

# Marginalized groups develop better beliefs because their testimony is devalued.

network modeling meets standpoint epistemology

What people of color quickly come to see—in a sense, the primary epistemic principle of the racialized social epistemology of which they are the object—is that they are not seen at all.

Charles Mills, “White Ignorance”

## The Base Model

### The Learning Problem

- Individuals are modeled as agents trying to solve a learning problem.
- They are given two options. One is in fact superior, but the agents do not know.

Each round:

- each agent tests the option they think is superior,
- and learns from their experience and the experience of others.

### Asymmetric Trust

- The community has two subgroups, the dominant group and the marginalized group.
- The dominant group **ignores** evidence from the marginalized group and only learns from in-group “neighbors” on the network.
- The marginalized group learns from all their neighbors.

### Three End States

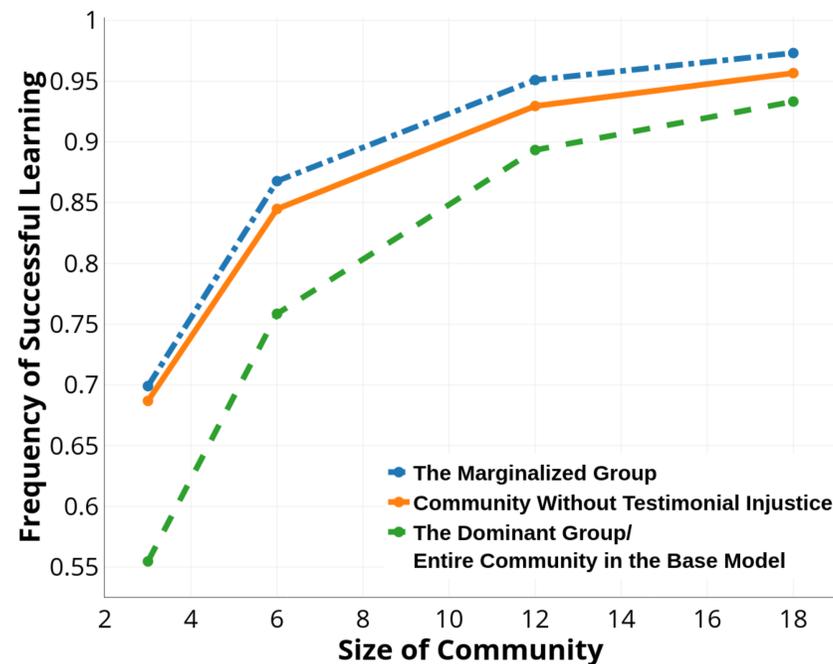
- Community success: everyone thinks the superior option is superior.
- Community failure: everyone thinks the superior option is inferior.
- Polarization: the marginalized group succeeds but the dominant group fails.

I simulate how well this community performs.



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The Paper  
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## Results

Marginalized group → epistemic advantage  
Dominant group → epistemic disadvantage  
Entire community → epistemic disadvantage

- The marginalized group **more frequently** succeeds in learning than both the dominant group and a community without testimonial injustice (see figure above).
- The marginalized group succeeds in learning **more quickly** than the dominant group.
- The marginalized group **more frequently** selects the better option during the process of learning than the dominant group.
- The entire community in the model succeeds in learning **less frequently** and **more slowly** than a community without testimonial injustice.

These results together support a **standpoint epistemology** thesis that marginalized groups sometimes have better beliefs. I connect the thesis to the **epistemic injustice** that marginalized groups endure.

## Variations

### Variation 1: Homophilic Network

- Agents prefer to connect with in-group members.

Results:

- The marginalized group **more frequently** succeeds in learning than both the dominant group and a community without testimonial injustice.
- Other performances depend on informational access.

### Variation 2: Testimonial Devaluation

- The dominant group **devalues** evidence from the marginalized group, without completely ignoring it.

Results:

- The marginalized group succeeds in learning **more quickly** and selects the better option during the process of learning **more frequently** than the dominant group.

## Further Work

In another paper, I develop an alternative interpretation of asymmetric trust.

I argue that truth-seeking scientists have incentives to **withhold** their evidence. I further apply the results to industrial science.

Email me for a draft of this paper titled “Withholding Knowledge.”

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