**The Price of Knowledge:**

Contributory Injustice Among Low-Income First-Generation Students in Higher Education

by

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

# Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that low-income, first-generation (LIFG) students experience epistemic injustice and oppression in higher education because of the inequitable distribution of hermeneutic and epistemic resources between LIFG and higher-income, continuing-generation students. I show that the alignment of continuing-generation and not LIFG students' resources within the academy results in institutional barriers to LIFG students' success and full membership in epistemic communities. Further, I develop the concept of "temporal epistemic injustice" to emphasize how temporal and financial constraints affect LIFG students' ability to engage fully in existing academic communities and contribute fully to knowledge production and dissemination activities. This discussion of contributory and temporal injustice is significant because it sets the stage for future work exploring how institutional and socio-economic barriers faced by LIFG students hinder their ability to impact the structure of the academy and, hence, function to maintain current unjust structures.

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## Preface

*I am first.*
*First to rise with the sun,*
*Peeking through my curtains,*
*Encouraging, cheering behind the buildings,*
*To get up and begin to get things done.*
*I am first.*
*First to smell the coffee brewing and the pastries warming,*
*Sweet treats that inspire the energy to kick in and start motivating.*

*I am first.*
*First to begin with books and pens and thoughts,*
*Tucked away in a corner,*
*Creating an oasis between headphones,*
*A tiny nook to explore what the future could have in store.*
*I am first.*
*To succeed.*
*To fill out forms that far exceeded all familiarity.*
*To take tests that were more than a page,*
*To study until my eyes close,*
*To stress until I*
*Can't*
*Breathe.*
*I am first.*
*To fail.*
*To receive red ink painted on paper,*
*To see grades nearing close to Z,*
*To see a bank account drain and see worry increase,*
*Because money does not, nor has ever, come cheap.*

*I am first.*
*To fall so hard, that nothing feels like it will get better.*
*To cry until nothing can get better*
*Because nobody you know and love and trust, knows how to make it better.*

*I am first.*
*To have dreams begin to come true.*
*To have a lasting smile,*
*A permanent song within my heart,*
*Playing tunes of joy, and pumping beats of exhilaration,*
*While everything finally falls into place.*

*I am first.*

*To have every lesson learned,*

*Turn into a meaning,*

*A value.*

*A truth.*

*A story for those who will follow after mine.*

*I am first to experience it all,*

*To gain every success,*

*To fail miserably and recklessly,*

*To ride every high,*

*And plummet to every low,*

*To experience all the moments in between.*

*I am first.*

*I am stressed.*

*I am pulled in all sorts of directions,*

*Trying to figure it all out by myself.*

*I am happy. I am conquering.*

*I am the difference.*

*I am first generation.*

***—Natallie St. Onge, Marquette Wire***

# Chapter 1:

# What is Epistemic Injustice?

In this thesis, I argue that low-income, first-generation (LIFG) students experience epistemic injustice and oppression in higher education. Through this exploration, I intend to show the intricate relationship between social structures, power dynamics, and knowledge production in higher education, illuminating the ways in which epistemic injustices and oppression detrimentally impact LIFG students. My research question thus examines the following: How do the experiences of low-income, first-generation students deepen our understanding of epistemic injustice and oppression within educational contexts and what implications does this have for addressing systemic inequities in knowledge dissemination and recognition? More specifically, how do the time restraints faced by low-income, first-generation students, who must work and take time away from their studies, contribute to their experiences of epistemic injustice?

Importantly, discussions of epistemic injustice highlight the significance of knowing across differences. Recognizing and addressing epistemic injustice requires acknowledging the diverse experiences, perspectives, and forms of knowledge that exist within society. Feminist epistemology provides a critical lens through which to examine the power, privilege, and inequality in knowledge production and dissemination. By examining the role of social institutions, cultural norms, and historical contexts in shaping knowledge claims, feminist epistemologists illuminate the ways in which certain voices are privileged and others are marginalized within epistemic communities. This emphasizes the importance of promoting epistemic diversity and inclusivity to ensure that a wide range of perspectives are represented and valued in the pursuit of knowledge. By actively engaging with perspectives that may differ

from our own, we expand our understanding of the world and cultivate more inclusive and equitable epistemic communities.

In this chapter, I start by laying the groundwork for understanding epistemic injustice, as I provide an in-depth exploration and timeline of the foundational concepts of epistemic injustice. First, section 1.1 focuses on how the idea of epistemic injustice arises as a theme in the works of Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins. Section 1.2 explores types of testimonial injustices. Section 1.2.1 examines Medina's (2011) critique of Fricker's (2007) concept of testimonial injustice, emphasizing the necessity of a sociohistorical perspective. Section 1.2.2 discusses Dotson's (2011) analysis of how marginalized voices are silenced in testimonial exchanges. Dotson (2011) uses epistemic oppression and violence to argue that an audience's failure to engage with a speaker perpetuates silencing and marginalization. Section 1.3 focuses on critiques and expansions of the concept of hermeneutical injustice. In section 1.3.1, I delve into Jose Medina's (2017) analysis of the varieties of hermeneutical injustice, particularly focusing on the concept of hermeneutical death and insurrection. Medina's (2017) exploration showcases the profound impact of hermeneutical injustices on individuals' interpretative capacities and agency, highlighting the need for both individual and collective responsibility in addressing these injustices. Then, in section 1.3.2, I examine Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.'s (2012) critique of Fricker's (2007) framework and her introduction of the concept of willful hermeneutical ignorance.

In section 1.4, I turn to Kristie Dotson's (2012a) conceptualization of contributory injustice, which expands upon Pohlhaus's (2012) notion of willful hermeneutical ignorance. Dotson (2012a) introduces the concept of contributory injustice to capture instances where agents' active ignorance perpetuates epistemic harms, compromising the epistemic agency of

marginalized knowers. In section 1.5, I contextualize these theoretical discussions within the field of the epistemology of education. I explore how epistemic injustices manifest in educational settings, examining both agential and structural dimensions of epistemic injustices. In section 1.6, I discuss the Spring 2021 APA Newsletter, which delves into several key themes related to the experiences of low-income, first-generation philosophy students, including themes around double alienation, community, and economic and time constraints. These themes set the stage for Chapter 2, which will delve into empirical evidence on LIFG students' experiences in higher education, offering a data-driven exploration of the disparities and systemic barriers discussed in the newsletter.

Understanding epistemic injustice becomes essential for uncovering how marginalized individuals and groups are silenced, discredited, and marginalized in knowledge production systems. In this thesis, I will explore key concepts, debates, and methodologies within feminist epistemology, with a particular focus on their implications for understanding contemporary issues in knowledge production, dissemination, and education. By engaging with diverse philosophical perspectives and empirical research, I aim to contribute to ongoing and upcoming discussions about the nature, scope, and significance of feminist epistemology in education.

### 1.1: Early Work

"Epistemic injustice" has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry within contemporary philosophy. Broadly speaking, epistemic injustice is a specific form of injustice where individuals or groups are wronged in their capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2007). This can occur through various forms of discrimination, marginalization, or dismissals of knowledge, experiences, or ways of knowing. Fricker is well known for her discussion of epistemic injustice in her 2007 book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. In it, Fricker (2007)

presents a framework detailing the ways in which social structures and power dynamics can systematically marginalize certain voices, leading to widespread injustices in knowledge production and dissemination. With this, she identifies two interconnected forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's testimony is unfairly discredited or given less credibility than it deserves due to a prejudice on the part of the listener (Fricker, 2007, p. 28). On the other hand, hermeneutical injustice refers to a form of epistemic injustice that occurs when individuals are unable to make intelligible or understand significant aspects of their social experiences due to structural biases or gaps in collective understanding (Fricker, 2007). While Fricker (2007) is famous for developing the concept of epistemic injustice and making it prominent in the literature, the origins of the ideas of epistemic injustice precede Fricker's work. Prior to Fricker's introduction of the concept "epistemic injustice," feminist, critical race, and decolonial scholars had already been examining the power dynamics and marginalization inherent in knowledge production (Pohlhaus, 2017).

The contributions from scholars, such as Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins, laid the groundwork for Fricker's (2007) analysis on epistemic injustice. Lorde and Collins emphasize the necessity of acknowledging and amplifying the voices of Black women in discussions surrounding knowledge and epistemology. Their work highlights the need to address and rectify the systematic silencing and exclusion of Black women from dominant discourses on what counts as valid knowledge and whose perspectives are considered credible.

### 1.1.1: Lorde on Silencing

Lorde (1984a, 1984b) discusses the concept of epistemic injustice by discussing the ways in which marginalized voices, particularly those of Black women, lesbians, and poor women, are silenced and erased. While she does not explicitly use the words "epistemic injustice," Lorde

(1984a) critiques the exclusionary nature of feminist discussions and the systems that uphold them by arguing that they focus almost entirely on the experiences of White middle-class women, while failing to address the diverse experiences and voices of Black women. This narrow focus perpetuates epistemic injustice by upholding a male-dominated hierarchy that silences Black women and stifles their advancement and social mobility. Lorde (1984a) argues that we need to challenge and abandon oppressive systems by creating a new, inclusive, and intersectional Black feminist movement that emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing differences based on race, sexuality, and class.

Lorde (1984b) also argues that silence can be a form of self-oppression and stresses the importance of individuals, particularly Black women, to speak out and share their truths. Lorde (1984a, 1984b) critiques the societal norms that silence and marginalize the voices of Black women, thereby perpetuating epistemic injustices where Black feminist perspectives and experiences are systematically undervalued or dismissed. She argues that silence, whether imposed or self-imposed, reinforces powerlessness and isolation among those affected. She emphasizes that remaining silent in the face of systemic racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination does not protect individuals, such as Black women, from these injustices; rather, it perpetuates them. Lorde advocates for speaking out and using one's voice to challenge and confront these issues, highlighting that true protection and progress come from active resistance and solidarity, not from maintaining silence or avoiding difficult conversations. By urging Black women to overcome their fear and speak their truths, Lorde (1984b) advocates for reclaiming agency and challenging systemic inequalities. She emphasizes that the act of speaking out is not merely a personal liberation but a necessary step towards addressing broader societal injustices. Lorde's (1984a, 1984b) call for the inclusion of Black women's voices in shaping collective

understanding directly counters epistemic injustice by promoting a more equitable discourse where the diverse experiences of Black women are recognized and valued. Ultimately, her stance emphasizes the importance of language as a tool for dismantling oppressive structures and fostering inclusive communities where all voices can contribute to positive social change. One of the things we can see throughout this thesis is that the perspectives offered by Lorde provide insights into how experiences of oppression, systemic discrimination, and silencing broadly applies to other marginalized groups, including LIFG students in higher education institutions.

### 1.1.2: Collins on Black Feminist Thought and Outsiders Within

Collins (1989, 2000) introduces Black feminist thought as a framework of analysis that centers the experiences, perspectives, and struggles of Black women within systems of oppression. She maintains that Black feminist thought represents a distinct epistemology that accounts for Black women's alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge to develop a distinct understanding of their oppression. However, their unique standpoint is controlled, suppressed, and discredited by Eurocentric-masculinist epistemology, severely hindering Black women's ability to substantiate their knowledge. This is an experience of epistemic injustice, where Black women are wronged in their capacity as knowers and not given the uptake they deserve. In her chapter *Intersectionality and Epistemic Injustice,* Collins (2017) specifically locates epistemic injustice within postsecondary institutions, focusing on the entrance of intersectional social activists into academia, arguing that

> Intersectionality's travels from social movement settings into academia not only reveal epistemological assumptions concerning social justice and political action, they also suggest how established testimonial relationships within the academy reproduce

> epistemic inequality, for example, those identifying white males as more authoritative than everyone else, and theoretical knowledge as better than practical experience (p. 121)

Collins discusses how intersectionality, initially rooted in Black feminism and social justice activism, has been appropriated and reshaped within academic contexts. This transformation often involves stripping away its political and activist dimensions to conform to academic norms of objectivity and neutrality. Collins (2017) addresses how dominant academic epistemologies can suppress and devalue the contributions and epistemologies of Black women. By emphasizing abstract, decontextualized knowledge, academia often undermines the epistemic authority of Black women who bring lived experiences and activist insights into scholarly discourse.

By detailing Black feminist thought and epistemic injustice, Collins (1989, 2000, 2017) provides Black women with a conceptual tool to understand and resist their subordination. She contends that merely assimilating Black feminist thought into dominant epistemologies would not serve the best interests of Black women. Instead, Collins (1989) advocates for a pluralist epistemology that embraces diverse perspectives and forms of knowledge. She suggests that focusing on rearticulating the standpoint of Black women is more productive than attempting to establish universal knowledge claims that apply across disparate epistemologies.

Collins (1986, 1999) also developed the term “outsider within” to highlight the unique experiences of Black women entering the academy, emphasizing how their belonging to a social group within a specific historical context, shaped by their race, gender, and socioeconomic status can enhance their perspective on the world. The concept of the "outsider within" applies broadly to various marginalized groups, capturing the tension of belonging yet being separate. As we can see from the contributions of Lorde and Collins, it is important to address the “legacies of understanding” developed by Black women (Berenstain, 2020, p.7). We need to acknowledge the

wider historical context of epistemic injustice, epistemic resistance, and the many ways individuals can be wronged in their capacity as knowers.

### 1.1.3: Diversity in Academia

A critique forwarded by Kristie Dotson (2012a), suggests that while Fricker offers "*an* account of epistemic injustice," it is not the only account of epistemic injustice (p. 42). Rather, there is room for multiple accounts, where each explanation serves a different analytical purpose and draws from a different set of experiences and resources. Dotson's (2012a) critique is rooted in the belief that a single account of epistemic injustice cannot capture the multifaceted nature of the problem. As such, she advocates for a view of epistemic injustice that reflects many diverse experiences and epistemologies. In arguing this, Dotson roots her arguments in epistemic oppression rather than epistemic injustice.

Epistemic oppression, as conceptualized by Kristie Dotson (2014), refers to a "persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, p. 115). Dotson (2014) identifies epistemic exclusion as an unwarranted infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers, which is essential for participating in and potentially revising shared epistemic resources. This exclusion can manifest in various forms and degrees, ultimately hindering one's capacity to influence and shape the collective understanding within a knowledge community. Dotson (2014) distinguishes between reducible and irreducible forms of epistemic oppression. Reducible epistemic oppression can be primarily attributed to social and political factors, which means that addressing it often involves utilizing existing epistemic resources within the same framework that produces the exclusion. In contrast, irreducible epistemic oppression arises from fundamental features embedded within the epistemological systems themselves. This type of oppression poses a greater challenge to address because it necessitates

recognition of the limitations inherent in current epistemological frameworks and the epistemic resources available within them. The notion of epistemic oppression extends beyond mere social or political exclusion to encompass structural barriers within the epistemological systems that shape knowledge production. Dotson's (2014) framework thus highlights the complexities involved in addressing different forms of epistemic exclusion and emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying sources of resistance and inertia that sustain such oppression.

This approach aligns with Dotson's broader calls for diversity within the academy, specifically within the discipline of philosophy, where Dotson (2012b) continues to challenge the dominance of any one perspective and encourages the inclusion of Black women's' voices and epistemologies. For example, Dotson (2012b) contends that the prevailing culture of justification in academic philosophy renders the field unsustainable for practitioners from diverse backgrounds, especially those who are Black women. She asserts that questions like "how is this paper philosophy?" maintain the existence of certain norms that dictate what counts as 'real' philosophy. At the core of the culture of justification inherent to philosophy lies the presumption that these norms are universally applicable and universally accepted. This creates a type of gatekeeping where positive recognition is only granted to work that conforms to these standards, thus considered 'real' philosophy. On the other hand, those who do not conform to the restrictive norms of justification-based philosophy cannot gain uptake or maintain careers in the discipline. By advocating for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to philosophy that acknowledges the worth of diverse epistemologies and experiences of Black women, Dotson moves us in the direction of a more equitable, dynamic, and diverse intellectual environment. However, there is still more work to be done in examining how diversity and epistemic injustice operate in our education systems.

### 1.2: Testimonial Injustices

As mentioned, testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's credibility is unfairly diminished due to prejudice held by the listener, leading to epistemic harm. Specifically, Fricker's use of prejudice refers to a "negative identity-prejudicial stereotype," which is defined as a "widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counterevidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment" (Fricker, 2007, p. 35). This prejudice may stem from preconceived notions about the speaker's identity, social status, or perceived credibility, thus involving wrongdoing on the part of the listener. By examining the role of stereotypes in credibility judgments, Fricker illuminates how prejudices can operate subtly, shaping perceptions without conscious awareness. For instance, a person from a marginalized community might find their accounts of discrimination dismissed or trivialized simply because their experiences do not align with the listener's worldview. Testimonial injustice thus perpetuates a cycle of marginalization by silencing voices that challenge dominant narratives and power structures.

Fricker illustrates testimonial injustice using the character Tom Robinson from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom, a Black man falsely accused of raping a White woman in racially segregated Maycomb, Alabama, faces significant testimonial injustice throughout his trial. In Tom's case, his credibility as a witness is undermined by the racial prejudice prevalent in Maycomb society. Although he provides a consistent and truthful account of the events, his testimony is discounted by the all-White jury due to their prejudiced beliefs about Black people. The injustice arises from the listener's identity prejudice, which leads them to make a credibility judgment based on biased assumptions rather than the content of the testimony itself.

Fricker's work has been instrumental in highlighting how prejudices can unjustly undermine a speaker's credibility, thereby causing significant epistemic harm. However, her framework, while groundbreaking, has been critiqued for its limitations in fully capturing the diverse and complex manifestations of epistemic injustice across different social contexts. This section will delve into the critiques and expansions of Fricker's theory as articulated by scholars José Medina and Kristie Dotson.

### 1.2.1: Medina on Credibility Excess

In his paper, *The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary,* José Medina (2011) offers a critique of Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice. Central to Medina's critique is his assertion that epistemic injustices are "temporally and socially extended, they call for a sociohistorical analysis that contextualizes and connects sustained chains of interactions, being able to uncover how contributions to justice and injustice appear and develop in and across concrete sociohistorical contexts" (Medina, 2011, p. 17). He argues that understanding testimonial injustice requires a broader contextualization that encompasses sustained interactions and historical contexts. Medina posits that epistemic injustices, including testimonial injustices, are not isolated incidents but rather the products of ongoing processes shaped by cultural norms, biases, and power dynamics.

A key aspect of Medina's critique is his emphasis on the comparative and contrastive nature of epistemic attributions, particularly regarding credibility. He argues that judgments of credibility are inherently comparative, involving implicit comparisons with other individuals or groups. Consequently, attributions of credibility cannot be divorced from broader social dynamics and power structures. Medina (2011) argues that "excessive attribution of credibility

indirectly affects others who are, implicitly, unfairly treated as enjoying comparatively less epistemic trust. In my view, this is due to a disproportion in credibility and authority assigned to members of different groups" (p. 20). As such, credibility excesses, where certain individuals or groups are disproportionately trusted, can perpetuate epistemic injustices by reinforcing existing hierarchies and marginalization. Medina (2011) contends that credibility excesses contribute to epistemic injustices in multiple ways. They not only privilege certain voices but also implicitly disadvantage others, creating disparities in epistemic authority that undermine fairness and equality. By linking credibility excesses to broader patterns of injustice, Medina (2011) challenges Fricker's notion that credibility excesses do not constitute testimonial injustices.

Medina's (2011) critique extends to the *To Kill a Mockingbird* example Fricker (2007) uses that depicts the trial proceedings of Tom Robinson. He argues that credibility excesses, particularly those afforded to White witnesses and authorities, play a pivotal role in perpetuating racial biases and injustices within the legal system. In such cases, credibility deficits assigned to marginalized individuals are intertwined with credibility excesses granted to privileged groups, illustrating the interconnectedness of epistemic injustices. Furthermore, Medina (2011) highlights the role of the social imaginary—the collective beliefs, values, and representations that shape our understanding of the world—in sustaining epistemic injustices. He argues that the social imaginary can both amplify certain voices and silence others, perpetuating ignorance and reinforcing existing power structures. Addressing epistemic injustices thus requires not only individual awareness but also collective efforts to challenge and transform prevailing social imaginaries.

### 1.2.2: Dotson on Testimonial Quieting and Testimonial Smothering

Rather than using epistemic injustice to center her paper, Dotson (2011) focuses on epistemic violence to examine the way in which marginalized voices are silenced in testimonial exchanges. In her paper, Dotson (2011) defines the concept of epistemic violence as a subcategory of epistemic oppression, distinguishing it from broader notions of epistemic injustice and shedding light on its manifestations in linguistic exchanges. Central to Dotson's analysis are the concepts of testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering, which showcase the ways in which marginalized speakers are prevented from fully expressing their knowledge and experiences.

At the heart of Dotson's (2011) framework lies the notion of epistemic violence, which she defines as “a failure of an audience to communicatively reciprocate, either intentionally or unintentionally, in linguistic exchanges owning to pernicious ignorance” where pernicious ignorance is “a reliable ignorance or a counterfactual incompetence that, in a given context, is harmful” (Dotson, 2011, p. 242). While Dotson’s definition focuses on ignorance, epistemic violence goes beyond mere ignorance, focusing on the failure of hearers to meet the vulnerabilities of speakers in linguistic exchanges. This ignorance isn't merely a lack of knowledge but a reliable ignorance that harms others. In this sense, epistemic violence hinges on the reciprocity of communication which depends on the audience's response to the speaker's efforts. When this reciprocity is denied, as is often the case for Black women, it constitutes epistemic violence. Unlike epistemic injustice, which encompasses various forms of unfair treatment in knowledge production and exchange, Dotson's concept of epistemic violence specifically focuses on the role of audiences in perpetuating silence and marginalization.

Building on epistemic violence, in another paper Dotson also establishes a definition for epistemic oppression. Dotson defines it as “persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one’s contributions to knowledge production” (Dotson, 2014, p. 116). In this sense, epistemic oppression addresses broader, systemic barriers that restricts participation in the communal process of generating, sharing, and revising knowledge. It differs from epistemic injustice in that epistemic oppression highlights long-term, structural exclusion from epistemic agency, whereas epistemic injustice focuses on specific acts of prejudice that undermine a person's credibility or interpretive capacity.

Nevertheless, a key aspect of Dotson's framework is her delineation of testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering as distinct forms of epistemic violence. Testimonial quieting occurs when “an audience fails to recognize a speaker as a knower,” thereby restricting their ability to testify (Dotson, 2011, p. 242). Dotson draws upon the work of Patricia Hill Collins to illustrate how marginalized groups, specifically Black women, are routinely denied credibility, due to stereotypes and controlling images. In this sense, testimonial quieting stems from the reliable ignorance of audiences who perpetuate false and negative stereotypes, thereby causing harm and hindering Black women from fully participating in communicative exchanges.

On the other hand, testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker perceives their audience as unwilling or unable to grasp the content of their testimony. This leads to a self-imposed limitation on the scope of their testimony, ensuring that “the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence” (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). Dotson identifies three circumstances that contribute to testimonial smothering: the risky nature of the testimony, the audience's testimonial incompetence, and the audience's pernicious

ignorance. By highlighting the coercive nature of testimonial smothering, Dotson's analysis emphasizes the ways in which Black women are compelled to silence themselves in order to navigate hostile or unsupportive communication environments. This highlights the unequal power dynamics inherent in testimonial exchanges, where marginalized speakers must navigate audience biases and ignorance to have their voices fully heard.

### 1.3: Hermeneutical Injustices

Now, we will be turning our attention to Fricker's (2007) conception of hermeneutical injustice. These injustices occur when there is a gap in collective interpretive resources that puts someone at an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their social experiences. This gap leads to a situation where marginalized individuals or groups are unable to convey their perspectives adequately, as there is no existing language or conceptual tools to express their unique lived realities. As a result, their narratives may be overlooked or distorted, further marginalizing them. This injustice is purely structural, lacking any specific culprit. Fricker (2007) emphasizes that hermeneutical injustices are not inflicted by any single agent but are instead a result of structural biases and gaps in collective understanding. It is rooted in the social structures and norms that shape the hermeneutical resources available to individuals within a society.

Fricker (2007) illustrates hermeneutical injustice using the example of Carmita Wood, a woman who experienced sexual harassment in her workplace but struggled to articulate and make sense of her experiences due to societal attitudes and norms regarding gender and sexuality. Before the recognition of sexual harassment as a social issue, women like Wood lacked a proper understanding of their mistreatment. In Wood's case, the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice lies in the obscuring of her social experiences from collective understanding. The existing hermeneutical resources in society failed to adequately capture and

interpret the nuances of sexual harassment experienced by women like Carmita Wood. As a result, Wood finds it difficult to communicate her experiences and seek validation or redress. To address hermeneutical injustices such as these, Fricker (2007) suggests that individuals cultivate the virtue of hermeneutical justice, which involves being reflexively aware of how one's social identity and positionality may impact the interpretation and understanding of others' experiences. This virtue encourages individuals to listen attentively, recognize gaps in collective understanding, and work towards creating more inclusive hermeneutical climates where marginalized voices are heard and validated.

José Medina (2017) and Gaile Pohlhaus (2012) developed significant critiques and responses to Fricker's conception of epistemic injustice. First, Medina (2017) emphasizes the need to consider the active resistance and agency of marginalized groups in responding to hermeneutical injustices, suggesting that Fricker's model underestimates these dynamics. Pohlhaus (2012), on the other hand, extends the concept to include the idea of "willful hermeneutical ignorance," where dominant groups deliberately ignore or dismiss the interpretive resources of marginalized communities. These critiques and expansions highlight the complexity of hermeneutical injustice and the need for a multifaceted approach to understand and mitigate it effectively.

### 1.3.1: Medina on Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice

In his paper, *Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice,* Medina (2017) delves into the intricacies of hermeneutical injustices, suggesting that they can lead to what he terms "hermeneutical death." This concept is a state where one's "hermeneutical capacities and agency" are constrained to the point where an individual experiences "the loss (or radical curtailment) of one's voice, of one's interpretative capacities, or of one's status as a participant

in meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices" (Medina, 2017, p. 41). Hermeneutical injustices of this sort occur when individuals are not only mistreated as communicators but are actively prevented from developing and exercising their voices. While Fricker (2007) has argued that hermeneutical injustices lack issues of responsibility, Medina (2017) contends that understanding responsibility is crucial in addressing these injustices. As a result, he argues that we need both individual and collective forms of responsibility to combat hermeneutical injustices. Overall, Medina highlights the importance of recognizing diverse forms of expression within collectives and the need to address issues of positionality and relationality when it comes to hermeneutical injustices.

To fight against hermeneutical injustice, Medina (2017) explains the importance of "hermeneutical resistance." He argues that everyone should feel responsible to assist unconventional voices in developing hermeneutical agency and forming alternative meanings and interpretations. To resist hermeneutical death, Medina (2017) introduces the concept of "hermeneutical insurrection," which he defines as "forms of disobedience to and result against expressive/interpretative norms and expectations in order to pave the way to a new hermeneutical order" (p. 48). He insists that individuals should do whatever it takes to fight and that those experiencing hermeneutical death owe nothing to the oppressive norms and groups that intend to destroy their meaning-making capacities. Rather, their disobedience challenges and works to dismantle oppressive frameworks, paving the way for new expressive styles and perspectives.

### 1.3.2: Pohlhaus on Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance and Epistemic Resources

Thinking again of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, another critique from Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (2012) suggests that Fricker's (2007) interpretation of the trial of Tom Robinson extends beyond mere

testimonial injustice. While Fricker focuses on the jury's failure to believe Robinson's testimony due to identity prejudice, Pohlhaus argues that this analysis oversimplifies the complexity of the situation. Pohlhaus contends that the issue involves a deeper hermeneutical problem where the jurors consistently misinterpret Robinson's words. She argues that the "inferences that the jurors ought to draw are unavailable to them, not because they inherently lack a capacity, but because they use epistemic resources that are faulty and that distort a significant portion of the experienced world" (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 725). This misinterpretation reflects a structural deficiency in their epistemic resources, which prevents them from accurately understanding Robinson's experiences and perspectives. By focusing solely on testimonial injustice, Fricker neglects the broader hermeneutical dynamics at play, thereby failing to fully capture the extent of the epistemic injustices experienced by marginalized individuals like Robinson.

To understand the broader issue in the Tom Robinson case, Pohlhaus (2012) identifies a specific form of epistemic injustice she calls "willful hermeneutical ignorance." This concept goes beyond the passive experience of being disbelieved or misunderstood. Rather, willful hermeneutical ignorance describes instances where "marginally situated knowers actively resist epistemic domination through interactions with other resistant knowers, while dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world" (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 716). This concept emphasizes the agency of marginalized individuals in challenging epistemic oppression, highlighting their efforts to resist and engage with epistemic structures that perpetuate ignorance and misunderstanding. In essence, willful hermeneutical ignorance involves a deliberate refusal by dominantly situated knowers to acknowledge or acquire epistemic resources developed from marginalized situatedness. It reflects an active choice to maintain ignorance about whole parts of the world, despite the availability of alternative perspectives and

experiences. This type of ignorance is not inherent to one's social position but is rather a conscious decision to disregard or dismiss epistemic resources that reveal aspects of the world not immediately obvious from one's own situatedness. Furthermore, willful hermeneutical ignorance can manifest as more than just a failure to see certain aspects of the world; it can lead to a systematic and coordinated misinterpretation of reality. This ignorance blocks the transmission of knowledge that challenges existing power dynamics, presenting instead a distorted picture of the world based on faulty epistemic resources.

In light of these considerations, it becomes essential to understand the role of epistemic resources in shaping individuals' understanding and engagement with the world. Epistemic resources, according to Pohlhaus, are specific tools and frameworks that individuals use to "understand, investigate, and know about particular aspects of the world" (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 717). These resources can take various forms, ranging from formalized structures found in academic disciplines to more informal practices of everyday knowing. They encompass "language, concepts, and criteria" that are normative and upheld by the influence they exert in coordinating agents who recognize and utilize them (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 718). Good epistemic resources are those that place individuals in a particular relation to their experiences, enabling them to effectively make sense of and evaluate their encounters with the world. Importantly, the development and dissemination of epistemic resources are shaped by social positioning, with certain individuals having greater access to and influence over these resources than others due to their social status and privilege. While Pohlhaus challenges Fricker's focus on testimonial injustice in the Tom Robinson trial, arguing for the consideration of broader hermeneutical issues, Dotson further utilizes Pohlhaus's concept of willful hermeneutical ignorance to introduce the concept of contributory injustice, which I shall turn to next.

## 1.4: Contributory Injustice

Kristie Dotson (2012a) conceptualized contributory injustice as a third category of epistemic injustice alongside Fricker's testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. This third category of contributory injustice is used by Dotson to forward the critique against Fricker for offering only one account of epistemic injustice. Instead, Dotson (2012a) argues that contributory injustice is another way for epistemic injustice to manifest that uses different epistemic tools and resources. This allows Dotson to create space for different epistemologies and embrace her calls for diversity.

### 1.4.1: Dotson on Contributory Injustice

Dotson defines contributory injustice as "the circumstance where an epistemic agent's willful hermeneutical ignorance in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources thwarts a knower's ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community by compromising her epistemic agency" (Dotson, 2012a, p. 32). Dotson maintains that where Fricker goes wrong is in assuming that everyone relies on the same hermeneutical or epistemic resources. She continues by emphasizing that not all individuals rely on the same hermeneutical resources, and the assumption of a universal hermeneutical framework fails to acknowledge alternative epistemologies present in marginalized communities, particularly the epistemologies of Black women. Drawing on Gaile Polhaus Jr.'s (2012) notion of "willful hermeneutical ignorance," Dotson contends that contributory injustice arises when an epistemic agent's ignorance perpetuates and employs structurally biased hermeneutical resources, resulting in "epistemic harm inflicted upon the epistemic agency of a knower" (Dotson, 2012a, p. 31). Dotson uses Pohlhaus's notion of willful hermeneutical ignorance to structure contributory injustice by arguing that an agent can employ

different hermeneutical resources to willfully refuse to recognize and adopt alternative epistemic resources. Importantly, contributory injustice differs from hermeneutical injustice in that those who experience it are able to understand and articulate their experiences. However, their attempts to articulate these experiences typically face challenges due to the biased hermeneutical frameworks employed by others. Consequently, despite their efforts to communicate effectively, their narratives often fail to receive the recognition and validation they deserve. Contributory injustice is also similar to Pohlhaus's willful hermeneutical ignorance in that it occupies a unique space between agential and structural perpetuations of epistemic injustice.

Using contributory injustice as a starting point, Bogia (2023) proposes a type of contributory injustice she calls *structural* contributory injustice. Bogia (2023) defines structural contributory injustice as when "a set of policies or political-level structures thwart knowers' abilities to contribute to and revise epistemic resources in ways that track with other forms of oppression and marginalization" (Bogia, 2023, p. 948-949). Unlike other forms of injustice rooted in individual interactions, Bogia's structural contributory injustice is inherent in the policies themselves, making it disproportionately challenging for certain groups to participate meaningfully in shaping shared knowledge. This obstruction not only hinders marginalized individuals from contributing but also limits their opportunities to learn from the community in return. Bogia outlines two essential conditions for identifying cases of structural contributory injustice. Firstly, the policy or set of policies should regulate access to something critical for individuals' contribution to and revision of shared epistemic resources within their community. Secondly, the identified policy or policies should disproportionately affect who contributes to these shared resources, aligning with systems of oppression and marginalization. Bogia (2023) emphasizes that while these policies may not be the sole cause of oppression and

marginalization, they significantly contribute to the outcome, underscoring the importance of addressing structural contributory injustice within broader discussions of epistemic injustice. I discuss Bogia here to highlight work building on structural aspects of Dotson's concept of contributory injustice. Bogia's view is different from my discussion of the structural aspects of contributory injustice in Chapter 3.

To address contributory injustice, Dotson (2012a) draws inspiration from María Lugones' (1987) concept of "world"-travelling as a solution. Dotson suggests that tackling contributory injustice necessitates third-order changes, which involve not just altering a single set of shared hermeneutical resources but also being fluent in different hermeneutical frameworks. Dotson likens this process to "world"-travelling, which goes beyond theoretical understanding to encompass actual experiences and interactions with diverse perspectives. Central to Lugones's concept is the idea that individuals inhabit multiple "worlds," each shaped by distinct cultural, social, and historical forces. For Lugones (1987), "world"-travelling requires a willingness to engage with others on their own terms, allowing ourselves to be transformed by their perspectives and experiences. This process involves relinquishing control and embracing vulnerability, opening ourselves to the possibility of being wrong or foolish. Through playful exploration and dialogue, we can cultivate genuine connections and mutual understanding across cultural and racial divides. Dotson (2012a) extends Lugones' (1987) concept of "world"-travelling by emphasizing the importance of assessing one's motives and building trust within epistemic communities before embarking on the journey of learning from resistant epistemological positions. She highlights the importance of cultivating a playful and open attitude towards learning from others' "worlds," and acknowledging the significant demands, complexities, and challenges involved in this transformative process. By integrating Lugones'

(1987) concept of "world"-travelling into her framework, Dotson (2012a) offers a pathway towards transformative change by encouraging individuals to immerse themselves in diverse experiences and perspectives, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable epistemic landscape.

### 1.5: Epistemology in Education

Epistemology and epistemic (in)justice are integral concepts in education, shaping how knowledge is acquired, validated, and disseminated within academic settings. Epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, underpins educational practices by examining how individuals come to know and understand the world. Epistemic injustice, on the other hand, highlights the ways in which individuals or groups are wronged in their capacities as knowers, often through marginalization, silencing, or discrediting. In the context of education, epistemology informs pedagogical approaches, curriculum development, and assessment practices. Educators grapple with questions about the nature of knowledge, how it is constructed, and how it should be transmitted to students.

When it comes to education, there is a concern regarding whether students experience an epistemic injustice in their roles as learners. Education, being fundamentally about knowledge acquisition, raises questions about the equitable distribution of educational opportunities and resources. In fact, debates surrounding education and educational justice have traditionally focused on distributive justice, examining how the distribution of education resources and opportunities impacts individuals' prospects in the labour market (Brighouse & Swift, 2006). However, Kotzee's (2013) work has shifted this focus towards epistemic justice as educational justice. Kotzee (2013) argues that instead of solely considering the distribution of education's positional benefits, attention should be directed towards the distribution of knowledge, which

arises directly and essentially from education itself. Unequal access to educational resources, experiences, or institutions, particularly when correlated with other forms of oppression, raises legitimate concerns about resulting disparities in knowledge production. It's important to note that not all epistemic injustices are educational, and not all educational injustices are epistemic. However, examining the intersection of epistemic injustices and educational injustices provides valuable insights into how disparities in knowledge acquisition and distribution contribute to broader inequalities in educational outcomes.

Discussions of the epistemic injustices taking place in education can typically be divided into two groups: agential and structural epistemic injustices. Note that these structural injustices can include but are not limited to Bogia's discussion of structural injustice discussed above. As we've seen, testimonial injustices are more closely aligned with agential epistemic injustices, hermeneutical injustices are more closely aligned with structural epistemic injustices, and contributory injustices are a mixture of both agential and structural epistemic injustices. However, we need to evaluate how both agential and structural accounts of epistemic injustice manifest in educational contexts.

First, agential accounts of epistemic injustice emphasize the individual actions of culpable agents (Nikolaidis, 2023). These accounts highlight how individuals, through their behaviours, attitudes, and decisions, actively contribute to or perpetuate injustices in knowledge production, dissemination, and recognition. Agential accounts zoom in on the agency of specific actors who engage in practices that marginalize certain knowers or undermine their epistemic authority. By centering on the actions and choices of individuals, these accounts offer insights into the mechanisms through which epistemic injustices are enacted and sustained, shedding light on the moral responsibility of agents in perpetuating or challenging unjust epistemic

practices. Kwong (2015) is an example of an agential account as he frames discussions of culprit-based epistemic injustices around open-mindedness, arguing that closed-mindedness contributes to these injustices and the cultivation of open-mindedness is a remedy. Hookway (2010) identifies various ways in which individuals can be marginalized in educational settings, emphasizing the agency of both educators and learners in perpetuating or challenging epistemic injustices. Similarly, Murris (2013) explores how adults' prejudices and preconceptions can lead to epistemic injustices against children in educational encounters. This perspective emphasizes the agency of educators and adults in shaping educational interactions and highlights the need for increased epistemic modesty and equality to include children as active participants in knowledge production. Haslanger (2014) explores how breakdowns in trust between teachers and students, often along racial lines, result in epistemic injustices that affect students' academic achievements and self-understanding. Finally, Applebaum (2020) highlights the need to address willful ignorance to promote intellectual diversity and greater understanding of issues of injustice. Overall, these accounts collectively highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing the active roles individual agents play in perpetuating epistemic injustices in education. And while agential accounts are important, my work will be focused on furthering the structural accounts of epistemic injustice, particularly concerning low-income first-generation students' experiences in higher education.

Structural accounts of epistemic injustice shift the focus from individual actions to the broader social, institutional, and systemic factors that perpetuate epistemic injustices. These accounts examine how power dynamics, social norms, institutional practices, and cultural ideologies shape the distribution of epistemic goods, such as knowledge, credibility, and recognition. Anderson (2012) highlights the systemic aspects of epistemic injustice, emphasizing

the need to use structural solutions to solve structural injustices. Similarly, Kidd (2020, 2021) explores how social institutions can bear epistemic vices, suggesting that understanding and addressing epistemic corruption within these institutions is essential for combating social oppression. Martín (2021) discusses the concept of white ignorance within a structuralist framework, arguing that it results from social processes that systematically give rise to racial injustices. She thus advocates for structural solutions to disrupt white ignorance. In the same vein, Nikolaidis (2023) critiques agent-centered educational solutions to white ignorance, asserting that education for disrupting white ignorance must be structure-centered and prioritize political forms of education. The structural factors contributing to epistemic injustice in education differ from one another, making it challenging to determine the root cause of these injustices. Rather, it is a combination of factors such as institutional biases, economic inequalities, historical legacies of oppression, and cultural stereotypes, recognizing that epistemic injustices are deeply embedded within social structures and cannot be adequately addressed solely by focusing on individual actions. Instead, structural accounts call for systemic changes and institutional reforms to address the causes of epistemic injustices and promote more equitable epistemic practices, especially in higher education.

Epistemic injustices manifest in various forms within epistemic practices and institutional structures. According to Pohlhaus (2017), these injustices operate on multiple levels and can be understood as epistemic in three ways:

> First, they wrong particular knowers as knowers, for example by suppressing a knower's testimony or by making it difficult for particular knowers to know what it is in their interest to know. Second, they cause epistemic dysfunction, for example by distorting understanding or stymieing inquiry. Third, they accomplish the aforementioned two

> harms from within, and sometimes through the use of, our epistemic practices and institutions, for example, when school curricula and academic disciplines are structured in ways that systematically ignore, distort, and/or discredit particular intellectual traditions. (p. 13)

We can see that an epistemic injustice harms individual knowers, but also involves wrongdoings perpetuated by and facilitated by epistemic institutions. Using this, my focus will be on how low-income first-generation students experience epistemic injustice, specifically contributory injustice, in higher education. In these institutions, epistemic injustices can manifest in various forms, including the exclusion of marginalized voices from academic discourse, the devaluation of experiential knowledge, and the perpetuation of epistemic hierarchies that privilege certain perspectives over others. By recognizing and addressing epistemic injustices, we can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments where all students feel empowered to engage critically with knowledge. To do so, we first need to acknowledge and contextualize the experiences of low-income, first-generation students.

### 1.6: Philosophy and Low-Income, First-Generation Students

The Spring 2021 issue of the APA Newsletter, centered on feminism and philosophy, consists of a set of essays in which philosophers describe and theorize their first-person experiences as first-generation low-income students. It if offers insights into how they navigate academia and interpret their roles within the academic philosophical community. Themes arising in this newsletter include double alienation, community, and economic and time constraints.

#### 1.6.1: Double Alienation

One of the primary themes highlighted in the APA newsletter is double alienation. According to Falbo and Stewart (2021), LIFG students can "find themselves straddling two

disparate social worlds with stark differences in power, norms, values, and social status" (p. 2). LIFG students may feel like outsiders within academic settings due to the socio-economic disparities they face in the academy, which hinder their sense of belonging in higher education institutions (Falbo & Stewart, 2021). At the same time, LIFG students may struggle to maintain connections with their home communities, further complicating their sense of identity and belonging in either world (Falbo & Stewart, 2021).

Several authors in the newsletter discuss their own encounters with double alienation. For instance, in her piece, *Flourishing in the Academy: Complicity and Compromise,* Jennifer Morton (2021) illustrates how LIFG students navigate an academic environment that feels foreign and unwelcoming despite their achievements. Reflecting on her personal and intellectual growth within academia, Morton (2021) acknowledges the tension between pursuing academic success and staying connected to her community back home, a dynamic that further intensifies her feelings of alienation. She reflects on how she has decided to pursue higher education thousands of miles away from home and is unable to see her family very frequently, stating "We love each other, but I am now part of a world whose logic is mysterious to them. This makes it hard for us to be a part of each other's lives in the intimate way that we used to be" (Morton, 2021, p. 10). Morton's (2021) essay emphasizes their struggles to reconcile their identity and aspirations within an educational system that does not fully recognize or value their diverse perspectives and contributions.

Kayla Aceves' (2021) personal reflections in *Confessions of a Working-Class Student* discusses her own feelings of double alienation as a low-income, first-generation student. She recounts her journey through postsecondary school, contrasting her small, culturally rich hometown of Calexico with the daunting, elitist atmosphere of a higher education institution.

Aceves (2021) candidly expresses a longing for the community and sense of belonging she once felt in her hometown, where she shared connections with teachers and classmates. Despite her academic success in philosophy, Aceves (2021) grapples with feelings of unworthiness regarding her degree and regrets over missed familial moments due to her academic commitments. Aceves' (2021) narrative powerfully underscores the isolation and internal conflict faced by many LIFG students in higher education, revealing the disparities and challenges they encounter in pursuing intellectual and personal growth within an environment that often overlooks their perspectives and struggles. While many of the authors in the newsletter discuss their experiences of double alienation, they also emphasize the role of community and mentorship in mitigating their feelings of isolation. These philosophers share experiences of the importances of supportive networks fostering resilience and assisting them as they navigating the complexities of higher education.

John D. Proios' (2021) essay, *Ethical Narratives and Oppositional Consciousness*, demonstrates the theme of double alienation among LIFG students. Growing up in a gentrifying small town in New York, Proios describes his family's financial struggles, where his father, a self-employed house painter, was the sole provider. As his father's health declined due to work-related illness, his mother took on the role of primary earner as a housekeeper, while his sibling dropped out of high school. These circumstances placed Proios in a position where he considered leaving his education to support his family as a painter. Despite his commitment to academic pursuits, he felt alienated from his peers at university, perceiving them as more educated, financially stable, and socially integrated. He states, “I felt caught between my obligations to my family, my attempt to transcend the conditions of our lives, and the sense that this part of my identity created a barrier between me and my learning community” (Proios, 2021, p. 12). This perception deepened his sense of being caught between two worlds: the academic environment,

where he sought to transcend his family's circumstances, and his familial responsibilities, which anchored him to a community struggling with economic challenges. Proios' (2021) narrative powerfully illustrates how these tensions shape identity, hinder integration into the academic community, and highlight a broad systemic barrier.

### 1.6.2: Community

Another recurring theme throughout the newsletter is the role of community and mentorship in mitigating the challenges faced by the LIFG authors. This theme resonates strongly across multiple contributions in this issue. Many authors reflect on their journeys within academia, emphasizing the profound value derived from connecting with peers and mentors who "share similar life histories and backgrounds," underscoring the invaluable support found in peer networks and mentorship relationships (Falbo & Stewart, 2021, p. 3). These accounts illustrate how such support structures are not merely supplemental but essential in navigating the complexities of academic life.

Morton's (2021) essay showcases the importance of finding community amidst the challenges faced by LIFG students in academia. Morton (2021) highlights how discovering a supportive community of peers and mentors, including her close friend Richie Kim, was transformative for her. Richie, a fellow philosophy student from a similar background, provided crucial solidarity and understanding, helping Morton navigate both academic challenges and personal doubts. Their friendship became a lifeline, offering not only emotional support but also affirmation of their shared experiences and aspirations within the field of philosophy. Similarly, Aceves (2021) talks about the importance of community as she found people with similar experiences to her. She shares that joining the FiloMex (Mexican Philosophy) Lab further enriched her academic journey by offering a supportive environment where her background was

celebrated. Engagements such as participating in the Ethics Bowl and serving in leadership roles within the Philosophy Club connected Aceves with peers who shared similar academic interests and challenges, creating a network of support. Additionally, the guidance and encouragement from advisors and mentors who understood her background played a crucial role in bolstering her confidence and determination to pursue graduate studies despite initial uncertainties. Aceves (2021) reflected that in these settings, "We could share and bond over the experiences of feeling like the odd-one-out in a classroom," highlighting how these shared experiences strengthened her sense of belonging within the academic community (p. 29). These experiences collectively allowed Aceves to carve out a space where she felt understood, valued, and empowered within the academic community.

In their collaborative essay, *Marginal Disclosures: Sisterhood, Standpoint, Community, and Thriving,* Ashley J. Lamarre and Zinhle ka'Nobuhlaluse (2021) also express the importance of community by discussing the sisterhood and solidarity they found as Black women scholars from working-class backgrounds navigating the competitive and isolating landscape of academia. Bonding over their intersectional identities and shared challenges, Lamarre and ka'Nobuhlaluse (2021) forged a supportive relationship that transcended mere collaboration, becoming allies in a shared struggle against systemic barriers. Their partnership exemplifies a deliberate rejection of divisive narratives imposed by institutional hierarchies, instead fostering networks of mutual support and empowerment. By centering their experiences and voices, they underscore the transformative potential of community in challenging academic norms and advocating for greater inclusivity. Lamarre and ka'Nobuhlaluse's (2021) narrative highlights the vital role of sisterhood in navigating and reshaping academic spaces to be more equitable and welcoming for marginalized scholars.

Proios' (2021) highlights the pivotal role of community in LIFG students' academic journey in higher education. He critiques conventional views of upward mobility and stresses the need for ethical narratives that recognize the specific challenges these students encounter. Proios (2021) underscores how Morton's (2019) notion of "clear-eyed ethical narratives" reveals the ethical dilemmas LIFG students face, such as balancing academic expectations with familial and community ties. This narrative encourages students to reflect on societal inequalities and use their education for broader social change, aiming for both personal and collective advancement. Proios (2021) argues that integrating oppositional consciousness is crucial for LIFG students, helping them acknowledge their marginalized status and advocate for transformative change within academic structures. He emphasizes the role of community in fostering solidarity among marginalized groups and empowering students to collectively confront barriers to mobility. This community-centered approach challenges dominant narratives and equips these LIFG authors with the resilience and agency needed to navigate and challenge injustices within higher education institutions effectively. However, it's important to note that while community support is vital, significant financial and time-related obstacles in higher education remain.

### 1.6.3: Economic and Time Constraints

Financial barriers emerge as another significant focus, with discussions centering on the economic hardships faced by first-generation and low-income philosophers throughout their academic journeys (Falbo & Stewart, 2021). These students "find themselves taking on additional work…to make ends meet" which can "slow or hinder progression towards their degree, and place them at a disadvantage relative to peers who might be positioned to devote most of their time to their work" (Falbo & Stewart, 2021). These time constraints significantly

impact these LIFG authors as they struggle to allocate time for studying while balancing work obligations to financially support and maintain their enrollment in higher education institutions.

Aceves (2021) shares how her academic journey is deeply intertwined with financial strain and familial expectations. As the first in her family to attend university, Aceves (2021) views her pursuit not just as personal advancement but as a transformative opportunity for her entire family, bearing the weight of their hopes and sacrifices. However, these aspirations collide with the harsh reality of economic hardship, forcing Aceves to balance rigorous academic demands with the necessity to work and support herself financially. This dual responsibility leaves her with limited time for academic pursuits compared to peers from more privileged backgrounds, exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and challenging her sense of belonging in university spaces designed for those with greater financial stability. Aceves (2021) critiques the prevailing academic norms that overlook the time-intensive jobs many LIFG students must undertake, highlighting the privilege divide in higher education that perpetuates societal biases and shapes academic opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Aceves remains resilient, expressing a determination to reclaim her academic aspirations post-graduation, affirming that with adequate time and resources, she possesses the potential to succeed academically. Her narrative underscores the critical need for equitable access to uninterrupted study time and supportive resources to empower her to achieve her educational and personal goals.

In her essay, *What It's Like to Grow Up Poor, but Fall in Love with Philosophy: A Notice to the Profession in Case It Forgot*, Elvira Basevich (2021) underscores how financial hardships force LIFG students like her to work while in college, often juggling additional responsibilities like childcare or family support, which hinders their academic progress compared to more financially secure peers. Basevich (2021) critiques the impact of cuts to student aid programs

like FAFSA and Pell Grants, exacerbating the economic strain on an already vulnerable student body. The escalating costs of higher education further entrench disparities, particularly in public university systems that were once more accessible (Basevich, 2021). Amidst these challenges, Basevich (2021) suggests practical solutions such as hiring student assistants and providing monetary awards and mentoring opportunities, advocating for these measures as crucial for supporting LIFG students in navigating academic and economic barriers within the field of philosophy and academia more broadly.

The narratives presented by the authors in the Spring 2021 APA Newsletter highlight the existences and experiences of LIFG students within the community of philosophy professors. These experiences highlight the significant role of family education levels and support, the impact of a sense of belonging, and the constraints imposed by financial and time limitations on some of our LIFG colleagues. It also highlights disparities in attrition, retention, and graduation rates among these students, revealing systemic inequalities that hinder their full participation in and contribution to higher education. To build a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by LIFG students, it is essential to frame these barriers within the broader context of contributory injustice. These institutional barriers constitute a contributory injustice, as they demonstrate that the academy is constructed for continuing generation students. It contributes to and is part of a culture that creates institutional barriers to the success of LIFG students which not only undermines their opportunity to share their perspectives and insights within academic discourse, but also their capacity to participate in and change that culture to better fit with the rest of their lives. I will argue that these obstacles not only hinder LIFG students' success but also deny them the opportunity to contribute their perspectives and insights to academic discourse.

# Chapter 2:

## Low-Income, First-Generation Students: Who Are They?

My overall aim in this project is to show how different kinds of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression are exemplified in the experiences of first-generation and low-income students in higher education relative to their higher-income, continuing-generation peers. I will argue that balancing work and academic responsibilities imposes temporal demands that marginalize, exclude, and exploit LIFG students within knowledge-producing environments. Constrained by their economic circumstances, these students must divide their attention across various domains to be a part of higher education institutions and contribute to their epistemic resources. To further highlight the contributory injustice that low-income, first-generation students face, I will review the empirical research that has been conducted on these students. This includes detailing who low-income, first-generation students are and the barriers they face in higher education institutions.

I found that many scholars roughly define first-generation students as the first in their family to attend postsecondary school. However, the literature does not agree about the nuances of this definition, particularly regarding factors such as the number of parents meeting the criteria, the level of education the parent(s) pursued, the type of institution the parent(s) attended, and if they completed their degree (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). For example, some define first-generation students as those with neither parent having *attended or enrolled* in any postsecondary institution (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Whereas others identify someone as a first-generation student if neither parent *completed* a bachelor's degree (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005). From this, it becomes evident that there is a lack of consensus regarding the definition of first-generation students, resulting in variability in

research findings depending on the definition used in each study. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) argue that the term "first-generation students" in higher education research oversimplifies the diverse realities of students facing educational challenges. They critique its tendency to homogenize a heterogeneous group characterized by varying demographics such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, potentially masking significant differences among individuals (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Instead, the authors advocate for an intersectional approach that considers how one's social factors intersect with their first-generation status, influencing educational outcomes.

Throughout this chapter, I will build on Nguyen and Nguyen's (2018) intersectional approach to studying first-generation students. Due to the inconsistent and varied definitions of the term “first-generation student,” I will adopt a broad and inclusive definition that encompasses several criteria. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “first-generation student” will include students whose parents have not attended or enrolled in any postsecondary institution, as well as those whose parents have entered but not completed a bachelor’s degree. To ensure transparency and maintain an intersectional approach, I will clarify the specific meaning and usage of “first-generation student” as it is employed in the studies I reference.

It is important to take an intersectional approach to this research as first-generation students can be members of multiple marginalized groups, with many first-generation students also being low-income students, female students, and Black, Hispanic, or Indigenous students (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) delineates the term "intersectionality" to describe how multiple dimensions of identity (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) intersect and overlap in the experiences of individuals, especially those who face multiple forms of

discrimination. The concept highlights that these aspects of identity are interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Intersectionality emphasizes that individuals may experience unique forms of discrimination that result from the combination of different social identities. Crenshaw (1989) showed the importance of this concept through the 1976 DeGraffenreid v. General Motors case. In this case, a group of Black women sued General Motors (GM) for employment discrimination. They argued that GM's hiring and promotion practices discriminated against Black women based on both race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). The plaintiffs were able to demonstrate that although GM hired both Black men and White women, they did not hire Black women, effectively excluding Black women from job opportunities available to White women and Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). The significance of this case lies in its illustration of how race and gender intersect to create a unique form of discrimination against Black women. The case highlights the limitations of approaches that focus solely on race or gender discrimination, as they often fail to account for the compounded discrimination faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups.

Research on first-generation students varies significantly in its approach to intersectionality. While studies like those by Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) and Pascarella, Pierson, and Terenzini (2004)[1] incorporate an understanding of how intersectionality applies to first-generation students, others, such as Inman & Mayes (1999)[2] and Hahs-Vaughn (2004), do not (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). By neglecting intersectional factors,

[1] In their studies, Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) and Pascarella, Pierson, and Terenzini (2004) addressed potential sample bias by implementing a sample weighting algorithm that adjusted for sex, race/ethnicity, and institution. They developed weights based on the proportion of each demographic group within the institution's end-of-second-year population, which helped correct for imbalances in the sample and provided a more accurate representation of the student population, though it did not fully eliminate response bias.

[2] Alternatively, Inman & Mayes' (1999) study's sample population was 91.6% White, indicating an over-representation of this racial category. The study did not account for the impact on non-White individuals or people of colour, nor did it address how non-European participants were affected by the study's variables.

these studies may draw conclusions based on samples that are unrepresentative of the diverse experiences within the population of first-generation students (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). This lack of nuanced analysis fails to account for the complex social factors affecting marginalized groups such as students of colour, female students, and low-income students, potentially overlooking critical barriers and perpetuating inequities in their findings and recommendations. This gap in understanding the diverse and intersectional experiences within this population presents an opportunity for more nuanced and beneficial studies that acknowledge and address the varied social positions of individuals. It is not uncommon for studies of first-generation students to not mention, analyze, or report differences based on features like race, gender, or disability status. This leaves open the question of whether these studies are capturing the intersectional identities of first-generation students. To ensure comprehensive insights into the challenges and successes of all first-generation students, future research should strive to adopt inclusive methodologies that account for intersecting identities. By examining the challenges of first-generation students as a population, we can better appreciate the diversity within this group and the nuanced ways in which social and cultural capital are acquired and utilized in the higher education environment.

In this chapter, I will reveal one way of framing various struggles and barriers faced by LIFG students in higher education. Section 2.1 explores the role of family support and experience in shaping the motivations and preparation of LIFG students for higher education. It highlights how parental involvement and the transmission of social and cultural capital influence students' aspirations and readiness for college, underscoring the disparities that exist in educational support and preparation among different socioeconomic backgrounds. Section 2.2 explores how financial barriers significantly impede the success of low-income, first-generation

(LIFG) students in higher education. It outlines how rising tuition costs, inadequate financial aid, and hidden expenses create significant barriers for low-income, first-generation students, leading to financial strain and lower completion rates in higher education. Following, in section 2.3, I will discuss the significant time constraints faced by LIFG students, particularly in relation to employment obligations. These challenges often create a delicate balance between academic responsibilities, work commitments, and the need for social engagement, impacting their overall higher education experience and academic success. Section 2.4 explores the challenges of attrition and graduation rates among LIFG students. It shows that LIFG students experience higher attrition rates and lower graduation rates due to socioeconomic status, racial disparities, and the need to balance work and academic responsibilities. These factors highlight the ongoing struggle for equitable educational outcomes for LIFG students in higher education.

### 2.1: Family Support and Experience

Low-income, first-generation students' motivations for attending higher education institutions are significantly shaped by their family's opinions and experiences. There is a body of research focusing on parents' role in forming their children's educational aspirations. For example, some research shows that enrollment and retention in higher education depends significantly on one's parents' level of education (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Ishitani, 2003; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Terenzini et al., 1996). Moschetti and Hudley (2015), argue that LIFG students encounter challenges in accessing the social capital resources available on campus due to the absence of parental guidance in locating institutional support. They argue that parents of first-generation students may not have recognized the significance of academic and social networks in higher education, thereby failing to encourage their children to engage socially and intellectually within the institution.

According to Moschetti & Hudley (2015), higher-income, continuing-generation students tend to enter higher education with valuable social capital, such as knowledge from family members about the college environment that LIFG tend to lack. For example, parents of continuing-generation students may be able to provide their child with information on how to fill out financial aid applications, how to register for classes, and how to meet with advisors to receive institutional support. This generational knowledge tends to help non-LIFG students navigate the institution and gain further social capital (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Ward et al., 2012). LIFG students are also disadvantaged compared to their non-first-generation peers due to a lack of inherited social capital. Note that this analysis focuses on lack of inherited social capital rather than on the causes of the disproportional distribution of social capital or the fact that particular kinds of social capital are required for a successful postsecondary experience.

### 2.1.1: Support and Motivations for Attending Higher Education

It has been argued that first-generation students often receive less support and encouragement from their parents than their continuing-generation peers as they pursue higher education (Choy, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1996). However, more recent studies have argued that it is not that these parents do not support their children during the university experience, but rather that they do not have the social or cultural capital to help them transition to their new environment (Irlbeck et al., 2014, Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). For instance, Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, and Jones (2014) argue that parents of LIFG students may struggle to navigate the complexities of financial aid applications, which can be a barrier to their children's enrollment and persistence in college. Additionally, Moschetti & Hudley (2015) argue that the parents of LIFG students may lack familiarity with the norms and expectations of higher education settings,

such as the importance of networking or seeking out academic support services.[3] Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, and Jones (2014) indicate that first-generation students often feel overwhelmed by the new academic and cultural environment, which differs significantly from their home life and comes with unspoken rules and norms.[4] Thiem & Dasgupta (2022) claim that LIFG students tend to lack confidence in their potential, experience high levels of stress and anxiety compared to their higher-income, continuing-generation peers, and face significant performance challenges.

It has been argued that while these parents may not have extensive knowledge about the higher education experience, they provide emotional support for their children by ensuring the student knows they have the ability to succeed (Gibbons et al., 2019; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Many parents of first-generation students may not have knowledge about or direct experiences with navigating the higher education system, understanding admissions processes, financial aid options, course registration procedures, and academic expectations. Additionally, these parents often do not possess the cultural capital related to higher education—such as knowledge of academic norms, career pathways, networking opportunities, and the unwritten rules of college life—that significantly impact a student's success. They may also not have personal networks within academia or related professions to provide mentoring, internship opportunities, job connections, and general career advice (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).[5] While

[3] It should be noted that Moschetti and Hudley (2015) define first-generation students as students where neither parent has completed a postsecondary degree. Additionally, their research specifically focuses on White, working-class, first-generation community college students (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

[4] Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, and Jones (2014) define first-generation students as those whose parents have earned no more than a high school diploma. Their study included nine respondents from various departments within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at Texas Tech University (TTU), as well as one representative from TTU's first-generation college student program. The study did not specify the race or gender of the participants.

[5] Thiem and Dasgupta (2022) define first-generation students as individuals whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree or higher. Their research also includes data on first-generation students of colour and low-income, first-generation students, providing a comprehensive view of these groups.

parents may provide emotional support, they may not fully understand the challenges and stresses that accompany college life, including academic pressures, social adjustments, mental health issues, and the overall emotional toll of pursuing higher education. Even though some of this research acknowledges the significance of parental support, all of it focuses exclusively on features of students and their families.

Despite the challenges they face, this research acknowledges that parents and extended family members often exert a strong motivational influence on LIFG students. Mitchall and Jaeger (2018) found that parents were frequently cited as the most significant motivational influence on students' decisions to attend college. They provided emotional support, validation, and basic assistance with admissions and financial aid processes, which enhanced students' feelings of autonomy and competency (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Additionally, parents were identified as influential in fostering a sense of competence by reassuring students that they were "college material" and setting high academic standards from an early age (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Even when parents lacked specific knowledge about the college process, their general encouragement and high expectations for academic success played a critical role in motivating students.

This body of research indicates that students of colour often find that maintaining strong connections with their familial, cultural, and community networks is essential for their persistence in higher education, sometimes even as crucial as their engagement with the institution itself (Melendez & Melendez, 2010). However, this familial support can be a double-edged sword: while it provides a vital emotional and motivational anchor, it can also create stress if the values of the family conflict with the expectations of the higher education environment (Melendez & Melendez, 2010). Additionally, students of colour may face more difficulties

accessing campus resources and forming supportive networks than their White peers, which can contribute to feelings of isolation (Melendez & Melendez, 2010).

Some research focuses on the discontinuity between home and college values can exacerbate the challenges that LIFG students of colour face, particularly in adapting to an environment where their racial or cultural identity may significantly differ from the majority. For instance, Melendez & Melendez (2010), say that Hispanic students tend to find that parental support correlates strongly with their attachment to the institution, suggesting that supportive family dynamics help these students feel more connected and committed to their higher education experience. Similarly, Melendez & Melendez (2010) claim that Black students benefit significantly from their families' emotional support, which helps them navigate both academic and emotional challenges. Conversely, some scholars maintain that parents' lack of knowledge about higher education can undermine low-income, first-generation students' motivation. This is because their parents are "unable to assist them in adapting and understanding important aspects of their new environments" (Irlbeck et al., 2014, p. 163). Mitchall & Jaeger claim (2018) that LIFG students also reported feeling less supported and more uncertain about the admissions process when their parents could not help due to their lack of knowledge about higher education procedures.

Returning once again to the work of Moschetti & Hudley, parental unawareness of the importance of academic and social networks in higher education institutions is also identified as undermining LIFG students' motivation. Other researchers find a similar theme. For example, Mitchall & Jaeger claim that a lack of parental assistance with the admissions process can undermine LIFG student motivation (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). While some scholars found parents of LIFG students were perceived as emotionally supportive, these parents still lacked the

social capital to provide instrumental assistance, making personal characteristics like motivation crucial for educational success (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). In these studies, parental involvement focused on students' personal abilities rather than encouraging the use of institutional support or integration into the campus community (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). In contrast, Moschetti & Hudley (2015) argue that college-educated parents tend to help their continuing-generation children navigate the transition to higher education by encouraging them to access institutional help, whereas first-generation students, mainly only received emotional support from their parents.

Note again that these studies focus on barriers that exist within individual students and their families, rather than the institution. While they point out that low-income, first-generation students often receive emotional support from their parents and extended family, the effectiveness of this support is influenced by the parents' level of involvement and understanding of the higher education process and so there is still a focus on barriers within families.

### 2.1.2: Preparation for Higher Education

It has been argued that many low-income first-generation students face significant challenges in preparing for and succeeding in postsecondary education compared to their continuing-generation peers. As such, studies believe that LIFG students' motivations for attending higher education, coupled with their parents' lack of knowledge and cultural and social capital, contribute to their inadequate academic preparation. As previously mentioned, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) argue that parents who did not attend postsecondary school often lack the knowledge and experience needed to guide their children through the complex processes of applications, enrollment, and adaptation when attending higher education institutions. According to Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012), these parents are generally less equipped to provide the

necessary support and intervention for their children to meet the challenges of both pre-college and college experiences. This once again locates these barriers within the families of LIFG students as opposed to the institutional structure and policy.

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nuñez (2011) indicate that the level of academic preparation is a key predictor of college success for first-generation students.[6] Hébert (2018) argues that first-generation students are less academically prepared because they are more likely to attend high schools with less rigorous curricula and fewer Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings. According to Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996), this can result in them entering college with lower GPAs and standardized test scores. Furthermore, Collier and Morgan (2007) maintain that many first-generation college students struggle to understand college culture, which exacerbates their feelings of unpreparedness. For instance, participation in extracurricular activities, including participating in student clubs, volunteer programs, and sports teams, is a crucial aspect of college culture that may be difficult for them to grasp. It's been argued that first-generation students who did not participate in such activities during high school or whose families prioritize work over extracurriculars may struggle to recognize the importance of these activities (Freeman et al., 2024; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). Additionally, some research suggests that the social and personal growth benefits of extracurricular involvement, such as networking opportunities and skill development, might not be immediately apparent to LIFG students (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). Note that the research continues to focus on barriers within families and students, while often overlooking how institutional structures impact their understanding and preparation for postsecondary education.

[6] Walburton, Bugarin, and Nuñez (2011) define first-generation students as individuals with parents who have not attended any postsecondary school.

According to Herrmann and Varnum (2018), LIFG students may also struggle with the social aspects of college life as they are often required to adapt quickly to the middle-class norms and culture of their universities. This cultural shift demands a significant adjustment, both socially and academically, which can hinder their ability to fully integrate into the higher education environment. But first, it is worth mentioning that the process of academic advantages and disadvantages for low-income, first-generation, and students of colour begins long before postsecondary school.

The correlation between a student's socioeconomic background and their educational achievement is significant and enduring (Thomson, 2018). Income segregation among school districts may be a key factor in this achievement gap, leading to unequal distribution of resources vital for academic success, such as funding, teacher quality, and peer characteristics (Owens, 2018). Research indicates that within economically disadvantaged urban districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students receive fewer resources than schools that are wealthier (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Affluent schools benefit from better funding, technology, and extracurricular opportunities, offering a more enriching educational experience (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Conversely, schools in impoverished areas face challenges like outdated materials and larger classes, hindering students' academic performance and readiness for standardized tests and higher education (Darling-Hammond, 2001). This resource gap directly impacts students' test scores and educational outcomes, potentially necessitating remedial courses that delay progress and erode confidence in their academic abilities (Gibbons et al., 2019; Terenzini et al., 1996).[7]

[7] Gibbons, Rhinehart, and Hardon (2019) define first-generation students as those who are the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education. Their study included 15 college students (11 women and 4 men) from the southeastern United States, comprising 6 White, 5 African American, 1 Asian American, and 3 multiracial participants.

## 2.2: Economic Constraints

Research suggests that economic constraints represent another barrier to success for low-income, first-generation students, perpetuating systemic inequalities that hinder their entrance and success in higher education institutions. One significant structural financial barrier is the exorbitant cost of higher education, which has risen sharply compared to household incomes (Long & Riley, 2007; Goldrick-Rab, 2016). For instance, the average cost for attending postsecondary school in the United States has more than doubled since the 1960s, increasing from $12,126 in 1963-1964 to $27,673 in 2022-2023 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).[8] The rise in tuition, fees, and room and board rates vary across different types of institutions, depending on if they are public, private non-profit, or for-profit (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Nevertheless, all these institutions have shown the same upward trend (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). In Canada, a similar trend is observed with tuition fees for undergraduate students rising from $4,400 in 2006-2007 to $7,076 in 2023-2024 (Statistics Canada, 2023).[9] This increase in costs disproportionately affects LIFG students who often lack the financial resources to cover these expenses without significant hardship.

Low-income, first-generation students also experience structural limitations in higher education due to the inadequacy of financial aid. While we have seen an increase in the amount of financial aid offered to students to account for the rise in tuition and fees, many LIFG students still receive aid packages that do not cover essential expenses such as tuition, fees, and living costs, leading to significant unmet financial need (Long & Riley, 2007; Morton, 2019). The gap

[8] The study used constant 2022-2023 dollars based on the Consumer Price Index to determine what the price of tuition in 1963 would be today. These prices include tuition, fees, and room and board rates for full-time undergraduate students.
[9] This study also accounts for the rise in inflation and only looks at tuition rate and does not include prices for additional fees and room or board rates.

between the actual cost of attending college and the financial aid offered places undue financial strain on LIFG students and their families, forcing many to rely on loans or multiple jobs to make ends meet. Specifically, a study by Goldrick-Rab (2016) in the United States shows how financial aid forms fail to account for the contributions LIFG students could be making to their families' subsistence if they were not attending college, distorting the true economic burden they face. Additionally, over 60% of LIFG college students in the U.S. live off-campus, many with family, indicating their dual financial responsibilities (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). The complexity and bureaucratic hurdles of financial aid further compound these challenges, leaving LIFG students vulnerable to administrative delays and miscommunications about eligibility criteria (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). According to Sallie Mae and Ipsos Public Affairs (2017), this situation is exacerbated by the fact that in the U.S., 82% of LIFG students attend college in their home state and 61% live at home to reduce costs, receiving less financial support from parents and funding a larger share of costs with scholarships, grants, and their own income compared to their higher-income, continuing-generation peers. This disparity makes postsecondary school increasingly unaffordable for LIFG students, limiting access primarily to students from more privileged backgrounds. This systemic issue underscores how institutional structures within higher education reinforce inequalities by failing to provide equitable financial support to those who need it most.

According to Goldrick-Rab (2016), the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) formula, used to determine financial aid eligibility, also fails to account for the significant financial contributions low-income, first-generation students of colour may already be making to their families. As a result, students with negative EFCs—those who are contributing financially to their families—find that their aid packages are insufficient to cover their true costs (Goldrick-

Rab, 2016). A notable disparity exists in the financial needs of these students compared to their White counterparts. For instance, 38% of Black students have a negative expected family contribution, reflecting substantial financial need, compared to just 11% of White students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Additionally, Black undergraduate students are more likely to rely on student loans, with 52% having taken out loans in 2011–12, versus 42% of White students and 36% of Hispanic students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). This reliance on debt, coupled with a higher likelihood of dropping out, creates a severe burden, as indebted college dropouts are disproportionately low-income Black students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Moreover, although Black students are more likely to seek financial aid advice—nearly three in four do so compared to just over half of White students—this increased effort does not necessarily translate into more effective or accessible aid (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). The Pell Grant, a federal financial aid program in the United States designed to support undergraduate students with exceptional financial need, also highlights disparities between students of colour and their White peers. Despite their substantial financial needs, less than one in four Pell recipients is Black, and only 19% are Hispanic (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Financial aid and work-study allocations further highlight the inequity; White students have higher expected family contributions and receive more generous work-study funds compared to their Black peers (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). These financial imbalances contribute to lower completion rates among students of colour, as evidenced by the fact that in Goldrick-Rab's (2016) study of the 216 students who began college full time in 2008, less than one in three earned a credential by 2014, and a significant portion were left with debt and no degree.

Bureaucratic hurdles and vague eligibility criteria further exacerbate financial stress for LIFG students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). The complexity of financial aid forms and eligibility

requirements often leads to confusion and miscommunication. LIFG students may struggle to navigate these requirements, which can result in errors on applications or misunderstandings about what aid they are eligible to receive. For example, 20% of families did not apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in the U.S. because they had problems with their FAFSA application or found it too complicated (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2023). Additionally, 19% did not have the information required for the application, 14% missed the deadline, and 10% did not know about the FAFSA (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2023). Such bureaucratic complexities disproportionately affect LIFG students as these delays and complexities reflect a broader pattern of disregarding the needs and challenges faced by LIFG students in navigating higher education.

## 2.3: Time Constraints

One of the most pressing difficulties that low-income, first-generation students face is the necessity to work part-time or even full-time jobs to finance their education. This obligation imposes significant time constraints, creating a delicate balance between work and academic responsibilities. Research indicates that first-generation students face heightened challenges in managing these dual commitments and determine how to divide their time and attention as they navigate higher education (Ecton et al., 2023). Unlike their higher-income, continuing-generation peers who might have financial support from their families, these students are often left to find ways to cover tuition fees, textbooks, and living expenses on their own. For many, this means taking on one or more jobs.

### 2.3.1: Employment Obligations

Research indicates that first-generation students, those from low-income households, and those living in large cities are more likely to work compared to their higher-income, continuing-

generation, rural peers (FEUQ, 2020). As such, many LIFG students face the dual pressure of balancing academic responsibilities with part-time or full-time employment to support themselves financially (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). LIFG students are also particularly likely to hold jobs that demand significant time and energy (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

According to United States Department of Education (2016), 21% of very low-income dependent students and 18% of above-poverty-level peers worked 21–35 hours a week while enrolled. Additionally, 10% of both very low-income and low-income dependent students worked more than 35 hours a week while enrolled, compared to 8% of their above-poverty-level peers (NCES, 2020). Furthermore, the Center for First-Generation Student Success reports that 66% of first-generation students compared to 61% of their continuing-generation peers hold jobs while attending postsecondary school. First-generation students are also more likely to enroll as part-time students to manage their numerous responsibilities (RTI International, 2021). Notably, 43% of very low-income and 45% of low-income dependent students attended school full-time for the 2015–16 academic year, compared to 57% of above-poverty-level dependent students (NCES, 2020).

While the comparative data between low-income and non-low-income, as well as first-generation and non-first-generation students regarding work rates, may not show drastic differences, the reasons behind their employment are crucial. Carnevale and Smith (2018) note that there are substantial differences between LIFG students and their more affluent, continuing-generation peers who work, including the reasons students work, how much they work, the kinds of jobs they have, how they pay for school, and their resulting education and career outcomes. For higher-income students, working often enhances their work ethic, soft skills development such as interpersonal and time management skills, and helps build social capital through

professional networks (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). In contrast, LIFG students frequently work out of necessity to finance their education and cover living expenses, facing significant opportunity costs and a higher risk of not completing their degrees (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Carnevale and Smith (2018) emphasize that "having a job is far less of a choice for low-income working learners: they work not just for extra spending money or as a résumé-building experience, but because they must to stay afloat financially" (p. 8). This distinction highlights the socioeconomic and generational disparities that shape students' experiences in higher education, where financial constraints and parents' educational attainment significantly impact the ability to focus solely on academic pursuits.

Moreover, the types of jobs available to LIFG students are often low-wage positions with inflexible hours, such as food service, sales, or administrative support (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Although these jobs provide basic employability skills like conscientiousness and teamwork, they do not offer the deeper technical and general skills that foreshadow good entry-level career jobs (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). These jobs typically do not offer the flexibility needed to accommodate a student's class schedule or study time. On the other hand, higher-income students often have access to lucrative internships and positions in fields like STEM, business, or healthcare; only 6% of low-income students work in these areas compared to 14% of their higher-income peers (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). This lack of relevant work experience can hinder LIFG students' future career prospects, creating a cycle of economic struggle. The necessity to engage in these types of employment can limit LIFG students' opportunities to develop professional skills and networks essential for future career advancement (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022, p. 220). Aligning work opportunities with students' academic and career goals can enhance their educational experience and future employability (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

Overall, the necessity of LIFG students to work imposes significant time constraints that can interfere with their academic success and overall college experience. This is an important concern as studies have shown that working more than 20 hours per week can negatively affect a student's grades and reduce the likelihood of graduation (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). For LIFG students, who might already be at a disadvantage due to a lack of familiarity with the college environment and academic expectations, the added burden of working long hours can be particularly harmful. LIFG students may find themselves constantly struggling to keep up with their coursework, leading to lower grades, delayed graduation, or even dropping out (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Research supports that the more hours students work, the more their academic success is compromised, highlighting the significant barriers faced by LIFG working students (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

### 2.3.2: Job Attainment

Graduating from college is not merely about obtaining a degree; it represents a gateway to higher-ranking job opportunities and socioeconomic mobility. However, the systemic barriers that hinder LIFG students' academic progress also severely limit their access to these coveted positions. Research from the UK highlights these challenges, revealing stark disparities in occupational outcomes based on social class and familial educational. For instance, Friedman and Laurison (2019) indicate that individuals from privileged backgrounds are disproportionately represented in top or ‘elite’ jobs as they are 3.6 times more likely to secure top jobs compared to those from working-class origins. This trend is evident across various fields as individuals with parents in high-status occupations, such as doctors or lawyers, are significantly more likely to enter these professions themselves, highlighting a substantial advantage rooted in familial background and education (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). According to Friedman and Laurison

(2019), even among graduates from prestigious universities, those from privileged backgrounds are more likely to attain top jobs than their working-class counterparts, despite comparable academic achievements.[10] These findings emphasize the entrenched nature of class reproduction in high-income countries, where educational attainment alone does not level the playing field (Friedman & Laurison, 2019).

Data from Braven (2024) indicates that before COVID-19, only 30% of the 1.3 million low-income and first-generation students in the U.S. graduated and either secured a strong job or pursued further education, leaving over 900,000 struggling to launch their careers. According to Braven (2024), this challenge is largely due to a lack of robust networks for LIFG students, which are crucial for career advancement. Braven (2024) argues that many LIFG students lack access to the behind-the-scenes preparation and coaching needed for competitive internships and jobs, and they often do not receive the same level of guidance from parents, mentors, or connections as their higher-income peers, placing them at a significant disadvantage in building professional networks. For instance, while many believe job candidates are evaluated mainly on credentials and intellect, 70% of professionals are hired through existing connections, with referrals making candidates nine times more likely to secure a job (Braven, 2024). Although the data attributes the lack of job success for LIFG students to familial shortcomings, this issue is deeply rooted in the broader societal structure, which exacerbates institutional and societal barriers by perpetuating inequalities in access to networking opportunities and professional resources.

Despite higher educational attainment levels among people of colour compared to their White counterparts, people of colour face significant barriers in obtaining higher-ranking jobs

[10] While this study is based out of the UK, this pattern also holds true in Canada and the US, where similar disparities persist.

with comparable pay and benefits (Statistics Canada, 2023). People of colour often experience disparities in employment outcomes, such as lower earnings and reduced access to unionization and pension benefits two years after graduation (Statistics Canada, 2023). The employment landscape reveals that while White workers are more likely to secure good jobs—defined as those with family-sustaining earnings—people of colour are underrepresented in these positions (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). In 2016, White workers held 77% of good jobs, despite comprising 69% of all workers, whereas Black and Latino workers held only 10% and 13% of good jobs, respectively, despite representing a larger share of the workforce (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Additionally, even when people of colour attain good jobs, they are paid less than their White counterparts at every educational level, underscoring ongoing inequities in job quality and compensation (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). These societal barriers highlight the systemic challenges people of colour face in achieving economic parity in the workforce. Thus, the privileging of certain familial and socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing top jobs and influential positions within academia perpetuates a biased hermeneutical framework that excludes LIFG graduates from contributing to and shaping epistemic norms and practices.

### 2.4: Attrition and Graduation Rates

The challenges that low-income, first-generation also significantly impact attrition, retention, and graduation rates. Attrition in higher education refers to the departure of students from an institution before completing their degree (Ishitani, 2003 & 2006). Graduation rates indicate the percentage of students who successfully complete their degree programs within a specific timeframe (López et al., 2023). LIFG students typically face lower graduation rates compared to their peers from higher-income backgrounds and continuing-generation families

(Pew Research Center, 2021). Understanding these concepts and their impact on LIFG students is crucial for addressing the institutional barriers they encounter.

### 2.4.1: Attrition in Higher Education

Attrition significantly impacts LIFG students, as data suggests they are more likely to leave higher education institutions before completing their degrees compared to their continuing-generation peers (Evans et al., 2020; Glaessgen et al., 2018; Ishitani, 2003, 2006). Research by Ishitani (2003, 2006) based on the U.S. indicates that minority students, alongside first-generation students, are more prone to leaving postsecondary school compared to their more privileged peers (Ishitani, 2006).[11] First-generation students are particularly at high risk of attrition, with a 71% greater likelihood of leaving the institution during their first year and not continuing their degree (Ishitani, 2006).

Financial constraints also play a significant role in student attrition. LIFG students consistently drop out at higher rates than their middle- and upper-income peers who have college or university educated parents (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002). The impact of lower family income on attrition was significant during these years (Ishitani, 2006). Ishitani's (2006) study of students in the United States found that students from families earning $25,000 or less annually faced a 49% higher risk of leaving in the first year and a 26% higher risk in the second year compared to those from families earning $45,000 or more annually (p. 446). As previously mentioned, LIFG students often face the dual pressures of academic and financial responsibilities, leading them to work more hours than their continuing-generation peers. This increased workload results in less time available for studying and academic engagement (Pascarella et al., 2004). As a result of their extensive work hours, LIFG students experience higher attrition rates (Evans et al., 2020).

[11]Ishitani (2003, 2006) did not provide a specific definition of "first-generation student" used in their study.

According to Ishitani (2003, 2006), students depart from institutions for the various reasons, including academic difficulties, financial constraints, personal issues, lack of engagement, or dissatisfaction with the institution (Ishitani, 2003, 2006). In their research, Ishitani (2003, 2006) asserts that attrition refers to several types of student departures, including, dropouts, stopouts, transfers, and academic dismissals. However, the reasons for departure only seem to focus on factors specific to the individual student, rather than the institution.

### 2.4.2: Graduation Rates in Higher Education

For LIFG students, graduation rates tend to be lower than their higher-income, continuing-generation peers (Pew Research Center, 2021). A Pew Research Center (2021) study highlighted the disparity in graduation rates between first-generation students and their non-first-generation counterparts. They indicated that among adults aged 22 to 59 whose parents have no education beyond high school, 20% have achieved a bachelor's degree or higher (Pew Research Center, 2021). In contrast, for those with at least one parent who has completed some college, the percentage rises to 34% (Pew Research Center, 2021). The likelihood increases further among adults whose parents hold at least a bachelor's degree, with 60% having attained a college degree (Pew Research Center, 2021). Notably, among adults whose parents both hold college degrees, a significant 82% have completed at least a bachelor's degree (Pew Research Center, 2021). Other research indicates that first-generation students are more than twice as likely as their peers with college-educated parents to leave four-year institutions before their second year and are less likely to complete their degrees within five years (Pascarella et al., 2004; Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Race and socioeconomic status further impact graduation rates. Considering the intersection of these social factors, we see that Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students, who are disproportionately represented among first-generation college students, experience even

lower graduation rates compared to their White peers (Ishitani, 2006). According to Ishitani's (2006) study in the U.S., first-generation students were 51% and 32% less likely to graduate in the fourth and fifth years than students whose parents graduated from college, and those whose parents had some college education were 44% and 29% less likely to graduate in the same time frame (Ishanti, 2006). Female students were 56% more likely to graduate within four years compared to male students (Ishanti, 2006). Race and ethnicity also significantly affects degree attainment: Hispanic students had graduation rates 59% and 31% lower in the fourth and fifth years, respectively, compared to White students, while Black students were 58% less likely to graduate in their fourth year (Ishanti, 2006). Despite efforts to increase access to higher education for LIFG students, including enrollment growth, disparities in academic success persist (López et al., 2023).

Departing from traditional measures of dropout or attrition rates, recent research has increasingly focused on the "push-out" rate, a concept that refers to the ways educational systems drive students out of school through unjust practices and policies (James & Turner, 2017). The "push-out" framework holds educational systems accountable for these injustices rather than placing the burden on students to navigate harmful environments. For example, strict enforcement of dress codes in elementary schools has been shown to disproportionately affect Black students, often due to financial constraints within their families (James & Turner, 2017). Similarly, practices such as penalizing students for minor infractions like being late, laughing in class, or speaking out disproportionately target Black students and other students of colour (James & Turner, 2017). These disciplinary measures are part of a broader system of inequity that disproportionately impact Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth, contributing to their under-representation among first-generation college students.

This chapter focused on research that characterized the barriers to LIFG student success as largely located in themselves, their families, or their communities. In the next chapter I show how characterizing these barriers as within the student as opposed to within institutions of higher education is constitutive of contributory injustice. I then develop the concept of temporal injustice to further describe the institutional and socioeconomic barriers faced by LIFG students.

# Chapter 3:

## Low-Income, First-Generation Students and Contributory Injustice

In this chapter, I extend Dotson's (2012a) framework to analyze the research I described in Chapter 2 on the experiences LIFG students in higher education and introduce the concept of "temporal epistemic injustice." According to my concept of temporal epistemic injustice, LIFG students encounter a specific form of epistemic injustice rooted in the temporal and financial constraints they face. By defining and exploring temporal epistemic injustice, I aim to illuminate the epistemic harms and barriers experienced by LIFG students, thereby revealing a critical dimension of epistemic injustice in higher education.

In Section 3.1, I explore hermeneutical injustice, as defined by Fricker (2007), emphasizing how LIFG students face institutional barriers that prevent them from articulating and understanding their experiences due to gaps in collective conceptual resources. Here, I will argue that the difficulties LIFG students face with networking are not precisely hermeneutical but rather reflect contributory injustice, where crucial concepts are available to higher-income, continuing-generation students but not LIFG students, exacerbating disparities in higher education. The goal of section 3.2 is to show in more detail how LIFG students experience contributory injustice in higher education. Subsections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 will discuss the agential and structural aspects of contributory injustice. I ultimately focus on the structural aspects in my analysis. Subsection 3.2.3 will discuss how the literature from Chapter 2 commits a contributory injustice against LIFG students because much of the research suggests that LIFG students, their families, and their communities are to blame for the barriers LIFG students face in higher education institutions. Subsection 3.2.4 shows how networking in higher education constitutes a contributory injustice. Section 3.3 will extend Dotson's (2012a) framework to include "temporal epistemic injustice,"

addressing how time and energy constraints further hinder LIFG students' engagement in academic and professional communities.

### 3.1: Hermeneutical Injustices in Higher Education

Hermeneutical injustice, as defined by Fricker (2007) entails “the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource” (p. 155) where there is “a gap in collective hermeneutical resources" (p. 6). This form of injustice occurs when individuals or groups face barriers in comprehending and hence also expressing their experiences due to a deficit in the collective hermeneutical resources. In this framework, such deficits mean that marginalized individuals or groups struggle to effectively make meaning of and to convey their perspectives because there are no existing language or conceptual tools available to articulate their lived realities. Consequently, these structural shortcomings prevent marginalized individuals from fully articulating their experiences, often resulting in their narratives being overlooked or distorted within broader societal narratives.

If we break down the definition of hermeneutical injustice further, we can identify four distinct elements. First, there is a significant deficit in collective hermeneutical resources. Second, this deficiency or gap in hermeneutical resources prevents members of marginalized groups from rendering their socially significant experiences intelligible. In this sense, marginalized groups lack adequate language or conceptual frameworks within which to articulate their lived realities. Without appropriate hermeneutical resources, members of these marginalized groups may struggle to understand and express their experiences. Third, this struggle can result in the narratives of marginalized individuals and groups being distorted, simplified, or outright dismissed by the dominant group, thereby perpetuating the

marginalization and misunderstanding of their experiences. Fourth, this gap in hermeneutical resources persists due to the systemic marginalization of non-dominantly situated knowers within societal structures. This marginalization contributes to a lack of recognition and validation of the perspectives and experiences of these individuals or groups. Overall, closing the gap in collective hermeneutical resources would eliminate the injustice.

Fricker (2007) exemplifies hermeneutical injustice through the case of Carmita Wood, a woman who faced sexual harassment in her workplace yet struggled to articulate and comprehend her experiences because of prevailing societal attitudes and norms regarding gender and sexuality. To further elucidate what hermeneutical injustice is, consider the following, more recent, example: the emergence of the concept genderqueer. Robin Dembroff (2020) argues that

> without the resources for understanding nonbinary gender identities, we sustain a conceptual lacuna surrounding nonbinary persons. This lacuna does not only reflect a gap in philosophical understanding; it contributes to a hermeneutical injustice that arises from the failure to spread and charitably analyze the concepts and practices underlying nonbinary classifications. (p. 2)

This lacuna, according to Dembroff (2020), goes beyond a mere philosophical gap; it constitutes a form of hermeneutical injustice. This injustice arises because without adequate resources for understanding nonbinary identities, misunderstandings occur. These misunderstandings range from outright ignorance to other forms of misinterpretation, which undermine the recognition and respect that should be given to nonbinary individuals, thus perpetuating their marginalization within society. Dembroff contends that addressing this injustice requires not only spreading awareness of nonbinary classifications but also critically analyzing and integrating these

concepts into broader social and philosophical discourse to foster greater understanding and inclusivity.

When examining the experiences of LIFG students, one might initially consider these experiences through the lens of hermeneutical injustice. It may appear that LIFG students experience hermeneutical injustice due to a gap in the conceptual tools available to them. However, this situation is not a textbook case of hermeneutical injustice. While LIFG students may not use or have access to certain concepts, this does not mean that these concepts are non-existent or completely inaccessible. Rather, the issue lies in the disproportionate availability of these resources and the institutions unwillingness to engage with the hermeneutical resources used by LIFG students. LIFG students often possess different cultural understandings of what it means to be a university student, yet their different understandings are frequently disregarded by the institution and continuing-generation students. Thus, the experiences of LIFG students are more closely aligned with Dotson's (2012a) concept of contributory injustice. This form of injustice arises not from a mere lack of conceptual resources, but from the active ignorance of the institution and continuing-generation students.

A central aspect of hermeneutical injustice is that the individuals facing this injustice lack an awareness or understanding of their experiences (Fricker, 2007). In contrast, contributory injustice occurs when marginalized individuals possess the conceptual tools to understand their circumstances, but these tools are not recognized or valued by those in dominant positions (Dotson, 2012a). I aim to show how disparities in hermeneutical resources between continuing-generation students and LIFG students combined with the institution's ignorance of LIFG students' alternative hermeneutical resources significantly impact LIFG students' success in higher education. The institution purposefully disregards and fails to integrate the hermeneutical

resources available to and used by LIFG students. Thus, LIFG students are not misinterpreting or unable to articulate their experiences; rather, their perspectives are intentionally overlooked. This structural inequality results in an uneven distribution of essential academic and social resources, creating institutional, structural, and cultural barriers that hinder LIFG students' from fully engaging with and benefitting from educational opportunities. I will now explore how LIFG students experience contributory injustice in higher education.

### 3.2: Contributory Injustice in Higher Education

Contributory injustice, as defined by Dotson (2012a), refers to "the circumstance where an epistemic agent's willful hermeneutical ignorance in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources thwarts a knower's ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community by compromising her epistemic agency" (Dotson, 2012a, p. 32). While Fricker (2007) assumes a singular set of collective hermeneutical resources that everyone relies on equally, Dotson (2012a) challenges this view by arguing that marginalized groups develop their own unique epistemic frameworks, such as alternative epistemologies, in response to their systematic marginalization. These alternative resources enable marginalized communities to understand and articulate their experiences independently of the dominant group's interpretive frameworks. Recall that willful hermeneutical ignorance describes instances where "marginally situated knowers actively resist epistemic domination through interactions with other resistant knowers, while dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world" (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 716). Consequently, due to power dynamics and situated ignorance, the dominant group often fails to recognize and engage with marginalized groups alternative epistemologies, leading to a situation where marginalized knowers are hindered from contributing their insights to the broader societal

discourse. Unlike hermeneutical injustice, contributory injustice arises not from a lack of understanding and ability of marginalized individuals to articulate their experiences but from the dominant group's refusal to acknowledge and incorporate these diverse ways of knowing.

To further break down the concept of contributory injustice, we can identify four distinct yet connected elements. First, contributory injustice begins with the presence of structurally biased or prejudiced epistemic resources within a given epistemic community. These resources are the frameworks, concepts, and language that individuals use to understand and interpret experiences. They are influenced by societal biases and power dynamics, which often reflect dominant group perspectives and marginalize alternative epistemologies. This disparity means that the dominant group possesses certain hermeneutical resources that are difficult to access by or unfamiliar to the marginalized group with whom they interact regularly. Second, there is willful hermeneutical ignorance, which means that the dominant group chooses to ignore or dismiss other ways of knowing, thereby maintaining and perpetuating biased epistemic frameworks. This ignorance is not accidental but a willful choice to uphold prejudiced systems of understanding. Third, due to the use of these biased hermeneutical resources, individuals from marginalized groups find their ability to contribute effectively to shared epistemic resources compromised. Although these individuals may understand and articulate their experiences, their contributions are impeded by the dominant group's refusal to adopt or acknowledge their perspectives. This leads to a situation where their insights and knowledge are not fully integrated into the broader epistemic community. Fourth, the result of this systemic bias and willful ignorance is an infringement upon the epistemic agency of marginalized individuals. Their capacity to shape and influence collective knowledge is restricted because their valid perspectives are undervalued or rejected. This active ignorance from the dominant group

significantly disadvantages or harms members of the marginalized group. It leads to their experiences being minimized, ignored, or misinterpreted, which can perpetuate social inequalities and reinforce marginalization. The failure to acknowledge and respect the perspectives of the marginalized group further exacerbates their exclusion from mainstream discourse and decision-making processes. This compromises their role as knowers within the epistemic community and prevents a more inclusive and accurate representation of knowledge.

Another aspect of contributory injustice is that it addresses both structural and agential dimensions of injustice. Dotson (2012a) states that "Both the structurally prejudiced or biased hermeneutical resources and the agent's situated ignorance are catalysts for contributory injustice. As such, it is located within the gray area between agential and structural perpetuation of epistemic injustice" (p. 31). Unlike hermeneutical injustice, which is concerned only with structural limitations in language and conceptual frameworks that hinder individuals from fully understanding and expressing their experiences, contributory injustice also encompasses how epistemic agents actively contribute to and perpetuate these injustices. Contributory injustice recognizes that injustices can result not only from systemic barriers but also from the deliberate actions or neglect of those in positions of power within academic and societal contexts. In the case of low-income, first-generation students, contributory injustice reflects how institutional practices, biases, and cultural norms interact with individual agency, resulting in barriers that limit these students' full participation and recognition within higher education.

### 3.2.1: Agential Aspects of Contributory Injustice

Agential aspects of contributory injustice refer to the role of individual actions and decisions in perpetuating epistemic injustice and oppression. It occurs when individuals, particularly those in positions of power or influence, intentionally or negligently dismiss or

ignore the hermeneutical resources of marginalized groups. This form of injustice involves willful hermeneutical ignorance, where dominant individuals or groups deliberately choose not to engage with or recognize the alternative epistemologies and hermeneutical resources developed by marginalized communities. Such actions or neglect result in the exclusion of these perspectives from broader societal or academic discussions, thereby undermining the epistemic agency of the marginalized group in question. By failing to acknowledge and integrate these diverse viewpoints, those in power restrict the ability of marginalized individuals to shape and influence collective knowledge, thus perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and misrepresentation.

Agential aspects of contributory injustice are closely related to Medina's (2011) critique of Fricker's (2007) concept of testimonial injustice by highlighting how credibility judgments are inherently comparative and influenced by social dynamics and power structures. Medina (2011) argues that credibility excess—where certain individuals or groups receive disproportionate levels of epistemic trust—can perpetuate epistemic injustices by reinforcing existing hierarchies and marginalizing others. In Medina's (2011) framework, credibility excess reflects a broader pattern of epistemic privilege where certain groups benefit from unearned advantages, such as increased trust and authority, compared to others who are systematically disadvantaged. This pattern illustrates how epistemic authority is distributed unevenly, affecting who is trusted and whose contributions are recognized. Agential aspects of contributory injustice, in this context, recognize that these inequities are not merely the result of systemic barriers but are also sustained by the actions, biases, and neglect of individuals in positions of power.

In this thesis I focus on the structural elements of contributory injustice affecting LIFG students. However, it is also important to acknowledge and explore the agential side of Dotson's (2012a) contributory injustice and recognize that further work is needed to identify culpable

agents. For example, higher-income, continuing-generation students may resist acknowledging how their greater access to academic resources, insider knowledge, and networks contribute to their academic success. Higher-income, continuing-generation students might not fully appreciate how their familiarity with academic norms and unwritten rules provides them with unearned advantages over their LIFG peers, thus failing to recognize the broader implications of their privilege. Higher-income, continuing-generation students may intentionally ignore the fact that they possess hermeneutical resources from which LIFG students are excluded.

Other members of academic institutions, such as professors and administrators, may also exhibit willful hermeneutical ignorance concerning the disparities between LIFG and continuing-generation students. When evaluating student performance or providing academic support, these agents may not account for the uneven distribution of resources that affects LIFG students. They may fail to recognize that resources within the institution are often disproportionately allocated to continuing-generation students, rather than to LIFG students. This oversight can lead to a perpetuation of epistemic injustice and oppression, as their assessments and feedback may inadvertently disadvantage LIFG students, who are prevented from receiving the same level of support and access as their continuing-generation peers. By not considering how the institution privileges the hermeneutical resources of continuing-generation students, these institutional agents contribute to reinforcing existing epistemic injustices and oppression.

Institutions themselves also play a significant role in maintaining the agential aspects of contributory injustice. They intentionally privilege and utilize the hermeneutical resources of higher-income, continuing-generation students, while willfully ignoring the resources used by LIFG students. For example, institutional policies might fail to recognize the different hermeneutical resources that are available to and used by LIFG. Consequently, LIFG resources

are not acknowledged and hence, not treated as assets to the institution. Rather, the institution obscures the existence of these resources from those in positions of power. This constitutes willful ignorance, as those in power could recognize and incorporate the hermeneutical resources of LIFG students if they choose to do so. The institution thereby perpetuates systemic and cultural barriers that contribute to ongoing injustices in higher education. While understanding the agential aspects of contributory injustice is important for grasping how LIFG students' resources are excluded higher education, this thesis focuses on the structural aspects of contributory injustice in higher education institutions, which I shall address next.

### 3.2.2: Structural Aspects of Contributory Injustice

Structural aspects of contributory injustice pertain to the systemic factors that hinder the contributions of marginalized groups to collective hermeneutical resources. This type of injustice is rooted in the presence of biased or prejudiced hermeneutical resources—frameworks, concepts, and language that reflect the perspectives of dominant groups. These structural biases are embedded in institutions, academic practices, and societal norms, which often fail to recognize or incorporate the epistemic frameworks of marginalized communities, including LIFG students.

Due to the reliance on biased hermeneutical resources and the institution's ignorance of alternative hermeneutical resources, individuals from marginalized groups often find their ability to contribute effectively to shared epistemic resources compromised. Here, "hermeneutical resources" refer to the tools, knowledge, and interpretive frameworks used to understand and navigate complex social and institutional environments. "Shared epistemic resources" denote the collective knowledge and practices understood and utilized within a particular community or institution. As a result, the knowledge and insights of marginalized individuals and groups are

frequently excluded from the broader institutional discourse. The systemic barriers and prejudiced frameworks within higher education institutions hinder LIFG students' ability to contribute effectively to these shared resources, thereby compromising their role in shaping collective knowledge. This perpetuates epistemic exclusion, which limits LIFG students' success in higher education. It's important to recognize that while the literature on LIFG students often attributes the barriers they face to factors within the students, their families, and communities, this understanding exemplifies contributory injustice.

### 3.2.3: Contributory Injustice in the Literature

The literature on low-income, first-generation students often exemplifies contributory injustice by attributing the source of the problem to the students themselves, their families, or their communities, rather than addressing systemic issues within higher education. Research highlighted in Chapter 2 frequently points to personal and familial challenges faced by LIFG students, attributing their difficulties to factors such as lack of prior academic preparation, insufficient parental support, or limited access to resources within their communities. This focus diverts attention from the institutional structures that perpetuate these challenges, effectively placing the burden of adaptation and success on LIFG students.

A recurring pattern in this body of research is the tendency to ascribe causation to the students' backgrounds and personal attributes, rather than examining how the educational system's inherent biases and inequities contribute to their struggles. For example, the literature links LIFG students' lack of networking awareness to their parents' unfamiliarity with higher education norms (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). The research suggests that parents may lack the cultural capital needed to guide their children through academic and social networks, such as understanding the importance of faculty interaction or attending office hours (Goldrick-Rab,

2016; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Additionally, the data maintains LIFG students often do not receive the same level of guidance from parents, mentors, or other connections as their higher-income peers, leading to a significant disadvantage in building professional networks (Braven, 2024). The literature also highlights the challenges faced by Black students in building networks due to their families' limited connections with other Black students or faulty, suggesting that seeking out such relationships can help (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). However, this focus on individual networks does not address the systemic issues at play.

The approach taken in much of the literature in Chapter 2 contributes to LIFG students' experiences of contributory injustice in higher education, where the lack of access to knowledge is a deliberate mechanism by the system to exclude LIFG students and prevent their success. The exclusion of LIFG students from contributing to shared epistemic resources is not due to personal or familial failings but is deeply intertwined with how institutional frameworks fail to accommodate and value their perspectives. Institutions often ignore the hermeneutical resources of LIFG students, placing the burden of adaptation on LIFG students and their families rather than addressing the systemic barriers. Consequently, this literature exemplifies contributory injustice by neglecting the structural factors at play and perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and disadvantage.

### 3.2.4: Structural Aspects of Contributory Injustice Applied

Contributory injustice in higher education can be exemplified through its application to networking. Institutions often overlook the structural barriers that affect networking, failing to recognize that LIFG students and continuing-generation students utilize different sets of hermeneutical resources. For example, networking might not be central to the education strategies of LIFG students due to their different priorities and access to resources. However,

institutions often fail to acknowledge these differences, instead placing the blame on LIFG students for not conforming to a system designed for continuing-generation students. As a result, resources are disproportionately allocated to higher-income, continuing-generation students, perpetuating contributory injustice. This reinforces existing disparities and undermines the inclusivity and diversity of academic and professional discourses.

Dotson's (2012a) notion of contributory injustice encompasses four elements, all of which can be observed in the experiences of LIFG students, particularly regarding networking. First, higher education institutions have structurally biased hermeneutical resources that reflect and favour the experiences and expectations of continuing-generation students, who view networking as a crucial aspect of academic success. Networking practices and career development strategies largely align with the norms of these higher-income, continuing-generation students, privileging those already familiar with such practices. In contrast, LIFG students often use difference hermeneutical resources and may not share the same understanding or value of networking. Second, there is willful hermeneutical ignorance, wherein institutions and continuing-generation students deliberately overlook the hermeneutical resources used by and available to LIFG students. The prevailing academic culture neglects to integrate LIFG students' cultural perspectives and fails to consider the social and economic factors that may limit their ability to network. For instance, LIFG students may prioritize studying or working over networking, a choice frequently disregarded by those who view networking as a simple and inherent aspect of academic success. The third element of contributory injustice is concerned with how biased hermeneutical resources in higher education prevent LIFG students from contributing to and benefiting from shared academic resources. Biased networking practices often restrict LIFG students' access to mentorship, internships, and professional opportunities,

limiting their participation in collaborative research and development networks. This exclusion impedes their ability to influence institutional norms and contribute to collective knowledge, underscoring the need for a more inclusive approach that recognizes diverse networking realities. The last element of contributory injustice involves how limited access to essential networking opportunities and the disregard for LIFG students networking practices undermines their epistemic agency. This exclusion and lack of recognition can diminish their role as contributors to academic knowledge and their ability to effect change within the institution. As a result, the ignorance of the institution and continuing-generation students creates structural and cultural barriers, perpetuating LIFG students' marginalization and reinforcing social inequalities, which compromises the inclusivity and accuracy of academic discourse.

Financial and temporal constraints significantly exacerbate the challenges faced by LIFG students, as they need money, time, and energy for networking activities. These financial and temporal constraints affect LIFG students' ability to engage fully in existing academic communities and contribute fully to knowledge production and dissemination. As such, I will now argue that LIFG students also encounter a distinct form of contributory injustice that I call "temporal epistemic injustice." This concept captures the additional layers of disparity and exclusion that stem from the time and energy challenges LIFG students encounter in higher education.

### 3.3: Temporal Epistemic Injustice

My concept of "temporal epistemic injustice" extends Dotson's (2012a) notion of contributory injustice by emphasizing that time and energy are crucial epistemic resources. As such, temporal epistemic injustice highlights a different dimension of injustice: the temporal and financial constraints that impede individuals' capacity to engage with and contribute to

knowledge production. I argue that time and energy are essential for creating knowledge and establishing oneself as a knower, asserting that without adequate resources in these areas, LIFG students face additional barriers to contributing meaningfully to academic and professional discourses. For LIFG students, balancing part-time or full-time work with academic responsibilities creates a significant temporal barrier (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Many of these students work long hours in demanding jobs to manage tuition, textbooks, and living expenses on their own, a necessity that significantly interferes with their academic success (Ecton et al., 2023). This temporal dimension of epistemic injustice and contributory injustice underscores that the opportunity to participate fully in knowledge creation is not merely about access to content but also about having the time and financial stability to engage deeply with academic and professional communities. Ultimately, it takes time and resources to know.

I refer to my idea as temporal epistemic injustice because it captures specific aspects of contributory injustice while diverging from Dotson's broader framework. This concept incorporates many aspects of Dotson's contributory injustice, such as the emphasis on willful hermeneutical ignorance, constraints on meaningful contributions to shared hermeneutical resources, and infringements on epistemic agency. However, this concept does not align with Dotson's element of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources, as it does not primarily address the biases inherent in the conceptual frameworks themselves but rather focuses on the financial and temporal barriers that impede LIFG students' contributions to knowledge.

The financial burden of tuition fees, coupled with the need to cover living expenses, forces many LIFG students into a precarious balancing act between work and study. Research highlighted in my second chapter indicates that LIFG students encounter heightened challenges in managing these dual commitments and in determining how best to allocate their time and

attention during their higher education journey (Ecton et al., 2023). Unlike their higher-income and continuing-generation peers who often receive financial support from their families, these students are frequently tasked with finding ways to independently fund tuition fees, textbooks, and living costs. This often necessitates taking on one or more jobs and enrolling as a part-time student to allocate more time to work (RTI International, 2021). Consequently, LIFG students frequently face significant temporal demands that hinder their ability to devote ample time to their studies. This imbalance not only prolongs their studies in higher education but also heightens their chances of experiencing academic setbacks, ultimately contributing to delayed graduations and higher dropout rates of LIFG students (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Nevertheless, the repercussions of these challenges extend far beyond delayed graduation.

The challenge of balancing work and study highlights the willful ignorance exhibited by higher education institutions. These institutions often fail to recognize or address the difficulties faced by students who must work to support themselves financially (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Aceves, 2021). This oversight reflects a broader systemic reluctance to accommodate alternative ways of navigating academic life. By not incorporating flexible scheduling, increased financial aid, or targeted support services, the academic community maintains a narrow view of LIFG students' experiences. For instance, Aceves (2021) recounts a personal experience where, despite informing a professor about needing to leave class early to get to work on time, the professor's response highlighted an underlying ignorance of the student's financial pressures. Aceves (2021) shared that, upon being asked how many hours a week she worked, she felt compelled to carefully consider her response in relation to her academic responsibilities. The professor, acknowledging the conflict between work and study, expressed disappointment that students had to manage such balancing acts, but the response was framed in a manner that seemed detached

from the systemic issues at play. Aceves (2021) recalls that “The next time our class met, my professor expressed how they were displeased with how our education competes for time with work. They also said that they knew some of us were ‘working up to twenty-eight hours a week’ and that it would simply be better for us if we just ‘didn’t have to’” (p. 29). Aceves (2021) reflects on this encounter by noting, “it bothers me deeply that I did not come from enough wealth in order to walk away from the tightrope balancing-act that is being a full-time student with a job” (p. 29). This willful ignorance of the institution and professors deliberately overlook the specific needs of LIFG students who are forced to work to stay enrolled. This ignorance perpetuates a one-size-fits-all approach that disregards the diverse lived experiences and challenges faced by LIFG students.

The necessity for LIFG students to work while studying significantly compromises their ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within academia. Employment obligations often limit LIFG students' availability for research, collaborative projects, and academic discussions as the jobs they secure are not always related to their field of study or desired career path (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). The types of jobs available to LIFG students are frequently low-wage and inflexible, such as positions in food service or retail, which do not offer the same professional development opportunities as internships in STEM or business fields that their higher-income, continuing-generation peers more often secure (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). This restriction not only hinders LIFG students’ personal academic growth but also prevents them from fully participating in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This limitation affects the richness and diversity of academic discourse, as the insights and perspectives of LIFG students, shaped by their specific experiences, are underrepresented in scholarly discussions and programs.

Contributing to epistemic resources involves actively participating in and enhancing the tools, frameworks, and norms that shape knowledge and understanding within a particular field or community (Pohlhaus, 2012). As such, the absence of LIFG students' experiences and knowledge deprives higher education institutions of diverse perspectives that are crucial for fostering innovation and inclusivity. Graduating from college is not merely about obtaining a degree; it represents a gateway to higher-ranking job opportunities and socioeconomic mobility. However, systemic barriers that hinder LIFG students' academic progress severely limit their access to these coveted positions (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). This entrenched class reproduction underscores how educational attainment alone does not level the playing field. Thus, the privileging of certain familial and socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing top jobs and influential positions within academia perpetuates a biased hermeneutical framework that disproportionately excludes LIFG graduates from contributing to and shaping epistemic norms and practices. This exclusionary practice not only stunts the potential of talented individuals but also undermines the principles of meritocracy and equal opportunity that higher education purportedly upholds. Despite their efforts to navigate and articulate their experiences within higher education, LIFG students often encounter barriers rooted in the entrenched biases of existing institutional structures, hindering their ability to receive equitable recognition and validation for their contributions.

The need for LIFG students to maintain employment while pursuing their studies infringes on their epistemic agency, limiting their ability to shape their academic and professional trajectories. The constant balancing act between work and study can restrict their opportunities for intellectual exploration, mentorship, and academic leadership (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). The hours spent working are hours not available for attending classes, studying, or

participating in campus activities, leading to a packed and exhausting schedule that severely impacts their academic performance (Gibbons et al., 2019; Carnevale & Smith, 2018). As a result, their potential to influence and drive change within their disciplines is diminished, reflecting an infringement on their role as active knowers and their ability to effect change within the institution. This systemic issue underscores how financial pressures can undermine the ability of LIFG students to fully exercise their epistemic agency and shape their academic and professional futures.

These temporal demands on LIFG students constitute a form of contributory injustice by systematically hindering their ability to fully engage with and contribute to academic and professional communities. The excessive burden of balancing work and study creates an environment where these students are not only disadvantaged in accessing educational resources but are also deprived of essential opportunities for intellectual growth and professional development. The necessity to work long hours in low-wage, inflexible jobs that often do not align with their academic or career aspirations limits their ability to participate in research, collaborative projects, and extracurricular activities that are crucial for academic success and career advancement (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). This results in a significant disparity in how epistemic resources are utilized and valued, as LIFG students' perspectives and contributions are underrepresented in academic discourse. The failure of higher education systems to address these temporal constraints reflects a broader disregard for the diverse lived experiences of LIFG students, reinforcing a cycle where their academic and professional potential remains constrained by financial necessity. By not accommodating the specific needs of LIFG students, the institution perpetuates an inequitable distribution of opportunities, thereby reinforcing a form of

contributory injustice that undermines the ability of LIFG students to fully realize their epistemic agency and potential.

In conclusion, the institutional and financial barriers embedded within higher education pose formidable challenges for low-income, first-generation students, hindering their academic success and limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to the intellectual and leadership aspects of academia. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to dismantle financial barriers, provide comprehensive support systems, and foster an inclusive environment that values the diverse contributions of all students. Only through such efforts can higher education fulfil its promise as a catalyst for individual advancement and societal progress, ensuring that talent and potential are not wasted due to circumstances beyond one's control.

# Conclusion

This project examines the epistemic injustice and oppression experienced by low-income, first-generation students in higher education. It highlights the inequitable distribution of hermeneutical and epistemic resources between LIFG and higher-income students. This thesis argues that higher education institution reflects and align with the perspectives and experiences of higher-income, continuing-generation students, often neglecting those of LIFG students. This misalignment creates institutional and cultural barriers that hinder LIFG students' success and their full participation as knowers within the academic and epistemic community. In Chapter 1, I reviewed the literature on epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression, focusing on Dotson's concept of contributory injustice. Chapter 2 explored empirical research on the experiences of LIFG students, emphasizing their diverse backgrounds and the disproportionate institutional barriers they face within higher education institutions. Much of the literature in Chapter 2 attributed this distribution problem to LIFG students, their families, and communities. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how much of the existing literature on LIFG students contributes to their experiences of contributory injustice. I further illustrated their experiences of contributory injustice through the example of networking, showing how institutional willful hermeneutical ignorance disregards their alternative ways of knowing and maintains biased epistemic frameworks. This constrains LIFG students' contributions to shared epistemic resources and communities, undermines their epistemic agency by undervaluing their perspectives, and affects their ability to drive change within the institution.

Building on Dotson's framework, I introduced the concept of "temporal epistemic injustice" to emphasize how temporal and financial constraints affect LIFG students' ability to engage in knowledge production and dissemination. Temporal epistemic injustice reveals how

essential resources like time and energy are disproportionately limited for LIFG students due to their need to balance demanding work schedules with academic responsibilities, which differs from their higher-income, continuing-generation peers. This situation creates significant barriers to full academic engagement and meaningful contributions to knowledge creation.

To address contributory injustice, Dotson (2012a) highlights the necessity of third-order changes, which involve not just altering existing hermeneutical resources but developing fluency in diverse epistemic frameworks. In this sense, addressing contributory injustice requires Lugones' (1987) concept of "world"-traveling, which is a process that demands a deep understanding of different sets of hermeneutical resources and a commitment to engaging with them on one's own terms (Dotson, 2012a). Dotson (2012a) extends this form of engagement beyond simple dialogue, arguing that it requires substantial trust and embodied communication to appreciate and integrate alternative epistemological perspectives (Dotson, 2012a).

Applying this understanding to the issue of temporal epistemic injustice, it becomes clear that educational institutions must make substantial revisions to their policies and practices to support LIFG students more effectively. Due to the limitations of this thesis, I was unable to explore solutions for contributory or temporal injustice in depth. Nevertheless, future research should aim to bridge the gap between the exclusionary nature of academic culture and the institutional barriers faced by LIFG students. By adopting a more inclusive approach that actively seeks to understand and address these structural barriers, institutions can work towards mitigating disparities and fostering a more equitable academic environment for LIFG students.

It is important to clarify that my discussion does not suggest that LIFG students are uniformly disadvantaged or lack resources compared to their higher-income, continuing-generation peers. In fact, LIFG students often have valuable resources and perspectives. For

example, their experiences can provide distinctive insights in academic and professional settings, offering innovative approaches to overcoming obstacles and contributing to diverse problem-solving strategies in higher education. Acknowledging and valuing these contributions helps to balance the narrative, highlighting the strengths that LIFG students bring to the academic community beyond merely addressing the challenges they face. One benefit of addressing contributory injustice is that it forces universities to change, allowing them to benefit from the experiences of both LIFG and higher-income, continuing-generation students. By integrating perspectives from these diverse backgrounds, higher education institutions can enrich their epistemic fabric and create a more inclusive and dynamic academic environment.

This project does not provide an exhaustive account of all the epistemic injustices and implications faced by LIFG students in higher education. While it offers significant insights into the institutional, cultural, financial, and temporal barriers these students encounter and their impact on academic engagement and contribution, it represents only a preliminary exploration of the broader issues at play. To fully understand how these barriers operate and hinder LIFG students across diverse cultures and communities, further research is essential. This project should be seen as a meaningful starting point that highlights the need for more in-depth investigation into the specific mechanisms of epistemic injustice and oppression and the development of effective strategies to address these challenges. Continued work is necessary to expand our understanding and to devise targeted interventions that can support LIFG students in a wide array of contexts and ensure a more equitable academic experience for all.

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