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# "I've Internalized That I Have to Work Really, Really Hard to Gain Recognition"

## FLINTA* Individuals Navigating Epistemic Injustice in Academic Settings

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**Abstract:**
Using Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of 'epistemic injustice' and Marcia Baxter Magolda's (1992) model of gender-related patterns in students' epistemological development, this paper explores four FLINTA* individuals' experiences with epistemic injustice in academic settings, with two of these perspectives being the authors' own. The following three questions guided the research: How is epistemic injustice perceived by FLINTA* students? What areas of university life does epistemic injustice impact and how do FLINTA* students navigate this? How does the experience of epistemic injustice affect academic writing? To answer these questions, the two authors each had a conversation with a fellow FLINTA* friend, which was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Four overarching themes emerged during the analysis: 'Relating to Others', 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus', 'Dealing With Epistemic Injustice', and 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology', which are explored in detail within this paper. The results show that epistemic injustice has been a constant companion to the contributors for a long time and is very present in various university settings. In response to this experience, the contributors react with, among other things, adapted competence strategies and resistance.

**Keywords**: epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker, FLINTA*, academic habitus, epistemological development, academic writing

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# "I've Internalized That I Have to Work Really, Really Hard to Gain Recognition"

## FLINTA* Individuals Navigating Epistemic Injustice in Academic Settings

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## Introduction

(The pursuit of) Knowledge[1] is generally considered to be of paramount importance in academia (and beyond). However, the power dynamics at play when it comes to producing knowledge and deciding who is a credible source of knowledge are often sidelined in discussions around the topic. We – Nora and Simone, two FLINTA*[2] individuals – have routinely been confronted with doubts when it comes to our own knowledgeability: Are we smart enough to raise our voice in academic discourse? Have we already read enough to formulate an argument? Why are we reluctant to consider ourselves knowledgeable? In this project, we argue that these dynamics need to be considered systemic rather than individual.

The above-mentioned doubts and inner struggles are unjust because they stem from a system in which knowledge is attributed to some (groups of) individuals rather than others, a process which is described by Miranda Fricker (2007) as 'epistemic injustice'. Discriminatory categories (e.g., gender [identity], sexual orientation, race, class) also extend to the dimension of knowledge: Discrimination based on such characteristics oftentimes means that individuals are denied the credibility that, for example, cisgender, white men are granted simply because of these immutable attributes. This structural denial of knowledge not only occurs through the actions of groups that are superior in the 'knowledge economy' (Fricker, 2007), but is also individually assimilated by marginalized (groups of) people and thus reproduced. While this dynamic operates in many social spheres, it is particularly prevalent in academia as it is characterized by a particularly strong tradition of privileging white male* knowledge. Academia can thus be described as an androcentric[3] space in which the habitus of a successful academic most closely resembles that of a white man*. This, in turn, disadvantages individuals such as FLINTA* who have to learn to embody a habitus that clearly does not reflect their experience(s) of navigating the world.[4]

Consequently, when writing academic papers, our experience as FLINTA* individuals leads us to experience constant conflict: On the one hand, our insecurity should not be visible in the finished work. On the other hand, this nonetheless existing insecurity makes it difficult to formulate a strong argument that is not based solely on the words of other authors. This illustrates that writing is not a process

1 For our thoughts on the concept of knowledge, please refer to the 'Key Terms' section.

2 FLINTA* is an acronym for female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans-, and agender. The * serves as a placeholder for all non-binary gender identities. While the term is primarily utilized within the German-speaking context, we have, nevertheless, opted to employ it in this study. We discuss this decision further in the 'Key Terms' section.

3 Androcentrism refers to "the propensity to center society around men and men's needs, priorities, and values" (Bailey et al., 2019, 307).

4 These dynamics will be explored in detail in the section 'Contextualizing the Topic'.

detached from the individual writer and thus, experiences with epistemic injustice are interwoven into the writing process.

By talking to FLINTA* individuals about our – and their – experiences with epistemic injustice we are attempting to examine the structural dimensions of what is all too often framed as an individually experienced struggle. To achieve this, we are using Miranda Fricker's (2007) theory of 'epistemic injustice' and Marcia Baxter Magolda's (1992) model of gender-related patterns in students' epistemological development as analytical lenses. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (e.g., Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) is used for the subsequent data analysis. RTA allows us to acknowledge our personal engagement with the topic as we – as FLINTA* students ourselves – are very much personally affected by epistemic injustice. Since we have chosen to actively incorporate our personal experiences into this project, we do not see ourselves as outside researchers, but as closely intertwined with the subject of our research. By showcasing testimonials of FLINTA* individuals, this paper seeks to increase awareness of epistemic injustice in a writing studies and writing center studies context and hopefully, by extension, facilitate a culture in which educators more widely employ strategies to empower marginalized student writers in claiming their epistemic rights.

# Contextualizing the Topic

In this section we critically engage with (our choice of) the term FLINTA* and our thoughts on the concept of 'knowledge'. We will also introduce the term 'academic habitus' and argue that it is largely embodied by men*, which serves to marginalize FLINTA* individuals in academic settings. Another key term, 'epistemic injustice', will be further explored in the theoretical section.

## Key Terms and Fundamental Assumptions

### FLINTA*

During two separate concept presentations of our article, we were repeatedly asked about our use of the term FLINTA*. Criticisms included, for instance, that it is not widely used in English-speaking contexts – even though the acronym does not require adaptation in English – and the concern that it encompasses too many heterogeneous experiences. However, we have deliberately chosen to use the term (instead of, e.g., 'queer'[5]), as we aim to focus not only on women*, but on the experiences of diverse individuals whose commonality is that they are marginalized in a patriarchal society.

We do not argue that the experiences of FLINTA* individuals are entirely congruent. However, our expectation is that most of the patterns we address regarding epistemic injustice will be relevant to many individuals who fall under the umbrella term 'FLINTA*'. Since we only have access to four experience reports for this project, we do not want to make any general claims about the experiences that *all* FLINTA* individuals have with epistemic injustice. However, we can provide a space for the perspectives of four individuals – three cisgender women (one of whom identifies as queer), and one non-binary, self-identified non-heterosexual person – and highlight commonalities in their accounts.

5 The term 'queer' would not have properly reflected our intention, as we do not want to include the experiences of cisgender gay men, who also profit from patriarchy, but do want to take into account those of heterosexual cisgender women.

Yet, we are aware that, for instance, the experiences of transgender individuals, who are also subsumed under the umbrella term, are not represented. We are also aware that the four perspectives we explore in this work represent the viewpoints of a relatively homogenous group in terms of ethnicity and class (see section 'Conversation Participants'). What is achieved, however, by using the FLINTA* term, is to bring together the perspectives of individuals that, in our view, are significantly affected by not being able to conform to the male*, cisgender norm.

## Knowledge and Credibility

The transfer of knowledge is significant not only in an academic context but is one of the fundamental epistemic practices we engage in every day (Fricker, 2007, 1). In this paper, we focus on the process of passing on knowledge. The varying credibility attributed to different groups of people leads them to experience this process very differently – ranging from empowering to unsettling. We aim to illuminate the ethical and political aspects of knowledge transfer, following Miranda Fricker. Fricker's work on epistemic injustice builds upon Edward Craig, who, by way of a practical explication, explores why we have a concept of knowledge in the first place (Fricker, 2007, 109). Referring to a 'State of Nature' construction, he identifies the different components that constitute a good informant, as summarized by Fricker:

> [T]he good informant […] [is] someone who (1) is likely enough in the context to be right about what you want to know, (2) is communicatively open (principally, sincere) in what he tells you, and (3) bears indicator properties so that you can recognize that (1) and (2) are satisfied (Fricker, 2007, 130).

Fricker (2007, 129-130) argues that Craig's idea of a 'good informant' is connected to our contemporary concept of knowledge. Referring to the three components, Fricker states that it is the third component (3) that leads an inquirer to identify a person as a good informant. (3) also marks the point at which prejudice comes into play in the judgment of the inquirer, which we will explore further in the theory section.

## The (Male*) Academic Habitus and Its Consequences for FLINTA*

According to Pierre Bourdieu, "the habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class"[6] (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, 86). The concept has been widely received in the Gender Studies and been used as a (methodological) tool to analyze academic settings and their 'inhabitants' by a multitude of scholars from many different disciplines (Beaufaÿs, 2019).

One of these scholars is Sandra Beaufaÿs who in her work focuses on the connection between gender norms and academic success (e.g., Beaufaÿs, 2003; Beaufaÿs et al., 2012; Beaufaÿs & Krais, 2005; Engels et al., 2015). She has investigated the process of how scientists are 'made' to explain why significantly more male* than female* students pursue academic careers. Based on Bourdieu's habitus concept,

6 We are aware that this is not a particularly detailed definition of Bourdieu's habitus concepts. However, as we are more interested in how the concept has been utilized by other scholars to interrogate the academic exclusion of women* and other FLINTA* we have kept Bourdieu's definition brief and focus more on other scholars' contributions.

Beaufaÿs argues that becoming a scientist also means that one acquires a discipline-specific habitus (Beaufaÿs, 2003, 71). Building on the results of two empirical studies conducted at German universities and research institutions, Beaufaÿs and Krais (2005) find that the exclusion of women* from the academy is a highly complex, multi-layered process. This process takes effect when scientists become actors – which entails learning to inhabit the discipline-specific habitus – in their respective fields. The scientific field is 'male*-dominated' because it is largely populated by actors who are endowed with a habitus that most closely resembles that of a male* scientist. Based on Beaufaÿs and Krais' research and the fact that the academy has historically excluded women* and minorities, one could argue the following: The academic habitus has been modeled on men* and might therefore be difficult to inhabit by persons who are deviating from said norm, leading to difficulties in establishing themselves as 'proper' academics. The process by which students become recognized scientists is consequently highly socially selective (Beaufaÿs, 2003). Beaufaÿs and Krais (2005) show that embedded in this process are mechanisms that contribute to reproducing the gender homogeneity of the scientific field. In academia scientists are produced – and produce themselves – as 'autonomous subjects'. This idea of independence from social conditions and constraints, independent work and originality, collides with many pervasive assumptions about women* – and we would argue other individuals who are not perceived as men*. One example would be the notion that female* academics supposedly lack the time to display the same perseverance, creativity and willingness 'to suffer through' that is purportedly better enacted and embodied by their male* counterparts (Beaufaÿs & Krais, 2005, 89).

Consequently, we can conclude that the academy is an androcentric space in which the role of the scientist has historically been tailored to fit men*. Though Beaufaÿs and Krais (2005) do not engage with this, we would argue that, in addition to gender, race and class are also highly relevant in this context, as it is largely white, middle-class men* who easily fit the habitus of 'the academic'. Individuals that deviate from this norm are confronted with the following message: "You don't belong here, because you don't have what it takes" (Beaufaÿs & Krais 2005, 90). This dismissal of students who are not socialized and outwardly perceived as white men* is deeply ingrained in academic settings. It is therefore not surprising that this results in a denial of competence (both by themselves and others) and lower confidence levels among these students, in other words: the experience of epistemic injustice.

## Literature Review

In the following, a review of the literature that we deem significant for framing the relevance of our research will be presented. It should be noted that the research detailed in this section operates from a perspective that assumes that gender is binary, but we would argue that – when this literature speaks to the experiences of women* – this can also be applied to many of the individuals under the FLINTA* umbrella term who do not identify as women*.

In her statistical analysis of the confidence levels in learning of male* and female* students enrolled in open access enabling science courses at a UK university, Mirella Atherton (2015) finds "a clear and significant difference between the responses of male and female students with females experiencing higher uncertainty and lower confidence than males" (91). While Atherton examines students at the very

beginning of their academic journeys, Arshad et al. (2015) study the connection between confidence and academic performance in male* and female* master's students at a Pakistani university. They also find a statistically significant gender difference regarding self-esteem and academic performance scores: While women* tend to outperform their male* counterparts in terms of academic achievement, their confidence levels are still low in comparison to those of male* students.

There are also several empirical studies that engage with the connection between gender and textual expression of uncertainty, two of which will be described in the following. Nasri et al. (2018) examine potential variations between male* and female* Iranian EFL students concerning the use of stance and engagement features in their writing assignments. They find that there are significant gender differences in the use of hedges (e.g., words such as 'suggest', 'possible', 'may', 'assumption') and boosters (e.g., 'obviously', 'clearly' or the use of first-person pronouns): Women* are more likely to utilize the former and less likely to employ the latter. These findings are supported by Fatemeh Mirzapour (2016) who analyzes the use of hedges and first-person pronouns in research articles of applied linguistics and chemistry. The author also concludes that women* are more likely to use hedges in both disciplines, thereby also providing evidence that STEM disciplines are not exempt from gender-related patterns of writing.

However, linguistic markers are only one of the ways in which gender differences become visible in academic writing. Looking at citational politics is vital because citation, according to Mott and Cockayne (2017) "is a technology of power implicated in academic practices that reproduce a white heteromasculinist neoliberal academy, but which also offers a model of resistance to those reproductions" (964). There exist several studies that engage with the gendered pattern that emerges when it comes to citation which largely provides men* (among other privileged social groups) with an advantage. For example, in their analysis of conference issues of *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, Earhart et al. (2021) find that both female* and male* authors disproportionately cite publications written by men* (which can in part be explained by women*'s underrepresentation in the field), but men* cite research authored by women* about half as much as their female* counterparts. This pattern of gender discrimination through citation is echoed by other scholars in various disciplines such as political science (Dion et al., 2018), astronomy (Caplar et al., 2017), and neuroscience (Fulvio et al., 2021).

The underrepresentation of FLINTA* in the academy, coupled with discriminatory citation practices employed by many (especially male*) scholars lead to a picture in which research by male* academics emerges as the 'gold standard' simply because it is cited more often. If students are not provided with information about the power dynamics behind citations, they are effectively socialized to consider men* the more prestigious, or even superior, scientists, even though this is not necessarily overtly communicated. Circling back to the experience of epistemic injustice, many FLINTA* students consequently inhabit a space in which the knowledge produced by persons like them is routinely disadvantaged, which impacts the way in which they evaluate their own competency as budding scholars. Additionally, the implicit messaging of male* superiority might lead them to reproduce the same gender discrimination patterns in their own projects: As they attempt to substantiate their own

knowledge claims, the scholarship they deem relevant enough to cite is often research published by men*, by which they unknowingly contribute to upholding epistemic injustice.

While the studies presented in this section are only a selection of the academic literature available on the topic, they nevertheless indicate that experiences of epistemic injustice are reflected in academic writing. Circling back to Beaufaÿs and Krais (2005), we argue that these linguistic markers and citational practices might have an impact on whether the texts, and by extension their writers, are perceived to be in line with the academic habitus. This, in turn, might impact a person's chances of having a career as an academic.

We also argue that being aware of epistemic injustice experienced by FLINTA* individuals, as well as how it manifests in the academic practice and writing of (prospective) academics is very important in a writing consultation setting. According to Godbee (2017) the act of writing up (asserting one's authority in writing and negotiating one's agency and rights) allows writers to stand up for their epistemic rights which can help them achieve their writing goals. Godbee argues that, by affirming a writer's epistemic rights, educators (e.g., writing tutors) can take on the role of facilitators in this process. Employing a relational pedagogy (based on building and sustaining relationships and prioritizing individuals and their needs), developing a language to talk to writers about their epistemic rights, and encouraging them to "analyze, speak back to [authority], and feel like they can make new and provocative claims" (613) can, according to Godbee, help counter epistemic injustice.

## Epistemic Injustice and Epistemological Development – Theoretical Framework

In this section, we introduce the theoretical foundations of this article. Fricker's theory serves as our theoretical framework with which we have developed the research questions. Baxter Magolda's model functions as an interpretive tool that helps us situate the experiences temporally and showcase gendered differences within the context of epistemological development.

### Epistemic Injustice

Gaining knowledge, passing it on, and being able to interpret one's own experience are essential epistemic practices that we perform daily (Fricker, 2007, 1). Miranda Fricker shows that these epistemic practices are necessarily performed by subjects who are socially situated. This perspective brings issues of power into focus and allows the ethical dimension of epistemic life to become visible: The dimension of justice and injustice (Fricker, 2007, vii). Fricker mentions sexism and racism as concrete political and social examples from which epistemic injustice arises. If, for example, a woman*'s statements are dismissed as 'female* intuition' gender power is involved (Fricker, 2007, 9).

Fricker (2007) describes two forms of epistemic injustice, testimonial and hermeneutical injustice:

> Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences (1).

For our analysis we will use both concepts: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. If FLINTA* students are affected by a lack of hermeneutical resources, it can impact how they frame and interpret their experiences at university. Therefore, it is relevant to understand at which point in university life (or even outside of the university) FLINTA* individuals have encountered interpretative resources that have been useful to them in interpreting their experiences, and at which points they have missed such tools. Fricker emphasizes that experiences of women* are less conceptualized in collective forms of understanding, stating that "so much of women's experience was obscure, even unspeakable" (Fricker, 2007, 148).

The concept of testimonial injustice helps us to examine how FLINTA* students perceive their own knowledgeability in an academic setting and why they arrive at such assessments. Testimonial injustice results from an economy of power that distributes credibility unjustly. According to Fricker, the central case[7] of testimonial injustice occurs, when people experience a credibility deficit due to prejudices regarding their social identity (Fricker, 2007, 17-27): "[P]rejudices that 'track' the subject through different dimensions of social activity – economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, and so on" (27) lead to systematic testimonial injustice because they are linked to other types of injustice. In a patriarchal society, prejudices against FLINTA* persons are directed against their social identity. They are systemic, affecting the subjects not only in terms of the dimension of knowledge but also in terms of other dimensions such as the labor market or political and public participation.

In this context, Fricker (2007, 37) sheds light on social stereotypes.[8] She understands them as images that are so powerful that they can influence a person's judgment even if they contradict said person's beliefs. Members of a subordinated group can thus reproduce epistemic injustice against their own group, despite their rejection of these stereotypical images. Fricker (2007, 37-39) calls this residual internalization. It is the most insidious and subtle form of testimonial injustice, and it takes a special effort of self-consciousness to expose this kind of bias in one's thinking. For our research, this means that, while FLINTA* individuals in academia have in many cases emancipated themselves intellectually from stereotypical prejudices towards them, these are at the same time so deeply inscribed in their behavior and judgments that they still partially (unconsciously) reproduce them.

The wrong that is done to someone when they are not given their due credibility takes different forms. Fricker distinguishes between primary and secondary harm of testimonial injustice. The primary harm is being denied an essential to human value – the capacity of being a knower (Fricker, 2007, 44). The secondary harm comprises possible follow-on disadvantages and can be categorized into practical and epistemic harm. Practical consequences might include a wrongful criminal conviction or being denied career advancement. Epistemic harm operates at the level of a person's beliefs: Someone who is experiencing persistent testimonial injustice may lose confidence in their own judgment and thus their access to knowledge. Epistemic harm also takes a less direct route: It prevents the development of 'intellectual virtues' such as intellectual courage, which ensures that one's own convictions are not

7 Fricker (2007, 27) calls this case "central" because it reveals how epistemic injustice fits into the broader pattern of social justice.

8 Fricker (2007, 30) understands stereotypes in a neutral sense as an adequate tool for making credibility judgments. They can be reliable and unreliable but are not to be regarded as something negative in principle. However, stereotypes are the main point of entry for prejudices.

hastily abandoned in the face of criticism (Fricker, 2007, 46-50). This is relevant for our research as the ability to defend one's own argument against criticism is of great importance in academic settings.

To counteract testimonial injustice, Fricker introduces the concept of the virtuous hearer (Fricker, 2007, 60-85). With this, she presents two perspectives: that of the victims and that of the perpetrators (the latter play a crucial role in improving the situation). Forms of resistance by victims of epistemic injustice are thus not adequately explored by Fricker (Kusch, 2009, 173). Still, with the concept of testimonial injustice, Fricker shows the harm to which the wrongful denial of knowledge can lead. Those affected likely doubt their own beliefs and intellectual abilities and thus attribute less credibility to themselves in the production of knowledge than people who are not subject to such discrimination. At the same time, the unjustified denial of knowledge significantly hampers opportunities for personal and professional development and advancement.

## Gender-Related Patterns of Epistemological Development

In addition to Fricker's theory, we also worked with Baxter Magolda's model of epistemological reflection. In her book *Knowing and Reasoning in College* (1992) the author develops a model for college students' intellectual development over the course of their studies with a specific focus on the impact of gender on said development. The results of this study are summarized succinctly in her later book *Making Their Own Way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-Development* (2001), which provides the basis for the following introduction to the model.

She identifies four different 'stages of knowing' which students chronologically traverse over the course of their epistemological development. The author argues that gender-related (but not gender-exclusive) patterns emerge within every stage of knowing.

The first stage, absolute knowing, is characterized by the assumption that knowledge exists in an absolute form, meaning it is either right or wrong. Women* are more likely to take on a passive, receiving view of knowledge (receiving pattern), while men* tend to be more assertive and active in their engagement with it (mastery pattern) (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 27-29).

Secondly, a transitional way of knowing (the second stage) accepts that knowledge is certain in some areas (e.g., in the natural sciences), but uncertain in others (e.g., in the humanities and social sciences). If there is disagreement over the supposed 'truth' it is assumed that this is because the facts are not yet known. Women* tend to subscribe to an interpersonal pattern in which they focus on sharing with and connecting to (the perspectives of) others, while men* tend to subscribe to an impersonal pattern, in which they create distance from others and the subject under study (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 29-32).

In independent knowing, the third stage, learners assume that knowledge is inherently uncertain and dependent on individuals and their specific viewpoints. Women* tend to follow an interindividual pattern in which they largely find it difficult to voice and stand up for their views and opinions while men* tend to find it easier to establish their voice alongside others but struggle to engage with other perspectives (individual pattern) (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 32-35).

In the last stage, contextual knowing, it is also assumed that knowledge is uncertain. The stage is characterized by the perspective that knowledge is context-dependent. Using available evidence,

learners judge the validity of different knowledge claims and come to the conclusion that individuals' "knowledge [is valid] if they can support their stance" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 35). The gender-related patterns are merged in this stage and individuals are able to combine elements from the two previously separated patterns as they see fit (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 35).

It needs to be stated, however, that the model is based on an examination of a relatively homogenous and privileged sample population and operates on the outdated assumption that gender is binary[9], a view to which we ourselves do not subscribe. However, we believe that the model can nevertheless help us in the following ways: Firstly, it can help us sort our participants' stories into different stages of epistemological development to better be able to contextualize them. Secondly, we would argue that, although Baxter Magolda operates from a binary perspective, the patterns associated with women* are also likely to apply to all four conversation participants. This is because all four of us have been socialized and are largely perceived as women* by others, regardless of how we see ourselves.[10]

## Research Questions

The following research questions emerged after linking Fricker's theory with our area of interest:

- How is epistemic injustice perceived by FLINTA* students?
- What areas of university life does epistemic injustice impact and how do FLINTA* students navigate this?
- How does the experience of epistemic injustice affect academic writing?

## Study Details

In the following we present our methodological approach, introduce the conversation participants and the dataset, and provide a step-by-step description of the analysis process.

### Methodology

To collect our data, we had conversations with two FLINTA* individuals, one of whom is in the process of finishing her master's thesis, while the other is a recent graduate of a master's program. We chose two people with whom we are friends because we believed that this familiarity would lead them to be more forthcoming. Consequently, this experience was a sort of research playground to 'see what happens' when the lines between research and private life are blurred. However, as the methodology expects researchers to critically reflect on their relationship with their participants it consequently offered the possibility be transparent about this setting.

We originally planned to conduct episodic interviews, a special type of narrative interview (Flick, 2011; Misoch, 2019), that is suitable to ascertain interviewee's subjective experiences, and consequently went into the conversations with a catalog of conversation prompts. In reality, however, the interviews turned out to be more like conversations in which we also shared our own experiences with epistemic

9 This makes sense when one considers that the model was developed in the early 1990s.

10 It should be noted that the model would be insufficient if we had participants who were socialized as men* and presented as such in the past (e.g., transgender women*) as it would not be able to capture such complexity in an individual's personal and epistemological journey.

injustice. While this was not necessarily planned, it provided us with two additional perspectives on the topic, namely our own. This also served to put our partners at ease because we shared our respective experiences, which provided catharsis on both sides.

For data analysis, the transcripts of both conversations were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), a methodology developed by the psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. This approach emphasizes the researcher's active role in coding and theme generation, acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in the analysis process. It is also able to account for the subjective, and potentially contradictory, experiences of our participants as it is based on a "qualitative orientation [which] usually emphasizes meaning as contextual or situated, reality or reali*ties* as multiple" (Braun et al., 2019, 848, emphasis in original).

Braun and Clarke outline various orientations within RTA, such as inductive, deductive, latent, constructionist, and critically realist approaches, which can be combined as needed to fit the research project (Braun & Clarke, n.d.-b). We chose a combination of deductive (as we were driven by our theoretical and analytic interest), constructionist (as we do assume that the realities produced in the conversations are only a small segment of a larger discourse) and semantic (as we were focused on the explicit content of the conversations as to not force our interpretations on our participants' statements) orientations.

The RTA process, as described by Braun et al. (2019), involves six stages – which will be detailed in the following section – that cumulatively generate patterns or themes within the dataset. It is important to note that the RTA process is not strictly linear, but rather reflexive and recursive (Braun et al., 2019, 852). The stages often overlap, and the six steps presented by Braun and Clarke should be viewed as a flexible toolkit that can be adapted to suit the specific research project (Braun & Clarke, n.d.-a).

We chose the Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology as we feel that it best reflects our own approach to research in which we view it not as an objective contribution to the discourse but rather as a subjective product that is heavily influenced by us as individuals. We therefore also utilized a participatory approach and included our contributors by having them read and – if they felt it was necessary – amend our analysis, as well as include a testimonial on how they perceived their participation in the project. This allowed us to partly dismantle the hierarchy between researcher and subject and work more collaboratively with the individuals who were kind enough to share their experiences with us.

## Conversation Participants and Conducting the Interviews

The conversations took place in April 2023, with one conversation conducted online via Zoom and the other in person in a private setting. Each of us conducted one conversation. Since we utilized the entire exchange for analysis (including the experiences that we – Nora and Simone – shared during the conversations), we will briefly describe all four conversation participants. Three have an interdisciplinary academic background, while one individual has specialized in a single field of study. One conversation participant has already completed her master's studies and is not currently enrolled at a university but is still active in the academic field. The other three are currently studying, having already completed at least a bachelor's or master's degree. As we explained in our discussion of the FLINTA* term, three

of the conversation participants are cisgender women, of whom two are heterosexual and one is non-heterosexual. One participant in the conversation is non-binary and non-heterosexual. All are white and middle-class. Two were born and raised in Austria, two in Germany.

The conversations lasted approximately 90 minutes and were transcribed using the software Buzz. In its transcribed form, the material generated a total of 33 A4 pages (single line spacing) or 1531 lines. We chose to transcribe the conversations with a focus on content and meaning rather than linguistic nuance. This fits both our research aims and the fact that the selected quotes needed to be translated into English for the final paper.

## Conducting the Analysis

During the analysis process, we utilized the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022) as a guiding framework. The thorough engagement with the transcripts and repeated listening to the audio files allowed us to become familiar with the data (*Phase 1, familiarizing yourself with your data*). For the first round of coding (*Phase 2, generating initial codes*), we decided to individually code the transcript that was less familiar to each of us to be able to utilize the 'fresher perspective' of the non-participant. This approach also allowed us to avoid coding our own statements right at the beginning of the coding process. During this phase, we summarized each unit of meaning with a brief code. We coded the entire dataset swiftly, without getting caught on specific code formulations. In the next step, we cross-checked our codes together, discussing and adjusting individual codes.

Subsequently, we reviewed the list of codes with the aim of generating initial themes (*Phase 3, searching for themes*). As our starting point, we took notes on potential themes, which we had already formulated in the preceding phase. As we assigned codes to these themes, we sometimes redefined themes and generated additional ones to authentically represent the codes within the themes. This approach allowed us to assign the initial 219 codes to 19 themes, with most codes being associated with multiple themes. Following this, we consolidated the 19 themes into five overarching themes.

To engage more deeply with the themes (*Phase 4, reviewing themes*), we employed an additional approach: utilizing a spreadsheet, we counted both the frequency of individual theme assignments and the intersections among different themes. From these intersections, we derived connections between the themes. For instance, if multiple codes were assigned to both theme 'M' and theme 'G', it indicated a relationship between the two. We gained two key insights: firstly, a quick overview of the most frequent and thus particularly relevant themes; secondly, the ability to check if our generated 'superordinate themes' aligned with these intersections. This created the foundation for another discussion on the 19 subthemes and five superordinate themes, ultimately leading us to refine them into 20 subthemes and 4 superordinate themes. Following this, we created a thematic map to illustrate the relationships between superordinate and subthemes, facilitating a clearer understanding for further analysis.

The refinement of the themes (*Phase 5, defining and naming themes*) was already part of our writing process (*Phase 6, producing the report*) as we believe that the act of writing itself can help clarify content and stimulate analytical thinking. In this combined phase, we again worked closely with the transcripts. We revisited the individual coded passages to deepen the analysis, reevaluate initial thoughts, and select text passages that vividly captured the essence of each respective theme for the reader.

# Navigating Epistemic Injustice as Part of a Personal Epistemological Journey Within an 'Ill-Fitting' Academic Environment

In the following, the authors Nora and Simone, as well as the two conversation partners, will be referred to as 'Contributor A, B, C, and D' to ensure anonymity. The quotes were translated with the help of Chat GPT and were checked for accuracy and amended by both Simone and Nora. Direct quotes will be labeled with the contributor's letter and the line number from the transcript. The analysis is structured around the four themes we developed: 'Relating to Others', 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus', 'Dealing With Epistemic Injustice', and 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology'. Since many of our codes have been assigned to multiple subthemes, these four overarching themes naturally overlap.

## Relating to Others

### Relating to Men* and FLINTA*

It became evident that the contributors often construct men* as more successful in various areas than they construct themselves or other FLINTA*. Men* seem to navigate their university and work routines effortlessly, exhibiting more confidence and receiving positive responses for their contributions. Conversely, the value of their own contributions is questioned by the participants. The strong presence of men* in seminars and work meetings is acknowledged and critically reflected upon. However, this recognition often does not result in an improved self-assessment of their own contributions. Instead, specific strategies of competence are adopted to be able to compete alongside men* (see section 'Competence Strategies'). We argue that this pattern of valorizing men*'s work and manner of taking up space in academic settings (e.g., seminars) while simultaneously degrading one's own contributions is one way in which testimonial injustice operates: FLINTA* are largely socialized with the message that their contributions are less worthy of recognition and have internalized this to the extent that they reproduce this narrative themselves. It could also be argued that hermeneutical injustice is at play here: Particularly at the beginning of their studies, students are not yet sensitive to the power dynamics inherent in university structures. Therefore, they also lack the interpretative resources to make sense of their experience of feeling 'less than' in a setting that was created to fit men*, who can therefore more easily occupy space and make use of their structural advantages. These dynamics are illustrated by C and A's statements:

> I believe I spoke up […], but usually with shorter remarks. The confidence to speak at length,

> presenting different aspects and considerations, is something I have always admired in others. And yes, I've had the feeling that […] male* colleagues mostly had that confidence to speak for an extended period and […] somehow managed to present things in a way that might be a bit controversial, but skillfully enough that the professor would still take it positively (C, 27-34).

> So, when I looked at my master's program, there was this guy who somehow managed to secure a spot in a research group under a professor and even published a paper while he was still in his master's. And I thought to myself, 'I just didn't come across that kind of opportunity' (A, 225-229).

> Here, it becomes evident that A feels disadvantaged in terms of her career within the academic sphere, which clearly demonstrates that epistemic injustice not only impacts the assessment of one's own competence but also, in Fricker's (2007) words, causes practical harm by impeding professional advancement (46-47).

The assessment of other FLINTA* individuals in the conversations is notably more nuanced. FLINTA* individuals exchange thoughts and experiences with each other more extensively than with men*, giving rise to a sense of shared struggles. However, this also results in the impression that it is 'only' FLINTA* individuals who are struggling:

> The impression I often got was that women* connect and struggle together, but that men* somehow don't struggle, even though I know it's not true. But that impression stuck with me, and it somehow influenced my perception of competence. […] When we exchange thoughts and everyone is like, 'Can I do this?' […] [or] 'Yes, I feel the same way too!' […] I found myself inclined, if I didn't hear that from a certain group, to think they don't have it, even though I objectively know that can't be the case (B, 527-537).

Sharing one's struggles and uncertainties is empowering while simultaneously contributing to a collective devaluation. Contributor A emphasizes that the exchange with FLINTA* often takes place on an organizational and social, rather than on a professional, level:

> And with colleagues, whether cis or not, I'm not sure… The exchange about uncertainties is more focused on organizational procedures or a bit more on handling interpersonal situations. Like, for example, when project meetings are coming up, there's talk about it like, 'Yeah, I found it really challenging because there are such different, strong personalities coming together, and as a moderator, it's sometimes difficult for me to steer that.' And less in the context of technical knowledge. I also had the impression that it often turns into a situation of reassurance. Like, 'No, no, you're doing really well!' Which sometimes, for me, isn't quite the same as saying, 'Oh yes, I sometimes feel that way too, but here's how I handle it.' Which is something quite different from my perspective (A, 512-522).

A general affirmation is perceived by A as less helpful than specific feedback. While the exchange fosters a sense of shared experiences and belonging, this kind of empowerment is seen as limited.
The following statements are a good example for what Fricker (2007) calls 'residual internalization', which leads D, A, and C to reproduce negative stereotypes or be overly critical towards other FLINTA* even though they are aware that, by adopting this perception, they are adhering to an image they actually (want to) reject:

> [W]hen a woman* says something, you kind of think, 'yeah, yeah,' and only half-listen, but when a man* says something, you're immediately more attentive. And what I've noticed

about myself is that I tend to question women* much more (C, 303-307).

> [E]specially when it's particularly feminine FLINTA* individuals, I tend to think, 'Huh? Maybe a bit too focused on your appearance? […]' And I have to sometimes reprimand myself and say, 'Hey, that person can do as they please. It doesn't mean they're not intelligent' (A, 339-344).

### Self-Assessment

This section focuses on moments of self-assessment among the contributors, which vary in relation to different actors as well as in different situations and thematic areas.

For example, the pattern of believing oneself to not be competent or knowledgeable enough appears in A's assessment of herself as a (non-)valuable contributor to this project. Even though its goal is simply to capture the contributors subjective experience with epistemic injustice, she struggles to see herself as a worthy source of information on her own marginalization in academic settings:

> This situation now, that you're asking me about the topic, and I am a contributor to your scientific work […] is like: 'Oh my God, am I prepared enough for this?! Am I even able to say something valuable that she can work with?! […] I hope I don't spoil her work by doing this?' (A, 82-86)

As mentioned previously, the enhancement of others goes hand in hand with the depreciation of oneself. In the context of seminars, C describes this as a subtle process in which the supposedly smarter remarks of previous speakers inhibit her own participation. When making a contribution in the seminar, she experiences the sensation that her statements are not being picked up by the instructor:

> I believe I've always had the feeling that other people say smarter things […]. It could have been super indirect as well, like I felt that the others were being pushed more. And I kind of had the feeling that I get little… Well, my statement is heard, but then […] it's not followed up on, not much is said about it. And that's how I think I got the feeling that what I have to contribute maybe isn't that valuable (C, 43-73).

Even linguistic expressions such as dialect are evaluated and devalued in comparison with others. The way of speaking is linked to (in)competence. Here, we also observe a strong connection with early pivotal experiences (see section 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology'):

> But in the context of seminars and lectures, I've often thought to myself: 'Why don't I sound as smart as the others?' […] [T]hat was, I believe, already something within me. A bit like: 'Why don't I sound… I don't know, like people from Germany' [C is from Austria, Note], […] [I]t's like whatever they say, it sounds so smart (C, 78-82).

Self-assessment also depends on the type of knowledge that is required in each situation. Social competence is more often attributed to FLINTA* individuals, which explains why their self-confidence is greater in these areas compared to instances in which specialized knowledge is required. However, within the academic context, specialized knowledge is usually the one that is rewarded. This is illustrated by D's experiences of engaging in different settings which, according to her, required different types of knowledge:

> [I]n this group setting, I felt quite comfortable and confident to share something. And that's because a lot of it was focused more on social competence or lived knowledge, areas where I actually felt really secure in sharing. And that makes a big difference for me compared to seminars at university, where I feel that it's more about how much you've read and how well you navigate the discourses, whether you know the actors and the theories, and can handle them with ease. And in those situations, I feel much more uncertain about saying the wrong thing (D, 139-147).

The comfort level also rises when a topic is treated in a more 'superficial' manner and there is room to bring in everyday or lived knowledge. This increases C's confidence in her own competence, as she explains in the following quote:

> I also find that in seminars, where you often approach topics initially on a more superficial level […] because you're not yet delving deep and into the area where you feel you need to have that profound understanding. So, in the more superficial phase, I definitely said more or would have felt more confident to say something compared to when it gets really specific (C, 154-159).

The quote illustrates that the self-assessment of the contributors also varies depending on how 'neutral' or uncontested the respective knowledge appears or whether there seems to exist one 'correct' way with which to engage with knowledge, as is the case in the natural sciences:

> [T]hat's what I love about the natural sciences […], Because […] you can hold on to the numbers there. You don't have to reveal anything about yourself, nor do you have to delve deep into any theories. You just have to calculate those equations (C, 228-232).

## Relating to Instructors

The four contributors also establish relationships with those individuals positioned hierarchically above them within the university system. The educators in the seminar rooms or lecture halls provide a framework within which the students operate. In the described situations, it becomes clear that these educators essentially curate their own image. Simultaneously, the students perceive attributes of the instructors such as age, gender (performance), and motivation, and interpret these cues. This leads to either identification with the educators or a perception of distance and lack of approachability, which subsequently influences interactions within the respective seminars or lectures:

> [O]ne of them was a man*, a professor, over 50, who came across as super competent, responding to all the questions that were raised. [When he allowed questions] you always felt he handled them very confidently. [...] [H]e positioned himself as the person who possesses that expertise. [...] I don't know, I could never do that because if I stood up there and critical questions came my way, I'd be completely lost, because you need to have that confidence to manage everything. [...] With that professor, I wouldn't have dared to participate much. [...] [T]here was kind of a different level of expectation when it came to raising questions (D, 186-219).

In this quote, D directly compares herself to the professor. On the one hand, she undermines her own competence by stating that she would not be able to handle the situations as confidently. On the other hand, this creates a distance from the instructor. The way he presents himself in this setting does not offer any possibility for identification for D and does not inspire her to participate.

Rather, educators who embody the role of the 'great (male*) authority' evoke reverence and do not come across as very approachable. This can significantly hinder one's own engagement, as described by A:

> These are the luminaries, and you shouldn't bother or pester them with trivial questions. For instance, even with my current supervisor, who was also my advisor for the final thesis, there have been times when I've really pondered: 'Should I write him the email? Should I ask him that?' And then I've spent hours thinking about it because I thought, 'I can't just send him an email about something like this. The guy is so busy and overwhelmed, I can't add my little thing on top and ask something from him. I don't have that right' (A, 559-566).

In the accounts provided by A and D, it becomes evident that they hold themselves back in interactions with these older, male* educators, even when they feel the urge to contribute or ask questions. While such feelings of inadequacy might also plague male* students, these statements nevertheless illustrate that the message "You don't belong here, because you don't have what it takes" that Beaufaÿs and Krais (2005, 90) speak of, is still being received by FLINTA* students.

However, contrasting this experience, a FLINTA* lecturer who positions herself as vulnerable allows D to identify with her and facilitates interaction during the lecture:

> And in the very first session, she actually opened up about how she approached the course and how she wasn't fully prepared yet: 'Well, we're going to explore this together.' [...] And then, in one of the initial sessions, it also permeated the content, [...] turning vulnerability into strength or how important it actually is for society. [...] [S]he simply created a different framework and positioned herself in a very different way (D, 199-207).

Identification and approachability were established for C when the instructors had not distanced themselves too far from the students, in the sense that it becomes evident that they also need to prepare intensively for the course in order to deliver it: "[W]here I had the feeling like, hey, you've been engaging with this, you've had to delve into this intensively to be able to present it to us, it ignited much more enthusiasm in me" (C, 245-247).

While the importance of instructors with whom one can identify has been shown, these individuals are practically non-existent in STEM disciplines. Contributor A reports mostly identifying with instructors from the social sciences while feeling alienated from FLINTA* in STEM, who, according to her, oftentimes exhibited masculinized behaviors:

> I absolutely didn't have a role model in my discipline. No one where I thought, 'Wow, such a cool woman*, such a cool FLINTA* person!' [...] I think, as a role model, I would have needed someone who is active in my main field of study [instead of just people from the humanities and social sciences] (A, 434-440).

B also describes the uncertainty that arose in her when an instructor did not conform to the prevalent norm within the system. This highlights how strong the associations that we connect with certain roles are, particularly ones associated with authority and power. It is not simply accepted that anyone can fill the role of the professor but individuals deviating from the white male* norm are still continually questioned, even by individuals that would position themselves as allies:

> But for me, a very impactful experience was being taught by a Black woman* [...], who was also young on top of that. [...] It evoked such a strong sense of uncertainty in me because my whole brain was like, 'This is wrong.' Not in the sense of... I was really glad about it, but I just didn't know how to handle it, because I was like, 'A Person of Color in a position of power? That has never happened to me before' (B, 359-365).

### Relating to Other Authors

All contributors report having very high standards for their academic achievements. In doing so, they place themselves in relation to other researchers, whose accomplishments they (negatively) compare themselves to, but whose work they also actively use to lend credibility to their written pieces.[11] This is illustrated in the following quote by A: "Yeah, I think it's so ingrained in me that I always have this urge to cram my texts with 'By the way, this person also says this, or here, this person says that'" (A, 427-429). D reports feelings of inferiority regarding her own contribution when writing academically:

> I've always considered the people whose books I've read to be much more knowledgeable and smarter than myself. So, I always felt like, 'Yeah, what more can I add to that?' [...] I never had that feeling like, 'Wow, I really have something to say about it!' when others have written a whole book about it and I [...] just scratched the surface (D, 597-602).

The analysis of this theme provided the following insights: The transfer of knowledge occurs among socially situated individuals (Fricker, 2007) and the conversations revealed that the perception of one's own and others' competence are closely tied to the relationships and interactions that shape university life. Based on interactions, the contributors experience varying degrees of competence attribution, both to themselves and to others. Within this web of actors, they also position themselves and others as more or less competent. This constant interaction with other individuals and their perspectives and disavowal of one's own opinions can also be connected to Baxter Magolda (1992). She argues that women* tend to subscribe to an 'interpersonal' and 'interindividual' pattern in the second ('transitional knowing') and third ('contextual knowing') stage of epistemological development: They focus on connecting their views with those of others but also struggle to voice and stand up for their own views and opinions. It sometimes leads them to distance themselves from their own lines of argumentation and to question their judgment. This 'epistemic harm' (Fricker, 2007) of testimonial injustice is clearly represented in the quotes by the contributors. The analysis of the theme also shows that the experience of epistemic injustice is not limited to certain spheres of university life but rather affects all academic settings: seminars and lectures, but also interactions with professors and fellow students.

## Interacting with the Academic Habitus

### The Academic Habitus

The narratives of the four contributors paint a picture of the academic habitus. It is a perspective from those who cannot (completely) conform to it and thus often struggle with and against it. In these narratives, men* naturally take their place as embodiments of this habitus, a perspective that largely

11 The experiences of the contributors with academic writing are further explored in the section 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus'.

aligns with existing research by, for example, Sandra Beaufaÿs (see section 'The Male* Academic Habitus'). On the one hand, the accounts depict a system of men*'s networks, with men* promoting other men* and being at ease with navigating academic spaces. On the other hand, the resulting rules and conventions are commented upon.

As previously described in the research, male* knowledge is more deeply rooted in academic discourse. This is evident in the literature presented in lectures and seminars, as described by C, and it is also reflected in the process of writing academic papers. In some disciplines, there is often no avoiding conveying predominantly male* knowledge. Even in fields predominantly studied by women*, as C describes, engaging with theoretical concepts developed by women* remains the exception: "[W]henever women* were chosen, it had this [...] aftertaste of 'token woman*'. Even if they were deceased female* scholars or something" (C, 356-359).

B describes the academic space as being influenced by masculinized behaviors, which are also reproduced by FLINTA* individuals as they have to conform to the male* academic habitus. The impression arises that room for opposition is largely reserved for individuals in positions of power, of whom few are FLINTA*. Consequently, the following norm is established: Displaying uncertainty has no place in academia; what is important is projecting an outwardly competent image.

> [T]he methods that men* exhibit aren't necessarily caring or nurturing but are still routinely imitated, which naturally results in the space itself becoming less appealing for FLINTA* individuals (B, 318-321).

> The academic habitus is simply masculine. And [...] you have to push through: 'Do or die!' Or you have to find subversive strategies, which, of course, you can only afford to do when you're in a position of power (B, 448-450).

While A can exchange uncertainties with friends it remains unsatisfying and unproductive in a work context. When she attempted to discuss an uncertainty with a male* colleague, the response was more of a dismissal:

> [I]n the work context, like now, with academic work, it doesn't seem to work. Especially not with cis men. I brought it up with a colleague once: 'Yeah, I'm not quite sure about that.' And there was this quick relativizing, which, I think, was meant to be nice or reassuring, but also conveyed a bit of a feeling like: 'Don't whine about it!' (A, 507-512)

Her attempt to establish herself within the academic circle of a professor did not succeed for A, leading her to question whether she has done enough to advance in academia. This also highlights that A navigates a system that does not seem tailored to her:

> [I]t's a bit hard to say whether that's because I should have taken more initiative myself and pursued my academic career differently. But on the other hand, I also know that at the time, I tried to do what was possible for me. Especially during my Bachelor's, when I actually had a professor who was knowledgeable about the method I used in my Bachelor's and Master's theses. I was so eager to somehow get into his circle, but he just didn't care, neither one way nor the other. So I couldn't tell you what I should have done differently or whether he even had a big circle anymore, or I don't know. Or maybe it was like: 'I have my position here, and I'll just take it easy.' I really don't know (A, 231-241).

**Writing Amidst Disciplinary Constraints, Uncertainty, and Enjoyment**

While discussing the writing process, it became particularly clear that this process takes place in constant interaction with the academic habitus and experiences of epistemic injustice. Applying learned rules and methods for scholarly writing, comparing oneself to other scholars in the field, and the feeling that one does not quite belong and therefore must pretend to be knowledgeable while silently grappling with uncertainties, is a constant struggle. Especially C highlights the enjoyable side of writing, where research curiosity and the search for one's own position trigger a surge of motivation. Once again, disciplinary differences are addressed – in this case, between social sciences and STEM fields – regarding the possibility of positioning oneself as a researcher in written works and reflecting on one's approach or conditions. Contributor A paints a picture of the natural sciences as a field dominated by men* and objectified knowledge.

Both C and A indicate that they hold very high standards for their written work. For C, this elevated standard increases the pressure while writing and hinders her from beginning to write:

> [I]t's just really difficult for me to sit down with such things because I believe I have high expectations. Then I'm sitting there with my high expectations, hating everything, and then I need the time pressure to think 'Okay, I'll just write something, better than nothing' and then I start writing something and then I get into the groove, and it works (C, 509-514).

For A, the high standard manifests in an extremely thorough examination of her line of argumentation: "I just think about the thoughts I have five times, whether I can say it like that, whether I can phrase it like that, and what my argumentation basis actually is" (A, 173-175). Certain approaches to written work are taught and maintained in the academic curriculum, such as the pattern of a good argumentation involving 'premise, premise, conclusion', as described by C. The perceived obligation to constantly rely on sources leads her to a tiring search for suitable references, which diminishes her enthusiasm for writing. In line with C's experience, contributor A also describes the urge to support significant portions of her text with existing literature:

> I still had this feeling, especially when it came to scholarly texts, that I had to substantiate everything. There couldn't be a single little paragraph that wasn't somehow supported by something. I think that's so ingrained in me that I always have this need to cram my texts full with 'By the way, this person also says this, or here, this person says this and that' (A, 425-429).

The fear of opening oneself up to criticism by not relying on the texts of prominent (male*) scholars (which might call into question one's right to occupy space in the academy), is exemplified in the following statement:

> [M]y initial impulse, which I didn't question [...], was to choose the most famous man*, behind whom you can also hide a bit, because no one says, 'Uh, difficult choice for the theoretical basis,' when you choose Foucault (B, 192-195).

Writing papers in which one engages with self-collected data appears to make the writing process easier as it provides a lot of material with which one can fill pages while simultaneously making one's own contribution very visible: "Yes, that's new material. Surely this is something new, interesting, nobody has done it like this before" (D, 591-594).

In contrast, literature-based work tends to exacerbate existing uncertainties about one's own competence and contribution:

> It's so stuffed with evidence that it might not be so obvious anymore that it's my own opinion. [...] But that's more of a feeling I have while writing, something that nobody has ever told me, like 'You can't even recognize what your own contribution is' or something (A, 180-183).

Disciplinary conventions also play an important role as C reports uncertainty about the extent to which she can express herself in a scientific paper in the natural sciences. For example, she questions whether it would be permissible to openly discuss her personal connection with the topic in the introduction of her master's thesis. She also mentions that she and her colleagues received feedback on a written assignment, stating that their reflection section in the paper was undermining their work. In this context, C and A observe significant differences between the social and natural sciences:

> Because in the natural sciences, it's not the task to insert oneself. [...]. You're already bringing yourself in anyway because you conducted the research. But that degree of reflection, that you're a person who's writing this and not a robot, as is the case in the social sciences, that's somehow passed by in the natural sciences (C, 616-621).

> I don't see the opportunity to position myself as a person within the work I do in the natural sciences [...]. Because [...] it's kind of [...] detached from people. Of course, that's not the case in all natural sciences, definitely not. And I am also very critical of this (A, 669-674).

Critically engaging with oneself as a researcher and with the research itself has little space in the natural sciences. If at all, reflection is packaged in 'neutral language', with an appearance of objectivity, that, it could be argued, is actually white, male* subjectivity as they are the individuals which dominate the field to this day:

> [T]he only thing I could say is that sometimes you might come across it, like: 'We also considered doing it this way, but due to these […] scientific and factual reasons, it didn't work out.' But perhaps someone might have actually packaged it that way and meant to say: 'I would have liked to do it this way, but due to the structures, it wasn't possible' (A, 766-771).

The veiling of identity, positionality, and subjectivity in STEM academic texts leaves A with the impression that everything has been written by men*, even though she is aware that this is not the case: "[W]hen I read scientific articles, whether I want it or not, there's always this initial sense that it was written by a white cisgender man" (A, 738-740). This assumption leaves her with the feeling that she has no choice but to adhere to the same style while writing, which forces her to reproduce a male* way of writing and conducting science:

> This feeling of, you're just swimming in this shark tank and well, the white cis men are the ones setting the rules and you just have to make sure you don't drown in there. And because of that, you end up imitating what they dictate in a somewhat forced way (A, 752-755).

However, the feelings towards STEM academic writing norms are somewhat ambivalent as the feeling of not having to 'expose oneself' as a person provides a sense of security as one is not being evaluated based on one's personhood: "It's also a bit nice to hide behind the numbers" (C, 627-628).

Even though she does not see quantitative research as suitable for every topic, C finds security in thoroughly engaging with data. In her conclusion, C aims to showcase that she understands her craft and can highlight her own accomplishments: "[T]he conclusion, I think, is where you can set your own priorities, what you consider relevant in the work. By choosing the topics that make it into the conclusion" (C, 722-724).

Outside constraints and the feeling of having to prove oneself while being plagued by uncertainties and insecurities are not necessarily conducive to enjoyment within the writing process. However, the conversations showed that there is joy to be found in the process. C describes the flow when constructing an argument and the interest in the topic as driving forces:

> But when I felt myself as a researcher and had this feeling that I was chasing after something, maybe nobody has thought about it yet, or something like that. [...] [I]n those moments, when I noticed, 'Oh, this is a really interesting topic and I want to explore this and that aspect', yeah, that's when I felt alive and in the flow (C, 499-509).

> [O]ne main thing is definitely your own interest. It's also a bit like [...] the urge to understand connections yourself, or to bring together two different theories or compare something, where you can personally grow (C, 521-524).

In summary, the theme 'Interacting with the Academic Habitus' detailed how FLINTA* individuals perceive epistemic injustice: In their experience, female* and FLINTA* knowledge is taught as less important, even as a type of niche knowledge that male* scholars need not engage with. The analysis also detailed how this experience of testimonial injustice is reflected in their academic writing. Because male* knowledge is so dominant in the discourse, the contributors cannot avoid reproducing it in their own texts. Additionally, as they do not feel confident in inhabiting the role of the self-assured scholar, they largely have high standards for their written contributions in an attempt to 'prove' that they belong in academia. At this nexus of uncertainty and high standards, the contributors begin to struggle: For C, this leads to procrastination, while A's intense need to prove that her argumentation is legitimate leads her to 'clutter' her text with a high number of credible sources that seemingly prove her own reasoning. The contributors also adhere to disciplinary conventions (e.g., not to position oneself in a STEM paper), which we argue is also the case because they continually grapple with the habitus of their discipline which they struggle to inhabit 'naturally'. As they do not perfectly fit this habitus they also cannot freely and flexibly interact with it.

## Dealing With Epistemic Injustice

### Competence Strategies

In the academic space, which is not made for FLINTA* and permeated by epistemic injustice, the contributors adopt competence strategies to assert their right to be present in this environment. These strategies are often not directly addressed as such in the conversations but appear rather subliminal. A common thread in the conversations is the pursuit of producing exceptionally good work and being well-prepared in various situations, as C puts it: "[...]I feel that if I want to make an impact, I need much stronger arguments and have to put in much more effort to earn recognition or knowledge

compared to men [...]" (C, 273-275). In seminars, thorough preparation, such as intensively reading the required literature, is necessary to counteract potential intimidation by male* colleagues' strategies for appearing competent and knowledgeable:

> I felt like we all had the same basis for discussion, and no one could just come up with something impressive out of thin air. [...] I always find that when there's a topic and someone starts talking really smart about something I don't know, it sounds really clever to me… Especially when they present it well, I get a little impressed and intimidated right away. But when we discuss a text, it's easier to notice if someone's just showing off (D, 167-174).

The fear of being found to be less than extremely competent is described by A, who only feels comfortable to share fully developed arguments with the class:

> I like to let my thoughts mature a bit, formulate them before I present them in a discourse that's ongoing, where maybe I might be misunderstood or face criticism, and I haven't prepared myself for that kind of exchange (A, 118-123).

Strategically building certain skills or knowledge reservoirs is another competence strategy, which is described by C and A:

> [N]ow I sort of strategize which topics are important to me, where I need to position myself, engage with the subject, and aim to achieve something. And which topics I just won't talk about… where I know I won't achieve anything, and it's just a waste of energy. I feel like it weakens me in the long run. So, I sometimes avoid saying things that I might be thinking because I feel that would somehow weaken my overall competence, how others see me, if I say things that [...] I haven't really thoroughly engaged with (C, 277-285).

> [W]ithin my topic, I'm seeking out a niche that hasn't really been explored at my institute yet. [...] And I'm actively working on building that up, so that I'll become that person. And people will come to me and say, '[…] [Y]ou're doing something there, explain how it works', and so on (A, 633-637).

Avoiding saying or doing things about which you do not feel competent is another strategy mentioned to prevent appearing incompetent. For instance, D discusses her reluctance to write empirical papers:

> I think I never really learned how to do empirical work properly. [...] And since I never felt like I really mastered it [...], it always seemed easier for me to open a book than to look for interviewees or, I don't know, go into the field (D, 574-582).

She also mentions avoiding active participation in seminars when she suspects a strong grasp of theoretical discourse is necessary, a point previously explored in the section 'Self-Assessment'.

The contributors also utilize competence strategies in their academic writing. This includes citing renowned authors to shield their work from criticism. Other strategies involve using extensive empirical data and relying on 'unassailable' facts to support their arguments (see section 'Writing Amidst'). B describes using many hedges in her bachelor's thesis. Self-relativizing and thereby making oneself 'smaller' can also be seen as a competence strategy in a system that devalues female* presence and contribution. It makes one less vulnerable than displaying confidence in a statement made:

> [W]hen we were finishing up the bachelor's thesis [...], [I noticed that] I hedged so much. [S]aying things like, 'You could interpret this as', and [a lack of] this whole confidence level that I sometimes notice in cis-men, to just say, 'I'm great, and my scientific achievement is also great'.[...] [E]ven though I would actually say that I hardly feel imposter syndrome, I realized that [...] [I unwittingly] make significant concessions, which tends to show itself in specific situations (B, 73-81).

Another competence strategy is adapting to a male*-oriented system through masculinized behaviors aimed at being perceived as equally competent as male* colleagues, which has already been explored in detail in the sections 'Relating to Men* and FLINTA*' and 'Relating to Instructors'.

### Empowerment

Even though all participants are routinely confronted with epistemic injustice, they also feel empowered in different situations and interactions. The conversations reveal that this is, for example, achieved in interaction with certain educators: Instructors who express their own uncertainty and create a caring seminar environment encourage (uncertain or insecure) students to participate more, as these students are made to feel more comfortable to set aside the perceived need to be 'perfect'. Empowerment also occurs when a sense of self-efficacy increases due to the honest interactions with instructors who are able to accept and publicly communicate when they have been proven 'wrong'. The engagement of educators with students' contributions and the recognition of the worth of these expressions foster enthusiasm:

> And at some point, I said, yes, the concept is nice, but it's incredibly heteronormative. He was like, 'Yes. Yes, you're right.' [with a surprised tone of voice, Note] I thought that was so cool. I mean, yes, it was obvious, but to somehow get confirmation. Or to receive such pleasantly joyful feedback. Those things really push me (C, 254-258).

> Where I then also think to myself, if I say this now, maybe [...] they will think about it. So, this sense of self-efficacy, not just saying something to have said something and show off, but because there really is a tangible counterpart, who might even develop a different perspective on something through the seminar context, I find that more invigorating (C, 247-252).

Secondly, the participants also feel empowered when embracing the role of a researcher. This happens during scholarly writing when they feel that they succeed in embodying the role of a researcher and develop their own position and argumentation. Reflecting on and disclosing one's situatedness as a researcher also feels empowering:

> [T]his socialization bias - 'Who am I?' - is particularly relevant in [...] [the humanities and social sciences]. But [...][i]t's equally important to consider: 'Okay, when I'm in my lab, who do I interact with? How are the experiments conducted? What resources are available to me? Do I have fewer resources available to me because of who I am?' (B, 694-698)

Thirdly, exchanging with other FLINTA* individuals is potentially empowering as the individual experience of uncertainty and feeling out of place becomes a collective one, which, in turn, is the first step to realizing that epistemic injustice exists. As A describes, this works particularly well with friends but, at least for A, is somewhat limited with colleagues (see sections 'The Academic Habitus' and 'Relating to Men* and FLINTA*').

## Resistance

Resistance against epistemic injustice becomes evident in the experiences of the contributors when residual internalization (Fricker, 2007, 37-39) is challenged. The preconceived images they hold about men* and FLINTA* are actively questioned and their own behavioral patterns in everyday situations are being reflected on. This leads to a resistance against the perpetuation of stereotypical images that contribute to upholding epistemic injustice.

C demonstrates resistance as solidarity with women* in a political context, though her condition for support is that she has to be in agreement with the issue that is being contested:

> [...][I]f a woman* says something and then a man* says the same thing, and the man* gets applauded for the thing that the woman* said earlier. [...] [S]ometimes, I'll raise my hand and say: 'Well, that so-and-so already mentioned this a moment ago' [...]. [...] I do this every now and then. Or sometimes, I'll just throw in another few arguments. [...] If it's something I actually think is stupid myself, I won't support it (C, 315-322).

Contributor A also commits to solidarity with other FLINTA* individuals. This commitment requires courage and needed to grow over time. We argue that this is part of a process of epistemological development. As individuals become aware of structural inequalities, they also recognize that knowledge is situated, embodied and, depending on who embodies it, more likely to be accepted or marginalized.

> If I were in a work-related discussion and I noticed a FLINTA* colleague of mine presenting an argument and being talked down or something... I think I would have a bit of a sensitive ear for that. [...] And I believe I would dare to intervene, which, I think, also has a bit to do with age. I mean, I wouldn't have done that 5 or 10 years ago. But I think I would already say in that moment: 'Hold on, I don't think this is right, the way this is happening. It's okay to have a different opinion, but that doesn't mean this person should be discredited' (A, 465-473).

Active resistance also occurs through constant self-reflection of residual internalization. When contributor A catches herself devaluing FLINTA* individuals who are dressed femininely and elegantly, she corrects and reminds herself: "Hey, that person can do as they please. It doesn't mean they're not intelligent" (A, 339-344).

Resistance is also possible in the reception and production of academic writing. For example, when reading publications, contributor A actively reminds herself that a woman* is writing, resisting the assumption ingrained in her that assumes that all STEM scientific texts are authored by men*:

> And I always try to pay attention to the names of the authors. [...] [W]hen I read names that are usually associated with women*, I think: 'Oh, nice, a woman*!' And then, when reading the texts, I fall back into this mode of thinking that it's written by a white cis man. And then I have to actively remind myself: 'No, no, a woman* wrote this' (A, 740-746).

Beyond gender, A also notices a reflexive devaluation of authors from the Global South which she immediately questions and revises:

> With this Western-centric monopoly on knowledge production, I always look at papers and think: 'So, what kind of paper is this, what university is it from?' And at first, I think: 'Oh, someone from Thailand, is that any good?' And then in the next thought, I'm like: 'Wait, what's that about?! We're not thinking that and we're not doing that. This will still be included in the literature review!' (A, 334-338)

C describes a way to put an explicit focus on gender in her citation practice which makes FLINTA* authors visible:

> [An] instructor said that it would be cool that, if you have a source from a female* author, you include their first name. Or that you generally include first names, just to make women* more visible (C, 740-748).[12]

Resistance that completely breaks with disciplinary norms appears more difficult. While writing her master's thesis, C shows timid resistance against STEM conventions by considering situating herself as a researcher:

> So, I've been thinking that maybe I'll include in the discussion that I'm a therapeutic riding instructor myself and whether that might have influenced things. I'm not sure. Well, I think I'll just do it. But I'm not quite certain whether that's acceptable, especially in the natural sciences [In her final comment on this article, C informed us that she ultimately decided against doing this, Note] (C, 621-625).

Maintaining one's own dialect (despite imposed language expectations) when speaking in academic settings can also be seen as a form of resistance. C continues using her dialect since she feels disconnected from herself when speaking Standard German:

> I did try it [speaks in Standard German, Note]. Like, around the age of 10 to 14 […] That sounds awful. It's like I don't even recognize my own voice (C, 112-116).

Within this theme, we explored that the contributors navigate epistemic injustice through the employment of competence strategies (though this is not necessarily an active choice) and explicit resistance strategies. The competence strategies are partly tailored to patriarchal structures. This can, for example, be observed in strategies such as strategically building knowledge reservoirs to become an expert in a certain area so one cannot be easily discredited, intense preparation or making oneself and one's contribution appear 'smaller' to avoid criticism. Consequently, we argue that these strategies should be identified as a tool to survive in a 'hostile' system, rather than as ones that aim to change said system. In contrast, moments of resistance indicate an emancipation from patriarchal structures: The 'wiggle room' in the system is exploited to actively counter it. This resistance is also linked to (hermeneutic) resources, as well as the individual's epistemological development, meaning whether they are able to classify and contextualize their experiences as well as identify 'residual internalization', and have developed the courage to speak out against injustice. Recognizing oneself as not only a victim of patriarchal structures but also a perpetuator of epistemic injustice, and thus confronting residual internalization, is something we also understand as an act of resistance. Empowering moments challenge the individuals' negative self-assessment and lead them to perceive themselves as competent.

Our analysis consequently illustrates that FLINTA* are not simply passive victims of epistemic injustice, but rather agents in countering it. By showing that the individuals do, in fact, have agency, we are extending Fricker's (2007) original theory, which hardly provides room for marginalized individuals to actively counter epistemic injustice.

12 We would like to note that the citation guidelines of academic journals often prevent the use of first names in the bibliography. In this article we could not mention first names in the bibliography due to the citation guidelines of *zisch*, though we would have liked to do so.

## Journeying One's Own Epistemology

The experiences reported by the contributors provide insight into their own epistemological history. Experiences from school, for example, shape and reverberate in their everyday (university) life. Simultaneously, a more intense engagement with society, whether at the university or through political involvement, introduces new interpretative tools that alter the interpretation of these experiences. Often, at these points, a sense of irritation arises, which is used productively.

In the conversations, early childhood experiences emerge as defining moments that set FLINTA* individuals on a different epistemological path than their male* counterparts. We consequently argue that the gender-related patterns identified by Baxter Magolda originate in gender-specific socialization that practically begins at birth. Contributor A recounts having received feedback that she would not amount to anything because of her gender as early as elementary school. This experience is an example of a stereotypical narrative about FLINTA*, which left a deep impression on A and led her to internalize the need to work exceptionally hard to prove she was, in fact, intelligent. The testimonial injustice that A experienced as a child is particularly tangible in the following quote:

> I believe I've been carrying this feeling with me my whole life. [...] [S]tarting in elementary school where a lot happened, and I encountered things like: 'Yeah, she won't amount to anything, she's a girl.' [...] I think I've internalized that I have to work really, really hard to gain recognition and to prove, really, really hard, that I'm not stupid. Because of that I find it very difficult to judge whether the individual situations [at university] were actually like that or if it was more of a feeling that resurfaced (A, 257-264).

C also describes an experience from her school days when an authority figure criticized her for speaking in dialect and forced her to speak in Standard German, which, we argue, is a form of degradation from a person that is both more powerful and supposed to be a nurturing presence:

> [I]n German class, the teacher was really insistent that I speak Standard German. [...] I wanted to borrow a pair of scissors from the teacher or something like that, and then she said I had to say it in Standard German. [...] And I couldn't even form a complete sentence anymore, I just stuttered and stumbled. So, it was definitely a formative experience for me (C, 98-106).

A describes a "feeling of powerlessness" (A, 268) of being subjected to this testimonial injustice without being able to change anything about it. The certainty of having to work hard(er) has become ingrained in A and continues in the university context:

> I always had this feeling that I have to work really hard. [...][F]or example, if we stick with the method that I'm using, I made sure to do an internship with a company before, a six-month one, to get deeper into this method and not just take the seminar with the professor. And afterwards I continued to work at the company as a student assistant. Only then did I feel like I could even ask him whether he would supervise my bachelor's thesis. Whereas I can easily imagine that there are other students who might say, 'Hey, cool method, I did it for a semester, and I'm going to base my bachelor's thesis on it.' [...] [But] I already had the feeling that there would be a 'no' if I hadn't really achieved something substantial beforehand (A, 271-286).

Upon entering university, C had a sobering experience when she revised her self-assessment in comparison to other seemingly more intelligent students and ended up devaluing herself:

> And I just had this feeling that at the beginning, I went to university with a lot of enthusiasm and saw myself as a knowledgeable person – I mean, I also thought it doesn't matter if I know things or not, because I'm there to learn. But that feeling decreased over time because I had this sense that I couldn't say as many smart things (C, 36-41).

C's impulse to speak up right away was gradually restrained over the course of her time at university:

> Yeah, so I think in the beginning, it was more like, whenever I heard something, I'd immediately think to myself 'lalalub' [babbling sound, Note] ... And then I'd want to say something right away. But that led to times when I didn't say something right away, which might be good sometimes. However, I got kind of unsettled by other people who had already said smart things and then I ended up not saying anything (C, 55-59).

Contributor A describes that, at the beginning of her studies, she focused more on absorbing content rather than engaging in immediate interaction, partly because the discussion felt too fast for comfort:

> [D]uring my Bachelor's, I interacted very little, meaning I didn't express myself much. Instead, I was more like a sponge, always trying to absorb everything, understand it all, and make sense of it for myself. I hardly dared to provide input of my own [...]. [...] I did notice that at times I had my own reactions or thoughts, and I thought to myself, 'Hmmm.' But sometimes, the discussion felt a bit too fast-paced for me (A, 106-118).

Circling back to Baxter Magolda's (1992) model for epistemological reflection, these statements powerfully illustrate that the fact that FLINTA* tend to follow the 'receiving pattern' in the first stage of epistemological development ('absolute knowing') is very much related to the way in which interaction is organized at universities. Speaking up in front of a large group and 'going to bat' for one's own opinion is a practice that is fostered in boys* and men* but discouraged in girls* and women*. Consequently, it should be discussed whether the format of seminars and large group discussions serve to force FLINTA* individuals into said receiving pattern when, for example, smaller group work might allow more of them to choose the 'mastery pattern'.

Interactions with relatives that largely operate outside of the academy allowed A to recognize her own competence and knowledgeability:

> I know that I know things and I also know that I know many things that other people do not know. [...] [In] my family, where I'm more or less the only scientist, [...] situations arise where if my sister asks me something and I say, 'Oh, I don't know,' she then asks more questions on the same topic, and I'm like, 'I just said I don't know about it, why are you still asking?' And at some point, she responded, 'Well, you always know so much! So, I thought maybe you do know, maybe you just need a moment to think' (A, 89-98).

Throughout their time in academia, all four contributors experience structural disadvantage that is routinely faced by FLINTA* individuals. C and A express frustration over the fact that FLINTA* are less likely to be heard in academic discourse compared to men*. This is evident in areas such as publications and teaching. FLINTA* are often invited to present when the topic is explicitly feminist, as described by C. Feminism becomes a 'special topic' that men* tend to withdraw from:

> Yeah, in sociology, we had some rather absurd situations where the professor [...] was actually replaced. [...] 'Right, now comes the special topic of feminism. Next week, I won't be here, and colleague 'So-and-so' will be here to talk about feminist economics' [...]. And this didn't just happen in one lecture [...] [H]e left this subject to a woman*. [...] I mean, if they're going to bring in a woman* just for that one lecture... then she should just teach the entire lecture. I found that really strange (C, 368-382).

This frustration leads B and D to consciously adjust their citation practices in order to amplify the voices of FLINTA* and align their own thoughts with those of FLINTA* researchers:

> And now in the academic context, it's also about what knowledge are you reproducing? Am I consciously working with a theoretical concept from a woman*, for example? Or am I just taking one from the big men* who are constantly being reproduced anyway? (D, 352-354)

Especially C and D describe their epistemological journey as one in which they have acquired interpretive resources over time, which is also in line with Baxter Magolda (1992), who argues that our conception of knowledge (and who has authority over it) changes as we progress in our studies. D encountered feminist theories at university, which initially left her feeling uncertain:

> [M]y first encounter with feminist theory was at BOKU [University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Note], and I was like, 'Huh, what's this?' [...] I mean, I had always thought about it in terms of equal pay, the job market, childcare, but I had no idea about all the other aspects that are connected to this. [...] [W]e had to reflect on some text, and [...] I was like, 'What is reproductive labor?' I felt like these terms were from another planet. After that there was a longer break and then I got more and more into it (D, 421-430).

For D, being a feminist* meant a commitment and a belonging that initially intimidated her:

> [D]o I want to engage with this, or do I want to actually belong to the feminists? It conveys this feeling that it might be uncomfortable [...]. It's not like I thought, 'Wow, cool, a new world is opening up to me.' Maybe much later, but at that time as a young person, I think I perceived it more as something uncomfortable (D, 469-474).

Both C and D's initial discomfort with feminism can also be connected to hermeneutical injustice. Having your 'rose-colored glasses' ripped from you simply cannot be a comfortable experience. Where they had previously not been able to gauge the true depths of systemic inequality, they suddenly had the tools and vocabulary (which had previously been largely withheld from them as this is for the most part not taught in school and many academic subjects) to more comprehensively interpret their experience as FLINTA*. These new interpretive resources led D to reevaluate past experiences and develop a new awareness of the patriarchal societal system:

> [W]ell into my mid-twenties, and probably still sometimes, I felt that the subtler aspects of how I was treated as a woman* in daily life, especially by men*, or how I was commented on or addressed, I considered that relatively normal for a long time. [...] [A]nd the situations were strange or uncomfortable, they stuck in my memory. But at that time, I couldn't really classify them. But now I remember them [...]. [S]omehow, the more knowledge you have and the better you understand it, the more outraged I become about what happens in everyday life (D, 406-414).

For C, political engagement led to gaining access to new interpretive resources. She describes the impression that these resources were not adequately provided or easily accessible at university.

Additionally, C found practical involvement in the youth political organization she belonged to more inspiring than the theoretical approach that predominated in university settings:

> For me, I think it was a strong combination of university and political engagement. So, the SJ [A socialist political youth organization, Note] [...] gave me a bit of momentum towards feminist theory because at university, it was always about these theoretical concepts [...] And the way the SJ and others conveyed that knowledge was much more tangible; they actually implemented things, and I would think, 'Ah, fuck, feminist theory can change the world!' So, there was a space created that was a FLINTA* safe space, and I was like, 'Okay, it's not just in our heads' (C, 433-443).

Within this theme, we also explored how epistemic injustice is perceived and navigated by the contributors. It became clear that epistemic injustice does not begin when one enters university but is instead oftentimes a constant companion since childhood. Early experiences of feeling discredited reverberate to such an extent that the contributors find it hard to identify whether the feelings they experience in certain academic settings are tied to specific incidents at university or are, in fact, deeper-seated. Epistemic injustice is partly perceived as a form of intimidation by the academic habitus: As one enters university one is confronted with said habitus (as well as individuals who seem to inhabit it with ease) and finds oneself 'lacking' because embodying it does not come naturally to many FLINTA* individuals. One's individual epistemological journey is also one of contact with and appropriation of hermeneutic resources over time, as these resources encourage one's epistemological development. The contributors perceived the university as a setting, and their time there as a phase of their life, in which they began to consciously engage with epistemic injustice (e.g., by experiencing the dominance of men* in seminar settings and content). The irritation that followed this observation was productively used to counter epistemic injustice (e.g., by changing one's citation practices). Additionally, being confronted with feminist concepts was a deciding factor for the contributors' epistemological development in the direction of actively countering epistemic injustice.

## Discussion

We will use the following discussion to reflect on our experience with conducting this research, as well as its limitations. We will also include short testimonials by our two external contributors in which they detail how they experienced their participation in the research.

After concluding this project, we are both exhausted and exhilarated by the feat we managed to achieve with this research. We definitely underestimated the workload required for a project of this scope but are nevertheless glad that we managed to finish it in time and to our satisfaction (which was hard to do as both of us are perfectionists).

However, there are a few aspects of the project which we might do differently if we had the chance to do it again. The RTA methodology allowed us to situate ourselves within the research project and approach the topic with an orientation that does not seek to find out the 'truth' but rather focuses on subjective experiences (including our own) with epistemic injustice. However, being this close to the research – as we are analyzing our own perspectives and those of two individuals that we are friends with – also posed challenges. For example, as we were the ones creating the list of questions

and conversation prompts and were also sharing our own experiences, we naturally steered the conversations in the direction of what we already believed about epistemic injustice. This inevitably led to the results of the analysis largely reflecting what we expected them to be. However, there were also unexpected nuances and aspects in the way the external contributors discussed their experiences with epistemic injustice, which we specifically tried to give ample space in the analysis. Acknowledging this does not mean that we believe this project not to be scientifically rigorous or too biased. We do, however, recognize that other people would have set different foci and would maybe have come to different conclusions.

One of our main struggles was to manage our resources while still conducting the data analysis in a way that does justice to the RTA approach. For example, we chose to only conduct two conversations, as this already produced a wealth of data material which we then had to code and develop themes for. Because we did not have the time to engage with the data for an extended period, we had to code and generate themes rather quickly. We could not delve very deeply into the data before we had to write the analysis. Therefore, the process of writing it was harder than we had anticipated. This might also explain why we struggled to adhere to the recommended word count for this article. Additionally, as the RTA is supposed to be conducted based on at least five interviews (Braun et al., 2019) – or, in our case, conversations – it could be argued that the approach was not suitable for this project. While we could imagine that, for example, a biographical approach could yield very different results, we are nevertheless glad that we tried our hand at conducting an RTA. Although the results might not be generalizable due to the small sample, we are okay with this, as producing generalizable 'facts' was never our intention. The methodology allowed us to immerse ourselves in the data and its rather flexible nature allowed us to choose a semantic orientation. This, in turn, made it possible for us to stay true to our desire not to interpret too much into what was said by the contributors, but rather to allow them to speak for themselves.

For future research it could be interesting to choose another methodology to examine the data from another angle. However, it would also yield very interesting results to add to the analysis by conducting another RTA with more interviews (specifically with a greater variety of FLINTA* individuals).

## Testimonials by the External Contributors

"Being part of this project was like being offered a bitter-coated candy or a sugar-coated pill. It's been elevating and down-casting at the same time. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the conversation, exchanging experiences, viewpoints, and feelings. And I felt honored to be asked to share and contribute. It gives me a vital feeling of being part of the scientific community and that my voice, thoughts, and experiences are being heard and valued, which resonates well in some chapters of this work. Reading the written result of this project felt enlightening as well as giving a sense of shared experiences and therefore a sense of belonging. But it made me feel sad, annoyed, and angry at the same time: That we, as FLINTA*s (still) come across so many obstacles in this machinery of scientific and academic work (and not just there)."

"For me, it was very nice to be a part of this wonderful project. During the interview and now, while reading the analysis, I was able to reflect on how I've been doing and how things have been going for me during my time at (various) universities. Reading the analysis now has completed the picture for me, and I feel somehow better embedded than before because I've gained more awareness for the fact that FLINTA* individuals have similar experiences at university (even though the way it is dealt with can be quite different). It's always alarming to me how unconsciously, invisibly, and casually 'male* dominance' is reproduced in so many contexts. That's why I'm very glad that you have tackled this issue!"

## Conclusion

This paper is founded on Miranda Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice and Marcia Baxter Magolda's (1992) model of gender-related patterns in students' epistemological development. Based on this theoretical foundation, we explored FLINTA* individuals' experiences with and navigation of epistemic injustice in university and other academic settings and the impact of gendered socialization practices on their epistemological development.

We, the authors, conducted a Reflexive Thematic Analysis – a methodology developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (e.g., Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) – based on transcripts from two conversations with friends and fellow FLINTA* individuals. The methodology enabled us to identify common themes within the four different reports concerning the experience and dealing with epistemic injustice. To achieve this, we coded the data extensively and developed four overarching themes, which were analyzed in detail in this paper: 'Relating to Others', 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus', 'Dealing With Epistemic Injustice', and 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology'.

Additionally, the methodology is founded on the assumption that meaning is situated and embodied, knowledge is subjective, and therefore a singular 'reality' cannot exist. Consequently, we do not see this paper as an objective account of how all FLINTA* individuals experience epistemic injustice but rather as the product of a small number of subjective perspectives. To – at least partly – dismantle the hierarchy between researcher and subject, we decided to involve our contributors in the data analysis. They were provided with a draft version of the analysis and could provide feedback and request changes, as well as write a short testimonial on their experience of participating in the research.

Three research questions were addressed in this paper:

- How is epistemic injustice perceived by FLINTA* students?
- What areas of university life does epistemic injustice impact and how do FLINTA* students navigate this?
- How does the experience of epistemic injustice affect academic writing?

The first question was primarily addressed in the analysis of three themes: 'Relating to Others', 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus', and 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology'. We have shown that the perception of one's competence and that of others is closely tied to interactions in university settings. While some of these empower FLINTA* students and help them perceive themselves as competent, others are perceived to be unsettling. In comparison to the performance of fellow students

and established scholars, one's own performance is devalued (see section 'Relating to Others'). FLINTA* individuals also experience epistemic injustice through the constant confrontation with the devaluation of female* knowledge as purportedly less significant and niche (see section 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus'). In line with this, the contributors perceive an academic habitus they cannot completely embody. The analysis also revealed that for the contributors, epistemic injustice is not a recent experience but a constant companion since childhood which continues to influence perceptions of (experiences in) academic settings (see section 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology').

The second question was addressed in all the main section of the analysis. It was demonstrated that epistemic injustice is not limited to specific university settings but affects all areas of academic life, including seminars, lectures, interactions with professors and peers, and academic writing (see sections 'Relating to Others' and 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus'). In the theme 'Dealing With Epistemic Injustice', we showed that the contributors navigate epistemic injustice by employing competence strategies and actively resisting inequality. While the competence strategies serve to 'survive' in a 'hostile' system, moments of resistance lead to questioning and challenging patriarchal structures and internalized images. The theme 'Journeying One's Own Epistemology' highlights that dealing with epistemic injustice is part of a personal epistemological journey in which the contributors acquire interpretive resources to address their experience of epistemic injustice. Additionally, it became evident that engagement with feminist concepts is significant in the contributors' journey of actively countering epistemic injustice.

We addressed the final question in the themes 'Interacting With the Academic Habitus' and 'Dealing With Epistemic Injustice'. The contributors are confronted with the dominance of male* knowledge and male* (forms of) expression in academic texts. They attempt to position themselves as knowledgeable within this framework using a range of competence strategies. Simultaneously, the contributors consciously (but selectively) seek to break out of this framework, for instance, by highlighting concepts by FLINTA* individuals or by situating themselves as researchers within their texts. Therefore, academic writing occurs between the poles of the joy of research and the constraints of the academic habitus. Uncertainty arising from the experience of epistemic injustice not only manifests in the content of the contributors' academic texts but permeates the entire writing process.

Notably, our findings show that FLINTA* individuals are not passive victims but active agents in adapting to and countering epistemic injustice. Thus, we expand Miranda Fricker's (2007) theory with perspectives of agency and resistance from marginalized individuals navigating a system that was not built for them.

We hope that this article contributes to an understanding of epistemic injustice as a collective struggle experienced by marginalized groups of people by showcasing that the four individual reports of epistemic injustice show a high degree of overlap. By 'shining a light' on this, we hope to raise awareness for this widespread issue in a writing studies and writing center studies context and therefore, by extension, help to facilitate a culture in which educators can more easily recognize and help counteract marginalized students' experience of epistemic injustice.

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