, creativity, attaining knowledge, pleasure, etc., and McMahan's claim that the cognitively disabled cannot experience this is also seriously misinformed (Kittay, 2010, p.403). As rebutted by Kittay using referencing that follows the 'neutral and objective' model that is preferred by McMahan, as well as based on her experience, most severely mentally disabled people can speak a few words, form meaningful relationships, and participate in activities. Thus, even using sources following their own epistemic criteria shows there are also factual mistakes using his own framework occurring in McMahan's understanding of cognitive

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[5] A quote from Singer when he is writing about a thought experiment in the book "*Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of our Traditional ethics*" (1996). The thought experiment describes a "special community" where we are meant to believe he describes behaviors from cognitively disabled persons and reveals, in the end, it is actually based on a chimpanzee living facility. His point being: there is no descriptive difference between the actions and moral consequences of the cognitively disabled and chimpanzees. Thus, cognitive capacities are seemingly not as relevant to our moral separation between non-human animals and humans.

disability. However, it is not sufficient for Kittay to solely reference these studies. They are still lacking something she finds present in retellings of experiences.

In Kittay's' meta-discussion, we are provided with a couple of learning experiences that she has taken note of during her production of the article following the panel. These experiences function as a direct rebuttal to Singer and McMahan's' collective definition of what it entails to be severely cognitively impaired. Kittay also includes what would be considered standard scientific research, where abilities following degrees of cognitive disability have been systematically mapped and considered through the field of sociology and medicine. However, her inclusion of the experiences suggests her stories contain philosophical implications that the mentioned scientific research does not. There are two experiences I find particularly interesting that Kittay includes;

Kittay's daughter, Sasha, lives in a group home with five other people who are all considered on the scale of being severely cognitively disabled. Here, Kittay has witnessed two of her neighbors experience grief, as they lost their respective fathers in a short amount of time. One of them was found with tears streaming down her face. The other upheld a seemingly unaffected and positive attitude but broke down with wails and howling when his sister and mother, who had delivered the news, left (Kittay, 2010, p.403-404). Kittay states how these experiences directly contradict keywords in Singer and McMahan's understanding of the cognitively disabled as "incapable of deep personal relations". Here I believe another importance of having an arena to consider experience philosophically becomes apparent when approaching the problem Kittay identifies. As mentioned, many who are severely cognitively disabled have a challenge with communication as well as are affected by societal neglect to explore alternative ways of communication. The history of what society has considered cognitive disability is also a turbulent one. An easy example to consider is the extreme treatment of the deaf in the times when sign language was not a given option to be able to learn, and being able to write was a privilege. If we were to evaluate this experience in the way Singer and McMahan consider it, their non-experience with the deaf expressing themselves would be considered valid and 'unbiased', and someone else's experience of a deep connection with a deaf person would be reduced to a bias. The potential insight that we cut from the equation when deciding to exclude experience as relevant becomes apparent, and we are left with knowledge claims that are lacking at best and mistaken at worst.

2.1.6 Harm

A major motivation for conceptualizing experience in epistemic contexts treads forward here;
harm. As Collins stated, wisdom has been essential to the survival of the subordinate (Collins,
2000, p.257-258), and if we were to proceed with Singer and McMahan's lack of experience,
and in turn theoretical understanding of cognitive disability, we might still have been labeling
children who have moderate hearing loss as severely cognitively disabled, institutionalizing
them, binding them to their beds and leaving them in their own excrements over periods of
time like common practice in the 60s up until as late as 2008, with cases still being made
today (Wong, 2009; UNDRR 2023). Experience, then, functions as not only a security of
knowledge, but a life-insurance for many when considering someone's talking points on the
topic at hand. Lack of experience does not become a security from "emotional investment" or
a risk of "tainting knowledge", experience is a possibility, and *only* a possibility, that the
severity or totality of what is discussed is considered. When Kittay, McMahan and Singer are
talking past each other, and the miscommunication occurs, it is a risk of a logical
inconsistency as it is treated by McMahan and Singer, and it is a matter of risk of *harm* for
Kittay.

I believe the type of knowledge claim and framework Singer and McMahan operate with is
what Sandra Harding calls 'weak objectivity'. As they insist on turning away from analyzing
the content of Kittay's' philosophical claims, they are not achieving a "more factual"
approach but are rather just turning away. What potential, effect or content can be drawn from
Kittay's experiences is reduced to just being synonymous with blinding bias. Kittay herself
makes a reflection, wondering if she has made herself an example of how impossible it is for
a mother to ascertain an 'objective truth' about the moral status of her own daughter (Kittay,
2010, p.400). She quickly denies this, rather suggesting that the intimate relationship between
them gives grounds for a greater grasp of a moral truth (Kittay, 2010, p.401). This she grounds
in two points: If her epistemic relation is *skewed* due to her relationship with her daughter,
then it would follow that the epistemic relation that Singer and McMahan inhabit is *skewed* in
another direction (Kittay, 2010, p.406), rather than their epistemic relation being "objective".
Secondly, what she means by this is built on the notion of rejecting a view from nowhere[6],

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[6] This references an ontological and epistemic stance that entails rejecting the possibility of producing
knowledge detached from a view, and ascribing the knowledge produced as "objective" due to the process
attaining the knowledge, known from *The View From Nowhere* (1986) by Thomas Nagel.

where if a concept of a skewed epistemic ground exists, there is also reason to base critique on this the other direction. If Kittay were to follow Singer and McMahans' ontological and epistemic premises, and witness her experience as not even just epistemically irrelevant but epistemically *weakening* her position, she would be accepting an epistemic framework that she experiences and argues is neglectful. As she mentions herself, there is no fault in their logical structure, the fault lies in their epistemic premises. By rejecting that her intimate relationship is irrelevant to the philosophical discourse on moral status, she is acknowledging that the change that is necessary is within epistemic considerations.

2.1.6 The Epistemic Impact

To summarize, these are the epistemic impacts of Kittay's approach to considering and using experience in a philosophical discourse. First, through analyzing Kittay's article, we have an example of how sharing experiences has an impact on their philosophical arguments, though strengthening or weakening knowledge claims. Introducing epistemic credibility to the epistemic framework affects how we can consider the strength of an argument. By considering McMahan and Singers l*ack* of consideration of experience, as well as their arguments and statements regarding the disabled and their cognitive capacities, the lack of experience considered results in a *weakened* position for their case, or is at least a weak reflection on the role of experience on the topic. When one claims a lack of complex cognitive abilities in a group of people, including deep and meaningful relationships, and do not consider experience epistemically while assessing these claims, it does not procure a more 'objective' result. It does not become a neutral point of interest either. Rather, it becomes an unaddressed epistemic consideration. In contrast, Kittay's experience (of that which she shares) can be considered as strengthening her knowledge claim, as she *at least* considers the relevance of experience to the philosophical discussion. As a result of this, she shares her experience of witnessing expressions of complex cognitive abilities, and her reflections. In turn, she can utilize the knowledge from participating in a complex emotional relationship, in addition, to being a bystander to the expression of this kind of relationship and provide support to her knowledge claim in addition to her theoretical sourced critique.

To be able to address non-experience properly in light of Collins and Harding's demand for the stricter criteria of credibility, I suggest we need to re-define what we consider to *be* non-experience. We also need this definition to provide us with a way to address how experience,

or a lack of it, is relevant to philosophical claims about concrete situations or experiences. It can function, for example for Kittay, as a strength in her providing a definition for the topic at hand. It can also function, as for Singer and McMahan, as a weakness for their claims. I want to stress here that although experience is addressed in the case above as a philosophical strength, it still depends on making a strong reflection based on these experiences. Including experience in an epistemic framework does not make the reflections drawn from these experiences strong. To be clear, I do not claim experience can completely oversteer or harshly determine the totality of a philosophical claim. This is not the intent of me claiming experience as relevant to epistemology. It is important to keep in mind that experience here functions only as a part of the totality of an epistemic framework, and must be seen in context with other strengths. What regarding experience as relevant to epistemology can do however, is have monumental impacts on reflections regarding a group of people's cognitive abilities, as seen above through Kittay's article. When Singer and McMahan want to deny the possibility of people having these capacities, they need to assert stronger credibility than having *experience of absence* with the cognitively disabled, especially when confronted by someone with life-long experience with the people they are denying these capacities. This critique, I claim, is directly available from respecting experience as epistemic credibility, and the philosophical implications that can be taken into consideration. Considering experience, in the sense that Collins defines it, epistemically, opens an important source of both strength and critique to a knowledge claim, following the goal of any other epistemic credibility, to produce sound knowledge not otherwise available with the framework that becomes apparent in McMahan and Singers philosophical practice.


2.1.7 Experience With, and Experience of Absence

Again, there is a limitation to the concept of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility that needs to be kept in mind. Skepticism of retellings, due to concepts such as hallucinations, dreams, manipulation, false memory, bias etc. are not worries that are shoved aside when including experience as a criterion for epistemic credibility. However, I claim they are also concepts that, without considering experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, are inadequately addressed. Experience cannot be considered as either always a positive or a negative influence to have, such as it is expressed when Kittay has experience and is labeled biased, and McMahan and Singer 'lack' the same experience, which they present as making them more rational. Experience is not a case of an exclusive either or, it is a case of having

**experience of absence** with something, as well as having **experience with** something. By viewing experience in this way, we open up to be able to address worries such as hallucinations, dreams, manipulation, false memory, bias etc. for all experience involved, and not just half of it. In essence, it does not make sense to label non-experience as nothing, as it in of itself is an experience of *absence*. We see this particularly with Singer, McMahan, and Kittay's' different experiences. Singer and McMahan's claim they have no experience with the topic at hand, synonymously with no *bias*. When we rather consider their lack of experience as an experience of *absence*, we are interested in reflections regarding this absence, rather than interpreting it as they seem to intend, a void of 'proof of no risk of bias'. As Kittay exclaims and I support, the disagreement that occurs in their panel discussion is an epistemic one and creates a claim that bias in Kittay occurs, left unjustified by McMahan and Singer. Bias is not brought up as a serious evaluation of the claims that are presented during their discussion, as McMahan and Singer only seem to regard it as a possibility for Kittay, and do not even consider as possibility that bias in theory can afflict their own experience of absence as well. To define experience of absence: if I grew up without a mother, it does not necessarily result in a total lack of any experience with a mother. It is an experience of *absence* of a mother, and can provide interesting reflections on par as having experience *with* a mother. The reflections it can yield is all dependent on the topic at hand. For example, the experience of absence with having a mother, and perhaps the additional experience with having two fathers, gives for an interesting point of reflection, coupled with a philosopher considering the same topic of the necessity for "motherhood" who has experience with having a mother, but experience of absence of two fathers. Thus, the presence of experience does not automatically relate to a weakness or strength, or bias and no bias. It is the act of considering experience *at all,* including experience of absence, that is demanded by Collins when she speaks of survival, and Harding when she speaks of strong objectivity.

Experience then, should not be considered as an epistemic strength in of itself. However, taking experience (both experience of absence and experience with) into epistemic consideration is a *stricter demand* for the epistemic integrity of a philosophical claim, because it enables us to adequately consider the presence of all experience present in philosophical discussion, instead of just half. In addition, If experience of absence or experience with can impact in such a way that it changes the conclusion of who is considered to possess abilities such as deep emotional relationships and aesthetic pleasures, and this as a result determines one's moral agency; the possible harm of inadequate knowledge claims becomes critically

apparent. Asking for experience to be accounted for epistemically is not a question of asking for a suspension of disbelief, but is *a stricter* demand to produce good knowledge. Lastly, the dissonance between experience and philosophical claims leads to an understanding of the significance of experience and how sharing the experience of this dissonance also results in philosophical implications when including these when addressing the claims one disagrees with. In this example, Kittay's sharing provides us with an opportunity to situate ourselves in her examples, address our own epistemic credibility on the topic, and evaluate Singer and McMahan's credibility on the topic. Again, although Kittay's experience comes from a unique situation, it still has relevance to the philosophical discourse it references for us as readers, as well as Kittay herself. This leads us to be able to understand how McMahan and Singer can be faulty on epistemic grounds and that the rejection of these grounds can be understood through the dissonance referenced.

In conclusion, the article and panel discussion provide an example where experience considered as a criterion of epistemic credibility profoundly affects a conclusion of whether some people are given the capacity of deep emotional relations, and in turn how their moral agency is defined. I argue it is not a question of whether experience is relevant to a discussion or not, but rather a demand for reasons for why experience of absence and experience with is or is not relevant. It becomes apparent that not only is emotional responses seen as something that justifies that bias is involved in the epistemic framework Singer and McMahan are operating with, but also that it can result in what I consider critically incomplete knowledge claims. Lack of justification of this epistemic stance when it is repeated without further clarification such as done by Singer and McMahan, results in weak objectivity. We are left with a case study that exemplifies several instances of harm that pinpoints why it is at least partially the epistemic disagreement between experience as a criterion of credibility that affects the vastly different conclusions that follow from their respective epistemic frameworks. I will now move on to the second claim I aim to argue in Chapter 2, how experience can unveil knowledge otherwise unavailable without it.

## 2.2 Experience Unveiling Knowledge

2.2.1 Introduction

Until now, I have considered a work from Eva Feder Kittay that illuminates the epistemic neglect of not considering experience epistemologically. In this segment, I will show how integrating experience into the epistemological framework of a philosophical field can directly unveil knowledge that is otherwise unavailable without it. I will analyze segments from bell hooks book *The Will to Change* (2004) where she supplies her philosophical points with experience, applying it in an integrated manner. I will then focus on what these shared experiences provide to the philosophical discussion, and argue that the epistemic credibility and philosophical implications provided by hooks supplies to her philosophical discussion in a way that is profoundly important to her philosophical conclusions on the concept of patriarchy. As experience as a criterion for epistemic credibility has been considered synonymous with bias in traditional non-feminist frameworks, hooks shows how a critical knowledge source and *entrance point of critique* has been barred from *unveiling* the very same lack of entrance point to critique patriarchal structures. I argue this barring is the same barring as seen in the discourse between Kittay, Singer, and McMahan in our earlier case.

Gloria Jean Watkins, famous under her penname bell hooks, was a distinguished professor at Berea College. hooks, famous for her academic and social contributions on topics such as black feminism, social critical theory, gender, class, and much more, provided a theory on patriarchy that I argue functions as a solid example of knowledge that is dependent on an epistemic framework where experience is considered a criterion of credibility. This is possible due to bell hooks black feminist epistemological groundwork, as well as her clear utility of experience to unveil knowledge about the patriarchy that would be otherwise unattainable without this consideration. hooks' ability to unveil knowledge otherwise unattainable also introduces the necessity for a *trusting environment*, which will be the topic of chapter 3.

2.2.2 Defining Patriarchy

When bell hooks writes the chapter "Understanding Patriarchy*"* in *The Will to Change* (2004), we are offered intimate experiences from her life. The chapter itself asks the question

of what patriarchy is, and how it seems like the word is foreign to a lot of men, even though feminism continuously promotes it as affecting men to the same degree as everyone else. The way hooks uses her experience here, is to provide both an opportunity to see how her understanding of patriarchy came to be and give the reader an opportunity to ascribe lived experience to her definition, as well as provide an example to the thesis of knowledge dependent on epistemic consideration of experience. Her lived experience and her utility of it, as I will show, elevates the definition of patriarchy through unveiling how patriarchal systems benefit from the exclusion of experiences in knowledge production systems. Let us begin by looking at hooks definition of patriarchy:

> Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorisms and violence (hooks, 2004, p.18).

hooks immediately follows up this definition in her text with a story from her life. She describes how, due to patriarchy, she and her one-year older brother were immediately met with a determined fate by their religious-patriarchal parents. Their beliefs and philosophy on the roles of a woman and a man were built up from both religious imagery like God being a man, and women were assumed to be subordinate helpers for the men who were to rule the world in Gods' name (hooks, 2004, p.18). Although this is a particular situated experience, readers who have general experience with religion, being a woman, having an older brother, or just patriarchal parenting, enables them to associate their own experiences to this unique description. This mirrors Kittay's' invitation to imagine, already establishing that the philosophical topic we are engaging with requires us to consider experience. Association through people sharing unique lived experiences also enables us to situate ourselves in these stories. By sharing her experience, essentially as her road to understanding patriarchy as a concept later in life, we are allowed insight into reaching a philosophical stance based on something *more*. As we saw with Kittay, experience and concepts depending on lived experience can have a direct impact on arguments made in philosophy that do not take this into consideration.

Continuing, hooks underlines how this patriarchal way of viewing life was inherited from their grandparents to their parents, as it was a "natural" way for them to organize life (hooks, 2004, p.18). hooks shares how she was taught to be weak, to serve, to take distance from critical thinking, to caretake and nurture; while her brother was taught to be served, to

provide, to be the critical thinker, and distance himself from caretaking and nurturing (hooks, 2004, p.18). She provides examples on how this teaching unfolded. Like when she responded with rage to being denied something, she was reminded how it was not a feminine feeling and should be eradicated (hooks, 2004, p.19). When her brother responded with rage, he was rather taught how appropriately situating his rage could help him protect his home and nation (hooks, 2004, p.19).  This is an example that me as a female reader, can associate to having been aware of as a child, where I was rather taught to be careful and gentle while playing outside, while my male classmates were encouraged to explore and challenge, for example tree climbing. Her use of this experience gives me an opportunity to again, situate myself in parts of her story, and associate different but similar experiences of my own. hooks then explains how both her and her brother felt uncomfortable with the roles and expectations of how they were to behave conflicted with their own wishes, and the concept of patriarchy was not a term that was learned, rather a term that named something they already knew (hooks, 2004, p.19-20). hooks providing her unique experiences as an explanation for understanding this concept when met with the semantics later in life, is an effective way of explaining a concept when coupled with her very direct definition earlier. hooks is making experience relevant to the philosophical understanding of patriarchy as a concept, by suggesting lived experience embodies philosophical concepts, and the reflections of these experiences providing you with epistemic credibility when addressing and considering these topics.

Finally, hooks definition coupled with integrating experience as directly relevant to the knowledge claim, allows us to critically assess the impact of experience and non-experience in relation to the concept of patriarchy. When recounting experiences, hooks not only considers her own experiences, but experiences recounted by others. She visits the recount of men's experience of challenging the patriarchy, among them reflections from male authors, participants of hooks male reflection groups in her work leading counseling and discussion groups for men, and her lectures for all male groups. She recounts how one participant shared his fear of becoming a failed father figure due to a missing role model, having had a childhood plagued with continuous humiliation from his father and abandonment (hooks, 2004, p.9-10). Some participants share their instinct to understand love by doing the opposite of what their father did (hooks, 2004, p.9-10), following a reflection on the struggles of learning how to approach an understanding of care and love without having experienced it themselves in the sense they would like to express it with their own children. As stated, experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility opens up for reflections from experience of

absence, as well as experience with. To underline, hooks also critiques reflections made from experience, particularly on the topic of women who draw the conclusion that a cold and cynical relationship with a man supports the notion that *any* man is incapable of care and warmth (hooks, 2004, p.69-70). What hooks shows through her examples here, is that experiences do not strengthen the credibility of a knowledge claim without active reflection in relation to the experiences, and when these reflections are presented, are just as susceptible to critique as any other part of a knowledge claim.

2.2.3 Understanding Patriarchy

In a segment where hooks details the violence associated with patriarchy and the shapes it can take, we can see a reasoning for why patriarchy is sustained when the defining power of an epistemic framework is grounded in mistrust. hooks shares an intense emotional and traumatic experience from living in patriarchy. This story builds on the intent of explaining a philosophic concept through experience, where she herself comments on the experience being neither unique nor exceptional (hooks, 2004, p.21). Continuing the story where hooks describes her own experiences that express knowledge of patriarchy long before the word itself was introduced to her, this particular story touches upon the mentioned process of situating ourselves in a story. This experience underlines the relevance of her sharing, not just to provide a pathway of imagination to the topic of the suffering by patriarchy, but invites reflection of experience and the effect as a bystander. By bystanders, I refer to "witnessing" an experience, where you yourself understand you are not in the spotlight of the story, but that does not entail you have no knowledge to draw from reflecting on the experience. She recounts how one evening, her brother was allowed to bring out a tin of marbles to play with. hooks reflects on how her father was horrified as a spectator to their play, where she exhibited more aggression, more competitiveness and a higher skill against her brother. That evening, she was denied being able to participate, being told that marbles was not a game for girls:

> "I did not listen. His voice grew louder and louder. Then suddenly he snatched me up, broke a board from our screen door, and began to beat me with it, telling me, "You're just a little girl. When I tell you to do something, I mean for you to do it". […] Our family sat spellbound, rapt before the pornography of patriarchal violence": (hooks, 2004, p.20-21)

The story is written short, but touches upon several distinct aspects of suffering under patriarchy as a philosophical concept. She addresses the concept and lasting feeling of

injustice that carry from these experiences, where she had already been allowed to play with these marbles beforehand, but suddenly the variety of choice was ripped from her, and excused as unnatural behaviour that needed correcting. She describes the verbal belittling, underlining that her natural role was diverted from, and diverting from the role of a "little girl" is punished with physical and psychological violence. The emotions, then, and especially the anger that resides in early feminist thinking, and the feminist activism that followed, *need* to be understood in the context of these experiences. hooks agrees with this sentiment, by making a point after telling this story of how this is neither a unique story, nor an exceptional one (hooks, 2004, p.21). She says every person raised in patriarchal homes have stories like these with the same undertone, where violence is used to reinforce the patriarchal structure (hooks, 2004, p.21). Not only does she address the suffering she tormented by just being categorized as a woman under a patriarchal structure, but she also addresses how her brother suffered as well, being both indirectly categorized by continuously witnessing hooks own punishments for diverting her role, and he himself being punished for diverting his own. This ties to her later points on how suffering under the patriarchy is not necessarily the exact same experience, but suffering nonetheless, and brought under the same cause by a common source.

Following hooks sharing of the traumatic event, she extends the effected parties beyond herself. Not only were many family members witness to the beating, but they kept bringing it up later in conversations throughout her life (hooks, 2004, p 21). The retelling functioned as a sort of collective reminder in her family of the consequence of stepping out of the bounds by the patriarchy through her father. I derive from this the point that patriarchal reinforcement has a necessity of imaging, and these experiences (or reflections from events) accumulate into an understanding. If we then remove the opportunity to consider these reflections from experiences under the scope of philosophy, by considering experience as inherently damaging to a knowledge claim, it in turn works in favor of the patriarchal structure. hooks sources this silencing through the patriarchy by the system demanding silence and secrecy from young children about their experience of patriarchal violence. By not allowing an easy access to the term "patriarchy", we are denying children a way to conceptualize their experiences (hooks, 2004, p.25), in turn making it a difficult task for a child to challenge something they cannot name. This is also seen though the violence on men under patriarchy, demanding them to be emotionally crippled (hooks, 2004, p.27) and neglecting concepts such as discussions on emotions and experience, deemed as "unmanly" and unavailable to uphold a patriarchal gender-role. All together they form a heavy backdrop for perhaps why experience has not

been seriously integrated, or at least considered in depth, to the epistemic framework of the traditional practice of philosophy.

2.2.4 Understanding Patriarchy is Inseparable from Experience

I claim that a substantial understanding of patriarchy is dependent on experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility as part of one's epistemic framework. Either these experiences are sourced form yourself or anyone else, there is a definitive necessity to consider how these experiences effect knowledge claims made on the topic of patriarchy. These types of experiences of sexism have shown to be an intricate source of knowledge about the concept of patriarchy itself, particularly in relation to the harm it induces. The need for providing an image and sharing a story, as well as epistemically considering experience, is as integral to understanding patriarchy as a theoretical definition. hooks addresses why her retellings are essential to her philosophical points. She says we cannot dismantle a system if we collectively deny its impact in our lives (hooks, 2004, p.24), stating how keeping men and women from sharing their stories from their family lives is one way for the patriarchy to control and maintain patriarchal culture (hooks, 2004, p.24). For context, hooks explores here the role of parental violence to the upholding of patriarchy, from both mothers and fathers, as a vital source to patriarchal sustainability. Not only is the collective reflection of lived experience, as well as sharing this experience, a necessity for being able to address a philosophical concept (patriarchy) here, it is also essential to conceptualize and critique it. What I mean by this, is that if patriarchy is sustained by silencing reflections on experiences of its violence, it follows that it is damaged by the voicing and reflection of these experiences, not neutral to it. Here we see an echo of the earlier discussion on the way experience is treated epistemically in the discussion between Singer, McMahan, and Kittay. As identified, experience in the mentioned discussion is confusingly established as inherently negative to have, as McMahan and Singer openly suggest it risks the integrity and sustainability of Kittay's knowledge claims. Presenting experience as inherently negative, and the absence of its consideration as a solution, seems beneficial to patriarchy, and patriarchal structures, as defined by hooks.

It follows then, that we would see a history of effort to silence voices and testaments that underline this violence when addressing the concept of patriarchy. Perhaps through shunning subjectivity in academic research, or trivializing experiences as unable to reach objective knowledge, or maybe tying semantics such as "feeling" something is wrong and embodiment

of knowledge to lower classes, low or no education, a particular gender or an "unstable" mind. I am, of course, referring to the history of feminism and minority activism fighting a cause for their voices to be heard. The highlighted words in quotations are classic examples of semantics tied to anything other than the patriarchal ideal. To make my suggestions blatant, I believe hooks is here addressing that not only is the philosophical concept of patriarchy in essence understood through experience, but is by necessity needed to be explained through experiences. Removing experience as an epistemic criterion of credibility when addressing patriarchy as a philosophical concepts results in a *lacking* understanding. This lack of understanding is, as a result, beneficial to patriarchy itself. Thus, hooks not only provides this thesis of an example of what might benefit from a total lack of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, but also applies how it is essential to both the understanding and conceptualizing of the philosophical concept at hand. We cannot understand the concept patriarchy removed from our experience, as patriarchal violence in its experience is integral to the concept itself.

2.2.5 Bias

Chapter 2 so far explores the idea and need of experience needing a cemented role as a criterion of epistemic credibility. By this analysis I want to highlight the more reoccurring contending point with the support of incorporating experience in the epistemic framework as an epistemic criterion of credibility, which needs to be addressed further; The notion of experience as bias. Although having experience with a topic at hand can be respected as a relational or to some extent ethical relevance to the individual, it is presented as synonymous with a risk of bias, in turn assumingly functioning as a risk of weakening knowledge claims.

As highlighted through the analysis of Kittay, Singer, and McMahan's' discourse, philosophers disagree on whether experience with is justifiably considered prone to causing bias, or in what way. Kittay's arguments are critiqued by Singer and McMahan on the basis of how her relationship and subsequent emotional reactions cloud her philosophical judgement. This is what I interpret McMahan and Singer to view as bias, which in turn they express as directly epistemologically weakening her claim. I do not contest that bias can function as weakening the epistemic integrity of a knowledge claim. On the contrary, I believe the risk of bias is a critical point to evaluate when considering any individuals reflections following their knowledge claims. However, I believe the totality in which Singer and McMahan associate

emotional investment, as well as Kittay's experience with being a mother *at all*, to be an epistemic fault that robs bias of the function it can serve as an efficient point of critique. The epistemic consideration that is made, in the case by Singer and McMahan, is that their experience of absence strengthens their claim epistemically by providing them with a stronger indifference, and the presence of experience weakens Kittay's claim epistemically. However, here I believe another epistemic fault occurs. Singer and McMahan consider experience as an exclusive either or, where experience with is the only type of experience that can instigate bias, rather than considering that both experience and experience of absence are equally at risk of being afflicted by bias. The dichotomy of experience with is not absent experience, but experience of absence.  This change affects when bias is a relevant risk to consider, as in it is at least equally a risk to everyone; Kittay, Singer and McMahan. As the question is no longer *if* there is any experience but rather how the experience affects the knowledge claim, bias can function as intended as being a way to evaluate the impact of experience on the knowledge claim, whether it is experience with or experience of absence. Either way, both Singer and McMahan's experience of absence and Kittay's experience with, can be regarded as impacting their knowledge claim in some sense. Bias becomes one of the ways to evaluate reflections based on experience, instead of being mistakenly and misguidedly tied to any mention and reference of experience.

Chapter 2 of this thesis accounts for ways in which experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility can impact philosophical knowledge claims, as well as unveil knowledge otherwise unavailable without it. In the first part of Chapter 2, I argue the stance on experience being irrelevant and negative to a knowledge claim is rather an epistemic fault, because something cannot be considered to negatively impact a knowledge claim without already being 'established' negatively in an epistemic sense. In other words, experience *is* in some way already considered epistemically, and cannot at the same time be stated as epistemically irrelevant without justifying how. This discloses a mistrust being present. In the second part of Chapter 2, the concept of patriarchy is shown to be necessarily dependent on being understood with an epistemic framework that considers experience, and patriarchy in of itself is sustained by neglecting to include experience in an epistemic framework. This leads to the disclosing of a second neglected concept, namely **trust**. A disregard of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility is shown to be particularly harmful for vulnerable groups who rely on experiential knowledge. One way this harm is done, is through mistrust. Thus, in Chapter 3, I will explore the concept of trust.

# Chapter 3: Trust

This chapter argues in support of the following claims: Trust and a trusting environment influences epistemic consideration of a knowledge claim. The second claim follows from this, stating that experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility is dependent on trust. This is due to trust being essential for knowledge exchange and production across dynamic power relations.

## 3.1 Trust as Undertheorized in Ethics

### 3.1.1 Introduction

Up until now I have argued that the inclusion of considering experience in an epistemic framework enables a knowledge claim to be strengthened or weakened based on reflections made on the relevance and content of experience to the knowledge claim, as well as unveil essential knowledge about the concept of patriarchy. I have shown this does not demand a suspension of disbelief, but is rather the opposite, a stricter demand for knowledge claims to be sound. However, the mistrust that is communicated by Singer and McMahan of Kittay's ability to 'separate herself from her role as a parent, and her role as a philosopher', and the mistrust of the content of her knowledge claims from her experience with her relationship to her daughter, demands further exploration. Through this exploration, it became apparent for me through Anette Baier's care ethical theory on trust that her care ethics theory could give a fitting account of what role harm and trust has in the case study of Chapter 2, and following connections to the concept of patriarchy as presented by hooks. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I present these findings and argue that trust is not separated from epistemic consideration. I claim that experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility is dependent on an *epistemic trust*. Trust is therefore already present in epistemology, but has been undertheorized, and as a result has contributed to the neglect of experience a criterion of epistemic credibility. I will argue this undertheorized trust can take forms such as Singer and McMahan's *mistrust* of Kittay, and can be reasoned as beneficial for the form of patriarchy as described by bell hooks. An extensive concept of trust and mistrust that can be brought to the field of epistemology is necessary for experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility is to be able to contribute with philosophical implications to a knowledge claim. This is because, as I will show, an epistemic

framework without experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility and an undertheorized concept of trust, leads to harm.

To explain the role of trust in epistemology, we need to look to the field of ethics where the concept of trust has been traditionally addressed. *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (1995) is a collection of essays by the late philosopher Anette Baier, where she discusses reasons for the neglect of trust in ethics, as well as presents groundwork for a more developed concept of trust. In her essays in the mentioned collection, "The Need for More Than Justice" and "Trust and Antitrust", justice, as she sees it, is an important social value and ethical virtue. However, it is clear to her that there is a need for something more as the foundation of ethical theories, as she presents her arguments in light of Carol Gilligan's work. Carol Gilligan's critique of traditional ethical theories, particularly those influenced by the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, focused on their limitations in representing the moral experiences and voices of women as explored in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (2003). Baier builds on her theory, extending the critique to the Kantian tradition of thought, as well as a new concept of trust. This new concept of trust as presented by Baier, is what I will bring to the epistemic field later in the thesis.

3.1.2 What *was* Trust?

I believe the concept of trust has been insufficiently accounted for in moral philosophy in the Western tradition and has, in turn, resulted in the 'epistemic mistrust' of experience. Baier makes a good account of creating an overview of the attempts made to theorize the concept of trust, mainly adhering to Western philosophical influences throughout time. Examples include looking back to antique philosophy, Plato in *Laws* does not make any direct mention of trust nor trustworthiness as a necessary virtue for cooperation in his societal structure, although he implies citizens are expected to trust both authorial figures and experts, as well as these authorities trust citizens not to harm them (Plato, 1914, 4.705a; Baier, 1995, p.97). Baier states that Christian moralists such as Aquinas have given certain forms of trust their attention, in particular passages dedicated to the concept of trust in God, but never as its own dedicated virtue (Baier, 1995, p.97). Continuing, more modern philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes have also dedicated time to trust, though in a limited sense. Baier names their approach an 'obsessive' focus on trust in government and officials, no more than a particular focus has been dedicated to the concept (Baier, 1995, p.97). What Baier is

underlining here is how, during her search for concrete theories on trust, it has been given very limited attention, mainly mentioned but not extensively defined, and mainly regarded through its presence and how it might have the potential to harm contractual relationships.

Another example I believe particularly highlights the depth one can come to expect about trust as a topic in moral philosophy is John Rawls in a passage from *A theory of justice* (1971, 1999), after a small account of trust as important to authorities, mentions this when tackling the issue of how to keep the moral and political system self-sufficient throughout generations: "*The Parents, We may suppose, love the child, and in time the child comes to love and trust the parents*" (Rawls, 1999, p. 405). Trust then, particularly between a child and parent, is only assumed to be that of the contractual necessity of trusting experts out of obligation, as 'magically manifesting' as the child is driven by "desire and instincts" (Rawls, 1999, p. 406). In agreement with Baier, I believe there is a lot left to be desired about the concept of trust.

### 3.1.3 The Fixation on the Contract

As Baier states, the contractual approach in ethics has the most extensive account of trust, which is where Baier concentrates her critique and subsequently presents her own theory on trust. Throughout Baier's arguments for why existing theories of trust in the contractual approach are not sufficient to capture the complexity of trust, several of the points she chooses to focus her critique on echo the same elements of critique found in the segment on Black Feminist Epistemology in Chapter 1, and hooks concept of patriarchy. I believe it is not coincidental that the concept of trust has mainly been accounted for through the lens of a contractual approach. It is not due to trust being adequately accounted for through those lenses either. It is, as Baier argues, a direct result of the need to universalize the experience of the white, Eurocentric, upper-class man in their epistemic framework. This echoes both Collins's critique of epistemic frameworks, as well as earlier mentioned cases of universalizing the men's experience.

Baier addresses how a fixation on the contraction view on relationships has resulted in an underdeveloped concept of trust through the essay "Trust and Antitrust" (1995). Firstly, Baier identifies that the source of an underdeveloped concept of trust lies in the way philosophers have been viewing interactions in sterile thought experiments, reducing these interactions to a contractual exchange that only considers gains and losses. She begins by criticizing traditional

moral theorists for being men who mostly had minimal to no contact with women (with some exceptions, although not necessarily as a guarantee for having *actually* been influenced a woman). Baier writes that this is what dampens the surprise of her current metaethical environment and explains partly why the major traditional theories prefer to use examples of distant, cold, and transactional relationships[7] in their theories of ethics (Baier, 1995, p.114). When a man of limited intimate relationships (family, lover, father, the ill, etc.) writes a theory on ethics, their focus will predictably be of the cool transactional business meetings or social interactions with other adult men of *assumed equal power* (Baier, 1995, p.114). In accordance, we end up with trust being defined as this particular perspective, only relevant in discussions on cold transactions, only benefiting or threatening the gain or loss of these transactions.

Universalizing a very distinct experience can be seen in another light using the terminology I introduced about the experience: The experience of absence some philosophers have with women in their lives has had a dire consequence on the way they have conceptualized interactions. As a result, the ethical considerations of these interactions have also been severely simplified. Baier also underlines the monumental attempts philosophers have done attempting to create "universal" ethical theories (Baier, 1995, p.115). The consequence of the traditional Western philosophical method of approach can be compared to the attempts made by medieval artists to paint animals they have never seen. Undeniable effort and skill, but the lack of considering essential experience with the topic makes for an uncanny feeling when considering the theories in praxis. Baier's reflections can be seen in light of Kittay, Singer, and McMahans "moral disagreement"; when cool transactional acquaintances become the defining power for a universalized understanding of "deep relationships", perhaps it is no wonder Singer and McMahan become confused as of how Kittay has managed to 'produce an equal-power contract to the benefit of both her daughter and herself', as neither Kittay nor her daughter are men of equal power.

Baier concludes because of the non-experience with women among philosophers, and women not being able to enter the sphere of theory crafting, trust as an ethical virtue has become

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[7] Read: «[…]*cool, distanced relations between more or less free and equal adult strangers, say, the members of an all-male club, with membership rules and rules for dealing with rule breakers and where the form of cooperation was restricted to ensuring that each member could read his* Times *in peace and have no one step on his gouty toes*" (Baier, 1995, p.114).

neglected in Western traditional theories (Baier, 1995, p.115). This lack of relevant life experience referenced by Baier earlier has another consequence than "just" producing lacking traditional ethical theories. As the fault lies within both lacking the experiences necessary and continuing a life that inhibits one from gaining these experiences, the men *continue to produce a life* where other men have the impression that the traditional ethical theories are sufficient. Baier claims this worldview that makes ethical theories to be purely transaction-based, is *alien* to women's experiences with life and morality (Baier, 1995, p.116). Having daily experience with the powerless and powerful makes moral rules for the equally powerful irrelevant to the lives of many (Baier, 1995, p.116). This statement echoes Patricia Hill Collin's earlier statement on why it is that subordinate groups find themselves dependent on a stricter epistemological demand for knowledge; the established theories developed under the epistemological framework of Eurocentric Academia have never provided the 'universality' that covers the majority of interactions in their lives. It is also perhaps no wonder then, that fields such as feminist philosophy have a historical academic entrance of questioning the premises that produced and stated that type of knowledge as "sound" and "universal". In addition, this self-sustaining directly echoes bell hooks reflections on the patriarchy; that patriarchy as a structure benefits from producing a role where the experiences necessary to question the systemic faults are 'unavailable' and 'untrustworthy' to the oppressors who hold the defining power of "universal".

3.1.4 The Fixation on Justice

The connection between hooks concept of patriarchy, Collins statement on survival, and how the skepticism of trusting/focus on mistrust become even clearer the further we move into Baier's analysis. Building on the reflections from contract obsession, Baier focuses her critique on not only the lack of focus of trust, but argues the fault lies in the monotone focus on justice as the only ethical virtue. In the essay "The need for more than justice" (1995), Justice, as Baier sees it, is an important social value and ethical virtue. However, it is clear to her that there is a need for something *more* as the foundation of ethical theories. Baier acknowledges that traditional theorists wouldn't be opposed to the idea that other things matter besides justice. However, she points out that the general notion has been that justice is at least the *most* important, or first ethical and societal *virtue*. Baier asks the question, considering late philosopher Carol Gilligan's work, "*What is it that comes into view from the "care perspective" that is not seen from the "justice perspective"*?" (Baier, 1995, p.21).

Answering her question, she states that in order to acknowledge the weakness of a justice-based system, we need to ask the question of whether it *is* a weakness. She says that with justice as the first virtue, in particular, a Kantian "civil society", there is little incentive to have deeper connections to others than the minimal relationships needed. Baier appeals here to experiences with "depth" in relations, stating these relations as something to be preferred. She continues by saying In a Kantian justice society with social goods such as freedom of speech, law-making, assembly, and religious worship, none of these ensure any other relationships than those needed to keep the society going. Loneliness, suicide, the feeling of meaningless lives and not wishing to bring a child through the same type of meaningless existence are wholly compatible with this type of justice-based society (Baier, 1995, p.23). In other words, to be able to address and affect harm, there is a need for an alternative approach. Men being established earlier as prone to *only* a justice-based perspective would be prone to the miseries listed above. The ideal society cannot be a set of simple ground rules that may or may not involve cultivating ideal care and responsibility (Baier, 1995, p.25). The ideal of care cannot be satisfactorily cultivated without closer cooperation from others than respect and justice can incentivize (Baier, 1995, p.27). Baier strongly urges the need for men to cultivate a virtue of care, not only as a salvation from misery under a patriarchal structure, but as the solution to transcending a system that is reserving oppressors the most powerful positions in its hierarchy (Baier, 1995, p.26-27). She therefore calls for the combined insight of both men and women to harmonize justice and care (Baier, 1995, p.31).

The virtue of justice then, might also fall victim to continuously conceptualizing the 'universalized' experience of a small, privileged group of people, which also Collins has stated as a major reason epistemic frameworks are insufficient without experience as a criterion for epistemic credibility. That is not to say any contribution that incentives justice as an ethical virtue is lost. Only that justice as a virtue in of itself is not sufficient to incentivize fundamental societal needs, in which she argues care as a virtue can bring to the table. It is the exclusionary nature in which justice has been conceptualized, the potential universalizing of a very limited group of people's experiences, that is problematic. Important to note is the way Baier is considering experience as critical to both address the lacking theoretical understanding of trust, and the fixation on the contract. Baier is talking about experience in two ways here, that directly relate to considering experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. Firstly, she establishes that a justice-based society does not nurture deep relationships, and follows it up with men being prone to a purely justice-based vision. This

vision, coupled with a prominent *experience of absence* from these deep connections, have resulted in a theoretical overweight of a justice-based system that have been contested and challenged by philosophers such as Gilligan and Baier. Their experience of absence of these relations are not inherently viewed as negative by Baier, but it is in light of the 'universalizing' intent of these theories that in turn results in the undertheorizing of concepts such as trust. In essence, Baier is not treating their experience of absence as separate from their philosophical conclusions, but rather as fundamental to their philosophical conclusions.

Secondly, Baier says that care as a virtue nurtures these deep relationships, and agrees with Gilligan that women are more susceptible to consider both virtues in their ethics. Considering the earlier discussion on types of ways to consider experience, Baier is saying here that men are, in a justice-based society, not urged to form experiences with deep personal connections. However, as women consider care in addition to justice, they have more experience with these deeper relationships. She considers this a hugely negative situation for justice-based prone individuals, in turn suggesting the notion that their non-experience results in rejecting that experience is relevant- to the degree that it has not even been considered as a part of trust and relationships in ethics almost *at all*. More importantly, Baier underlines how these concepts that are focused on equal power relations, in turn, become useless for women who regularly engage in fluctuating power dynamics. Here, I want to echo the sentiment from the segments on Collins and hooks in the previous chapter: a patriarchal structure benefits by being able to continuously prevail from excluding experiences from the epistemic domain, and the demand for a stricter and more extensive concept of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility flourishes as a necessity in oppressed societies. A theory that cannot be criticized or challenged through contradicting experiences or has the possibility to address experiences at all is regularly stated or observed to be neglected or incomplete through the experiences of the oppressed.

3.1.5 Patriarchal Circularity

The connection between patriarchy and a purely justice-based system in the way Baier addresses it is also addressed in bell hooks' writing. More importantly, hooks provides further insight into how this universalized patriarchal experience is continuously self-sufficient. What I mean by this, is that patriarchy inhabits traits that ensure generational inheritance of the same system, to repeat and sustain itself. The misery described by Baier that is compatible

with a justice-based perspective is also discussed in bell hooks' *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (2004). In the chapter "What's Love got to Do with It?", the concept of *patriarchal self-esteem* is introduced. Patriarchal self-esteem can be understood as what the patriarchy considers fulfilling, and in the case of the patriarchal model, an important example is work (hooks, 2004, p.91 hooks) As a current time observation and example, a resurgence of what is coined "hustle culture" or "the grind", income, work hours, and profit seem to be on the rise and presented as a promised source of fulfilment among the younger generations today. Some examples promoted regularly in social media are stock market guides in 20-second video reels, the increase of drop shipping[8], and Only Fans[9] the year you become of legal age. hooks' reflections on the consequence of work as a source of patriarchal self-esteem are prominently relevant to the younger coming generations. In addition to the increase in promoting and commercializing these opportunities to earn money, very few succeed in their work. hooks explains how when men fail to make the great economic profit breakthrough, they are compensated by society with solutions to make work more bearable, such as sex as a transactional action for their "providing" (hooks, 2004, p.92). Work as a vital source of patriarchal self-esteem is connected to the ability to provide economically for others, but as the majority fail to provide for themselves, and some are barely able to provide for others, many men are left with the feeling of being a masculine failure (hooks, 2004, p.93-94). This misery that is brought on by chasing patriarchal confidence is a type of misery that is also compatible with Baier's concept of a purely justice-based society.

Connecting this to Baier's discussion on a justice-based ethical virtue, work is an arena of interactions of *care-less* and *individualistic* relationships for many, in addition to a gathering of many men with low masculine self-esteem. Furthermore, hooks points out how work also becomes a place of *escape* from emotional awareness, using it as a distraction to achieve numbness (hooks, 2004, p.97). In this section of the book, hooks references several personal accounts from men when describing their reflections on the value of work, and the hurt it entails. She references these experiences of men to give weight to her arguments regarding work as a harmful source of self-esteem under patriarchy. In addition, hooks address the socioeconomic differences in accounts of work as a harmful patriarchal source of self-esteem.

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[8] Establishing a business where you run an online shop, where traditionally you sell an item you don't have in stock, and outsource production and storage to a third party. You function as a middle man, and usually charge many times the cost of production.
[9] A webpage for selling self-made nude images, porn videos, private chats or otherwise explicit content, mainly targeted at women as a platform to earn easy money from sexual favors.

Women with a higher-class privilege would express surprise at the notion of men leaving work feeling less powerful, in contrast to working-class women's account of men being severely wounded by the patriarchal self-esteem grounded in work (hooks, 2004, p.99). Again, this reflects hooks' statement that economic success provides some form of patriarchal self-esteem, to those who manage to achieve it. It falls into the particular grouping of universalized experiences, where upper-class men are prone to the benefits of a patriarchal society. What is important to repeat and comes to light through this example, is that any group can repeat and produce patriarchal roles and cycles just as well as any other person. Being blind to the pain of men in our society caused by patriarchal structures is a benefit to the patriarchal structure itself.

hooks observations of men and their pain in a patriarchal world through work is the same result of misery that is mentioned by Baier concerning a purely justice-based society. If work is also a source of both escape from emotional consciousness and a promise of masculine fulfilment, it is a circle that produces these same rigid and emotionless theories of relationships and virtues of ethics. If patriarchal self-esteem is connected to the economic profit produced in a system where a majority are bound to fail, it also results in these men experiencing the pain of lack of self-worth. Not only is work a primary source of relationships for patriarchal men, but it also becomes an escape from the same misery that their working situation is producing. Economic failure becomes the source of a fractured self-esteem, which in turn demands an escape, which many find through work. Even more important is the fact that the experience of the failing patriarchal man that is also barred from being expressed, such as the experiences of subordinate groups. As highlighted by hooks, it is regarded as a source of power and self-esteem by the men who *succeed,* and the people who surround them. Universalizing the experiences of successful patriarchal men, will then reflect a system that considers deep emotional connections and dynamic power relations as limitedly relevant to ethics and justice as power and self-esteem have been attained without it, and have long been barren from the environment their self-worth is dependent on.

# 3.2 Trust

As Baier states that 'Justice as the single most important virtue' is not sufficient for a sustainable moral virtue and has resulted in a neglected concept of trust, she presents an alternative theory on trust considering care ethical values. As addressed, trust has not been covered to account for personal relationships in an adequate sense. Her suggestion of how we should understand trust builds on pre-existing notions of trust, resulting in a unique definition that she also suggests might underline the need for an expansion on the subject (in addition to her contribution). I argue her theory both makes it possible to see the harm that occurs in neglecting experience epistemologically, and offers an alternative approach that is compatible with and necessary for experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, as well as makes it possible to reach a trusting epistemic environment by identifying what contributes to a mistrusting epistemic environment.

## 3.2.1 Trust is Vulnerability

Firstly, Baier states, "Trust is accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will" (Baier, 1995, p.99). Trust, then, includes firstly a vulnerability to be extended to someone else's care. It is a dependable goodwill that is present in trust through the expected goodwill and the element that leaves one part vulnerable (Baier, 1995, p.100). In addition, she accounts for a variety of vulnerabilities. What is meant by this, is that trust is a dynamic concept. Not in a "percentage of trustworthiness" type of value, but as an unconscious process of development. Over time, both consciously and unconsciously, a relationship strengthens trustworthiness. In addition, a lot of the time, we leave our vulnerabilities in the care of someone else with little or no choice. She uses the example of a child, that has little to no current control or consciousness over the vulnerable trust granted to their caretaker. This example appeals to our general experience with having a relationship with a child as an adult or having been a child with a relation to an adult. Here, Baier says, an unconscious sort of trust takes place and might develop into a stronger, more conscious trust with time. In addition, things that we cannot singlehandedly sustain on our own, like play, conversation and other forms of interaction that we enjoy, require us to let others care for what we care about (Baier, 1995, p.101). This highlights another point in the variation of the power dynamic of a trust relationship, namely that the most important things we leave in the care of others are things that require more than non-interference to thrive (Baier, 1995, p.103). This *separates*

Baier's form of trust from "trusting" the cashier to be nice or the bus driver to drive me to where I need to get for the day. In other words, trusting someone not to act.

This vulnerability and care as described by Baier demands a more complex view on interactions and relationships than through the traditional Kantian justice-based society. The vulnerability of letting someone care for me, does not stem from the risk of them committing injustice, but a risk of lack of care. In addition, not only am I trusting someone to care for me, but I am trusting them to act to nurture the trust between us. It is dependent on more than non-action, and will be affected by the *intent* of action, or non-action. The vulnerability is dynamic, as *power relations* are dynamic. As a child, I am vulnerable in my parents care, as their care demands more than non-action and their possible lack of care can be devastating. My friendships have a highly varying power-dynamic, continuously inducing shifting situations of vulnerability that demand action from me or them. I might be in an economic struggle and in need of a place to stay, they might be in a struggling relationship and in need of support. I am not, in a juridical sense, committing injustice if I reject to act on their need of care, but I am acting a lack of care that influences the environment of trust in the relationship.

3.2.2 Trust is Cultivated Through Promises

Continuing, Baier makes room for the concept of *promises* and trust. Promises seem to be a type of trust we can consciously accept, in contrast to general trust that is an action-based relationship that establishes in a balance between conscious and unconscious attention, rather than choice (Baier, 1995, p.111). They can function, seemingly, as a gateway to a more deepened sense of trust. The fascinating thing with promises is the groundwork they can produce for a deepened sort of trust that in other cases seem to rely on circumstances. However, Baier in agreement with Nietzsche points out the fact that the ability to offer and accept promises is a privilege. Historically and currently; minorities, women, children, slaves, the non-able bodied etc. was the *traded* and not the traders (Baier, 1995, p.113). What is meant by this is that the environment which makes promises fade into the background noise in certain societies, like the promise of justice from an institution, or the promise of protection rather than harm from police institutions, is based on having had access to a climate of trust. For promises to become background noise there needs to have been a constant upholding of promises over a long period of time. Inheriting justified generational mistrust to the police, to men, to the state, due to broken promises makes a trusting climate unreachable for many.

This environment of *mis*trust is also clearly to me directly addressed by hooks, in particular in the context of early feminist notions of mistrust regarding men. hooks states that the feminist observation of patriarchy being inherently promoting of hate and fear towards all things women was not wrong, acutely observable through the generational fear and survivalist approach that women have had to have in environments regarding relationships with men in their lives, and society (hooks, 2004, p.107-108). This lack of trust created an anti-male environment sentiment, later shifting from anti-male to anti patriarchy. However, hooks state this generational mistrust has sparked a challenge when it comes to caring for men who also fall victim to patriarchy. Viewing this in light of Baier, many women struggle with a generational environment of broken trust of care, and as a result have in newer feminism failed to properly address male pain under patriarchy (hooks, 2004, p.110). This mistrusting environment is what comes to light in the earlier discussion between Kittay, Singer and McMahan. McMahan and Singer base their epistemological assumption of the role as a mother as inherently a risk to her ability as a philosopher. The *mistrust* they are expressing in regards to the role as a mother leaves no room for experiences to grant insight or support to knowledge claims and can in the sense of Baier be viewed as harm. Kittay is in a position where she is vulnerable by both sharing and engaging her experiences in the philosophical discussion, which is in turn both neglected and violently disregarded. The mistrusting environment is upheld by experience and trust being undertheorized and wrongly universalized in traditional approaches to philosophy. Certainly, no promise of care was upheld in that discussion, and as a result, mistrust was highly present and harm was expressed.

3.2.3 Trust in Dependency Relations

Most importantly, Baier addresses the dynamics of power relations, focusing on dependency relations. This is where Baier makes mention of the possibility of mutual trust across dynamic power relations, which is critical for the thesis. The easier relationships to consider for a trust test are the slice of life relationships. Frozen in time, we pick out a static relationship, and consider their power dynamic at the moment, and the content of their trust relationship. Examples like two articulate adults are present in almost all previous theories on trust, and Baier suggests this might be the reason for the lackluster previous attempts by other philosophers to understand trust in its entirety as a virtue in ethics (Baier, 1995, p.106). Static

time frozen moments in relationships would not be adequate comparisons to draw conclusions about trust when considering the fluctuating and dynamic nature of trust. This is where Baier introduces *dependency relations*. Dependency relations in her example, as is a theme throughout multiple of her essays, is first and foremost a child dependent on their parent or parents. Examples include how a naïve type of trust is needed for the child to survive in their first stages of life. The dynamic then changes with the growth of the child and ageing of the parent, where the child begins to form a complex trusting relationship with their parent, and vice versa. Their relationship has *mutual trust* even though the dynamic of power fluctuates (Baier, 1995, p.109). This means that a fluctuating power dynamic within a trust relationship doesn't depend on an expectation of a future return, as a contract theory might be based on. Instead, mutual trust is presented as viable across fluctuating power dynamics. This is important to note, and I will come back to this in chapter 3.4 when addressing trust in epistemology.

### 3.2.4 Forgiveness and Leniency

Baier also addresses the role of forgiveness and leniency when talking about trust. This is a key aspect to change the environments of trust and is essential to rebuild and uphold an environment of trust. Baier states that a trust relationship is threatened by a rigorous unforgiving nature, and a harmful sensitivity to any criticism (Baier, 1995, p.103). Forgiveness, to forgive and to be forgiven, is essential according to Baier in a trusting relationship. Leniency includes both a point of no return, and a space to grow and develop trust based on situations that need both forgiving and to be forgiven. The risk of hurt is also essential for trust to be present. Her second key aspect is letting other groups of people, both organized and unorganized, take care of something you trust. This care involves some exercise of discretionary powers (Baier, 1995, p.105). The group must then exercise care based on their own judgment about said care. However, Baier mentions that the factor of explicitness proves challenging to both her own theory of trust and other traditional concepts of trust. As mentioned, trust can build and sink unconsciously. In addition, trust does not need to be explicit. To address this, Baier adds another dimension to the relationship dynamic between trusting parties, namely the varying of power dynamics (Baier, 1995, p.105). This aims to address the situations where power dynamics change throughout a relationship, like with a child becoming a caregiver for their parent later in life. Baier states that to judge whether a form of trust is morally decent, the dynamic of power needs to be considered

(Baier, 1995, p.106). Taking varying power dynamics into account functions to reflect on the morality of the trust that is exercised and cultivated. That is to establish that any form of care given to cultivate an environment of trust, needs to take dynamic power relations into account of the situation they are approaching. Looking at the case of Kittay, Singer, and McMahan, McMahan expresses what they deem an appropriate exercise of care at the end of the panel discussion:

> You know, Peter and I didn't come here to hurt anybody's feelings. We're here to try to understand things better. I think that Peter and I engage in a fair amount of voluntary self-censorship. I'm trying very hard not to say anything offensive, something hurtful. I'm profoundly averse to making people miserable. (Kittay, 2010, p. 422)

Basing our analysis on Baier, we can identify this as neither cultivating a trusting environment, an appropriate exercise of care across power dynamics, nor sufficient considering the power dynamics present. Neither an accurate *reading* of the power dynamics present between Kittay, Singer, and McMahan. They express an exercise of care, perhaps (hardly) sufficient in the space of equal power men with no relationship with the cognitively disabled, but falls incredibly short when viewing it in the appropriate context of power relations. To them, it serves as an incredible effort to uphold a promise of care, that as established earlier, comes second to the philosophical discussion. The world where this is deemed both a morally sufficient act of service is as Baier mentions, a purely justice-based one where care is only exercised on obligation, and out of voluntary respect for equal power relationships. Thus, they might be exercising this type of 'caring' self-censorship based on Kittay's' role as a philosopher, but unfortunately have already revealed their view on her role as a mother and how it impairs their view on Kittay as an equal participant in the discussion. Baier's concept of trust might help cultivate the environment of trust that has been woven so tightly shut through the history of oppression.


3.2.5 The Power Dynamic between Men and Women, Forgiveness and Leniency

bell hooks gives an answer that becomes essential in the meeting with the environment of trust in epistemology, and how to cultivate it. The role of forgiveness, dependency, and promises are key concepts found in hooks writing. We need to identify how patriarchy in essence is making emotional detachment a part of masculine self-esteem. By also making economic profit the only source of self-esteem, work becomes (as mentioned earlier) an area of both self-esteem issues and an escape from emotional burdens. In addition to this, men who

wish to break free from their patriarchal roles are met with resistance from other self-sustaining circles from the patriarchy. Where the three components of trust mentioned and how they can cultivate trust can become apparent, is through relationships with these patriarchal men who *wish* to break free from their roles.

In the chapter "feminist manhood" in *The Will to Change* (2004), we are reminded how integrated to patriarchy the fear of women and womanhood is. If a part of a patriarchal commitment is to hate or fear the womanly, then this suggests a gendered categorization of emotional consciousness was made, and then made unavailable for the ideal patriarchal man. Emotional labour, then, shows itself through women having to compensate for men's lacking emotional awareness, and then also educating them on emotional awareness when it is necessary or requested of them. A sentiment of feminists being man-hating or anti-male was quickly popularized by the patriarchy when it emerged (hooks, 2004, p.107-108). In truth, the feminist movement grew numbers from women who joined because of experience with violent and sexist relationships, using anger to fuel the cause and in the process, but also educating themselves further (hooks, 2004, p.109). This further education shifts the focus for most feminists from men being a problem, to the patriarchy hurting us all. An early sentiment *was* that men were the problem, based on the associations to violence, sexual exploitation, gang rape activity, and abuse often found in male-dominated collectives, but not present in the feminist movement or collectives of mainly women (hooks, 2004, p.108). The educated change in focus from men as a problem to patriarchy as a problem had consequences for feminist thinking, as it included reflections on what part women have in the cycle of sustaining patriarchy (hooks, 2004, p.109). However, hooks makes reflections on her experiences with feminism, stating that even though the recognition of men's suffering under patriarchy, there has never been a collective use of energy to engage in meetings with men that inspire this change (hooks, 2004, p.110-111). hooks advocates for women to engage in honest and open communication with men, challenging them to confront their privilege and how they benefit from patriarchy. She emphasizes the importance of women setting boundaries and not tolerating abusive or oppressive behaviour. At the same time, she believes in the power of love and care in transformative relationships. She suggests that women can inspire change in men through love and encouragement, provided that men are willing to do the necessary emotional labour and self-reflection.

Even though hooks promotes a standard for the men women should involve themselves with,

she makes a call for all women to love the men in their lives. Forgiveness and leniency, then, become relevant concepts to understand how this inspiration through love is to be formed by men's responses and actions. When women enter or exist in these complex relationships with men, there is a prevalent power dynamic that the women who have distanced themselves from their patriarchal role are critically aware of. Engaging in a relationship with a person who is still ignorant of, or just recently started questioning this power, demands leniency and forgiveness from the party that wishes to inspire change. There will be mistakes, there will be exertions of this power, and there will be hurt that the person in power is completely oblivious to. Forgiveness and leniency of the promise the people have made to engage in change can feel challenged, as well as the inspiring party can feel their promise of inspiring begin to be challenged. However, to engage in these relationships there are a few standards that have already been met, and that is that these relationships engaging in change is not one of necessity, but a more complex and deeper connection, similar to the way dependency is not synonymous to a contract for Baier. The power dynamic that fluctuates in this dependent relationship is not one of cost and reward, but one that can perhaps be understood in the light of care and trust, instead of justice. Understood in the light of Baier's theory, this enables us with a degree of forgiveness and leniency when engaging in the process of inspiring a loved one for change. Providing inspiration for change, can be said to fall under a concept of care for a vulnerable group of people.

## 3.2 Trust in Epistemology

To understand how come the role of a mother can warrant *epistemic* mistrust according to McMahan and Singer, in addition to the insight given by moral philosophy, we also need to look back at the epistemic environment that subjugated groups have persisted through as accounted for by Patricia Hill Collins. I claim although testimony and the concept of trust have been accounted for it does not broach the problem of the lack of care and mistrust that Kittay encountered. Miranda Fricker and her theory on epistemic injustice provide the answer for the clear mistrust that takes place, as she dives deep into the topic of mistrust, ethics, and politics within epistemology. From there, we gain a clearer picture of both the cause and consequence of the neglect of trust in epistemology, to underline the vital relationship between experience and trust in epistemology.

3.2.1 The Fear of Trust

One of the most prominent topics within western epistemology regarding trust is concerned with testimony, lies and deceit. Trust is regarded an upmost fragile thing, but there is such a thing as unhealthy skepticism, and mistrust must be grounded in justifiable logic. But what does this say about the *environment* of trust in epistemology? As observed by Baier, many foundational western philosophers have dedicated minimal attention to the topic of trust in philosophy besides in equal power relations. hooks makes accounts for how cold and transactional the working environment and life as a man can be under a patriarchal system (hooks, 2004, p.99). Collins make note of how the Eurocentric knowledge validation process is permeated with both moral and political virtues, to the blindness of the system itself (Collins, 2000, p.253-256). And last but not least, Kittay is subjugated to what I identify as an intense mistrust, with monumental epistemic consequences for the arguments and philosophy presented to her.

We ought to consider the broadest topic within Western traditional theory that is concerned with trust, namely testimony. However, trust is seen as a factor that determines the trustworthiness of a testimony, often thought of in a juridical or justice arena. Within epistemology, trust is seen as an essential part of accepting that a testimony as a source of knowledge. One would assume this area would be considered with both the epistemological, moral, and political benefits of trust, as well as ask the questions of when one ought to trust as well as when one ought *to mistrust*. Although there are many written works on trust and testimony in epistemology, such as "The Epistemology of Testimony" (1987) by Elizabeth Fricker and David E. Cooper, where they approach the topic through a juridical context, discussing the limits and challenges of power in a court when confronted with a testimony. J. Lackey, P. Faulkner, and L. Code also all provide a foundation for understanding the role of testimony in epistemology, but again, in a juridical and justice-allocated context. Kittay, hooks, and Baier in their respective retellings are all broaching the topic of trust and mistrust, but not from the seemingly common consideration of trustworthy versus untrustworthy. Instead, they approach it from a meta-perspective, asking the question of how trust has been defined and where its benefits and challenges might have been neglected. The Western traditional philosophical approach to the topic of testimony and its challenges is often about the juridical challenge of lying and/or forgetting, conscious or subconscious. However,

contemporary philosophers are broaching the subject of discriminating factors affecting trust in testimony, and one of them, Miranda Fricker, makes a critical contribution.

3.2.2 Epistemic Injustice

There is a feminist philosopher who presents a thorough theory of the epistemic mistrust that Kittay was subjected to. Miranda Fricker, professor of philosophy at New York University, presents the concept *of Epistemic Injustice* in her book "*Epistemic Injustice: Power & The Ethics of Knowing*" (2007). Fricker makes a case for the concept of testimonial injustice, which she defines as a moral and epistemic wrongdoing to someone on their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007, p.1). Fricker can be said to agree with Harding and Collins by considering the traditional epistemological approach to be susceptible to needless deficit and that starting from a socially situated conception allows us to reveal the ethical features of epistemic practice (Fricker, 2007, p.3-4). Thus, ethics and epistemology inform each other.

We can present her theory in light of Kittay's' case. Firstly, Singer and McMahan are communicating what they consider well-intended advice, urging Kittay to distance herself from what they consider to be something that clouds Kittay's philosophical judgment. They correctly identify the situation as emotional and intense and urge her to distance herself from what they consider as both a source of emotional distress, as well as seek what they consider a more 'objective' view. Fricker names this an exertion of gender power, and although well-intended, it is benevolently patriarchal (Fricker, 2007, p.15). Singer and McMahan are actively exerting their gender power and attempting to achieve what their *gender power* can do, silencing Kittay. They are attempting to achieve this by invoking the stereotypical view on women as leading by intuition, rationality as secondary, and unable to consider the grander picture. This is done by, presented as a favor, reminding her to keep to what is relevant. I ground this interpretation in Fricker's analysis of an eerily similar situation in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999)[10], and calls this a clear exertion of gender power and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007, p.15-16). Fricker states that there are two critical consequences for epistemological processes and knowledge that follow from epistemic injustice: One, the hearer makes a wrong judgment of the speakers' credibility and misses out on knowledge as a result, and Two, "*the speaker is wrongfully undermined in her capacity as a knower*" (Fricker, 2007, p. 17). The two consequences as described by Fricker I believe are easily identifiable in

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[10] Minghella, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999)

the case of Kittay. Firstly, Kittay's credibility as a philosopher is explicitly questioned and doubted on the grounds of her role as a mother. Furthermore, as I have argued throughout this thesis, Singer and McMahan in their case miss out on both their capacity to identify their misjudgment, as well as the potential philosophical content provided by her perspective. Their actions are what Fricker names a testimonial injustice, and is executed by a patriarchal exertion of power that undermines Kittay on the premise of mistrust in her capacity as a knower, and a conceptual mistrust of the capacity of women.

Echoing the words of Collins, Fricker supports the notion that our social and political lives have a direct connection to the evaluations we make of the authors and speakers we hear and read. Epistemic evaluation of someone's credibility I believe has shown itself to be critical to the process of knowledge production, and the ability to evaluate the evaluation is shown to be equally critical. I believe Fricker's' concept of epistemic injustice, identifying this case as resulting in a credibility *deficit* (Fricker, 2007, p.17), underlines the severity of epistemic judgment being affected by prejudice building on patriarchal notions, and how the call for extended attention to the topic of trust in epistemology is necessary. More importantly, this allows us to consider both trust and experience, as supported, relevant to the epistemic disagreement that happened between Kittay, Singer, and McMahan. I also want to bring attention to Fricker's concept of the exertion of gender power. She bases her theory of identity power on Michel Foucault, and I would like to consider Baier's concept of dynamic relations here as well. Following Baier, we need to consider the dynamic of power at a point of time, *as well as* the dynamic shape it takes. Interpreting power in relations and the effect it has on epistemological considerations invokes perhaps an even grander request for attention to the scene, but also enables us to consider the consequences and ways it exerts itself in epistemological discussions in a grander totality. In addition, I also want to ask the question of whether our case can be seen as an example of an epistemic injustice, but also an example of how a trusting environment is kept from being nurtured through exertions of this epistemic injustice.

Epistemic injustice as it says in its word, is based on a justice-virtue approach. I believe by considering Baier's theory on trust, Fricker's theory can apply to an approach where an ethics of care lies as an important supplement. I believe the harm Fricker mentions is efficiently identified in the case of Singer and McMahan, and an ethics of care approach by Baier allows us to expand upon it. The development of Baier's' theory of trust is dependent on referencing

lived experience to justify an expanded concept of trust. As she mentions, with a sole focus on equal-power transactional relationships, too much experience is unaccounted for that is directly related to concepts of promises, trust, relationships, and morality. The "universal" traditional theories become universal for a very specific, very limited and very privileged group of people. These experiences directly influence stereotypical assumptions in both society and individually, and result in cases of epistemic injustice that both discredit the speaker and potentially morally harm them. Fricker defines this harm as intrinsic injustice, drawing on psychology to map the consequences of testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 46), concluding in the primary violence of epistemic justice being dishonor. This dishonor shows itself through what Fricker categorizes as practical harm, such as not being believed in a court case and consequently being wrongly judged as guilty, or even epistemic harm, resulting in such loss of confidence in one's own ability that the result is a *loss of knowledge[11]* (Fricker, 2007, p. 46-49).

An ethics of care as provided by Baier allows for us to address the societal consequences of epistemic injustice towards individuals. In the case of Kittay, she is not only dishonored based on her credibility as a philosopher and knower. She is also rejected the moral value of her own daughter, as well as belittled on the premise of her reactions. Her relationship to how her experiences influences her philosophical knowledge claims is not philosophically challenged respectfully by Singer and McMahan, it is bluntly rejected as even relevant to the discussion. As we have seen, their attention to their own epistemic evaluation of Kittay is both non-existent, as well as wholly damning to the philosophic discussion they are engaging in. As said by Fricker, we meet each other in an epistemically loaded way (Fricker, 2007, p. 86). Baier's theory on trust and Fricker's theory on epistemic injustice underlines how it is in the clear interest of *both* knowledge production and moral conduct to address our epistemic load.

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[11] There are several examples these forms of harm are presented through, such as court case examples, teacher student examples, literature examples and literal analyses that Fricker brings to light to underline her point (Fricker, 2007). The entire list falls outside the scope of the thesis but is a highly intriguing read on both the psychosocial and practical consequences of epistemic violence.

# Chapter 4: Limitations and Further Discussion:

## Surviving versus Thriving

I began this thesis with the goal of exploring the role of experience and trust, and the impact of experience as a criterion of epistemological credibility, arguing in support of the two following claims: One, that integrating experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility in an epistemic framework yields a beneficial and stricter demand for philosophical knowledge claims. Furthermore, not only does it produce a stricter demand for knowledge claims, but it can unveil knowledge that is otherwise unavailable without an epistemic framework that accounts for experience. Through care ethics and Anette Baier's concept of trust, the distinct harmful consequence of neglecting experience is shown to be tightly connected to moral philosophy and is in need of being contested both epistemically and morally.

Throughout the analysis, there are, in particular, three findings and limitations I would like to discuss to cover implications of what experience as a criterion of credibility can offer to the goal of knowledge, and considering trust in its care ethical sense as epistemic. Firstly, I want to revisit and underline the topic of harm and trust, to address the situational expression of harm and overarching harm, and how it can be considered expressed through mistrust. Following this, I will revisit the change that experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility does to the process of epistemic consideration. A visual model is included to help visualize the claim that experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility strengthens the epistemic stance of a knowledge claim through being a stricter demand. Lastly, I wish to discuss the limitations of how many concepts we should consider in addition to patriarchy as essential to be seen in the light of experience integrated into an epistemic framework.

## 4. 1 Trust and Harm

Harm, misery and violence have shown themselves to be a critical reoccurring theme among the included philosophers following the thesis analysis. Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding argue that the need to integrate experience into an epistemic framework is paramount as the neglect of experience so far has shown to be directly harmful, particularly to subordinate groups. Uma Taylor provides a history of black feminist philosophy and care ethics, introducing historical grounds for the parallel between historical oppression and

violence and the political and academic engagement to end the harm (Taylor, 1998). Historically, care ethics and black feminist philosophy consider and critique knowledge validation processes, where knowledge has been produced to justify the harm these subordinate groups have been subjected to, to be critically in need of necessary change. This provided the delimitation and groundwork for moving forward with the exploration of experience and trust in epistemology. Entering the case study in chapter 2, Eva Feder Kittay provides a case I argue exemplifies the mentioned harm and direct effect on philosophical reflection that experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility can provide. bell hooks in her analysis of the patriarchy, outlines the harm of excluding experiences from affecting the way in which we address harm, as it is seen to be a necessary part of understanding the violence patriarchy cultivates. Miranda Fricker makes us able to give the harm Kittay is subjected to the name epistemic injustice, resulting in a credibility deficit that is based on mistrust in her capacity as a knower. Anette Baier also mentions how harm and misery are completely compatible with a purely justice-based perspective in moral philosophy, urging for the need for an expanded understanding of trust to combat violence. Together, Baier and Fricker's theories of trust in their respective fields show a parallel consequence of harm when neglected to be addressed in each respective discourse. Summarizing the contributions of Collins, Harding, Kittay, hooks, Baier and Fricker; loss of knowledge, loss of moral autonomy, and loss of life stand as direct and active consequences of operating under epistemic premises that exclude experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility.

Taking a closer, look, I believe the harm described can be separated into two categories. One is the direct harm that follows not having a stricter set of criteria for credibility, or in Harding's words, harm following a history of weak objectivity. This is the type of harm that I argue Kittay is subjected to when her philosophical credibility is questioned on the basis of emotional reactions and a mother role. It cultivates mistrust towards the person at hand. The second category of harm is caused by the patriarchal power dynamics that influence the construction of epistemological frameworks, which results in the marginalization of experiences and following knowledge claims. This is the type of harm that perpetuates the systemic bias and gives 'reasons' as to why emotions and motherhood are considered subordinate and negative influences in general. It is the patriarchal violence that hooks speaks of when addressing the process of patriarchy reestablishing itself, and an 'epistemic load' as named by Fricker. This cultivates a general societal mistrust of what patriarchy deems as untrustworthy. Both of these two categories together enable situations where general mistrust

of traits is wholly unjustly applicable to each individual, but justifiable if challenged on the basis of situational expression. As an example, the epistemic load that McMahan and Singer enter the discussion with perhaps contains a patriarchal understanding of motherhood connected to uncritical reflection. As Kittay expresses her emotions and disagrees with their arguments, it becomes a self-fulfilling definition for McMahan and Singer, rather than their epistemic load being addressed first, and the situational response being considered in light of these reflections. Thus, their general epistemic load seems irrelevant to the discussion, even though they enter the discourse with a loaded gun, as Kittay in that situation alone shows her "motherhood results in uncritical reflection", which becomes the trigger for justifying the load. Instead of their load being up for discussion and demanded reasoning (which would make it possible to unveil patriarchal influence), we are left with the case as it unfolds, ultimately resulting in harm and missing knowledge. Epistemology without an account to deal with harm, is therefore shown to result in missing knowledge.

This process of the two categories of harm is the harm that I believe integrating experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility can reduce. Furthermore, Fricker categorizes the harm as epistemic injustice and reasons it as misplaced or unjustified *mistrust*. She states that this mistrust is a consequence of patriarchal violence, as echoed by Collins and hooks, respectively. By introducing a virtue of care, as theorized by Baier, she enables the possibility of trust between fluctuating power dynamics. Baier makes a case for how traditional philosophers have been insufficiently accounting for the dynamic power relationships we interact with throughout our lives. In turn, her theory of a trusting environment and the necessary principles one must operate with to nurture this trusting environment gives way to a functional trusting environment compatible with dynamic power relations. Following Fricker's statement of how we approach each other in an epistemologically loaded way, the need to address mistrust and cultivate a trusting environment becomes important to reduce harm and cultivate the possibility of unveiling knowledge.

The process of changing an epistemic framework and learning how to operate with reflections from experiences, both your own and others possible critique or agreement, is not something I imagine is attainable in a day. Baier states "*trust is accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will*" (Baier, 1995, p.99), and also that how forgiveness and leniency is key to developing a trusting relationship, as it is threatened by a rigorous unforgiving nature, and a harmful sensitivity to any criticism (Baier, 1995, p.103). Following

an epistemic framework where experience is considered a criterion of epistemic credibility, leniency and forgiveness become important to keep in mind as the process of involving one's life in philosophizing and dialogue, as well as one's own reflections on these experiences, as it accounts for *vulnerability*. To be able to expose what perhaps makes the personal philosophical, involves a sense of trust through the possibility of ill will. This is challenging from a standpoint where a majority of groups carry a history of being subjected to oppression and violence. The challenges of building a trusting environment where the environment is overbearingly *mistrusting* and familiar to patriarchal violence that thrives on the exclusion of experience. In this regard, this thesis at least attempts to support the epistemic gains that experience provides.

4.2 A Demand for Explicit Reasoning

One of the major issues that inflicts harm in the case study of Chapter 2 is how the transcript disagreement takes form in an undisclosed part of the discussion. What I mean by this, is that although Singer and McMahan routinely ask for clarification on where their logical or definitional disagreements take place, it occurs on the basis of epistemic premises.
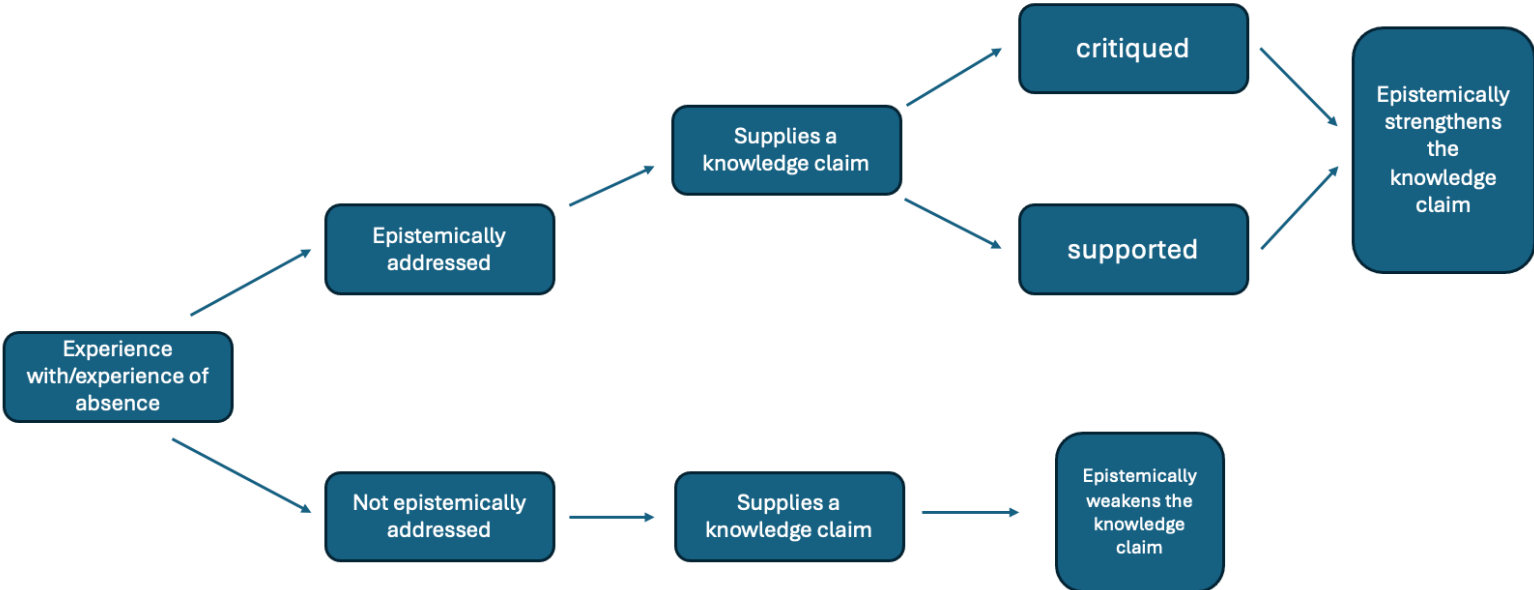


*Figure 1: Choice tree following the presence of experience with/experience of absence.*

In the model above, I have attempted to visualize the process demanded by the stricter demand for knowledge claims, as well as how one is to consider the presence of experience and its epistemic impact on a knowledge claim. In addition, it provides the reasoning for considering any claim that does not account for or address one's experience when approaching a knowledge claim as epistemically weakened.

As an example to follow the model, I begin by making a knowledge claim on a topic, for instance, the capacity of someone with severe cognitive disabilities. Throughout my knowledge claim I am confident my logic is sound, my sources are strong, and any other criterion of credibility that my epistemic framework demands for a sound knowledge claim. In addition to this, I have my experience that relates to the topic. I have experience with working as a health assistant in a communal living facility for people who have severe cognitive disabilities. Here, my first road split occurs. I can either follow the demand for experience to be addressed, as it is a criterion of epistemic credibility, or I can choose not to. Note, that I do not have a choice of whether it supplies or affects my knowledge claim. I only have the choice of epistemically addressing the possibility that my experience does, or does not affect my knowledge claim. If we follow the top route, having chosen to epistemically consider if my experience affects my knowledge claim, I can then move on to either support that the mentioned experience gives valuable insight on topics such as capacity for emotional relationships. I can also choose to argue that my experience does not affect my knowledge claims, as I perhaps argue that my interactions and observations were not impactful enough to warrant any disagreement with other sources. Either way, I have still addressed the importance or irrelevance of my experience with the topic at hand, to the best of my abilities. This results in a *strengthened epistemic stance*, no matter how I deem the reflections I present as either in support, neutral or negative to the following knowledge claim. Had I chosen not to address it at all, it will always end up with a weakened epistemic stance. As I have chosen not to address my experiences and argued/accounted for in what way they supply my knowledge claim, I will have neglected the necessity for soundness to my knowledge claim.

Choosing the top route opens up for others in the discourse I am engaging with, other speakers, to take my reflections on my experience into serious philosophical account. As my experience have a direct influence on my conclusions in my knowledge claims, it is a justifiable element to either critique or contest by others who disagree with my conclusions.

My faults may lie logically, in weak sources, or in my reflections on the effect my experience has on the topic at hand. Either way, criteria of epistemic credibility have a chance to affect my knowledge claim, and I need to reason why my experience or experience of absence *does*, or *does not* influence my knowledge claim. My possible epistemic load becomes a *visible* part of my discussion, as opposed to *hidden*. Connecting my epistemic load to be a risk of harm through a form of mistrust, enables us to consider theories that engage in cultivating a trusting environment to counteract said harm. When we consider experience as experience with and experience of absence, instead of experience with and void experience, we free the concept of bias from operating as a dichotomy to experience and are able to consider epistemic loads. This involves me trusting others to be critical and considerate of my reflections, as well as cements my epistemic load as relevant until reasoned otherwise. This thesis calls and argues for explicit reasoning for mistrust.

As an example, bell hooks continuously considers and *critiques* reflections from experiences from others as well. In the segment from *Will to Change* (2004) where hooks writes about how some feminist thinkers wrongfully perpetuate an unwillingness to participate in the feminist fight for men's liberation from patriarchal oppression, she critiques the shortcomings of reflections based on experiences with patriarchal men (hooks, 2004, p.109). hooks quotes feminist thinker Minnie Bruce Pratt, and challenges her on a statement where Pratt reflects that the personal contact needed to change men is an unjust demand of energy from feminists (hooks, 2004, p. 110). Instead, hooks suggests that although there is no denying the pain that male patriarchal violence causes towards women in their lives, the reduction of these experiences cause feminist thinkers to neglect the task of addressing male pain (hooks, 2004, p. 109-110). Here we have an example where hooks addresses reflections made from experiences of patriarchal violence, that she both reasons with, as in builds on the understanding of connecting violence to patriarchal influence, and then critiques for not considering a component that hooks argues is essential for societal change. The mistrust some feminist thinkers like Pratt express is reasoned by them, and this process gives hooks an opportunity to further expand on or critique their reasons. Their experiences are not rejected as irrelevant, but are rather addressed in view of those following reflections by hooks.

4.3 Beneficial Frames

This thesis suggests at least that care ethical theorists and some black feminist philosophers are operating with parts of their epistemic framework in common that I state as beneficial when I consider cross-field theories and their respective effects on the epistemic discussion. When fields of philosophy introduce and apply the concept that events can turn into experiences with philosophically relevant content in the academic scene, reading other fields that also apply this strengthens the ability to identify, learn, and use it oneself. This is a statement regarding why I have chosen to compare a philosopher with ties to black feminist philosophy, and philosophers with ties to other fields of feminist philosophy and care ethics. The history of feminism provided in this thesis shows how the fields have grounds for diverging development of their epistemic frameworks, but their regard of experience makes for a beneficial yield when comparing theories. Although Baier and hooks differ in the types of experiences they reference, it is still beneficial that Baier regards experience as monumental to consider in philosophy. This makes it so that hooks writing can be directly considered in light of Baier's work, and vice versa, based on their mutual respect for experience and its philosophical implications. These fields (and perhaps other feminist philosophy fields) have a history of having had to yield a stricter epistemic demand for knowledge claims. I call it an advantage, as having parts in common in an epistemic framework seems to make those other fields more easily accessible. Although this thesis has only addressed a limited amount of philosophers, they give reasonable insight in to making assumptions about their respective fields within feminist philosophy.

As each field also values experience as having epistemic credibility, experience reading these topics is beneficial to understanding other fields of feminist or minority fields of philosophy, even fields where the topics differ and contain another set of generally unavailable experiences. I mentioned how black feminist philosophy, care ethics, queer philosophy and critical disability theory all have a foot in the topic of experience, more specifically originating in having experience that differed from previous theories on their own identities. Continuing work on what these unique perspectives can provide philosophically has resulted in critiques and new theories that extend to all topics within philosophy. Even though they are experiences generally unavailable to the majority, having one's own experiences that are not generally available to the majority translates into an effective relationship with crediting experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. This, I argue, does not mean that each field

can replace the other or even represent each other in all cases. This is because the experience demands, to a degree, reflections to go from events to experiences, and further consideration when applying them to philosophical discussion. This is, however, where I contest that only *experience with* affects our epistemic load, through introducing experience with and experience of absence. As stated, experiences of the absence of privilege, the experience of the absence of care, and the experience of the absence of trust are all experiences that have contributed to impactful philosophical knowledge claims and are just as valuable as reflections from experience. This thesis does not intend to limit the capacity in which experiences can provide reflections that are relevant, or determine in any way how they can be relevant, and it argues in support that an effort to consider experiences, as the fields or philosophers who operate with this commonality in their epistemic framework seem to beneficially consider reflections cross fields of study with the same respect and possibility of yield. This thesis at least suggests that it is possible to consider each field and respective theory in light of each other and make connections and distinctions based on the experience they provide in their respective theories.

4.3 Limits of Experience

Another implication I have not addressed up until now is the extent of which we can understand words in the context of experience to unveil knowledge, not just strengthen or weaken claims. I argue in support of hooks that the concept of patriarchy is expanded when taking in to account experience. This yields the question: are all concepts dependent on being understood through experience? I confess I am not able to leave it as something more than an open question. I do, however, want to point out the concepts that are mentioned by the philosophers through this thesis that they argue need to be understood in the context of an epistemic framework considering experience. Eva Feder Kittay, for example, states this when asked by Singer to "factually support" her claims about humans being more than a set of capacities;

> [...] Most of the time. When I say you can't just wave your hand and say "and so on," it's because there is so *much* to being human. There's the touch, there's the feel, there's the hug, there's the smile, . . . there are so many ways of interacting. I don't think you need philosophy for this. You need a *very good writer. . . .* (Kittay, 2010, p.408).

Analyzing the statement, I interpret it as Kittay expressing that the limits of the epistemic framework she is perceiving Singer to operate with, is faulty to a degree where the

phenomena she lists of lived experience will never be part of the philosophy Singer considers as "factual". She is attempting to stress how his refusal to accept these experiences as having philosophical content, results in incomplete knowledge.

bell hooks, in addition to patriarchy, talks about *love* in the same sense she presents the definition of patriarchy as inseparable from a discussion on experience when recounting a couples therapy session with one of her ex-partners;

> Like so many men who know that the women in their lives want to hear them declare love, Anthony made those declarations. When asked to link the "I love you" words with definition and practice, he found that he did not really have the words, that he was fundamentally uncomfortable being asked to talk about emotions. [...] (hooks, 2004, p. 5)

And defines love as *more* than knowledge, including *action*;

> Ever since I started writing about love, I have defined it in a way that blends M. Scott Peck's notion of love as the will to nurture one's own and another's spiritual and emotional growth, with Eric Fromm's insight that love is action and not solely feeling. Working with men who wanted to know love, I have advised them to think of it as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust. (hooks, 2004, p.65-66).

Deep relationships, aesthetic pleasure, touch, feel, ways of interacting, love, commitment, responsibility, respect, and trust are a few of the concepts that Kittay and Hooks suggest as dependent on an epistemic framework that considers experience, to unveil essential aspects of them. So much so that Kittay even invites Singer, after the panel discussion, to visit her daughter's living facility to build experiences (an offer he declines) (Kittay, 2010, p. 404-405). I do not believe patriarchy stands as the *sole* concept that can be unveiled through experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, but the exploration of other such concepts, unfortunately, stands outside of the scope of the thesis. However, I do propose that any concept should be subject to be explored through an epistemic framework that has experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. I want to state clearly that the thesis has consciously not made any effort to argue it is limited to certain concepts or just one concept. I find no reason to. Following the list of concepts mentioned by hooks and Kittay we might deduce that concepts that are present in social experiences, the thesis at least strongly implies the case of *more than one* concept would be interesting to view in light of the argued beneficial epistemic framework, with the chance of unveiling knowledge. If philosophy is in totality able to

achieve this though, is questioned by Kittay in her statement that this is work that perhaps is better achieved by good writers and artists. I believe it is, if we work to build a trusting environment to be able to share and listen to each other.

4.4 Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In this thesis, I have explored the intricate relationship between experience, trust, and epistemology through the lenses of black feminist epistemology and care ethics. This investigation was driven by the premise that integrating experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility can lead to stricter demands for knowledge production and unveil knowledge otherwise unavailable. I argued in support of scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding, contending that incorporating experience into epistemic frameworks yields significant epistemic benefits. By doing so, it not only adheres to stricter knowledge standards but makes it possible to counteract the harm caused by systemic structures that enable patriarchal circularity. I have shown how experience directly influences philosophical conclusions and unveils the harm caused by systems like the patriarchy. I propose this as possible when experiences are re-defined as always present, as I argue we should be viewing experience as experience with, and experience of absence. This is to show the discussion should be about whether experience is or is not relevant to discussions instead of considering experience as synonymous with a weakened epistemic stance. I have also underlined the under-theorized nature of trust in ethics and its pivotal role in fostering a trusting epistemic environment, and how a trusting environment is essential to access experiences and have experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility. Trust cultivated through vulnerability, promises, and dependency relations, is essential for the exchange of experiences to the production of knowledge. Mistrust needs to be explicitly addressed to reduce harm and cultivate a trusting environment, to the benefit of knowledge production. In conclusion, the integration of experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility into epistemological frameworks is not merely beneficial, but a critically stricter demand for knowledge claims to be sound. A key method of doing this lies in the demand for explicit reasoning of mistrust as part of cultivating a trusting environment and combating epistemic injustices that cause serious harm and incomplete knowledge. I stress the critical role of experience and trust in shaping epistemology. I advocate in support of Collins and Harding for integrating experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility into epistemological frameworks and for a stricter

demand for knowledge. As argued, it can reduce harm and cultivate a trusting environment, ultimately leading to significant epistemic benefits.

Throughout the work on this thesis, I found a philosophical community within this research that related to the feeling of dissonance I mentioned in the introduction, and also a path that led back to experiencing philosophy as wonderous and limitless again. This suggests, following my own thesis argumentation, that I have experienced a trusting environment that not only put words to something that had alienated me from my own interest in philosophy, but also made it possible to navigate exactly what this experience of alienation could be rooted in, through philosophy. Acknowledging the limits of this thesis, there is much left to discover about how experience can inform and interacts with definitions and concepts outside of bell hooks' definition of patriarchy, as well as any other extensive theories on trust and their interaction with epistemology. In addition, this thesis focused on bringing attention to an epistemic framework defined as disadvantageous and harmful, and argued in favor of Collins and Harding's theories as a beneficial alternative. The primary form of harm was focused in particular on mistrust, but that does not exclude any other form of harm being present in the meeting with a neglectful epistemic framework. These are not necessarily limits that I view as anything other than potential for future exploration, and with an epistemic framework that considers experience as a criterion of epistemic credibility, brings the neglected source of knowledge and epistemic credibility, experience, into the fold to shape our knowledge to a possibly fuller potential.

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