Standpoint Achievement via Allyship

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ABSTRACT: Several standpoint epistemologists have suggested that a standpoint is not granted to the oppressed automatically. Further, they suggest that, as a result, standpoints may be achieved by non-oppressed people. However, none have clarified what it takes for such an event to occur. This paper presents an argument in favor of certain privileged people—call them *allies*—achieving standpoints given that, among other things, they have justified beliefs about the justice-based interests of the allied-with group. First, I characterize a standpoint as consisting in knowledge that some feature of social reality is oppressive. Then I present a novel account of allyship. My view places an epistemic requirement on allies; namely, they must have justified beliefs about the justice-based interests of the allied-with group. Importantly, I conceive of justification as involving a lack of normative defeaters. Finally, I show how allies so conceived can achieve standpoints. In doing so, I also show that knowledge of what it is like to be oppressed is not necessary for standpoint achievement.

KEYWORDS: Standpoint Epistemology; Allyship

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1. Introduction

At various points, several standpoint epistemologists have suggested that a standpoint is not granted to the oppressed automatically and, as a result, may be achieved by non-oppressed people (see Haraway 1988; Harding 1993; Janack 1997; Toole 2024; Wylie 2003). Despite this, none have clarified what it takes for such an event to occur. The central aim of this paper is to do exactly this. Specifically, I will argue in favor of a view upon which certain privileged people—call them allies—can achieve a standpoint given that, among other things, they have justified beliefs about the justice-based interests of the allied-with group.

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To make the case that allies can achieve standpoints, I must clarify what a standpoint is. In section 2, I distinguish a *standpoint* from *knowing what it is like to be oppressed*. While the latter is certainly epistemically useful in contexts of epistemic resistance, my interest in this paper is the former. I characterize a standpoint (relative to some group G) as knowing that some particular feature of social reality is oppressive for G. I also clarify the relationship between a standpoint and critical consciousness. In section 3, I put forward a novel account of allyship. First, I consider the recent contribution of Holly Lawford-Smith and William Tuckwell (section 3.1). Then I show that their account is epistemologically inadequate (section 3.2). In closing that section, I offer my own view according to which, among other things, allies possess justified beliefs about the allied-with group, where justification includes a no-normative-defeater clause (section 3.3). In section 4, I show that since knowledge of what it is like to be oppressed is not necessary for standpoint achievement, allies so conceived can achieve standpoints. Lastly, section 5 concludes by briefly considering how such an account might connect to recent discussion of deference and disagreement among standpoint epistemologists.

2. Preliminaries: Standpoint as a Contingent Epistemic Advantage

Alison Wylie (2003, p. 26) writes that the animating insight for standpoint epistemology is that "those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects." The purpose of this section is to present a view of this epistemic privilege; when it is attainable and in what it consists.

Before proceeding, I wish to note something that has sometimes been the source of great confusion. The state of epistemic advantage to be investigated—a '*standpoint*'—is not the same as one's '*social location*'.[1] One's social location is one's "structurally defined position within a social system" (Milanovich 2025, p. 7). It is defined by how one relates

[1]Milanovich 2025 critiques some theorists – such as Dror 2022, Toole 2024, and Bright 2024 – for conflating a standpoint with one's social location.

to the institutions and social categories that structure social reality. This means that it is not necessary that one have certain knowledge to qualify as being a certain social location. By contrast, a standpoint is defined as an *epistemic* status. One is said to possess a standpoint when they have an epistemic advantage insofar as they know about the workings of oppression and others do not.

Although only a standpoint necessarily implies a certain kind of epistemic advantage, it has become customary to talk about certain kinds of knowledge or ignorance that tend to be associated with people of particular social locations. It is in this respect that Charles W. Mills (2007) introduced the notion of white ignorance. He famously theorized a distinctive form of ignorance which includes both false beliefs and the absence of beliefs about social reality that results from one's racial identity.[2] As he notes, this is a corollary of standpoint-theoretic insight that members of oppressed groups tend to have knowledge about what it is like to be oppressed. From such considerations, we can formulate the *Epistemic Advantage Thesis* and state it as follows:

> **EAT**. Socially marginalized people, by virtue of their social location, *tend* to have a superior epistemic position than non-oppressed people when it comes to knowing things about the workings of social marginalization that concern them.[3]

The 'superior epistemic position' that oppressed people tend to have is possessed when they have knowledge of what it is like to be oppressed.[4] I will refer to the superior epistemic position that we are discussing as 'possessing *situated knowledge of oppression*'. The knowledge of oppression (knowing what it is like to be oppressed)

[2]See Mills 2007, 20ff for the details. See also Medina 2013 on active forms of white ignorance.

[3]This is formulation is from Dror 2022. Despite technical differences noted by Young (1990), I will use 'oppressed' and 'marginalized' as synonymous. I will use 'privileged' or 'dominant' as antonymous to 'oppressed'.

[4]Because of this, we could formulate a corollary of **EAT**—call it the Epistemic Ignorance Thesis—as follows:

> **EIT**. Socially privileged people, by virtue of their social location, *tend* to have an inferior epistemic position than oppressed people when it comes to knowing things about the workings of social marginalization that concern those oppressed people.

Hence, Mills' conception of white ignorance is a special case of **EIT**. But note that **EIT** would require some revision to accommodate José Medina's revised conception of situated ignorance (see Medina 2013).

is situated in the sense that it is achieved by virtue one's social location. Nevertheless, possessing situated knowledge of oppression is not quite the same as possessing a standpoint since "some standpoints (as opposed to locations) have the especially salient advantage that they put the critically conscious knower in a position to grasp the effects of power relations on their own understanding and that of others" (Wylie 2003, p. 34).

In this respect, a standpoint presupposes some amount of 'critical consciousness'. To see this, consider Timothy Williamson's distinction between seeing that p and seeing a situation in which p. The former but not the latter requires the perceiver to "grasp the proposition" in question (Williamson 2000, p. 38). Consider his example: "A normal observer in normal conditions who has no concept of chess can see a situation in which Olga is playing chess, by looking in the right direction, but cannot see *that* Olga is playing chess, because he does not know what he sees to be a situation in which Olga is playing chess" (ibid., p. 38). The idea is that seeing that p requires the concepts present in p to be possessed and arranged in the perceiver's mind in the right way. By contrast, one can see a situation in which p obtains without seeing *that* p obtains because they do not possess the relevant concepts or have them arranged in the right way in their mind. Importantly, only when one sees that p (rather than sees a situation in which p) does one come to know p.[5]

Although the cases that we will be concerned with are not cases in which one sees someone playing chess but instead that some social practice or institutional arrangement is oppressive, the distinction still holds. To be sure, the key insight from Williamson is that one must possess the concept of 'oppression' in order to hold the relevant factive mental state.[6] Hence, one cannot be said to know that police brutality

[5]That is, according to his knowledge-first epistemology. If we are not knowledge-firsters, then some additional argumentation is likely required to move from seeing that p to knowing that p. I do not wish to engage the debate between knowledge-first accounts and alternative accounts of knowledge. Instead, I aim to construct my argument to be neutral on this matter.

[6]As readers of *Knowledge and Its Limits* may know, Williamson deploys the aforementioned distinction in part of his explication of an analysis of knowledge that is not in terms of simpler concepts like justification and belief. As a result, we can ask how much of his knowledge-first epistemology we have to take on board when we deploy this distinction. My answer is not that much if any. I will discuss this below.

is a means of oppression for Black people merely by seeing or hearing about a situation in which a Black man is made victim of police brutality or, arguably, even by reading a statistic about it. In any case, one need not apply the relevant concepts that grant the knowledge that such an act is oppressive in nature. To know that this is oppressive requires possessing and applying, among others, the concept of 'oppression'. In turn, possessing and applying this concept showcase a certain kind of awareness of the inequitable and unjust nature of the social landscape. This is the sense in which I mean to say that standpoints presuppose a certain kind of critical consciousness.

A standpoint very clearly requires awareness of oppression. And this serves to classify its possessors as critically conscious. As a result, I offer the following characterization of a standpoint:

> **S**. An individual I possesses a *G-standpoint* if and only if, for some feature of social reality F, I knows that F is a means of oppression for G.

To my mind, this seems to capture what we are talking about in the above cases. For instance, someone with a Black standpoint is aware of the oppression of Black people in America by at least *some* means. Perhaps one could question whether knowing of exactly one means of oppression is sufficient for standpoint achievement. To my mind at least, it is because, as I mentioned above, knowledge is conceptual and, hence, knowing that some group is oppressed requires awareness of oppression and application of the concept.

A key point for many theorists was that our theorizing take the form of "[w]orking from the experience of the specific oppression" (Rose 1983, p. 88; cf. Wylie 2003, p. 32; Harding 1993, p. 54). Doing this "will generate less partial and distorted accounts [...] of the whole social order" (Harding 1993, p. 56). That is, the epistemic advantage available to the oppressed can be negatively defined as lacking the biases against their group. Positively, we can understand this epistemic advantage as consisting in the knowledge *that* one is oppressed and *that* one is oppressed by certain means.

Additionally, many standpoint epistemologists have suggested reshaping certain epistemic practices to center the contributions of the oppressed folks who hold such

an advantage. A number of feminist philosophers were interested how androcentric values had biased the questions considered and interpretations offered by both the natural and social sciences (e.g., Haraway 1988; Harding 1986, 1991; Intemann 2010; Longino 1990; Okruhlik 1994; Rose 1983). Patricia Hill Collins (1986), for instance, identifies several respects in which the insights of Black feminists can improve sociological theory by introducing evidence previously ignored due to the racist and sexist exclusion biases or offering compelling reinterpretations of existing concepts like 'work' or 'family'.

One thing that this discussion should make clear is that a standpoint is a *contingent* epistemic advantage. It is not guaranteed to someone in virtue of their social location. Not only must they possess the concept of oppression and apply it to the experience of some group—that is, be critically conscious in my sense. But they must also meet standard conditions for knowledge while doing so. I will not here take a stance on exactly which conditions must obtain for one to know that p, but it has been argued that one's belief must meet safety, sensitivity, or no-defeater conditions, or be the result of a reliable process or cognitive ability, produced by some intellectual virtue. And none of this is guaranteed.

3. Defining Allyship

3.1. Authorization-based View of Allyship

Few philosophers have attempted to provide an account of allyship to oppressed groups.[7] In this section, I will take as my start the recent contribution of Holly Lawford-Smith and William Tuckwell. Because our interest here is epistemological,[8] I will be particularly concerned with allyship's *epistemic* requirements. However, the critique offered here holds independently of our interest in standpoint epistemology.

[7]This is not, of course, to say that nothing has been said about allyship at all. See Almassi 2015, 2022; Blankschaen 2016; Blum 2011; Fried 2019.

[8]Independent of our present interest in standpoint epistemology, providing an account of allyship is significant since it has been pointed out by some scholars that vagueness regarding the concept's use in the public sphere allows some to behave shallowly or reprehensibly (see McKinnon 2017; Sullivan-Clarke 2020).

Holly Lawford-Smith and William Tuckwell (2024) present an account of allyship on which an ally is, roughly, a socially privileged person who takes actions aimed at improving the social/political position of the allied-with group. Importantly, they argue that the actions taken by the ally must be authorized by some member of the allied-with group in order to be sufficient for allyship. Because of this feature, I'll call their account the *Authorization-based View of Allyship*. They offer the following more precise formulation:

> **AVA**. An individual I is an ally to a marginalized group G if and only if: (1) I is privileged on the same axis on which G is oppressed; and (2) I takes resistant actions that are authorized by G, and a product of appropriate deference to G, in order to improve the position of G.

Condition (1) is meant to capture a feature of the examples which Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell take to be paradigmatic of allyship: (*i*) Peter Norman joining Tommie Smith and John Carlos in symbolic protest of the oppressive conditions facing Black Americans at the 1968 Summer Olympics; (*ii*) John Stuart Mill used his influence position to publish *The Subjection of Women* which argued "the rights of a person should not be dictated by accidents of birth" (ibid., p. 2); and (*iii*) Irish comedy writer Graham Linehan published several news articles and appeared in TV interviews defending sex self-identification because he saw women facing harassment for taking such a position and wanted to use his influence to amplify their voices. In each case, a person outside the relevant marginalized group – Black people in (*i*) and women in (*ii*) and (*iii*) – uses their influence to support the interests of the marginalized group. And, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell reason, it is essential to their classification as allies that they are *outside the relevant group*; if they were in the group, we would not want to call them allies.

Condition (2) contains three notions that must be explicated in order to appreciate their view: resistant actions, group authorization, and appropriate deference. Let us take each in turn. The notion of 'resistant action' is a generalization on Luara Ferracioli and Rosa Terlazzo's 'feminist action'. Luara Ferracioli and Rosa Terlazzo (2026, April 6,

p. 5) suggest that to be a feminist is to have "sincere feminist beliefs and values" and, as a result, be disposed to act in ways that actively resists or undermines sexists norms and expectations. Such actions are *feminist actions*. So, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell reason that this notion can be generalized from the particular context of women's oppression to oppression in general. Hence, they suggest that an ally is someone who "(i) sincerely believe[s] in the importance of advancing the justice-based interests of an oppressed group and (ii) for that reason take[s] actions that aim at furthering those interests" (Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell 2024, p. 7). And those actions which further the justice-based interests of the relevant group are *resistant actions*.

But how does the ally know which actions advance the justice-based interests of the allied-with group? Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell suggest that the ally must take only those actions which are authorized by the group. More specifically, the ally must either pass along the testimony of the group or seek out a member of the group to approve their action. To motivate the claim that allies must only pursue approved actions, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell provide the following case:

> **Zealous Ally**
>
> Consider a would-be ally (call her Sally) to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people prior to marriage equality who was aware that LGB people were campaigning for it. Nonetheless, this would-be ally had been convinced by second-wave feminist literature that marriage was a central institution in patriarchal oppression, and so vehemently opposed marriage for anyone. She thought LGB people were getting it wrong to want, and campaign for, equal marriage. Suppose this translated into her taking actions against equal marriage, for example, persuading friends and colleagues to vote 'no' when the time came.

As Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell reason, Sally fails to be an ally because she "act[s] according to her own judgement of the interests of LGB people" (ibid., p. 12). Further, even if she is right about marriage and her actions are effective, she has still interfered with the autonomy of the group she hoped to help. So, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell conclude that "an ally must make sure that at least some members of the group they act for want them to act that way" (ibid., p. 12).

Lastly, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell suggest that allies actions must be the result

of 'appropriate deference' to the allied-with group. Here, they are responding to Avery Kolers (2014) who suggests that solidarity requires acting against one's best prudential, epistemic, or moral judgment in order to be in alignment with the group. Though Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell submit that this may be true of solidarity it is not true of allyship. Instead of suggesting wholesale deference, they suggest that because the ally values the justice-based interests of the allied-with group, they have value-reflecting reasons "to act in those ways that promote justice and to avoid doing those things that demote justice" (Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell 2024, p. 16). This does not mean that the ally will strictly defer to the allied-with group, but there will be times in which allies should be more inclined to exhibit serious scrutiny.

3.2. Allies Needn't Be Authorized

Now that I have reconstructed the rationale for **AVA**, I want to offer a critique. In short, I do not think that allies' actions need to be authorized. To see this, recall that Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell motivate the claim that allies' actions must be authorized by considering **Zealous Ally**.

Sally fails to be an ally because she acts according to her own judgment of the interests of the group that she aims to help. And she 'acts according to her own judgment' because she reads some literature suggesting that marriage is oppressive and concludes—without considering the views of the members of the group—that she must act on the basis of these interests. To put the point otherwise, Sally believes that the justice-based interests of LGB people does not include achieving the legal right to marriage. She believes this not on the basis of the views of LGB people but on inferences that she drew after being convinced that marriage is an institution of oppression. It is in this sense that Sally is 'acting according to her own judgment' and this is her mistake. And because of her mistake, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell contend that Sally fails to be an ally.

I submit that while Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell are right to say that Sally has done something wrong in **Zealous Ally**, it is a mistake to say that what she did wrong was fail

to seek authorization. As the reasoning in the previous paragraph elucidates, it would seem that Sally's *beliefs* about the justice-based interests of LGB people was formed without reference to the right kind of evidence. Indeed, I want to replace Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell's *practical* analysis of **Zealous Ally** with an epistemological one by suggesting that her mistake is an *epistemic* one.

So, what went wrong with Sally's belief? I will suggest that her belief about the justice-based interests of LGB people is *unjustified* on the grounds that there is evidence she should have had. To see this, let us consider an analogous case developed by Jennifer Lackey (2026, p. 215).

> **Cherry-Picking Racist**
> Suppose that a racist claims to have epistemically justified racist beliefs on the grounds that the very limited amount of cherry-picked information he is exposed to supports them. This is because he actively insulates himself from conflicting evidence, surrounds himself with like-minded racists, carefully curates his news consumption so that it reflects his already existing views, and so on.

As Lackey notes, some views in epistemology suggest that the beliefs formed by the racist in **Cherry-Picking Racist** are epistemically permissible. In particular, she considers what Sarah Moss calls a 'time-slice epistemology', according to which epistemic permissibility turns on "what mental states you are in at that time" (Moss 2015, p. 172). As a result, unless the racist has introspectively accessible counterevidence, his beliefs are in the epistemic clear. Yet, this seems wrong, he is clearly making an epistemic mistake. As Lackey (2026, p. 215) summaries, "[w]hat cases like this self-insulating racist show is that you cannot get off the epistemic hook by simply failing to expose yourself to counterevidence you should have."

Similar to the racist in **Cherry-Picking Racist**, Sally in **Zealous Ally** has failed to expose herself to pertinent evidence. Sally's inquiry into the justice-based interests of LGB people would be better served by considering the interests of LGB people beyond those she can reason about *a priori*. Relevant evidence could come in many forms. She could have read books or articles by LGB theorists pertaining to marriage, listened to podcasts or interviews from LGB, or simply talked to LGB people. Had she undergone

any of these efforts, she would have emerged with evidence allowing her to make a more informed decision.

One way to appreciate the challenge I am raising is to cast it in terms of *defeat*. Very broadly, a defeater is some proposition which is incompatible with justification or knowledge. Some epistemologists have argued that evidence that you do not possess but which you ought to possess can function as such.[9] Following the literature, let us call these '*normative defeaters*'. A normative defeater is "a true proposition D such that if D were added to S's belief system, then S would no longer be justified in believing that p" (Lackey 1999, p. 475). I will not here offer an argument in favor of the existence of such defeaters, but it is worth briefly considering an intuitive case. Hilary Kornblith (1983, p. 36) considered a case in which a physicist ignores his colleague when he presents the physicist with an objection to his hypothesis because of his stubborn personality. Since the particular objection presented is devastating and the physicist merely ignored it due to a personal failing, his belief is unjustified.

Even if her belief turns out to be true (that is, that marriage really is a form of patriarchal oppression for LGB people), it is not at all clear that we should think the evidence Sally is in possession of supports her belief. This means that even without the notion of normative defeat we can cash out her mistake in evidentialist terms by saying that she fails to believe in line with what the evidence suggestions.[10] To summarize this discussion, as **Zealous Ally** is constructed by Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell, Sally's belief is faulty. If her belief is false, there are normative defeaters insofar as she ought to consider the testimony of LGB people. If it is true, it is still unjustified insofar as her evidence does not support the content of her belief. Recall that Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell's reasoning for Sally's failure was that she acted according to her own judgment when she should have sought authorization. However, what I have shown is not that her course of action was faulty (though it may very well be), but that the belief guiding her action is fault.

[9] See Goldberg 2017a,b; Lackey 1999, 2005; Reed 2006.
[10] See Conee and Feldman 2004; Feldman and Conee 1985.

3.3. Justification-based View of Allyship

Bearing in mind this alternative account of the mistake in **Zealous Ally**, I will now propose the *Justification-based View of Allyship* and formulate it as follows:

> **JVA**. An individual I is an ally to a marginalized group G if and only if: (1) I is privileged along the same axis on which G is oppressed; (2) I has justified beliefs about the interests of G; and (3) I frequently takes resistant actions to improve the position of G, where the intentions of those actions are consistent with (2).

The addition of condition (2) is **JVA**'s largest departure from **AVA**. This condition is meant to explicitly account for the challenge to Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell's view which I have just offered. By requiring condition (2), we omit Sally in **Zealous Ally** from becoming an ally. Indeed, just as I showed earlier, Sally either faces an issue of normative defeat or of believing in accordance with the evidence. In the first case (supposing her belief is false), she lacks justification in the sense that if beliefs about the interests of the group attained via group member testimony were added to her belief system, they would undercut her internal sense of justification. In the second case (supposing her belief is true), she lacks justification in the sense that the evidence she considered does not support her conclusion. In either case, Sally should have gathered and evaluated evidence in the form of testimony from the group members she sought to help. Thus, condition (2) prevents Sally from being conceived of as an ally to LGB people because she does not have justified beliefs about the interests of the relevant group.

Additionally, it can be observed that condition (3) differs from **AVA**'s second condition in one crucial way. Though I retain Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell's conception of resistant actions, I add the requirement that allies must act *frequently*, where this is understood to mean some number greater than one. By contrast, Lawford-Smith and Tuckwell require only that someone act the improve the position of the relevant group once to be considered an ally. This is quite surprising relative to their understanding

of an ally as someone who values the justice-based interests of some oppressed group and is sincerely committed to liberation of that group. Hence, to revise their view for consistency, I submit that insofar as allies are sincerely committed to the liberation of some group from their oppression, they must act more than once.

4. Standpoint Achievement for the Non-Oppressed via Allyship

Several standpoint epistemologists have alluded to the idea that standpoints are not in principle unattainable by people who do not belong to the relevant oppressed group (see, e.g., Dror 2022; Harding 1986; Toole 2024; Wylie 2003). However, none have clarified what it takes for outsiders to achieve this epistemic advantage or considered the implications for a broader epistemology of resistance. In this section, I will do precisely this. First, I will show that allies can achieve standpoints.

In section 2, I showed that the epistemic advantage that standpoint epistemology is concerned with is a contingent one. It is contingent because we cannot guarantee that any member of a given oppressed group will have some particular experience. Even if they do have some experience, it is not guaranteed that they will possess the concepts to develop the relevant knowledge. As a result of its contingency, we can ask whether it is in principle possible for someone who is not a member of the oppressed group to achieve a standpoint.

My answer is: *yes*. It is possible. To see this, recall from section 2 that one possesses a standpoint if and only if they know that some feature of social reality is a means of oppression for the relevant oppressed group. This means that while the experiences of oppression are a relevant means to achieving a standpoint, they are not constitutive of a standpoint. And this seems to align with the previously mentioned insight from various standpoint epistemologists that standpoints can be achieved by others. If the standpoint was even partly constituted by having had specific experiences of oppression then this insight would be rendered moot. After all, privileged people *ipso facto* do not experience oppression.[11] But since authors have argued convincingly that priv-

[11] A clarification is required. The language of condition (1) of **JVA** should make sure that we are talking

ileged people can achieve standpoints, the standpoint must not require experiences of oppression.

My interest in this paper is not just the in principle possibility for privileged people to achieve standpoints. I am interested in how allies, as privileged people committed to ameliorating social reality, can achieve standpoints and what this means for theorizing in standpoint epistemology and epistemology of resistance, more broadly.

As I said, allies are privileged people. This much is stated in condition (1) of **JVA**. So, it is in principle possible for them to achieve standpoints—that is, to know that a particular group is oppressed by some particular means. But what means are available to the ally to achieve this knowledge?

Since allies lack the experiences with oppression that play an important role in standpoint achievement for the oppressed by definition, it seems reasonable to suggest that most will achieve standpoints via *testimonial* mechanisms. They will develop an understanding of the oppression of some group by read about their experiences in memoirs, biographies, and history books. They may also learn through in-person testimony like attending public lectures or conversations with oppressed folks.[12] In any case, this means that their knowledge will be second-hand or testimonial in nature.

It could be objected that, in permitting allies to achieve standpoints, the view developed in this paper undermines the epistemic position of the oppressed. The worry would be that in formulating condition (2) of **JVA**, I have permitted allies to have too much autonomy and they would be better off deferring to the oppressed. Liam Kofi

about privileged/oppressed status along certain 'axes'. This suggests that one could be privileged along one axis and oppressed along another. And this seems right. A Black man is, in some sense, privileged insofar as he is a man and may assume some benefits for this, but oppressed insofar as is Black and may receive some penalties for this. One thing this particular example illuminates is that the language from Iris Marion Young (1990) may not be particularly help for thinking about intersectional cases. After all, there are additional forms of oppression which Black men may experience that will detract from the privilege that the theory predicts they should have. Due to limitations of space, I will not be able to deal with this subject and shall delay it for future work.

[12] In the latter case, there is a question of whether the ally can learn that some group is oppressed by a particular means when the speaker herself does not know it. A version of this question is a central focus of the epistemology of testimony: Does the epistemic status (i.e. whether it is justified or rational or known) of one's belief formed through testimony depend on the epistemic status of the speaker's belief? I will not here take a stance on this issue. Instead, I wish to note that there are resources available to say that one can form a justified/rational belief from another without the latter being justified/rational. See, e.g., Lackey 2008.

Bright (2024) seems to make a related point when he objects to characterizations of standpoints that are not in term of group-level beliefs. His worry is that standpoint theorists create a conceptual gap between the experiences of the oppressed and the epistemic status a standpoint confers by failing to empower the beliefs of the oppressed. Likewise, the objection runs, the view offered here does not properly empower the beliefs and experiences of the oppressed because it grants similar status to non-oppressed people.[13]

By way of response, consider a thought experiment due to Lidal Dror (2022):

> **Mary's Room Applied**
>
> Consider two social scientists: a Black woman called Chloe and her white colleague, Jane.
>
> Both women know 'just about anything one would want to know' about the history and present conditions of Black Americans: they are experts on slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, Mass Incarceration, and so on.
>
> For her part, Jane has read autobiographies, stories, and personal letters with emotional accounts of the suffering of Black Americans in addition to talking with and listening to particular Black people in interpersonal exchanges. Further, she is an activist in numerous organizations to better the lives of Black Americans.

Dror's example is meant to be analogous to the famous Mary's room thought experiment by Frank Jackson (1982). Just as Mary is said to have all of the physical information about the color red in her room, so also is Jane meant to have all the pertinent information about the historical and present conditions of Black Americans. Thus,

[13] One way of responding to this that I will not explore would be by defending the conceptual gap that Bright 2024 criticizes. Consider the following quote from Charles W. Mills (2007, p. 19):

> Du Bois's famous and oft-cited figure of "double consciousness" has been variously interpreted, but certainly one plausible way of reading it is as a prescription for a critical cognitive distancing from "a world which yields the Negro no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world," a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" [citation to Du Bois 1903].

If we endorsed such an account of double consciousness, we could surely show that the conceptual gap critiqued by Bright is actually *necessary*. After all, Black folks live in a world that is antagonistic to their experiences of oppression *as* oppression. Hence, putting distance between one's thoughts and one's experiences allows one to be critical in a way that one's experiences do not all. They do not allow it because, as Mills and others (e.g., Fricker 2007; Medina 2013) have made clear, the concepts which one uses for making sense of one's experiences belong to the dominant social groups. In the case of race, Mills (2007, 24ff) notes the importance of white group interests in generating and sustaining white ignorance.

Jane has the same epistemic standing as Chloe excluding whatever differences might amount from their respective social locations. Indeed, Dror (2022, p. 629) suggests that we can we can recognize that Jane "does not know important things about how it feels to be oppressed as a (particular) Black person" and so "concede that Chloe and Black people generally have this epistemic advantage over her" without endorse the claim that "Jane must thereby be epistemically disadvantaged when it comes to understanding the operations of racism within the United States." Hence, the lesson to be taken from **Mary's Room Applied** is that insofar as we take the relevant epistemic good to be "understanding the operations of [oppression]," we should not think that this requires its possessor to have phenomenal (firsthand) knowledge of oppression. In other words, one can have an epistemic advantage insofar as they understand the operations of oppression without having firsthand experience with it; after all, Jane surely has an advantage over white folks who have not put in the epistemic work that she has.

In analyzing this case, it is helpful to bear in mind the distinction drawn in section 2 between situated knowledge and a standpoint. On the one hand, *both* women possess knowledge about the historical and present conditions of Black Americans. As I argued in section 2, knowledge that p is not necessarily acquired from perceiving a situation in which p (cf. Williamson 2000) since the former but not the latter requires grasping the proposition p and hence requires possessing the concepts expressed in the content of p. Thus, insofar as both women represent the historical and present conditions of Black Americans *as* oppressive, *both* women know that Black people are oppressed and can point to several means by which they are so. By **S**, this latter point means that they *both* possess a standpoint. On the other hand, we can think about Chloe as having an epistemic advantage over Jane because Chloe (but not Jane) has experienced oppression. That is to say that Chloe knows what it is like to be oppressed and Jane does not. This would seem to be a case of situated knowledge. Chloe possesses knowledge about what it is like to be Black in America and Jane does not. It is worth adding that although Jane may have had white ignorance prior to her achieving

the epistemic feats described in **Mary's Room Applied**, it would seem that she has put in the work to remove her ignorance.

Thus, my response to the objection is not dissimilar to the view of Michael Hannon (2025, p. 5) insofar as I do not think there is an "[unbridgable] epistemic gap between marginalized and non-marginalized individuals." I do not think we lose anything by recognizing that the oppressed and non-oppressed alike can both achieve a critical understanding of social reality. Insofar as they do, both are empowered and enabled to engage in ameliorative projects.

5. Concluding Thoughts

This paper has set out to provide an argument in favor of standpoint achievement for the non-oppressed. In so doing, I have provided a novel account of allyship. Allies so conceived can achieve standpoints because they must have justified beliefs about the justice-based interests of the allied-with group. As we saw earlier, all of the means available to the would-be ally to become such are testimonial in nature. So, a good step for one interested in becoming an ally would be to find ways to talk with and listen to oppressed people.

Lastly, although I have not addressed them, an account such as the one offered in the previous section will surely have something to say about topics of recent interest for standpoint epistemologists like deference and disagreement (Hannon 2025; Pearlman 2026; Toole 2024). Because both allies and the oppressed can achieve a standpoint, their disagreement is nothing more than a standard case of peer disagreement and so we can use the tools from the epistemology of disagreement to consider such interactions. Such a move will have implications for addressing the question of whether the non-oppressed must defer to the oppressed. If I am correct that the knowledge of what it is like to be oppressed does not need to factor into our definition of a standpoint, then it is not totally obvious why allies would defer to the oppressed. Why defer to someone with whom you are epistemic peers? Instead, we may perhaps begin to consider how allies and the oppressed can work together to navigate this choppy epis-

temic terrain and perhaps generate new epistemic and hermeneutic resources.

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