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Concepts and Contexts: Towards a Theory of “Hermeneutical Bastardization”

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Abstract

This paper theorizes and defends a process I term “hermeneutical bastardization.” This concept tracks the way in which some hermeneutical injustices arise not from a gap in a shared pool of hermeneutical resources, but from the decontextualization of an advantageous hermeneutical resource into another (typically dominant) hermeneutical domain. This decontextualization *bastardizes* hermeneutical resources by severing the concept from its original meaning and significance. I focus on the term “trans woman” and examine the way in which dominant epistemic agents rewrite and redefine the concept according to prominent and prevalent pernicious representations. Specifically, once decontextualized, the term “trans woman” denotes an individual who is thoroughly erotic and sexual in nature. *Hermeneutical bastardization* can illuminate how hermeneutically marginalized groups are reconstructed by other dominant epistemic agents according to these pernicious representations and can be silenced whilst their concepts, or rather their *terms*, are being utilized in sets of dominant hermeneutical resources in ways that severely diverge from their original intra-communal conceptualization. This type of hermeneutical injustice does not arise from a lacuna in our set of resources, but instead *depends* on the uptake of a concept’s term and its subsequent decontextualization.

Defining hermeneutical bastardization

Various philosophical works have undertaken to expand and enhance the notion of *hermeneutical injustice* introduced by Fricker (2007) in recent years (Pohlhaus 2012; Medina 2012, 2013, 2017; Barnes 2016; Elzinga 2018; Goetze 2018; Dembroff 2020; Hänel 2020; Jenkins 2020; Federico 2021; Falbo 2022). I am interested in a phenomenon that makes a non-lacuna-based species of hermeneutical injustice possible: *hermeneutical bastardization*. I elaborate and defend the following definition:

A resource or concept is hermeneutically bastardized when it is displaced from a set of counter-epistemological hermeneutical resources. Subsequently located in a

dominant set of hermeneutical resources, the concept no longer has the original content or force that it held intra-communally. Instead, the meaning of the resource or concept is “re-written” and is poorly operationalized within larger social discourses through this process of decontextualization.

This decontextualization *bastardizes* hermeneutical resources by severing the concept from its original meaning and significance. In this paper I understand “hermeneutical resources” to mean concepts—including stereotypes, images, associations, narratives, and heuristics—that enable both *knowledge acquisition* and *knowledge transmission* (McKinnon 2016, 441; Podosky 2019, 145).¹ The poor redefinition of resources causes harm to members of hermeneutically marginalized groups because of the influence exerted by what Collins (2000) terms *controlling images*. Controlling images are potent stereotypes or misrepresentations that exert cultural influence by prescribing behaviors for hermeneutically marginalized groups. These images provide the basis for poor conceptualizations of hermeneutical resources² that are interpreted in different ways by epistemic agents depending on the pool of resources being used.

The next section tracks what I take to be key developments in the literature on hermeneutical injustice. I highlight the ways in which hermeneutical injustice literature has focused on lacunae in the pool of shared hermeneutical resources. I therefore shift my focus to Falbo’s (2022) critique of this emphasis on lacunae. My definition of hermeneutical bastardization depends on Falbo’s claim that species of hermeneutical injustice exist that do not depend on a lacuna *per se*, but instead are caused by *poor conceptual aptness and adequacy*.

Next I focus on the capacity of *representations* (both cognitive and in the media) to exert influence over the ways in which epistemic agents parse the social world. This includes the way in which a dominant knower characterizes (and marginalizes) an individual on the basis of their group identity, using these hermeneutical resources to impact the constitution of selfhood experienced by an epistemic agent within the group being represented. I draw on de Lauretis (1984, 1989) and Collins (2000) to substantiate the notion of productive images and to argue against Fricker’s view that this process is lacuna-based. I subsequently identify and reconstruct a binary pair of images for transgender women that twist sex positivity and enjoyment of sex into *an erotic core* that makes all transgender women into a sexual resource of one type or another (submissive or active).

After this I present the idea of hermeneutical bastardization and cash it out in terms of decontextualization and poor concept operationalization. Here I return to definitions of “hermeneutical resources” and underscore the existence of resources that can *aid* understanding and those that can *hinder* it. Considering Dotson’s (2012) critique of a *single* shared pool of resources and Medina’s (2013) argument concerning epistemic vices I establish that hermeneutical resources can be *pernicious*. I then describe how decontextualization of hermeneutical resources can take place from a marginalized pool to a dominant pool of hermeneutical resources. Drawing on Falbo (2022) I argue that hermeneutical bastardization is a parallel concept to that of *hermeneutical clashes*—the difference depending on whether conceptual decontextualization or conceptual distortion occur.

Then I defend the definition of bastardization as depending on decontextualization by examining the way that the same twin images can be interpreted in diverse ways by epistemic agents depending on their pool of resources. Highlighting that a subset of patriarchal epistemic agents interprets trans women as fetishized sexual resources whilst

some radical feminist epistemic agents interpret trans women as a humiliating performance or sexual threat demonstrates that the concept <Transgender woman> does not contain any of the intra-communal meanings developed by the trans community but has been removed from its original conceptual context.

I conclude that *hermeneutical bastardization* can illuminate how hermeneutically marginalized groups can be silenced whilst their concepts, or at least, their terms, are being utilized in sets of dominant hermeneutical resources. This type of hermeneutical injustice does not depend on a lacuna in our set of resources, and instead *depends* on the uptake of a concept and its decontextualization. This results in controlling images offering the closest approximation to conceptualizations of certain identities for privileged epistemic agents that are taken to *adequately represent* the groups for which they stand.

Hermeneutical injustice and hermeneutical resources

The study of hermeneutical injustice, amongst other forms of epistemic injustice, has become a key area of interest in social epistemology following Fricker's (2007) articulation of the concept. On the Frickerian model, hermeneutical injustice describes the structurally differentiated capacities of various social groups to define, conceive, and communicate their experiences in the social world (Fricker 2007, 148). Illustrated through the early feminist movements of the 1970s, Fricker highlights the way in which *women's experiences*³ required consciousness-raising sessions to shed light on the "scantly understood, barely articulate experiences" (148) that were unrecognizable as a shared experience for women unable to attend these meetings (Medina 2017, 45–46).

Redstockings co-founder Kathie Sarachild, the primary proponent of consciousness-raising (C-R) as a political (and epistemic) strategy, defined the idea of C-R as endeavoring to "awaken people ... [to] thinking and acting" in ways that would widen "the common pool of knowledge" (Sarachild 1978, 147, 148; see also Echols 2019, 84). C-R facilitates the naming and conceptualization of *hermeneutical resources* because of its role in contributing to the pool of concepts available for members of a marginalized community (Fricker and Jenkins 2017, 268). That is, C-R offered a means by which individuals (in this instance, *certain types* of women)⁴ are able to make their experiences intelligible to themselves and to others because it facilitates the production of concepts that fill lacunae in a full understanding of our "distinctive social experiences" (Fricker 2007, 1, 6, 150–51).

On the model presented by Fricker in *Epistemic injustice* (2007), the two types of injustices, testimonial and hermeneutic, are separate and rarely come into contact with each other (2007, 159). However, the two forms of injustice antagonize each other, coalescing to enhance the effects of each other—hermeneutical injustices can depend on testimonial insensitivities, and testimonial injustices can be enabled by the unintelligibility that appears to befall members of hermeneutically marginalized groups (Medina 2012, 206). This leads Medina (2017, 42)—in what is to my mind a critical moment in the literature—to challenge the notion that individuals cannot be culpable for hermeneutical injustices (Fricker 2007, 7, 168).

For Fricker, lacunae in the set of shared hermeneutical resources are not caused by an agent's actions, but by certain structural failures. But if hermeneutical and testimonial injustices are not as distinct as Fricker first proposed, then the line between culpability and inculpability must also narrow. Paying attention to the role of *social structures*

and the *complicity* of agents in the direct or indirect maintenance of these injustices is a crucial means to ensure that “[individuals] cannot (at least not always and completely) be allowed to hide behind the shortcomings of their culture” (Medina 2017, 42). Moreover, the lacuna underscored by Fricker is said to be a gap in *the* shared set of concepts and resources. Both Medina (2012, 2013, 2017) and Dotson (2012) rightly challenge this assumption and open up theoretical ground from which to take analyses of the phenomenon of hermeneutical injustice further.

Dotson (2012) challenges the idea that there exists one particular set of shared concepts and favors instead a view of multiple hermeneutical domains that might compete with or affirm one another and may have more or less suitable resources available in each. Medina emphasizes the *polyphonic* nature of communicative contexts and the difficulty with purporting to know which voices use which concepts, especially in cases of marginalized communities in which terminology and concepts may still be in their embryonic state (Medina 2012, 209). These approaches reverse what might otherwise be assumed;⁵ thus, naming and conceptualizing a hermeneutical resource is not merely the solution to an injustice, but the beginning of a complex process of diagnosing the factors and dynamics that made the structural failing(s) possible. The existence of multiple sets of hermeneutical resources, in conjunction with the polyphonic character of communicative contexts, therefore, induces a critical turn in thinking through hermeneutical injustice bringing us closer to “calibrat[ing] [the] complex issues of shared and collective responsibility” (Medina 2017, 43).

Though the initial model presented by Fricker points to the existences of *lacunae* in certain epistemic and hermeneutic contexts, the emphasis on the lacuna itself can preclude the possibility of individuals feeling and accepting *complicity* in the manufacture of these gaps in understanding and interpretative failings. As Medina (2012, 207) demonstrates, we ought to be sensitive to these lacunae as both victims of them and perpetrators of them. That is, we ought to participate in our own consciousness-raising practices that facilitate the production of intra-communal concepts and practices, whilst simultaneously being sensitive to the lacunae faced by other social groups. Fricker highlights virtuous listening as a key strategy in the march towards hermeneutical justice, but Medina (2017, 48) describes *hermeneutic resistance* as a practice in which we not only exercise the kinds of sensitivity and acute awareness towards the speaker’s extraordinary structural barriers to communication, but in which we seek to “[exert] epistemic friction.” Hearers, therefore, ought to actively subvert and abandon the dominant modes of interpretation and knowing to make epistemic and conceptual space for *seemingly* unintelligible voices and meanings. Not only *virtuously listening*, then, but *actively seeking to understand by refusing the prevailing dominant epistemology and recognizing hermeneutical dissonance* is crucial to hermeneutical justice (Medina 2012, 209). It is clear, then, that identifying lacunae in one’s set of hermeneutical resources and actively seeking to subvert or close these gaps in knowledge is an imperative for hermeneutical justice to occur, and no doubt a valuable contribution to the literature on epistemic injustice.

Hermeneutical resistance of this type can be understood as a critical practice with which people outside of a hermeneutically marginalized group can combat *willful hermeneutical ignorance* (Pohlhaus 2012). Here, members of groups with intra-communally intelligible meanings and concepts are misunderstood not because the “epistemic agent[s] [are] not believed or cannot make sense of [their] world” but because dominant knowers continue to parse the world according to a narrow epistemic framework (Pohlhaus 2012, 716). That is, in effect, the dominant knowers suffer their

own hermeneutic lacuna through their own resistance to perceiving the world and its various configurations. Whilst this survey of the literature has identified important and valuable turns in the development of theorizing hermeneutic injustice, its structure, and possible means of resistance, the discourse assumes or depends on the presence of a *lacuna* in a set of resources. This is most explicit in Fricker (2007, 161), in which the conceptual gap is compared to a hole in the ozone layer under which protection from discrimination is most thin, if not absent. These lacunae-centered analyses are valuable, of course, but in my view, they are not exhaustive of the varieties of hermeneutical injustice.

Falbo (2022, 346–47), like myself, contends that lacunae-centered analyses are insufficient since they preclude theorizing about hermeneutical injustices *not* caused by these hermeneutical gaps. The critical issue is that a majority of theories of hermeneutical injustice do not consider the *productive* power of these resources to socially legislate oppressive attitudes and arrangements that restrict access to “practices of influential meaning-making” for marginalized groups (Falbo 2022, 347). By drawing together Collins’ (1986, 2000) elucidation of *controlling images* as perniciously productive representations that function as bases for racist knowers’ knowledge, and Jenkins’ (2020, 191) argument that *ontic injustice* befalls individuals if they are constructed as belonging to a social kind bearing “constraints and enablements,” Falbo (2022) underscores the power concepts have to not only interpret, but to actively form and shape, social reality. It is central to my argument in this paper that the *presence* of concepts can be just as *productive* of hermeneutical injustice as their *absence*.

We must therefore begin the present analysis from understanding the social world as parsed epistemically, whether justly or unjustly, through hermeneutical resources. Hermeneutical resources that socially sanction agential and structural racism, sexism, classism, and queerphobia are still hermeneutical resources; they are, however, pernicious or harmful. That is, hermeneutical resources are not exclusively inert conduits that aid intelligibility, but crucially these resources “serve crucial *productive* functions as well” (Falbo 2022, 348, emphasis in original). Thus, echoing Medina’s contribution above, the presence of a named resource is insufficient to ensure hermeneutical justice; the resources need to be of the right *type*, carefully examined and critiqued against the historical contexts of our social world to prevent “a failure of conceptual application or conceptual aptness” (Falbo 2022, 352, 354).

My definition of hermeneutical bastardization depends on the existence of species of hermeneutical injustice that are not caused by a gap in our hermeneutical resources, and therefore I seek to frame hermeneutical bastardization as a parallel phenomenon to that of “hermeneutical clash” (Falbo 2022). In the next section, I examine perniciously productive hermeneutical resources, drawing on de Lauretis’ discussion of the distance between real women and the representation Woman and Collins’ discussion of the logic of controlling images. This subsequently grounds my articulation of two pernicious resources that are affixed to the term “trans woman”.

Representations, resources, and sexualization

The previous section demonstrated the tendency to presuppose hermeneutical injustice as proceeding from a gap in hermeneutical resources, and to indicate the need for conceptualizing forms of hermeneutical injustice that do not depend on lacunae. In this section, I focus on the ways in which hermeneutical resources are *productive*; that is, how some concepts have the capacity to influence an agent’s perception of the social

world, and hence to influence the material realities of members of marginalized groups. Specifically, this section concerns *perniciously* productive images and representations.

Though the deceiver/pretender binary (Bettcher 2007; McKinnon 2014; Serano 2016) is a concise analysis of some perceptions of trans women, I instead develop a pair of twin images that interpret trans women through a solely sexual lens⁶ such that we become either the good submissive or the carnal (wo)man-eater. This is to underscore that controlling images twist a facet of a group's identity and centralize it as emblematic of the entirety of a group's character. This occurs with transgender women in the case of sexuality. Though we can celebrate our sexuality and be proudly sex positive, certain epistemic groups centralize our sexuality, transforming trans women into purely erotic beings. Controlling images produce a concept of <Transgender women> as sexual creatures through-and-through.

Representations and controlling images

To situate the proceeding discussion, it is necessary to first detail the kind of case that prompts the charge of disingenuity if an appeal to a lacuna is made. The fetishization of transgender women, in which real existing trans women are interpreted and subjectively constructed by dominant epistemic agents as purely erotic creatures, ought to be considered a case of hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice produces the construction of an individual as something which they are not, according to the broader perception of the group that they are (perceived to be) a part of (Fricker 2007, 168). Transgender people, especially transgender women (Bettcher 2007, 52), are the object of pornographic fantasy or perceived as transitioning from (male) subject to (female) object (Serano 2016, 256, 258, 261), as will be developed later. To suggest that the common trans feminine experience of total fetishization results from a gap in hermeneutical resources seems implausible *precisely* because the process of fetishization is dependent on *an* understanding of the term "trans woman." It is, however, a pernicious resource.

The idea that hermeneutical resources (such as images and representations) can be productive (for better or for worse) is by no means new. Nonetheless, the emphasis on lacunae, as Falbo (2022) established, foreclosed certain ground for theoretical engagement. The works of Teresa de Lauretis (1984; 1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), however, offer grounds from which to theorize the type of hermeneutical injustice that obtains during these cases.

First, we can consider pernicious hermeneutical resources to be characterized by their "removal" from social reality. This *slippage* (de Lauretis 1984, 5) between that which is being represented and the representation characterizes the tension between feminism and patriarchy (1989, 10). Thus, on the one hand, there exist flesh and blood *women*, and on the other, a representation—*Woman* (de Lauretis 1984, 5–6; 1989, 10). This representation is a pernicious hermeneutical resource drawn from numerous Western patriarchal discourses (medical, legal, familial, and political, for example) that sustains hermeneutical injustices against real existing women across various social and political axes (race, class, and sexuality, for example).⁷

Whilst it would be correct to claim that this injustice is hermeneutical⁸ it would also appear contradictory to suggest patriarchal epistemic agents lacked a hermeneutical resource (no matter how narrow or pernicious) of "women" through the representation of "Woman." Their set of hermeneutical resources does not have a gap *per se*, they have the term "woman" and have a set of associated meanings that comprise their understanding of that term. However, this produces a patriarchal conceptualization of

women as Woman (adhering to de Lauretis' terminology) that is at odds with the knowledges and self-understandings that feminists have developed.⁹

Second, Collins' (2000) theorization of *controlling images* is a primary example of the productive power that concepts have over individuals and their parsing of the social world. Members of a marginalized social group engaged in forms of epistemic resistance to dominant perspectives and expectations often become negatively stereotyped through dissemination of images that construct or shape (dominant) public opinion. This is the description of the punishment that Black women have been subjected to in response to "their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality" (Collins 2000, 69). In this characterization of the *reason* for the development of controlling images, it is not that a hermeneutical gap exists in their *own* understanding, but that white society rejects the possibility that Black women can be understood. That is, it is a case of *willful hermeneutical ignorance* (Pohlhaus 2012) grounded in the fact that a majority of people who *benefit structurally* from the racism, misogyny, and the poverty therein do not want to confront their complicity in this unjust system; therefore it is "simpler" to maintain ignorance and uphold perspectives they "hear ... from one of their own" that alleviate the sense of collective responsibility they may otherwise feel (Collins 2000, 70).

The willful hermeneutical ignorance brought against Black women denies this group the opportunity for *reciprocal communication* because of the rejection of epistemic openness. Consequently, Black women are precluded from having their self-made meanings recognized and understood. This leaves functional intra-communal hermeneutical resources fairly impotent outside of certain epistemic contexts owing to the structural relations of patriarchal racism (Falbo 2022, 347, 347 n. 8). Whilst there is not a lacuna *per se*, there is an (*unjust and vicious*) imperative for structurally privileged epistemic agents to not only maintain their willful hermeneutic ignorance, but to make this ignorance to injustice "*believable*."¹⁰ This agential/structural imperative for believability underpins the manipulation of images of Black women to make racial, gendered, and economic oppression "appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable" (Collins 2000, 69). The power of controlling images—productive resources as they are—is that they reduce living, breathing subjects to mere objects, capitalizing on a facet of an individual or group's experiences and identity to protract and polarize particular aspects of them (Collins 2000, 70–71).

Thus far, I have described the way that controlling images or representations function as pernicious hermeneutical resources that affix alternative meanings to a term, resulting in the interpretation of a flesh and blood individual as a mere representation or simulacrum which in turn significantly shapes that individual's material reality. This might appear to track Fricker's (2007, 163–64, 167–68) analysis of the hermeneutical harm suffered by Edmund White, who authored an autobiographical novel on his experience as a young gay man in mid-century America.

Representations and associations of homosexuality ("The Homosexual") generated for White a sense of dissonance with his status as a flesh and blood gay man. He therefore faced his reconstitution in the eyes of others as diseased or as "an unnatural vampire-like creature" (Fricker 2007, 166) in much the same way that trans women are constructed from the perspective of dominant patriarchal knowers as inherently sexual. If this is true, however, we face a problem: Fricker's account of White's entanglement with "various constructions of The Homosexual" is *lacuna-based* (2007, 164, 167). The reason for this, it seems, is that the harm derives from White's experiences of isolation. The agent here is presented as suffering from an inability to connect

and communicate with others. Without a network capable of articulating as their common ground this experience of dissonance between their flesh and blood realities and a series of pernicious associations that construct them as sinners or unnatural, the agent experiences a lacuna in their set of resources. This, Fricker suggests, is overcome through consciousness-raising.

There are, however, two issues with taking this type of injustice to be dependent on a gap in a set of resources. First, the agent to whom harm is done is described as experiencing themselves as inarticulable because of isolation from others who have formulated this dissonance as a *common* experience. This is certainly the case for White, given his existence in a turbulent era for gay communities, whose embryonic formation in the early twentieth century only gained traction during the post-war era (Meyerowitz 2002, 2, 8, 22). Thus, these alternative identities were communicated through codes imperceptible by those outside the closed set of hermeneutical resources of the time. However, the terrain has arguably shifted substantially. The era of quasi-instantaneous communication and information transfer marks a different epistemic era than that of mid-century America. The emergence and increasing accessibility to “asynchronous” consciousness-raising material (Gleeson and Turner 2019, 56) leads us to the second issue: it supposes that the confrontation of marginalized knowers with representations that induce slippage or dissonance will cease once consciousness has been raised. However, this is not the case.

This is evident when we consider the transgender (trans*) community. Despite the increased visibility of the trans* community in the past decade or so, the continued association between transness as eroticism (i.e., the production of *The Transsexual* as an inherently sexualised being) has only become stronger. Recall that the naming or conceptualization of a hermeneutical resource to fill a lacuna does not mark the end of a process, but the beginning of a process of resisting hermeneutical harms. I think, in light of this discussion, that the function of representations cannot be dependent on a gap in shared resources *precisely* because those who perpetuate these harms do so on the basis of a *hermeneutical resource*; albeit one that has retained the term in question (e.g. “trans woman”) and affixed an alternative set of meanings to it, derived and synthesized from the public imagination and circulating representations of media. Thus, in the case of trans fetishization, both parties know that at least one individual is a trans woman, the term, however, denotes two different hermeneutical resources from different epistemic domains sharing one term.

The submissive surprise and carnal (wo)man-eater

The production and application of twin images that oppose one another to members of a marginalized group, is a key method in (i) managing widespread (dominant) attitudes towards members of the group, (ii) managing behavior and encouraging internalized self-policing on the part of members of that group, and (iii) provides “conceptual ammunition” in the form of poor hermeneutical resources for use by (competing) dominant social groups.

This analysis of the role of controlling twin images is applicable to the contemporary debates surrounding transgender people. My discussion focuses on trans women for two reasons. First, I am aware that trans women have been criticized for speaking for the whole community whilst failing to accurately portray trans masculine and non-binary experiences. I therefore leave open the analysis of similar controlling images applied to trans men and non-binary people to be analyzed in their own voices drawing

on their unique experiences. Second, as a trans woman I am more familiar with the representations that trans women are stretched between and, therefore, I am better placed to theorize trans feminine experience rather than other trans* identities or of trans* experience *in general*.

Although there has been a significant amount of literature written about trans feminine stereotypes (Bettcher 2007; McKinnon 2014; Serano 2016; Howansky et al. 2021; Anzani et al. 2021; Serano 2021), I am interested in constructing a set of inverse twin images that parallel a common set of images found in the literature. Though the deceiver/pretender dichotomy is an important departure point, I argue that the submissive/(wo)man-eater dichotomy is different in important ways. Just as the images of the mammy and the matriarch reduced Black women's identities to deferent motherhood (performed to different degrees of "success") (Collins 2000, 71–75), the transfeminine twin images reduce our identities to sexual beings, with our sexuality being performed in two markedly different ways. Owning one's sexuality itself is not a problem but being reduced to a sexualized caricature based on concepts circulating dominant pools of shared concepts certainly is.

The two media archetypes that shape public response to and opinion of transgender women are the *deceptive transsexual* and the *pathetic transsexual* (Serano 2016, 36). Importantly, the distinction tracks the perception of trans women as being either visibly or invisibly transgender, resulting in their classification as either a *make-believer* or an *evil-deceiver* (Bettcher 2007, 48–49). The role of passing, or of being (in)visibly transgender, is foundational in this distinction (Bettcher 2007; McKinnon 2014; Serano 2016). The evil deceiver who passes exceptionally well as a cisgender woman is a *threat* precisely because of unknowability of her status as "really a boy" (Bettcher 2007, 48). The image declares that passing trans women transitioned to "fool innocent straight guys" rather than for their own identity affirmation and personal happiness (Serano 2016, 36). It is assumed—because of the deceiver archetype—that trans women undertake vaginoplasty to facilitate penetrative heterosexual sex (Anzani et al. 2021, 899).

The deceiver trope is a productive image because it misrepresents the motivations for trans women to transition, underscored by a perceived disparity between gendered image and sexed reality that reduces trans women to predatory individuals "still full of 'male' energy" (Bettcher 2007, 48; McKinnon 2014, 858). In contrast to the predatory image of the deceiver, the *pathetic transsexual* garners sympathy because of her poor make-up skills, masculine mannerisms, inability to walk in heels, and poor outfit choices. The pathetic transsexual portrays trans women as an *object* of sympathy—the pitiful thing (McKinnon 2014, 858; Serano 2016, 37–39). Inspiring fear and humor/pity respectively, the deceiver/pathetic images operate to vilify opposition to the binary sex-gender system; challenges to it are either for nefarious "male" gain or are disarmed by reducing trans feminine lives to a punchline—as Serano (2016, 40) observes, both "validate the popular assumption that Trans women are truly men."

Though unquestionably valid analyses of popular archetypes, the focus is on the double-bind caused by the need to pass; many cisgender people are trained through these representations to be aware of the wolf in sheep's clothing and to actively seek to perceive "clockable offences." My interest in controlling images as they apply to hermeneutical resources is not on passing, but on the pernicious perception of transgender women as inherently sexual beings. Where the make-believer/evil deceiver dichotomy is concerned with passability and one's acclimation to a perceived ideal of femininity *generally*, I am interested in the *sexualization* of transgender women and the expected practices we are expected to desire or enjoy. I argue that the deceiver/pretender and my

submissive/(wo)man-eater dichotomies may therefore be considered *inverse* of each other, foregrounding passing and sexuality respectively. *It is the sexuality, or perceived sexuality, of transgender women that forms the basis of my elaboration of hermeneutical bastardization.*

The submissive surprise

The controlling image I term the *submissive surprise* blends aspects of the deceiver and the make-believer—as does the twin image, *carnal (wo)man-eater*. Bettcher (2007, 52) discusses the “whorification” of transgender women which, she suggests, is partly dependent on trans women being “uncloseted” and a cisgender man’s desire to “look past” the “pretense” in the service of his sexual fantasy. Similarly, Anzani et al. (2021, 904) include testimony from a bisexual trans woman who describes “[b]eing talked to like [she] was a sex toy” and the use of transgender individuals by sexual partners to engage in a “novel sexual experience.”¹¹ Another trans feminine participant recorded that discovery of her trans status encouraged sexual partners to reduce her to a “thing to be fucked, and not in a good way” (Anzani et al. 2021, 906).

Two things ought to be noticed in this discussion: (i) the dehumanization of trans women involves the objectification and control of the individual,¹² the *domination* of their body, and disregard for their subjectivity; and (ii) domination and objectification are not *inherently* negative experiences for trans women, consider the qualification “and not in a good way”—domination can be empowering and enjoyable experiences *under the right circumstances*, for instance, in BDSM contexts (Graham et al. 2016). The power of the submissive surprise image is that it takes (some) trans women’s enjoyment of sex and expression of sexuality as signaling that *all transgender women are mere sexual resources*. Specifically for this first image, trans women’s sexuality is presented as hyper submissive (Robinson 2023, 364–65), performing the role of the “good woman” who lies back and thinks of England, rather than having complex sexual desires or sexual conventions regarding their body and the permitted set of acts.¹³

The image of the submissive surprise, then, renders transgender women as—in more than one way—*open* to sexual encounters from anyone and at any time. As Serano (2016, 256–57) notes, trans women receive differential treatment depending on whether they are perceived as cisgender or transgender women from intrusive and graphic stories about a man’s previous sexual experiences, or their sexual fantasies about trans women. These advances come in the form of strangers at social situations or from anonymous emailers online who, when they receive rejection and criticism from Serano, respond with accusations that she was “misleading” or had been “asking for it”. Rejecting the “exotic” or “rare” explanation as insufficient, Serano (2016, 258–59) argues that transition from male to female is read as an open invitation for sexual objectification, use, and degradation because, from the lessons media teaches young men and women, *what else are women for?* Thus, the idea that someone who had been perceived as a man transitions is translated by patriarchy into the message “first come, first served.” Passing barely enters this construction of trans women as “out to be objectified” and forced into submission (perceived as “woman’s” role) given Serano’s (2016, 253) acknowledgment that she experienced sexualization and objectification when she “was still dressing in boy-mode ... to hide [her] developing breasts.”

The submissive surprise produces an expectation that transgender women *must* be submissive, not least because patriarchal conditioning leads many men and women to the conclusion that an essential part of femininity is meekness and sexual politeness. The basis for the image of trans women as inherently submissive, or that a condition of

their transition being “successful” is an acceptance of this sexualized submissiveness, lies in the patriarchal perception of *what woman is* (Serano 2016, 328–29). Interestingly, whilst women’s rights movements and feminist activism have been partly successful in combating widespread misogyny and undesired sexual advances (partly through, it should be added, epistemic and hermeneutical labor), there still remains the view that *there at least some types of women* (among them, transgender women) *that are wholly sexual beings and exist for this purpose*.¹⁴ This repeated exposure to controlling images—analogue to the repeated exposure to hermeneutical harms discussed by Fricker and Medina—can result in acquiescence to the “role” that has been foisted upon individuals in this group:

You start settling for being a waste bin object of desire for a night. Eventually, you realize you may as well get paid for your troubles. I’m starting to see why all my sisters are in the sex trade now ... (Anzani et al. 2021, 903)¹⁵

It is not that trans women lack the hermeneutical resources from which to understand their identities and the influence of cisheterosexual patriarchy on our movements and practices in the world that puts us in these situations. It is not, therefore, that there exists a hermeneutical gap that prevents transgender women from rejecting the view of ourselves and our bodies as open sexual resources, but the continual pressure exerted by productive concepts governing our livability makes the epistemic and hermeneutical climate intensely difficult to navigate because of willful hermeneutical ignorance. Cisgender people¹⁶ who subscribe to the image of trans women as the submissive surprise are more comfortable with the idea of a “good woman” than with the radical challenge transness more broadly represents to the status quo of gender relations.

The carnal (wo)man-eater

The accompanying sexualizing twin image to the submissive surprise—the good transsexual—is the carnal (wo)man-eater, representing the bad transsexual.¹⁷ Recall that the submissive/(wo)man-eater dichotomy is not premised on the distinctions of passing/non-passing, fear/pity, or acceptance/rejection as the deceiver/pretender dichotomy is. This is because these images are not uniformly *feared* or *desired* by cisgender men and woman but inspire both in different subjects.

So, what does the image of the carnal (wo)man-eater represent? Similar to the deceiver, she is sexually powerful (McKinnon 2014, 858; Serano 2016, 37), however this is not *solely* because of her imagined appearance but because of her conditioning as a man under patriarchy. Tinged with the themes of cultural feminism, the (wo)man-eater represents the inverse of Serano’s (2016, 197) account of the formation of her submissive streak. Barraged with media depictions of women, heterosexuality, and “the not-so-subliminal messages” that portray womanhood as lesser, inferior, open to domination, the image of the carnal (wo)man-eater carries the imperatives of patriarchy within her. Whilst the submissive surprise internalizes her role as a woman as the *target* of patriarchal power and sexual domination, the (wo)man-eater does not distance herself from these lessons—there is no “submissive streak ... as deep as the Grand Canyon” but the mark of masculine socialization (2016, 273).¹⁸

Paralleling, then, the pathetic transsexual’s inability to unlearn masculine behaviors, the carnal (wo)man-eater is represented—at her core—as embodying a masculine sexuality, similar to Henrietta, a pathetic transsexual character in *The Adventures of Sebastian Cole*, 1998) who “overtly [ogles] a waitress” (Serano 2016, 39). Other

examples might be the act of “topping” (engaging in penetrative sex with one’s penis) which sits at odds with the standard perception of gendered sexual relations, and the perceived motivations for transition (Anzani et al. 2021; Serano 2016). Note, however, that the carnal (wo)man-eater and her (perceived) masculine sexuality does not entail the rejection of her identity as a woman or reify a perception of her *as a man*. Rather, the reason the (wo)man-eater is the *bad transsexual* is her failure to conform to gendered expectations—not necessarily through appearances as in Bettcher (2007), McKinnon (2014), and Serano (2016)—but through her embodiment, personality, and, centrally in these images, her *sexuality*.

Thus, the construction of this image, I argue, is a mutation of the “transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist”, wherein the “problem” with trans women is their claim to a feminine identity without feminine gender expression.¹⁹ These trans women reject stereotypical notions of femininity, argues Raymond, but fail to shed “its obverse side—stereotypical masculinity” (Raymond 2006, 133); through reference to Pat Hynes, Raymond notes that bodily behaviors and mannerisms reflect ideas of patriarchal possession and Othering of lesbians that is not present in cases of strong or butch lesbians. The specific changes I perceive from the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist to the (wo)man-eater are (i) the potential acceptance of their feminine identification, and (ii) the reflection of this potential acceptance in ways the image is talked about. For example, whilst Raymond (1994, 2006) refers to trans women using explicitly masculine pronouns, Serano (2016, 51) observes that, despite being unconventionally feminine, she has “never been accused of expressing ‘male energy’” and is described instead as being “butch” or a “tomboy.”

The image of the carnal (wo)man-eater serves, in many ways, as a message to transgender women that if they do not take up the position of the submissive surprise then they are at fault for not embodying the type of feminine sexuality patriarchy expects of women. The carnal (wo)man-eater—similarly to the image of the matriarch—functions as a “normative yardstick” (Collins 2000) with which trans women can be trained, incentivized, or beaten into accepting its inverse image. The production of these twin images that control and police trans feminine behaviors and personalities take as their paradigmatic site of discipline one’s *sexuality*, similarly to how the images of the mammy and the matriarch center on the role of *motherhood*. These *facets* of an individual or group’s identities are protracted into central and overpowering affects that we might not want to reject wholesale, but equally might not want to make central in our identity construction. That is, wanting to be a mother and enjoying looking after children is *not an inherently dangerous or oppressive concept*, and neither is experiencing sexual desire, craving submission or dominance; these become areas of concern when members of certain social groups are *expected* to be deferent carers or erotic resources.

Hermeneutical bastardization

Willful ignorance, twin-images, and conceptual aptness

Let us review what has been argued so far. First, I surveyed some of the work on hermeneutical injustice, focusing on Medina’s (2012, 2017) responses to Fricker (2007). I outlined Falbo’s (2022) criticism of lacunae-based analyses and stated that my elaboration of “hermeneutical bastardization” relies on the existence of hermeneutical injustices that do not depend on a gap in our hermeneutical resources. Second, through de Lauretis (1984, 1989) and Collins (2000) I articulated the ways in which images and representations function as hermeneutical resources that produce flesh and blood

individuals as simulacra, resulting in material harms to marginalized groups. I argued against Fricker's (2007) analysis of subjection to controlling images as deriving from a lacuna in the shared pool of hermeneutical resources. The problem with such an analysis is that members of marginalized groups continue to be constituted according to pervasive pernicious representations that depend on the identification of that individual as being relevantly interpellated by a concept that has been decontextualized and poorly operationalized.

I then reconstructed a pair of controlling images of transgender women. Just as Collins' (2000) discussion of the mammy and the matriarch images centralize motherly care and deference as integral to Black women's identities in oppositionally valued ways, the images of the submissive and the (wo)man-eater centralize sex and eroticism—these centralizations constitute a form of discipline or policing through reducing members of these groups to *mere facets* of their identity, simplifying and de-complexifying the lives and experiences of these people. This has two purposes: First, I offer the trans feminine controlling images as a point of analysis to highlight some of the subversive means of sexualizing transgender women in the public imaginary, and second, I will use the trans feminine images to underscore how and why decontextualization ought to form the basis for an account of *hermeneutical bastardization*.

This section revisits definitions of "hermeneutical resources" and foregrounds the point that *hermeneutical resources will not always be conducive to hermeneutical justice insofar as these resources can be pernicious* (Collins 2000; Dotson 2012). Following Collins (2000, 69) I emphasize that pernicious resources can render injustice against hermeneutically marginalized groups as "natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life." Giving a working definition (or evolving heuristic) to understand hermeneutical resources, I proceed to consider how these resources can become bastardized through reference to Falbo's (2022) notion of hermeneutical clashes, of which I propose hermeneutical bastardization is a parallel process. I argue that facets of a group's identity that might be positively celebrated can be decontextualized and unduly protracted to stand for the totality of a group's identity; this decontextualization both *draws from* and *reinforces* the productive power of pernicious hermeneutical resources, such as controlling images. I will go on to discuss the role of decontextualization and defend it as a central characteristic of this form of hermeneutical injustice.

Revisiting the original definition(s) of "hermeneutical resources"

As discussed at the outset, on the Frickerian model, hermeneutical resources are the collective concepts shared in the public imaginary that allow individuals to make sense of their experiences—they are primarily interpretative insofar as they allow us to parse the world into intelligible concepts and experiences (Fricker 2007, 1, 6; Podosky 2019, 145). Hermeneutical marginalization occurs when social groups experience a deficit of epistemic goods in the credibility economy because patterns of testimonial injustice—caused by structural prejudice or stereotypes—lead to differential distribution of concepts, credibility, and knowledge (Fricker 2007, 30; Dotson 2012, 29–30; Medina 2013, 27–28; McKinnon 2016, 440–41; Fricker and Jenkins 2017, 269–71). Noting that stereotypes in this structural context may not always be negative, nor always incorrect, we can accept that certain stereotypes that aid in correct judgements about the reliability of speakers are—in a sense—good *hermeneutical resources*, whilst those that unjustly deflate the credibility, expectations, or moral qualities we would attribute to members of this group are *bad* (or "biased") *hermeneutical resources* (Fricker 2007, 31; Dotson 2012, 29).²⁰

Whilst the Frickerian model might entail that these bad resources are simply evidence of a *lack of proper hermeneutical resources*, this might require that we consider marginalized groups to be *unable* to make sense of their experience intra-communally (Podosky 2019, 145). This inability is often framed as a lacuna that prevents dominant knowers making sense of marginalized groups *because the group is unable to make itself intelligible* (Fricker 2007, 162; McKinnon 2016, 441; Falbo 2022, 345). However, I argue following Medina (2013, 2017), Podosky (2019), and Falbo (2022), that poor, inadequate, or pernicious (PIP) hermeneutical resources exist and—in some contexts—hermeneutical injustice results from the *presence* of these PIP hermeneutical resources rather than the *absence* of hermeneutical resources in the collective public imaginary.

Identifying three primary epistemic vices that befall the structurally privileged epistemic agents—epistemic arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness—Medina (2013, 31, 32–33, 34–35) eloquently articulates the manner in which these three *epistemic vices* contribute to the sedimentation of epistemic attitudes that prevent the possibility for the continual revision of hermeneutical resources and vigilance against *PIP hermeneutical resources*. Though Medina does not refer to such hermeneutical resources, his focus is on two principles, *acknowledgment and engagement* and *epistemic equilibrium*. I am interested in the latter which seeks to determine the relevant factors in establishing a level playing field for cognitive forces—or the exertion of one epistemic standpoint over others (Medina 2013, 50). An acknowledgment and engagement with the influences and factors that contribute to privileged epistemic agents becoming arrogant, lazy, and closed-minded enable us to challenge these epistemic tendencies or vices with the aim of establishing better epistemic practice through encouraging critical reflection, tackling prejudice and bias, praising the challenging of one's own beliefs, and paying attention to cognitive gaps (Medina 2013, 50).

The analysis of the epistemic vices of epistemic agents and their influencing, and being influenced by, the hermeneutical resources available is present in Haslanger's (2015) description of *schemas* as the shared framework of reference that allows epistemic agents to navigate, conceptually, the world and to *coordinate* our actions (Podosky 2019, 145). Shaping how we understand behavior and emotion *collectively*, hermeneutical resources *produce* a common ground for social life. Without the epistemic virtues of humility, diligence, and open-mindedness deployed in the service of epistemic resistance, the meanings produced by our hermeneutical resources might misfire because they fail to adequately operationalize the concept being interrogated (Falbo 2022, 348).

That is, though we might *have* a concept attached to the term “transgender woman” (and thus, no hermeneutical gap where the concept should be), the meaning applied to the term (i.e., the concept) misfires because “[h]ermeneutical resources are not introduced in a vacuum” and therefore we need to be critically aware of the history of related concepts or practices (Falbo 2022, 348). For instance, the vilification and criminality of cross-dressing during the twentieth century and the continued association between gender-crossing with sex and violence circulates within the (decontextualized) concept of <Transgender woman> for arrogant, lazy, or closed-minded epistemic agents. This is not due to a *lack of resources* but because motivated ignorance and structural oppression facilitates the development of epistemic vices for dominant groups of knowers.

From this, we can establish the baseline definition of hermeneutical resources given at the start of this article that functions more as an *evolving heuristic* than it does a *final definition* of the concept of hermeneutical resources. I note this tentatively and with qualification because of the complications Dotson (2012, 25) observes that “when attempting to avoid epistemic oppression, even while drawing attention to epistemic

forms of oppression” one can “inadvertently [perpetrate] epistemic oppression by utilizing a closed conceptual structure.” The reason for providing such a baseline is to better understand what happens to hermeneutical resources when they undergo *bastardization*.

With this in mind, hermeneutical resources are concepts—including stereotypes, images, associations, narratives, and heuristics—that enable both *knowledge acquisition* and *knowledge transmission* (McKinnon 2016, 441; Podosky 2019, 145). It is important to note that knowledge *acquired* is not always (i) an adequate reflection or description of experiences (Falbo 2022, 351–52), (ii) beneficial to resisting hermeneutical injustice (Podosky 2019, 145), (iii) nor *constructed by* the social group the concepts are perceived to “refer” or “belong” to.²¹ The impact on knowledge acquisition results in an impact on knowledge transmission. Therefore, hermeneutical resources can be both *aids* in the resistance to epistemic and hermeneutical injustice but can also *hinder* this project (Dotson 2012, 29). Controlling images of the sort discussed above are PIP hermeneutical resources on this definition.

Hermeneutical resources behaving badly

What happens, however, when useful concepts (<Transgender woman>) that enable members of a social group to explore their identity and experiences in a safe, therapeutic, and positive way become weaponized against that group? That is, what happens when a good (intra-communal) hermeneutical resource is misrepresented by privileged epistemic agents? The guiding question for the elaboration of hermeneutical bastardization is *how do good hermeneutical resources turn bad?*

Contributory injustice (Dotson 2012, 31–32) brings together the ideas of structurally flawed hermeneutical resources and willful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012) to argue that there is a species of hermeneutical injustice fostered by the obfuscation of the existence of multiple sets of shared resources. Contributory injustice occurs, therefore, when knowers willfully ignore the existence of alternative pools of concepts that might contain more apt, and thus less pernicious, hermeneutical resources. I argue that the process of hermeneutical bastardization takes place when an adequate resource is *displaced* from its intra-communal *context* and, through this decontextualizing process, has its linguistic reference (“trans woman”) transplanted into the dominant (or presently dominating) set of hermeneutical resources without its referent(s), that is, its relevant meanings or associated concepts (e.g., a critique of the sex binary, or of hegemonic cis-heterocentric subject positions).

This criticism of the single shared set of resources model makes possible the idea that an adequate hermeneutical concept can be decontextualized and situated in a different set of resources. However, it is pertinent to highlight the difference between *conceptual distortion* (Falbo 2022) and *decontextualization*. Falbo (2022) uses Balkin’s (1990) notion of *nested opposition* and the distinction between conceptual opposition and logical opposition to underscore cases of what she calls *hermeneutical clashes*. A hermeneutical clash occurs when there exists a concept in the prevailing set of hermeneutical resources, and yet structurally privileged epistemic agents are unable to recognize (or are willfully ignorant) of the correct application of the concept. Falbo’s (2022, 349–50) illustration of this clash is *conceptual distortion* produced by the supposed opposition between <golden boy> and <rapist> and the case of Brock Turner²² that led to the fractured ability of legal professionals, friends, and family to apply the concept <rapist> to Turner. The key idea is that *having the concept* does not entail *correct application* of the concept: Turner raped Miller, and yet because of the distorting images that can

accompany the conceptual resource <rapist>, Turner was perceived by *some* epistemic agents not to be a rapist, but instead its perceived opposite, the golden boy.

I propose that hermeneutical bastardization is a type of hermeneutical clash, but whereas the latter entails *conceptual distortion*, the former entails *conceptual decontextualization*. Where conceptual distortion depends on the construction of conceptual oppositions and poorly applied concepts, conceptual decontextualization depends on the displacement of a hermeneutical resource from the intra-communal set of resources, resulting in an inadequate, poorly redefined, and often harmful conceptualization within the currently dominant pool of resources. In both hermeneutical clashes and hermeneutical bastardization, faulty operationalization of a hermeneutical resource occurs but, I argue, for distinct reasons. Hermeneutical clashes are produced by distortion because though the concept is available for use in “the collective stock of hermeneutical resources,” its meaning is still subject to alteration and distortion by controlling images (Falbo 2022, 350–51). Hermeneutical bastardizations are produced by decontextualization because the concept in question is *fairly new* to many different sets of hermeneutical resources, and may not be uniformly possessed nor uniformly understood, and is thus liable to repeated redefinition by agents *removed from the original conceptual context*.

Both types of non-lacunae-based hermeneutical injustice disarm a critical concept, where this disarmament depends in part on cultural associations or controlling images. It is the means of disarming these resources that is different. In both cases, however, pernicious stereotypes help shape and perpetuate ideologically dominant modes of parsing social reality (e.g., cis-patriarchal or androcentric perspectives).

Fear and fetish: an uneasy transgender dialectic

A bastardized hermeneutical resource, then, is a concept that, despite originally facilitating intra-communal intelligibility and understanding, is subsequently decontextualized through its movement from a marginalized community’s set of resources to a new location in a dominating set of resources. I argue that hermeneutical resources of this sort can be instrumental in the *production* and the *maintenance* of twin controlling images. That is, controlling images will be interpreted differently by different epistemic agents owing to the existence of multiple pools of shared concepts; the controlling images circulate the public imaginary but will be received in varying ways. I elucidate this point through discussing the differential interpretations of the submissive surprise and the carnal (wo)man-eater by patriarchal epistemic agents on the one hand, and exclusionary radical feminist epistemic agents on the other. The *potency* of hermeneutical bastardization to reify and strengthen a species of hermeneutical injustice *not* formed by a lacuna lies in the dialectic that occurs between two external epistemic groups and the controlling images. For example, the trans* debate in popular discourse is premised on the discussion of *mere controlling images* (typically of transgender women) than on real existing transgender people. The terms of the debate are set by patriarchal and radical feminist differential interpretations of the twin controlling images—this is made possible through the existence of bastardized resources.

The term “transgender woman” is poorly conceptualized by certain epistemic agents (one group engaging with radical feminist hermeneutical resources, and another engaging with a certain array of patriarchal hermeneutical resources).²³ Though both groups have the *concept*, the *use* of the concept is often *inadequate*. This inadequacy, I have argued, is caused by *hermeneutical bastardization*: the concept <Transgender

woman> has the meanings produced by intra-communal (trans*) resources exorcised because the concept is placed within another set of resources and subsequently decontextualized. Through decontextualization, the term is open to being defined differently by radical feminist or patriarchal subjects. I proposed that part of *hermeneutical bastardization* was this decontextualizing movement of a resource out of one pool of concepts and into another. Why make decontextualization part of this definition? The process of decontextualization makes possible an explanation of how the same set of controlling images can be interpreted as bearing different meanings depending on the set of hermeneutical resources one has access to. In particular, the interpretation of transgender women as a force to be feared on the one hand, and as a resource to be fetishized on the other.

Take those patriarchal agents who understand <Transgender woman> as a concept to be at least partly synonymous with eroticism and sexual practice. This kind of fetishization (similar to that described in Anzani et al. 2021) *derives from* but also helps to *reproduce* the images of the submissive and the (wo)man-eater. The image of the submissive surprise as described above is the transgender woman qua open sexual resource—meek, polite, and receptive, she graciously receives what is being given. The featuring of this kind of trans embodiment in cis-oriented media such as pornography, film, and television promotes the uptake of this concept and its application to real-world trans women as embodying this sexualized caricature. Similarly, the image of the (wo)man-eater—or the trans woman who “knows what she wants”—is the sexually forward woman. Again, sexual in nature, this image is also a feature of cis-oriented media and is represented as the awakening of (cisgender) desire rather than the submissive’s satisfaction of (cisgender) desire. In both images, what is being twisted is the celebration of sex and sexuality such that any sex positivity is interpreted as the *core* of trans experience and the only thing we are good for. The controlling images, when interpreted by certain patriarchal epistemic agents, unduly fetishize trans women and encourage complicity with cisgender sexual desire rather than embracing our own desires and exploring our own relationship with sex and sexuality. Expression of sexuality becomes something that can mark one out as being open to sexual advances or the one who does the sexual advancing and for this set of epistemic agents, either case is understood as something desirable and provocative: *transgender women fulfilling their social function as sexual resource*.

On the other hand, the very same set of images can be interpreted as something *dangerous and threatening*. No longer emblematic of sexuality and hidden or naughty (by cis heterosexual standards) desires, <Transgender woman> comes to be something that ought to be treated with caution when interpreted through a set of exclusionary radical feminist hermeneutical resources. What for some patriarchal subjects is an invitation to explore erotic fantasy (the submissive) is for these radical feminist subjects a concerning caricature of “woman”—the centralization of sex and sexuality in these images is subsequently interpreted as a new instance of patriarchal control or male dominance that seeks to reify the idea of “woman” as necessarily sexually subordinate. The (wo)man-eater represents the more overtly dangerous trans woman through her (supposedly) male sexuality and masculine traits that have not been cast off (such as in Raymond’s description of the constructed lesbian feminist). Interpreted through understandings of male/female relations and gender injustice as being due to the dispositional and cultural differences between men and women, these radical feminist epistemic agents conceptualize <Transgender woman> through the lens of cultural feminism and its (often) essentializing views of gender and sex differences.

Between fear and fetish, then, the concept of <Transgender woman> is suspended in debate between cisgender voices. Whilst there is no lacuna where the concept ought to be, poorly operationalized concepts are present depending on the set of resources utilized in its conceptualization. Crucially, these conceptualizations do not draw from the breadth of intra-communal resources available within the transgender community. Instead, cisgender conceptualizations constitute the terms of the trans* debate: *Is transness just a sex thing? No, it's a malicious force of patriarchy! They can have sex with whoever they want as long as no one gets hurt! But the structural forces of gender make that impossible, woman is more than a sexual object!* The concept is overly sexualized because of the narrow conceptualization that results from hermeneutical bastardization and, consequently, the debate rages without transgender women being included within it. It is the process of decontextualization that makes this silencing and phantom debate possible because of the differential meanings produced by the interpretation of controlling images found in the media and the public imagination.

Hermeneutical bastardization as a species of hermeneutical injustice

This paper proposed a form of hermeneutical injustice that does not require a lacuna in our pool of shared resources. A key aim of the paper was to consider how good hermeneutical resources can go bad when used by privileged epistemic agents. Following Falbo (2022) I explored how hermeneutical concepts *make* meanings, rather than simply offer material for interpretation. I articulated two representations that operate as a binary pair of controlling images following a discussion of de Lauretis' and Collins' accounts of how representations can work to effect oppressive systems of thought and action. I suggested that the fetishization (desire) and demonizing sexualization (fear) of trans women are not connected necessarily to one's passing status but regard the conceptualization of "trans woman" as a term denoting an inherently sexual person or set of practices. Transgender women are considered *essentially* sexual or erotic when the term is decontextualized and reconceptualized outside of the intra-communal pool of resources (i.e., queer epistemologies). When members of a social group are made into *essentially* sexual creatures, such that sexual forthcomingness or sexual depravity is expected as part and parcel of one's identity, the ability these group members have to be well understood and *seen* for who they are (complex individuals) is nullified by simplistic caricatures.

The production of these controlling images is a symptom of *hermeneutical bastardization*. Resulting from a form of willful hermeneutical ignorance, epistemic agents reject or are ignorant of the intra-communal conceptualization of certain terms by hermeneutically marginalized communities, but they *do* acquire the term and a vague conception of its use.²⁴ That is, there is no lacuna in their conceptual pool, but rather the concept fails to operate in an adequate capacity. The example used in this paper has been the term "transgender woman"; it's not that other epistemic groups lack the concept, but that they do not adequately conceptualize it in accordance with the understandings developed by the transgender community.²⁵ The reason terms that undergo this process are *bastardized* is because the reconceptualization attached to them by external dominant groups are *illegitimate* and fail in their original task of maximizing understanding of the experience or identity that the group engineered the concept to refer to. These hermeneutically bastardized resources are *unjust* for at least two reasons. First, the willful hermeneutic ignorance that makes bastardization possible signals certain epistemic vices such as arrogance, laziness, or closed-mindedness; and second, the

poorly redefined concepts can become harmful and further marginalize the community from which the concept was decontextualized. I illustrated this capacity for hermeneutical resources to *swing both ways* through the perception of transgender women as either *sexually available resources* or *subversive oppressive patriarchy* depending on the set of hermeneutical resources that the term is transplanted into, and the controlling images used to redefine the concept.

This analysis of bastardized hermeneutical resources is intended to highlight the ways in which hermeneutically marginalized groups have their identities and understandings debated without their input. Agents from two conflicting dominant epistemic domains—patriarchy and radical feminism—debate the validity and intelligibility of trans feminine caricatures without trans feminine lives entering the conversation. This kind of hermeneutical injustice therefore derives, not from a gap in our collective hermeneutical resources, but from the interaction between dominant sets of resources and the bastardization of intra-communal resources developed by marginalized groups.

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Notes

1 A note on terminology: I refer to “hermeneutical resources” to denote concepts that aid in the parsing of the social world. As such, a hermeneutical resource might be a stereotype, a heuristic, or a “just-so story.” For this reason, at times I use “concept” to mean “hermeneutical resource” for the purposes of readability. If I use “concept” in an alternative sense, this will be marked appropriately.

2 In this paper I focus on <Transgender woman>.

3 I identify here a concern about the alleged univocality of “women’s experiences.”

4 Women’s liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s found themselves embroiled in disputes over race, class, and sexuality. The movements of the period were largely white and middle-class, leading to a myopic conceptualization of “women’s oppression” (Echols 2019, 106–07). The emergence of gay and lesbian movements inspired suspicion and accusations were levelled towards lesbian women that they were retreating from the “good fight” so to speak (2019, 155–56). The success of the Redstockings led to internal criticisms regarding the success of prominent leading members of the group and their motivations for participation (2019, 150, 206).

5 Namely, that by devising and giving conceptual content to a term that the lacuna can be filled and thus that hermeneutical injustice will cease. For example, that by devising “Trans woman” within the contexts of queer activism and communities, a nameless experience will become identifiable and understandable beyond the confines of those who have this experience.

6 Rather than the lens of passability, with which the deceiver/pretender binary is primarily concerned.

7 To illustrate this point, consider the ways in which this totalizing representation is white, middle-class, both virginal and experienced, heterosexual, thin, and so on. De Lauretis’ theorization of The Woman can be understood through Lorde’s (2017, 96) concept of the mythical norm: that which real existing individuals are unlikely to achieve, and yet which structures the social realities in which we move.

8 Insofar as the epistemic agent in question is constructed by another as that which they are not (Fricker 2007, 168).

9 Here we see the insight of Dotson (2012) at work: patriarchal epistemic agents and feminist epistemic agents have differing sets of hermeneutical resources that structure and parse social reality in diverse ways.

10 Through, e.g., ideology, rhetoric, or storytelling, which on this account are hermeneutical resources.

11 Anzani et al. (2021) focused on trans men, trans women, and trans non-binary individuals, not exclusively trans women.

12 Which the study demonstrates is not unique to trans feminine persons.

13 Gender dysphoria can require individuals to have in-depth conversations with their partners about what is and what is not permitted in terms of touching or feeling various body parts.

- 14 Consider Robin Morgan's 1973 address in which she declared that a transgender woman who experiences cat-calling or physical sexual assault would *enjoy* the experience because of the alleged erotic core of transgender practices (Samek 2016).
- 15 Note that there is a big difference between individuals who work in the sex trade because either it is their career, they want to, or because they enjoy it, and those that do it because it is something they have acquiesced to or become resigned to from repeated poor treatment in sexual contexts.
- 16 Anzani et al. (2021) observe that TGNB participants recorded fetishization by both cisgender men and cisgender women.
- 17 "Good" and "bad" here tracks whether the individual is sexually receptive or sexually active and traces conventional sexual expectations of women under patriarchy.
- 18 The relation of the twin images as described here reflect the Blanchardian typology of "homosexual [straight] Transsexuals" and "heterosexual [lesbian] Transsexuals." Blanchard's work on autogynephilia might be considered a precipitating factor in the formation of these twin images. Blanchard's research into transsexuality and its etiology was focused on sexual orientation, practice, and most significantly, sexual arousal. Blanchardian studies into trans feminine persons centers the sexual character of subjects, rather than treating it as only a facet of one's identity or interests. (For more criticism and discussion on Blanchard see Serano 2010, 2021.)
- 19 Which, for Raymond, would also constitute a problem because the femininity of transgender women is a problematic uptake of an oppressive social construct by individuals perceived to be part of the patriarchy.
- 20 Dotson (2012, 29) observes: "The problem of biased hermeneutical resources is discussed often in the work of women of color. For example, Patricia Hill Collins identifies structurally prejudiced assessments of knowledge that work to suppress the knowledge of Black women in the United States."
- 21 See Podosky (2019) for in-depth discussion regarding the complexities of whether conceptual resources are borne by social groups.
- 22 I will not discuss the intricacies of the example in this paper. See Falbo (2022) for an interesting exposition of hermeneutical clashes in this context.
- 23 I am referring to a specific set of radical feminist agents and a specific set of patriarchal agents, however for ease I use "radical feminists" and "patriarchal agents" to talk about these specific groupings.
- 24 E.g., of "a man dressed as a woman," or "a man who thinks he is a woman."
- 25 Which has, of course, drawn on and developed the meaning of the term from the pathological categories of "transvestite" and "transsexual." I acknowledge this for completeness and leave open the question of whether reclaiming terms is a reversed process of bastardization or another process entirely.

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