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A Feminist Re-Imagining of Participatory Planning

Elena Castellanos

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A Feminist Re-Imagining
of
Participatory Planning

submitted to
Dr. Briana Toole
and Dr. Albert Park

By
Elena Castellanos

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Abstract

This thesis presents the benefits of feminist epistemologies in exposing current unjust structures hindering spatial justice in the urban planning process. I explore three main questions: (1) how do urban planners’ and designers’ biases shape American neighborhoods’ physical and social landscape?, (2) why traditional government or private planning approaches historically chose not to encode community-making functions into their frameworks for community input?, and (3) does a substantively inclusive and equitable urban planning project require a rigorous context-based understanding of people?. Additionally, I investigate what a participatory planning process that embraces feminist epistemologies would look like, a practice that prioritizes epistemically privileged residents in an asset-based, culturally competent procedure. In short, a feminist re-imagining of participatory planning is one where feminist epistemology serves as a tool for evaluating unjust spatial arrangements and aids implementers in re-constructing their relationships with marginalized residents.
For my home, a place where I found space to reflect, heal, and create during a pandemic, political unrest, and grief.

For the communities who have opened their doors to me throughout these four years, your stories continue to inspire me and remind me of the generosity of everyday people.

For my papá, you taught me to notice and find joy in simplicity.
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Acknowledgments

I began writing this thesis at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Living in Los Angeles at the time, my days were spent in my childhood home. These pages were written nomadically: on the dining room table, outside patio, living room couch, kitchen counter, and even on the front steps of my front porch. Although forced to live in isolation, I never felt distanced from the people most important in my life. I am deeply grateful to my family and friends who made this turbulent time also one filled with joy, laughter, and of course, long Zoom calls. To my family, thank you for always listening to my antics and reminding me to stay grounded. To my friends, Nandeeni, Anna, Will, Romi, Laleh, Sarah, and Ariel, your constant check-ins and words of encouragement do not go unnoticed.

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Introduction  Design Reflects Our Values

“The real focus of my teaching is the necessity to get out and look around, to see acutely, to notice, to make connections.”

- John R. Stilgoe, Outside Lies Magic

Quarantine has given me time to notice. When I take my dog out for a walk every morning, I observe the places and people around me. The giant eucalyptus trees, chalk-stained sidewalks, and occasional sound of the National Anthem being played out at the nearby Air Force Base are details I fail to pay attention to when driving around town in my car or miles away from home at college. Apart from the more aesthetic particulars of my neighborhood, my walks have challenged me to think about my neighborhood’s invisible components that continue to shape the physical landscape.

As I began to contextualize the history behind some of the most despicable and loved spaces of my neighborhood, I realized my neighborhood was not my neighborhood at all. As an unincorporated Los Angeles County area, much of the neighborhood’s urban planning is left to private developers. Though members of my community attend public forums hosted by our Board of Supervisors, not much has changed regarding centering citizen input in planning deliberation and implementation. The lack of community input in our neighborhood’s spatial planning has left many to feel powerless, manipulated, and frustrated with our urban spaces’ current trajectory. Despite wanting to contribute to where you/one lives, private developers with separate agendas pursue urban planning projects without regard for the people these projects will affect most.

I start explaining urban planning with my experience because the practice can
sometimes feel impersonal. Yet, the footprint of the decisions made by urban planners leaves an indelible mark on our neighborhoods. Recently, practitioners and academics have centered justice, inclusivity, and equity in understanding the urban planning project. The events of this summer, COVID-19 and George Floyd’s death, have created a new interest in how urban planning and design have exacerbated inequality in American neighborhoods. Urban planning is not an impersonal practice, and this has become more apparent within academic research and in lieu of current events.

At a high level, urban planning is negotiating the built environment. How planners and designers choose to negotiate physical space is not straightforward. Urban spaces, whether parks, restaurants, or even sidewalks, often reflect a “society’s play for power.” P.M. Ward, an urban planning theorist, describes this phenomenon best when he writes, “how cities are governed and organized physically tells us much about the nature of power relations in that society, and about the opportunities for citizen involvement in the management of the city.” Although the superficial implications of urban planning seem simple, there are a multitude of driving forces influencing power structures which can be identified by exploring the nuances of urban planning developments.

Urban planning has historically been used as a tool of injustice and justice. In this project, I will explore this distinction by explaining how theoretical frameworks of justice, space, and feminist epistemology can serve as a lens for examining the various

2 Ibid.
planning practices used to build American neighborhoods. Furthermore, I make a case for an urban planning project that works to repair historical neighborhood neglect and build a community agency in the process of designing public realms like parks, streets, and business corridors. I refer to this project as participatory planning, which relies on community knowledge to design.

Still, urban planning in the United States has embraced various approaches worth explaining in defense of participatory planning. The three approaches I reference here are not exhaustive but a good starting point for our purposes. I distinguish between traditional municipal planning, market planning, and participatory planning, using the example of developing a local park in Claremont to illustrate the different approaches each will take. Let’s say the Claremont City Council wants to build a new public park. For this explanation, I assume that the City already has the permits and land necessary to build the park. Now, the Claremont City Council must decide how to build the park.

Traditional municipal planning processes are usually top-down. In the past and even today, top-down frameworks are still the dominant procedure in local and national development strategies. In this practice, city councils and urban planners alone prioritize development and maintenance projects, choose the level of community involvement, and create metrics for project evaluation. Using the park example, the Claremont City Council prioritizes this public park project because a City Council member dislikes driving past the dirt lot every morning on his commute to City Hall. Next, the Planning Department and City Council decide the park should be a sculpture garden to promote the gravitas of the town—this is “the town of trees and PhDs”.

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built, the planning department evaluates the success of the project based on the opinions of the City Council.

Notice, in this scenario, constituents living near the park or in Claremont are not once asked if they think a sculpture garden is the park’s best use. Nor does the City Council suggest that the finances allotted to build the park might be better spent fixing the broken benches at the park in front of Pepo Melo or adding more programming to that park’s summer schedule. In most scenarios, like this one, the community constituents are not asked their preferences. If asked, their interactions with those charged with the project are minimal and insubstantial. In a traditional municipal planning process, planners and city councilors do not rely on context or collaborate with community members on the final design. Also, evaluation standards do not include social justice, environmental sustainability, or maintenance costs. My public park example is not too different from urban planners’ viewpoints like Robert Moses. He is known for his exploitative use of development and zoning to build freeways, public housing, and parks in New York City.

A market-based planning approach is dominated by private development with minimal oversight by City officials. Again, I will use the public park example to illustrate this practice. This time, the Claremont City Council is not financing and building the park; instead, Claremont McKenna College spearheads this effort. The Claremont City Council does not have the financial capital to build the public park. Therefore, the Council offered CMC a tax break on the CMC apartments’ property if they


4 In recent years, some cities have become more substantial in their oversight of private development, especially for large scale housing, work campuses, and sports arena projects.
build a public park. CMC is financing the project; CMC trustees decide on the park’s design and what amenities the park should have. Given the City Council’s limited guidelines, CMC chooses to build the park on the roof of their brand-new football stadium. The public can only access the park during the field's working hours. Furthermore, CMC may decide to evaluate the project’s success by its overall cost-effectiveness. In my example, it is in CMC’s interest to build the park since they can invest minimal effort into the project and forgo costs accrued from paying higher property taxes.

This scenario is an example of privately-owned public spaces common practice in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Problems of access arise in these types of developments because of invisible barriers to entry like class and race. Market-based projects are usually prioritized based on the maximum profit gained from the development and are not attached to neighborhood contexts. Privately-owned public spaces are just one example of market-based planning. Housing is another development sector that city planners largely leave to the market. The main problem I see with market-based planning is its lack of attention to neighborhood context. Development projects are built based on market value rather than infrastructure or public policy gaps in a neighborhood. For instance, it is more lucrative to build market-priced housing units than low-income housing units, creating holes in the housing market and forcing existing residents to be priced out of their neighborhoods. An unwarranted and harmful prioritization of economic goals is entailed with market-based planning approaches, often

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5 The public park I refer to above is also based on two San Francisco public rooftop parks built by Salesforce and the Oakland As.
making their introduction into a pre-existing community awkward or ineffective.

An alternative planning practice, I define as a participatory planning practice, centers on community context and resident collaboration within developing projects. A planner who embraces participatory planning views herself not only as a developer but as a community builder. In particular, in the United States, planning agencies, private developers, and citizens are experimenting with mechanisms to tie civic engagement to spatial planning. Participatory planning practice is more robust than a municipal or market-based procedure. This is a positive alternative that collectively can pursue urban planning goals while also looking to the community for input and advice; this alternative model juggles multiple objectives: involving community building and developing space.

Using the park example, the Claremont City Council might prioritize park projects based on data demonstrating the highest need. From their research, urban planners find that El Barrio Park needs renovation. The Claremont Urban Planning Department decides to partner with a local urban design non-profit agency to head the brainstorming, design, and renovation implementation. The non-profit hosts small pop-up events to engage with local park residents and inquire about the area. The non-profit designers find that elderly park residents would like an ADA-approved ramp to enter the park during these events. Fathers would like baby changing tables installed in the restrooms, and kids would like a water playground to endure the hot Claremont summers. Planners also learn that local vendors like to buy food on Sundays at the park and want an official space in the park. The non-profit runs a “build your own park” competition that encourages residents to draw their dream parks.

Claremont urban planners and the local non-profit collaborate to design the
renovations’ mock-ups using the participatory planning model. Then, both stakeholders present their designs to residents, facilitate a community vote on the mock-ups, and listen to community feedback about designs. This process continues until the final design is selected. In addition, planners and non-profit designs collaborate with residents to create standards for evaluation, including environmental sustainability, social justice, economic development, and site maintenance.

My description does not give justice to the holistic procedure participatory planners employ. Municipal planning agencies like Los Angeles, Boston, and San Francisco partner with local community-based non-profits for projects similar to my example. In Los Angeles in particular, non-profit partnerships are increasingly popular with non-profits like Los Angeles’s Kounkuey Design Initiative, LA Mas, and Inclusive Action. In terms of planning departments, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and the San Francisco Planning Departments have taken steps to integrate social justice, need-based prioritization, and participatory procedures into their mission statements. The presentation of participatory planning models is not entirely new. Other projects and organizations utilize models like this to promote social justice, need-based prioritization, and community-building into their urban planning projects.

Participatory Planning procedures are fascinating on two fronts. First, these networks offer insight into how participatory democracy can manifest on the local scale. A participatory planning framework supports a planner’s ability to garner community trust, robust participation, and legitimacy across a wide range of stakeholders. At their best, a planner who embraces participatory planning practices can serve as instructors of democracy by offering citizens processes, spaces, and resources for meaningful
collaboration with government agencies and private developments. Yet, at their worst, participatory planning processes can be a procedural entity only meant to check off a box of citizen participation necessary for private developers or public agencies to satisfy public entities’ demands. This inclusion of this type of urban planning model offers benefits at its best and even at its worst, forces the inclusion of citizen participation (which is still more helpful than harmful).

Secondly, urban planning and design non-profits like the Kounkuey Design Initiative and LA Más are intermediaries between market forces and neighborhood needs. Urban planners, designers, and government officials have an opportunity to center the neighborhood’s context in the economic arrangements of spatial planning. Pedro Peterson, a planning theorist in San Francisco, argues that “spatial planning still serves as a fundamental interlocutor between the market and the public good.” With a clear opportunity to include citizens in the planning process, many United States planning agencies, place-based non-profits, and research institutes have started to collaborate with neighborhood residents to design their communities. Suppose citizens have meaningful avenues to express and leverage their neighborhoods’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to developers. In that case, their urban spaces’ economic footholds will genuinely reflect their understanding of their neighborhoods.

Yet, participatory planning practices only hold a viable groundwork for

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participatory democracy and citizen-centered economic arrangements so long as they create spaces for meaningful participation for citizen input—this is where feminist epistemology is a helpful lens.

Feminist epistemology perceives knowers as being situated in a specific context that informs their production and knowledge acquisition. One’s standpoint also influences a knower’s availability to understand other knowers’ standpoints. Feminist epistemological theories can expose the implicit biases and dominant forms of thought that influence planners and designers and explain why those actors prioritize specific values in a planning project or might ignore a marginalized community’s input in the planning or design process. Concepts of feminist epistemology are foundational to critiques of the current state of the urban planning practice and its role in perpetuating unjust spatial arrangements locally, nationally, and globally. Although not explicitly referenced, research institutes like Harvard’s Just City Lab and texts like Jane Jacobs’ *Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Leslie Kanes Weisman’s *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* challenge dominant understandings of accepted knowledge and advocate for epistemic frameworks that center co-knowledge creation amongst planners, designers, architects, and the community members.

For instance, Toni Griffin, director of Harvard’s Just City Lab, indirectly speaks to the power of epistemic privilege in her study “Patterns of Justice” when she writes, “In short, poor design contributed to the trauma that inflicts enduring physical and emotional harm on the people subjected to it. The poor design gives social and political license for those with the power and privilege to change these conditions to choose instead to
continue to ignore them.”7 Urban planners and designers build their values in mind and manifest them, consciously or unconsciously, into the built environment. The utilization of features feminist epistemology, such as a knower’s situatedness, helps us understand how urban planners can uncover patterns of injustice and/or injustice within a given community.

A feminist epistemological framework serves the purpose of explaining why a participatory planning approach lends itself to design projects where justice, inclusivity, and equity centered. Together, urban planning and feminist epistemology methodologies explain how an urban planner or designer’s perspective is built into the physical landscape.

My project aims to put urban planning and feminist epistemological frameworks in conversation to expose the potential consequences of undervaluing a community’s historical context, knowledge, and trust when designing public spaces. The following three questions will be explored throughout this project:

1. How do urban planners’ and designers’ biases and values shape American neighborhoods’ physical and social landscape?

2. Why have traditional government or private planning approaches historically chosen not to encode community-making functions into their frameworks for community input?

3. Does a substantively inclusive and equitable urban planning project

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require a rigorous context-based understanding of people?

In the first chapter, “The Social Construction of Public Spaces,” I will introduce the concepts of spatial, social construction, and spatial violence as theoretical frameworks used to examine the history of public infrastructure in the United States. These concepts underpin the need for participatory planning and reappear in other chapters.

In Chapter 2, “Imagining the Neighborhood: a Community Praxis,” marginalized communities will be presented as epistemically privileged individuals whose input should be prioritized in the urban planning process. To motivate the participatory planning model, which argues for greater inclusion of citizens in the planning process, I will conclude that marginalized communities are epistemically privileged to show that the insights from these communities might help shape urban planning practices. Social, political, and economic power determine how government and business professionals grant community residents discretion when assessing a project’s validity and formulating the project’s agenda.

I explain in final chapter, “Asset-based Pedagogies for People-based Procedures” how asset-based pedagogies ingrained in culturally competent planning practices leads to more significant amounts of community trust and cooperation in a project. I also describe how and why urban planning and design non-profits the Kounkuey Design Initiative and community development corporations like the Unity Council and the Harlem Children’s Zone mitigate issues of testimonial injustice like credibility deficit and credibility excess.

The project will explore what role feminist epistemology should play in advancing participatory planning approaches. I also point to the feasibility of participatory planning approaches on a large scale and their ability to solve systemic
issues of justice, inclusivity, and equity.

The text’s focus and organization have evolved from research trips studying American neighborhoods as an undergraduate researcher. Conversations with residents, activists, and community leaders inform the patterns of research and theoretical concepts I explore in this text. Although I am grateful to the communities, scholars, and organizations I reference in this project, I assume sole responsibility for my interpretations of their insights and work.

This project draws from and engages with the work of planning and design of non-profits and research institutes; yet, it is primarily a project of feminist epistemology. This thesis is an exercise of discovery and reflection—I understand its subjectivity and will not make any absolute claims. Nor is it my intention to identify all causes of inequality perpetuated by urban planning or provide policy or design recommendations. Instead, this project aims to provide insights into the inescapable connections between feminist epistemology, participatory planning approaches, and the urban planning practice. Readers of this project will find this to be an accessible text meant to ignite conversation and perhaps, even a reflection on how to be mindful of the social, political, and economic values that manifest themselves in the physical landscape around us.
The Social Construction of Public Spaces

Following George Floyd’s death and the ongoing events of COVID-19 in the summer of 2020, The Ford Foundation re-published a slate of essays presenting “twenty-six visions for urban equity, inclusion, and opportunity.” In one such vision called “Urban Spaces and the Mattering of Black Lives,” Darnell L. Moore, writer-in-Residence at the Center on African American Religion, Sexual Politics and Social Justice at Columbia University, imagined:

A safe and equitable space centers all residents’ needs and desires, regardless of race, gender, ability, income, or sexual identity. And in the cases when design and re-development revolve around those typically centered in the public imagination—characteristically white, sometimes heterosexual, nearly always abled-bodied people with wealth or access to other forms of capital—the work must be recalibrated. Yet, the only way these forms of erasure can be assessed is by ensuring the group assembled at the planning table is as diverse as the communities it aims to reimagine and rebuild.¹

In the early 1990s, Leslie Weisman offered a similar insight into the 1970s New York City women’s activist group, the Fifth Street Women. At the time of “radical activism,” the Fifth Street Women took over an abandoned building owned by the city of New York to create spaces designed by women that centered things essential to women like health care, child care, food insecurity, clothing. They chanted “gimme a women's shelter, a

lesbian rights center, a inter-arts center, a feminist school, and a drug rehabilitation.” The organization argued that the city did not provide these essential services, as their integration into the city’s overall design would facilitate women’s independence from a male-dominated society. In her book Discrimination by Design, Weisman writes, “The Fifth Street Women clearly understood that the appropriation of space is a political act, that access to space is fundamentally related to social status and power, and that changing the allocation of space is inherently related to changing society.” Although there is over a twenty-year gap in their work, both Moore and Weisman point to the relationship between power and the built environment. The function and design of physical infrastructure are subjective based on their values of those determining their purpose. If this is the case, what is at stake in our cities is a battle of imagination. Some in society decide how to constrain conflicting imaginations of space and, in turn, impose their accepted conception on the rest.

To explore the connections between imagination and the built environment, I will explain (1) how spaces are socially constructed, and (2) spaces have been primarily constructed by dominantly situated individuals, to demonstrate how (3) if they are socially constructed then spaces can change, and (4) as a result, that has produced spatial injustice against individuals who are already marginalized. I draw on spatial theory, spatial justice, and feminist epistemology.

I bring spatial theory and feminist epistemology into the conversation to investigate the impacts of spatial injustice. Edward Soja describes spatial injustice as the

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3 Weisman, 2.
uneven spatial distribution of socially valued resources. This chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the rest of this project; I will begin to carve out how a feminist epistemological intervention can be situated within existing conversations of social construction, spatial production, and spatial justice.

**Social Construction**

As articulated earlier in the chapter, the built environment is not value-neutral; it is shaped by human experiences, culture, and biases. If control over our material reality’s spatial imagining is tactfully fabricated, the question becomes by who? Moore and Weisman suggest that public imagination is typically centered around dominantly situated individuals. Underlying the construction of public imagination are processes for producing and legitimizing common knowledge. Both authors point to individuals who are “characteristically white, sometimes heterosexual, nearly always abled-bodied people with wealth or access to other forms of capital” as being dominantly situated in the project of constructing and maintaining common knowledge, and thus, public imagination. Therefore, public imagination is bordered by the experiences of those who reflect these characteristics.

Feminist epistemology provides an entry point into understanding Moore and Weisman’s reflections on the relationships between dominantly situated individuals and the creation of public imagination, as the discipline has identified how similar phenomena function in other disciplines. The implications of knowledge and social

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4 In “‘But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!’”, Sally Haslanger uses the term common knowledge.
5 Public imagination is limited by the schemas of those with the most social/political power historically and now.
imaginations extend beyond urban planning, and there are cases of this relationship within healthcare as well. For instance, medical knowledge on the female reproductive system historically relied on studies conducted by men, who were characteristically white and heterosexual. Anthropologist Emily Martin finds that these scientists’ characteristics informed their gendered conclusions of a female’s egg and a male’s sperm.

Martin highlights how during reproduction, an egg is described as passive, while sperm is described as “burrowing through the egg coat” and “penetrating” the egg. Sally Haslanger similarly describes this phenomenon in her discussion on social institutions’ construction known as schemas. She writes, “Social institutions are constituted, at least in part, by sets of shared beliefs and conventions; even false beliefs about social phenomena can cause changes in the social world that result in the belief’s becoming true.” Male scientists were asked to defend the accurately of their depictions the female reproductive system, until female scientists began to challenge their findings.

In the same vein, because physical spaces have been predominantly constructed by urban planners and architects who are characteristically white men, a similar phenomenon has occurred. Like the sperm and the egg example, communities that need to use these spaces are alienated from these areas in which they exist. And as such, mainstream public imaginations about how these spaces can change are ignored. As Haslanger put it, “When social knowledge goes wrong, it may be because it has constituted a reality—and perhaps accurately represents that reality—that nevertheless

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"...Features of the social imagination make it difficult for members most affected by flaws in the social imagination from having the epistemic power to change the imagination itself. For individuals for which public imagination falls short, they may believe that this constituted reality created upon “accepted common knowledge” is an illusion and unjustified. The limits of current public imaginations are epistemically problematic and can lead to cases of spatial injustice, a concept I will discuss later in this chapter.

What’s troubling about these procedures for building public imagination is that they are exclusive and tend to be defended as infallible. This procedure’s perceived legitimacy fails to recognize the modes in which this dominant public imagination can be unjust and oppressive, as is displayed similarly to the sperm and the egg example. And, importantly, this example ignores that these spaces are constructed from the standpoint of the dominant. Whether done consciously or unconsciously, individuals are left out of the process of perceiving, conceptualizing, and living within the boundaries of this accepted public imagination. Both Moore and Weisman point to ways in which this dominant imagining of spatial arrangements is felt, questioned, and challenged by outsiders. Yet, the struggle of articulating the unjust procedure of public imagination in the context of spatial arrangements is its challenge to imagine a completely different arrangement.

Consider a familiar example: Los Angeles’ freeways and car culture. The towering concrete structures hovering over the Los Angeles cityscape are considered freeways not only by “virtue of [their] shape but also by virtue of having a certain

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history, function, interpretation, etc.” In Los Angeles, freeways are accepted as the primary mode of transportation. Without this interpreted function, freeways in Los Angeles would be nothing more than large concrete slabs. It is people who determine the functionality of freeways. As such, Angelenos’ reliance on freeways to navigate the city is chosen and can change. Just as Angelenos in the 1930s shifted from using their streetcar system—-one of the most robust in the country---to the automobile and freeway. This example shows that people give meaning to objects, and if this is true, individuals can begin to re-define their relationship to these objects. Yet, individuals' current public imaginations of their built environments are so etched into their psyche that it becomes difficult to imagine something completely different. Our orientation in spatial arrangements is constantly evolving. We have just forgotten to notice.

Consider an example of a social event rather than a social object: Saturday Brunch with friends. Before the COVID-19 era, friends may have come together on Saturdays to enjoy a mask-less meal at their favorite restaurant. This meal is an event that involves both the setting of the restaurant, food, and people in-person (Haslanger considers these resources), and also a process in which the brunch is facilitated like first people wait to be seated, order drinks and an appetizer, and then an entrée, plus the rituals that make this event Saturday Brunch and not just any other meal like (Haslanger considers this a schema). Based on this example, Haslanger might say that most of these

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actions “involve not only an agent with an intention and a bodily movement but a set of dispositions to interact with things to realize the intention.”\textsuperscript{11} These dispositions conform to publicly accessible and socially meaningful patterns (known as schemas) and are “molded by both the social and physical context.”\textsuperscript{12} And therefore, according to Haslanger, if a practice is the structured product of schema (a set of dispositions to perceive and respond in certain ways) and resources (a set of tools and material goods), it is not “subjective” in any of the ordinary uses of that term.\textsuperscript{13}

Haslanger also suggests that “because often such dispositions give rise to objects that trigger those very dispositions, they can be extremely resistant to change.” Take, for instance, the first example of Los Angeles freeways. Although Angelenos’ have experienced a changing of dispositions in the past (i.e., the streetcar system), their current dispositions are viewed as permanent and considered the only acceptable arrangement. Then, one might wonder if people will only be receptive to changing their dispositions and re-shape commonly accepted schemas (i.e., public imagination) in extreme cases of change such as large-scale political unrest, climate change, or economic downfall.

Public imaginations of the built environment include artifacts that are considered necessary because we deemed them necessary. It’s Angelenos who interpret the functions of the large concrete structures they call freeways. Angelenos decide the “schemas for action” that direct their interactions with freeways, such as choosing to consider them to be the main mode of transportation in Los Angeles. Therefore, the connection between

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
immaterial processes (i.e., social construction, shared knowledge, and public imagination) and material processes (i.e., freeways or restaurants) are co-constitutive. Haslanger claims that “this sort of schematic materiality of our social worlds is ubiquitous: towns, city halls, churches, universities, philosophy departments, gyms, playgrounds, homes, are schematically structured and practice-imbued material things (cf. a “ghost town” or “a house but not a home” whose schemas are lost or attenuated).”

Schemas are not solely privately held processes (i.e., Eating on Saturday in the early afternoon is Saturday Brunch) but are social structures that can be publicly held (i.e., Saturday Brunch is only deemed an event based on the collective interpretations and patterns of action accepted). Although an individual may participate in these social structures, it does not mean that they accept it as the only possible ordering of this social structure. And if this is the case, then social structures can be rearranged, leading to negotiations of what constitutes common knowledge. It can then expand public imaginations about what built environments can look like and be used for. Haslanger comes to a similar conclusion when she writes, “Although social structures are not simply material things, they [public imagination] are constituted by material things [built environment]. They are “constructed” by us in the ordinary way that we create artifacts.” As such, schemas can be both individual and collective knowledge structures; they also are not a by-product of something, they are ‘constructed’ – an active process.

The malleability of social structures and their material manifestations, as highlighted by Martin’s sperm and the egg example and Haslanger’s discussion of social

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15 Ibid.
construction, point to feminist epistemology’s value in our broader discussion about the processes that determine the material and immaterial functionality physical landscapes. Feminist epistemology and spatial theory create a lens to aid us in re-training ourselves to notice and hopefully, begin to challenge current social structures that limit our ability to perceive public imaginations and take Weisman and Moore’s concerns about the role of dominantly-situated individuals in determining the spatial arrangements of the built environment seriously. Working together, these lenses (i.e., feminist epistemology and spatial theory) aid us in refocusing our attention on the built-environment, and in turn, learning to identify unjust social structures and understanding public imaginations more thoroughly.

**Spatial Theory**

Spatial noticing is an awareness of the physical landscapes’ spatial construction. By strengthening this skill, we expose how space actively shapes human behavior and identity. Spatial noticing can also help understand how the spatial arrangements of public spaces reflect and reinforce social, economic, and political power imbalances amongst our communities, leading to instances of spatial injustice. Moore and Weisman practice spatial noticing when they pay attention to how spatial forces influence the immaterial and material imaginations shaping their current contexts.

If one seeks to make substantial changes to spatial arrangements, one must also begin to expand the boundaries of public imagination. The material and immaterial worlds in which we inhabit are intertwined. For instance, in the United States, a single-

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16 Spatial noticing is not a natural skill but by practicing it, we can expose how space shapes identity.
story house with a white picket fence (i.e., material) is associated with the American Dream (i.e., immaterial). Spatial theory provides a lens to recognize these forces’ connectedness and is the first step in building one’s potential to practice “spatial noticing.”

Once an individual begins to practice spatial noticing, they come to realize that the neighborhoods they inhabit are socially produced. Social patterns and historical context inform the placement of groceries, design of homes, and function of parks. As discussed in the previous section, the spaces people navigate every day are conceptualized and built by people (e.g. Los Angeles freeways). Even when one might think a social object or social event is neutral or objective, a social object or social event’s functionality is informed by dominant public imaginations. In the case of the built environment, people create spatial arrangements, define their functionality, and determine their value.

Weisman brilliantly parallels the social construction of space to language’s social construction. In elementary school, children are taught that words are neutral. Words are simply a tool for communication, not a means for maintaining social and cultural norms. The word “street” seems value-free. A “street” is simply a wide strip of cement or maybe a narrow-cobbled stone path. However, a “street” can also take on a metaphorical definition. For instance, a “street” might be a space for community or viewed as a space of unsafety. Words are loaded with perspective. It’s difficult to conceive of a word that is objective. Weisman writes, “Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect
and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society.”

Weisman’s insights follow Haslanger’s logic on schemas and social structures.

Haslanger notes that an individual’s schema is informed by social patterns that shape their interpretations of the world around them, and in turn, their actions. For instance, if a child is socialized to believe that the streets are unsafe, they may accept that knowledge and decide not to play on the street. In this case, this child has identified the nature of the street and their relation to it based on their parents’ assumptions. Like this example, dominantly-situated individuals (i.e., parents) present individuals (i.e., the child) with seemingly objective information that is in reality intertwined with their biases about a given object or event. Similarly, public imagination dictates individuals' interpretation of the built environment’s functionality and their relation to it. Although the connection between material and immaterial space may seem intuitive, physical space and social space are often viewed as mutually exclusive. It can be difficult for individuals to notice the hidden perspectives engrained in physical landscapes. Still, academics like Henri Lefebvre hold differing conclusions.

Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* outlines a spatial triad: first, second, and third space. Together, these three functions of space underlie the social production of space. First space, also known as perceived space, is determined by language, signs, and other tools of orientation that help individuals understand the organization of material processes like the spatial arrangements of buildings. A map is an example of first space. In my first attempts riding the New York Subway, maps of the subway lines and stops

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were my lifeline for navigating the city. Without them, I had no direction as to what was downtown or uptown.

Second space, also known as conceived space, is produced by planners, architects, bureaucrats, and socially powerful individuals who “identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.” Conceived space is a means of representing lived spaces. For instance, a tourist may attest to that New York City consists of Times Square, Central Park, and the Statue of Liberty—as this is how the city is represented in popular media and marketed by the city. In the mid-twentieth century, the purpose of the city was highly contested. Some like Le Corbusier, a French-Swiss architect who greatly inspired the work of New York “master planner” Robert Moses, imagined an ordered city, complete with clean, well-designed parks and streets. In contrast, others like Jane Jacobs advocated for a place-based conception of a city’s purpose. In her view, it’s the people, not the places, that create and maintain space.

This dichotomy between first and second space, and in turn, people and place, is best displayed in Robert Moses and Jane Jacob’s opposing understanding of the street. The United Nations Headquarters is the only building built by Le Corbusier in New York City. His architectural theories, most notably expressed in The Radiant City, greatly influenced public housing design and zoning law in 1950s New York. Le Corbusier’s blueprint of the city was ordered, almost totalitarian. Much like Robert Moses, Le Corbusier believed that “architecture and planning are the healthy fruits of a sound society.” A city’s plans require foresight and preparation; therefore, they require technical knowledge only held by experts. The city’s problems were to be addressed from

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a bird’s eye view. In a disorganized city:

The street becomes appalling, noisy, dusty, dangerous; automobiles can scarcely do more than crawl along it; with the pedestrians, herded together on the sidewalks, get in each other’s way, bump into each other, zigzag from side to side; the whole scene is like a glimpse of purgatory.19

He questions how any individual can “achieve the serenity indispensable to life” in a crowded, noisy city. In his architectural imagining, city streets should be exchanged for vast parklands. Cars roam the exteriors of the city, leaving the city interiors peaceful. Local bodegas and other businesses should be separated from housing, standardizing each section of the city’s main functions.

Le Corbusier’s “conceived space” of the street underscores “individual liberty.”20 Individuals come to the street to find peace and solitude, not collective public life. Finding inspiration in this architectural idea, Moses’ blueprint for New York City emphasized the development of highways and public parks across the city. One such highway project was planned to go through the Greenwich Village, home of urban activist and journalist Jane Jacobs.

Jacobs is a proponent of systems of complexity over spaces of homogeneity. Unlike Corbusier or Moses, who viewed cities as spaces to be tamed, Jane Jacobs viewed cities as spaces of “organized complexity.” Organized complexity viewed city streets’ messiness and imperfection as a testament to thriving public life. Jacobs questioned

whether Le Corbusier or Moses’ architectural ideas could handle a city of residents who did not fit within their designs’ narrow understanding of urban life. Cities should be viewed as systems of complexity rather than spaces of homogeneity and order.

Jacobs’ conception of the street was informed by her eye-level observations and interactions with neighborhood residents. Jacob writes, “[…] the least we can do is to respect—in the deepest sense—strips of chaos that have a weird wisdom of their own not yet encompassed in our concept of urban order.” That “weird wisdom” was residents’ wisdom: the intergenerational knowledge, culture, and habits of everyday people. Their knowledge represents how spaces are used rather than how they ought to be used. In Jacob’s view, “weird wisdom” may motivate an urban planner to pay attention to how people use and approach their neighborhood spaces.

A planner might find that many residents in this neighborhood have small children and value walkability and public transportation. Based on the planner’s attention to this “weird wisdom,” he or she may advocate for site plans where schools and daycares are easily accessible or conveniently located, next to a grocery store or a transit spot. By centralizing commonly accessed locations, neighborhood residents can accomplish multiple tasks efficiently. Weird wisdom is the term for the knowledge that makes these populations epistemically privileged and entitles them to a role in urban planning—this is the focus of chapter two. To think of a city abstractly and not seek out “weird wisdom would be to miss the particulars that inform the production of a city’s “first” and “second” spaces.

Jacob’s attention to the “weird wisdom” of people informed her conception of the street. Streets are an essential organ of the city providing public spaces for city residents to congregate. In Jacob’s view, a silent, empty street incites people’s fear of the street. Instead, a lively street with robust pedestrian activity increases a feeling of community safety and trust. Sitting on a stoop overlooking the street or walking down the street to a local bodega ensures a steady stream of people on the street and creates opportunities for community building. The street, especially the sidewalk, “brings together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion.” Yet, it is through these small contacts between people that community trust is enriched. If a street is ordered, then it is possible that organic conversations between strangers and public usage of these spaces would dwindle. At a larger scale, the over-organization of a city may prohibit otherwise likely positive interactions and connections.

Jacobs’s value of public life and community relationships shape her conception of the street’s function. And in turn, her designs of the street are shaped by this attention to community life. Meanwhile, others like Robert Moses or Le Corbusier value individual liberty. Both conceptions of the street manifest themselves into the physical landscape. For instance, unlike Moses, Jacobs might advocate for mixed-use neighborhoods and busy streets as she believes they are bedrocks to healthy public life. The perception and representations of space are based on an individual’s own experience and values. A single street may hold a different purpose from one person to the next. Still, both cannot exist in the physical manifestation of their ideas. This is why when one walks down a busy street

in New York City and not a quiet one. This transition from conception to implementation is described in Lefebvre’s third space.

Third space, also known as lived space, is a social product of the first and second spaces. Lived spaces consist of physical landscapes everyday people navigate. This could be the street in front of your apartment or route to work. For example, if I live in Greenwich Village, I might hold a richer understanding of the space and its people, than a tourist visiting for the weekend. A person who lives in this space experiences day-to-day life in these physical landscapes. Together, perceived, conceived, and lived space actively shape the social production of space. Social and physical spaces are constantly changing based on shifts within these three conceptions of space. Lefebvre’s spatial triad exposes the subjectivity of spatial production. His work is foundational to contemporary theories of space and its role in shaping human life. Still, Lefebvre’s spatial triad does not address issues of equity and justice within the procedure and outcomes of construction of spatial imaginaries also known as public imagination. Without an explicit procedure for accommodating varying interpretations of public imagination, it is no wonder that cities continue to be battlegrounds of imagination. Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* presents insights into how space is constructed and how dominantly situated individuals’ schemas can mold public imagination, and mold the physical manifestation of the built environment. As such, space is constructed and reflects the imagination of the dominant standpoint.

If this is the case, as I have articulated and defended in this chapter, then non-dominant standpoints are not included in the spatial imagining of the built environment, leading to issues of epistemic oppression and spatial injustice. In cases of epistemic
oppression, individuals or groups are un-warrantly excluded by others from the practice of knowledge production. For an individual to not be excluded, they must practice epistemic agency, which refers to “the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources.”

Similarly, in cases of spatial injustice dominant groups have unwarranted influence over space (or involves the unwarranted exclusion of the non-dominant group from influencing the space which they inhabit). This means that non-dominant who will experience the outcome of the project (ie. a park) are excluded unjustly from the process of imagining, designing, and building the end product. Yet, others who are dominantly situated are given a right to comment on such a project and their input is considered in the end product. Therefore, the fact that some individuals are given the right to comment, while that right is rescinded from others is a case of spatial injustice. The epistemic oppression and spatial injustices that occur are cyclical and prohibit non-dominants communities from righting these wrongs. And as such, spatial justice involves a rebalancing of influence over space.

**Spatial Justice**

Lefebvre’s lived space is an entry point into Edward Soja’s updated framework of the social production of space. Soja’s three concepts of spatial thinking that include the

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25 Ibid.
ontological spatiality of being, the social production of spatiality, and the socio-spatial
dialectic re-frame Lefebvre’s spatial triad around ideas of justice. Soja’s ontological
spatiality of being and the social production of spatiality follows almost exactly
Lefebvre’s theories of second and third space. Soja’s socio-spatial dialectic adds to
Lefebvre’s case for the social production of space. Soja argues that spatial and social
productions of space are mutually reinforcing.

If space is socially produced, it can be socially changed. In Soja’s views,
conceptions of space have historically been constrained to the imaginations of dominant
populations. Living space is “created by society under oppression or marginalization that
wants to reclaim the space of inequality and make it into something else.”

The active silencing of alternative conceptions of space have left cities susceptible to spatial
injustice—unfair and inequitable distributions of socially valued resources in a given
space. Manipulating the distribution of socially valued resources in a given space is an
example of spatial injustice. For instance, in Los Angeles, there are more than two-
thousand city-owned vacant lots across the city. These lots are disproportionately located
in low-income, colored communities, contributing to insecurity and poor health in “park-
poor communities already hard-hit by disproportionate rates of disinvestment.”

These communities have experienced spatial injustice on two fronts: (1) empty lots are
disproportionately located in their neighborhoods and (2) their neighborhoods lack parks
and other public spaces compared to wealthier, white neighborhoods.

A re-imagining of the functions of space fosters new processes and spatial

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27 Ibid.
interventions to remedy these injustices. For instance, to remedy these injustices against low-income, colored neighborhoods of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles piloted the Adopt-a-Lot program. This program allows residents to access city-owned empty lots in their neighborhood and turn them into public spaces until the city can replace the empty lot with a permanent public space. Based on Soja’s framework for spatial justice, the city’s Adopt-a-Lot program is taking steps to remedy past spatial injustices in these neighborhoods. It should be noted that Soja’s framework focuses on the material harms of spatial injustice (e.g. replacing the empty lot with a public space).

I am concerned that remedying material harms alone cannot constitute spatial justice. As Moore highlights, “the only way these forms of erasure can be assessed [e.g. cases of spatial injustice] is by ensuring the group assembled at the planning table is as diverse as the communities it aims to reimagine and rebuild.”29 A more comprehensive solution, driven by an understanding of feminist epistemological theories, is needed. As communities, planners, architects, and bureaucrats begin to re-negotiate their stake in the conception of public spaces, feminist epistemologies will prove helpful in exposing dominant conceptions of space and facilitating the involvement of previously marginalized individuals whose participation was previously ignored.

In the next chapter, I build on our conversation on the connections between immaterial and material processes by presenting a framework for ensuring that the planning process reflects the publicly accessible and socially meaningful patterns (i.e. schemas) of the community. This framework aims to heal immaterial harms caused by

spatial injustice by considering individuals harmed by spatial injustices as epistemically privileged, and therefore, valued stakeholders in the re-shaping of public imagination and the construction of public spaces.
2 Imagining the Neighborhood: a Community Praxis

The urban spatial structure of cities has become a topic of interest for local municipal officials and urban and transportation planners, in part because this structure is believed to affect the economic health of a city’s local economy, the quality of life of its residents, and inequalities across socio-economic groups. Some neighborhoods in the city will inevitably be more favorably located near resources than other neighborhoods. Although differences in accessibility to city amenities are sure to occur, local municipal officials and urban and transportation planners must ensure that lower levels of accessibility do not disproportionately affect economically, socially, and politically vulnerable inhabitants of their population.

City management requires a balancing act between unavoidable exclusion and necessary inclusion. An unequal spatial structure impacts the quality of life of inhabitants, especially those with lower incomes. Low-income inhabitants are disproportionately affected by longer commutes and less public access to amenities like parks, libraries, and transportation, and they are also more likely to bear the brunt of local air pollution and climate change. In a study on the connections between urban spatial structures and inequality, Luis A. Guzman and Juan P. Bocarejob (2017) found that leaving aside the condition of lower levels of education, poor quality of life of low-income people is also partly caused by two urban factors: low accessibility levels to workplaces and exposure to the negative externalities of concentrated

2 Ibid.
poverty in deprived zones.³

Therefore, local municipal leaders are tasked with rectifying unequal spatial structures into equitable ones. Some city leaders, planners, and academics argue that equalizing spatial structures can increase access to city amenities and provides similar opportunities for all socio-economic groups to experience the city.⁴ By repairing fragmented urban spatial systems, a city can also begin to extend its resources to inhabitants previously excluded from the benefits of urban life. The question is how to include previously excluded community members into the re-imagining of their neighborhoods.

I believe that participatory planning is one possible answer to this question. Recall that, in the previous chapter, I argued that spatial injustice (of the sort identified above) is in part produced by failing to attend to the immaterial harms of planning, leading to unjust urban spatial structures. One virtue of participatory planning, then, is that it enables planners to address (and avoid) both material and immaterial harm. Of course, participatory planning is unmotivated unless it can be established that planning can in fact be enhanced by pursuing a more inclusive approach. Thus, to motivate this claim, I draw on the concept of epistemic privilege as a justification for prioritizing the marginalized knowledge in the planning process. Epistemic privilege is the idea that marginalized individuals hold more evidence on certain issues than dominant knowers.⁵

By imagining spatial justice as a project interested in rectifying both material and

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immaterial harms, implementers (i.e., those involved in shaping spatial arrangements) can begin to re-sew the social fabric of unjust spatial structures.

In this chapter and those that follow, I aim to motivate a participatory planning model by appealing to this idea of the epistemic privilege of marginalized users. Under my definition, participatory planning assumes that the users (e.g., marginalized residents) in a community have just as much value to contribute as those who are traditionally the implementers (e.g., designers, planners, public officials) in designing spaces. Drawing on Tommie Shelby and Will Kymlicka’s work on bonded capital, I explain how an individual’s relationship to place is tied to one’s identity. Therefore, marginalized knowers are more likely to notice immaterial harms. As an epistemically privileged user, her knowledge about the neighborhood should be essential to the planning process.

In this chapter, I begin by drawing on Edward Soja’s concept of spatial injustice with acute attention to immaterial processes that inform an individual’s sense of belonging in a public space—as this is a new aspect yet an essential step toward spatial justice. I next discuss the intrinsic value of immaterial goods to challenge pre-conceived understandings of the ends of spatial justice and the means of determining admissible testimony. I then turn to Briana Toole’s work on epistemic privilege as a template for my approach to remedying immaterial harms associated with spatial injustice. I then present a test case to support my argument regarding epistemic privilege and this concept’s functionality within the planning process.

**Material and Immaterial Harms**

In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja argues that the built environment is
socially constructed and re-imagined. He presents the concept of spatial injustice as the unfair and inequitable distribution of socially valued resources in a given space. Soja considers how implementers (i.e., those who influence spatial arrangements) can, in their re-imaginings, rectify material harms of spatial injustice. Socially valued resources can be material, like parks, well-paved streets, and libraries. Yet, an aspect of spatial injustice not explored by Soja are immaterial injustices like ownership, respect, belonging, dignity, recognition, and trust. Therefore, how can both types of socially valued resources (i.e., material and immaterial) be reconciled in the pursuit of spatial injustice? And are both necessary to remedy spatial injustices?

The material and immaterial are entirely tied, and there is a one to one relationship, so to meet the aims of spatial injustice, both must be rectified. Yet, it is commonly the case that material inequities are prioritized, while the immaterial injustices experienced by the community are overlooked or ignored.

To illustrate the undervaluing of immaterial harms in spatial arrangements, let’s compare two contrasting analyses of the success of new affordable housing added to wealthier neighborhoods of lower Manhattan. Consider first the analysis of Joe Cortright, a contributor at The Atlantic, who references a study from NYU’s Furman Center in his article “In Defense of Gentrification.” The study analyzed the impact of affordable housing in high-income and “increasing income” (i.e. gentrifying) neighborhoods of lower Manhattan. Cortright writes, “the study suggests that residents of public housing in wealthier and gentrifying neighborhoods make more money, live with less violence, and have better educational options for their children, despite facing some challenges.”

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not included in his article were sections of the NYU study that focused on the alienation that some lower-income residents felt within their mixed-income communities. Though this analysis considers the role of economic housing integration in rectifying material harms done to previously disadvantaged communities of New York City, it also overlooks the immaterial damages that these residents are subject to, such as community loss.

In the second analysis, the New York Times also cited the same 2015 NYU study as The Atlantic but focused on the social cost that integration had on lower-income residents. According to the New York Times, “Census and city figures show that the average household income in Chelsea, about $140,000, is almost five times the average for households in public housing in the area.” The NYU Furman Center study’s primary investigator said, “The [public housing] residents felt profound anxiety. They appreciated the safety, but they felt a loss and daily expenses were greater, and they felt great alienation.”

About her interviews with residents, Navarro writes, “gone were the old mom-and-pop stores, the bodegas, the low-rise buildings, and the gathering spots, replaced with higher-end substitutes.” One interviewee said, “I feel like most of the businesses around my home aren’t for me.” As a result, perhaps this resident must go to another neighborhood to find a local grocery store, hair salon, or restaurant that fits his or her

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
preferences. By focusing on improving the material circumstances of lower-income residents, Navarro argues that New York policymakers ignored the social cost residents must accrue to maintain their culture and the costs of losing it. Their plan did not account for immaterial forces’ intrinsic values like self-respect and trust, facilitating community cohesiveness.

It would seem to some people that access to the material benefits of a just spatial structure is the sole element in meeting the ends of Soja’s Spatial Injustice because immaterial services will follow from material changes. But I am not solely concerned with the materiality of spatial justice efforts but the immaterial impact of these spatial decisions. The dominant perspective cannot recognize these immaterial injustices; only the users can.

**Intrinsic Value of Immaterial Goods**

Displaced residents are not just losing their local bodegas, but touchstone to something deeper. Those bodegas are social hubs integral to community life---this is a subject of discussion in Tommie Shelby’s *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform.* According to Shelby, many people of influence underestimate the linkages between economic capabilities and the bonded capital of existing disadvantaged communities.11

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11 Shelby’s “injustice chapter” highlights how past discrimination “ghetto denizens” have faced may inform their current circumstances. The legacy of structural racism during Jim Crow and implicitly racist housing discrimination post-Jim Crow have prevented many African Americans from buying housing that meets their desired preferences or even from buying a house in the first place. Shelby reinforces this point when he argues, “The accumulated socioeconomic handicaps [Jim Crow, slavery, housing discrimination] and financial burdens transmitted across generations are never fully offset despite affirmative action policies and Great Society Programs” (45). Therefore, Africans Americans continue to face challenges recuperating from government policies and private practices that “restrict liberty, undermine equal opportunity, and disrespect black citizens” (45).
Shelbie introduces a distinction between “bridging” social capital (that are social connections across different social factors) and "bonded" social capital (that are social connections with individuals within one’s own social factors), noting that often one comes at the expense of the other. An example of the first is a bilingual neighbor who serves as a quasi-translator for a neighbor who does not speak English. An example of the second is enrolling your child in a cross-city soccer association where your child will play with children from nearby cities. But, assuming that bonded capital is equally valuable, one loses something of value just as one is acquiring something else of value. My aim is to show that social capital can be secured without a sacrifice (or compromise) of “bonded capital”.

In Shelby’s view, economic capabilities, and group identity are primary goods that must be secured and promoted. Shelby notes that the ‘bridging’ social capital (i.e., between different social identities) gained living in an integrated community cannot be equated with ‘bonded’ social capital (i.e., the bondage between citizens of a similar identity and background). As such, in promoting economic capabilities within the racially disadvantaged communities, disruption to the community’s ‘bonded’ capital and identity as a critical mass must be limited.

Shelby argues that a neighborhood should sustain a cultural context so long as community members believe it is essential to their identities. Cultural context encapsulates shared social institutions and traditions that define a community’s ‘bonded’

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13 Shelby presents economic capability and group identity as primary goods. Primary goods are socially valued goods that should be prioritized when evaluating the soundness of efforts attempting to remedy injustices faced by a wronged community.
capital. The ‘bonded’ capital of a neighborhood secures each citizen’s self-esteem and self-respect. As such, a community with high bonded capital must protect its identity as a collective to improve its economic capabilities as individuals.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, only when a disadvantaged neighborhood’s economic capabilities are improved, and the community’s high-bonded capital is secured can residents who have experienced spatial injustice make choices that genuinely reflect their preferences.\textsuperscript{15}

Shelby worries that in forced economic integrated neighborhoods, marginalized residents can longer rely on their neighbors to “vouch for you when it counts, share information with you that would advance your socio-economic prospects, or even be friendly toward you.”\textsuperscript{16} One example that Shelby presents to support this claim is the reliance of African American single mothers on their neighbors. This reality could negatively impact residents like African American single mothers who rely on their neighbors for child care or emotional support. These communities ‘bonded’ capital gives its residents the self-esteem and self-respect necessary to participate in political and

\textsuperscript{14} Shelby is a liberal who values choice. As such, if an individual does not believe that their cultural context is central to their self-esteem and self-respect, then he or she should be free to leave that context. He claims that liberal societies should ensure just conditions, so that their citizens can make choices that reflect their preferences. If a highly-bonded critical mass believes that their group identity is essential to their self-esteem and self-respect, then the state should preserve their community as a valued good. If a disadvantaged neighborhood believes that community input in development efforts is necessary to secure a robust context of choice for the residents, the state should take steps to ensure that they are given a substantial stake in negotiations.

\textsuperscript{15} This claim is central to Shelby’s rebuke of Elizabeth Anderson’s argument in favor of forced economic integration of a disadvantaged neighborhood. Anderson argues that “today’s residential segregation is the legacy of state-sponsored, overt housing discrimination and contemporary private (though sometimes covert) discrimination” (64). Her usage of historical context to strengthen her argument for continued unjust conditions in ghettos is similar to Shelby’s. She continues, by arguing, “Processes of race-based residential exclusion, formal and informal, are the principle cause of group inequality, and these processes are unjust” (64). Anderson presents economic and racial integration as the only solution to correct for unjust practices against ‘ghetto denizens’ (64). According to Anderson, forced racial integration would correct for unjust practices that disadvantage African Americans and in turn, increase their economic capabilities.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 71.
economic spaces. Bonded capital also offers the foundation for networks of mutual help and support.

As such, I argue spatial injustice results from not giving enough deference to or enough consideration of the user perspective. In particular, implementers tend to overlook those considerations occupied by marginalized backgrounds. For instance, an ethnic enclave like Spanish Harlem in New York City is known for the neighborhood’s rich Puerto Rican history. As an established immigrant neighborhood, collectivist values among immigrants are valued over traditional American individualist norms. Yet, as the community’s social and physical landscape begins to transform with gentrification pressures, many residents have become concerned that their collectivist values will be impaired and unsupported by implementers and new residents.

Like Shelby, Will Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship* describes cultural context’s importance to highly-bonded critical masses’ identity in a multiethnic society. Kymlicka acknowledges that it is deeply unjust that dominant cultural contexts persist while minority cultures do not. Like Shelby, he argues that for some minority citizens, their sense of group identity informs their self-esteem and self-respect. Therefore, a liberal society (e.g., the United States) should accommodate minority cultural identities to secure equal worth among citizens of minority and majority cultures. He writes, “In all liberal democracies, one of the major mechanisms for accommodating cultural

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17 Shelby argues that Anderson focuses too intensely on improving the nodes of economic capabilities without acknowledging the cost integration may have on disadvantaged residents. In Shelby’s view, a liberal society should not force racially and economically disadvantaged residents to integrate. It should instead secure just conditions within its society, so that individuals can make choices that align with their preferences. Shelby argues that without preserving the ‘bonded’ capital of a neighborhood, Anderson’s solution may not be an effective one. As such, Anderson underestimates the linkages between economic capabilities and the bonded capital of existing ghetto communities.
differences in the protection of the civil and political rights of individuals.”\(^\text{18}\)

Kymlicka outlines multiple ways in which the government, or in our case implementers, may extend these protections; polyethnic rights and special representation rights help understand how to accommodate Spanish Harlem’s collectivist values into the neighborhood’s changing landscape. Polyethnic rights (e.g., a Native American reservation) promote cultural expression among minority groups within a dominant cultural context. Kymlicka asserts that polyethnic rights are inalienable because the cultural differences they protect are not something we seek to eliminate.\(^\text{19}\) Unlike polyethnic rights, implementing special representation rights (e.g., a community council) respond to systemic disadvantages a minority community may face in the political process. These disadvantages make it difficult for the group’s interests to be represented within their communities.\(^\text{20}\) Yet, according to Kymlicka, these special rights are a temporary measure until the “society no longer needs special representation” (i.e., there are just conditions that ensure equal standing among citizens).

Both state actions protect individuals’ civil and political rights but serve different purposes. Polyethnic rights protect minority cultural connections from being dominated by a majority culture. In contrast, special representation rights ensure that disadvantaged community members have a substantive stake in their communities’ decisions. The latter


does not necessarily mean that members of a critical mass necessarily value preserving their current cultural contexts. They may simply want to have enough political power to ensure that changes to their cultural context reflect their community’s opinions rather than outside stakeholders.

This distinction helps understand the nuances of Spanish Harlem’s ongoing gentrification. In some cases, residents may be concerned that outside actors will disrupt their cultural context. Yet, in other cases, some residents may be upset that the collective or individual does not consider their input in development negotiations between cities and private investors. Both cases present valid concerns by community members but ask for different solutions.

In the first case, Kymlicka’s polyethnic rights may serve as a better framework than special representation rights. If a highly-bonded critical mass is concerned that their culture will be displaced by gentrification, the state should introduce external protections. According to Kymlicka, these protections can include land claims, language rights, and other rights necessary to preserve a community’s cultural context.21 In the cultural enclave context, this could consist of housing subsidies for enclave residents or preserving historical landmarks. By protecting the cultural context of highly-bonded critical masses, the state, or implementer, is not impeding others’ ability. A state, or implementer, is simply protecting the context of a critical mass from continued

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disadvantages that it may face if gentrification were to occur. Kymlicka argues that polyethnic and special representation rights position “various groups on an equal footing, by reducing the extent to which the smaller group is vulnerable to the larger”; and, therefore, are justified.\textsuperscript{22}

Determining which framework fits a community’s needs requires a rigorous process for community participation. Without valuing minority cultural values or through the community engagement process, implementers may mis-prescribe a framework and ultimately further existing immaterial injustices incurred by a disadvantaged community. A significant consequence of this type of immaterial injustice can lead marginalized residents to lose valuable ‘bonded’ capital central to their identities.

To demonstrate why spatial injustice happens and to motivate moving toward participatory planning, I will argue that marginalized residents are afforded epistemically valuable insights (which is where the epistemic privilege thesis comes in). There are particular insights that marginalized users offer that constructing urban spatial structures lack. It is precisely the fact that implementers do not pay attention to those insights that lead to the spatial injustices Soja describes.

As illustrated in the affordable housing and gentrification example above, whether done consciously or unconsciously, individuals are left out of the process of perceiving, conceptualizing, and living within the boundaries accepted by public imaginations. As such, residents do not experience the built environment equally. Although most of my

discussion so far has been focused on the agent who socially produces material and immaterial spatial arrangements (i.e., implementers), in this section, I will focus on individuals who experience the built environment (i.e., users).

For users not included in the public imagination of spatial arrangements, the built environment presents endless obstacles and considerations unbeknownst to dominant users. Whether due to ignorance or testimonial smothering, non-dominant users’ grievances are typically devalued, trivialized, or questioned. The lack of concern afforded to non-dominant users leads to further spatial injustice and less effective efforts in providing spatial justice. A user’s experience informs whether the ends of spatial injustice have been accomplished, not simply the implementer’s perceived solution to the injustice itself.

Before one can begin to remedy spatial injustice cases, it is productive to understand how one navigates unjust spatial arrangements. The oppression elicited by spatial injustice is not always apparent to implementers but can be incredibly significant in non-dominant users’ lives. In the coming sections, this chapter will explore how non-dominant users experience the built environment and why their experiences are critical to the pursuit of spatial justice.

**Schemas and Evaluations of Evidence**

A concern one may have about participatory planning is that implementers are incapable of evaluating and appreciating the contributions made by marginalized residents. To motivate this claim, I will rely on Sandra Harding’s concept of schemas and how schemas inform implementers’ interpretations of the evidence. An implementer’s
evaluation of a resident’s contributions during a planning process is not always merited equally—schemas largely influence this phenomenon. In the previous chapter, I defined schemas as “constituted, at least in part, by sets of shared beliefs and conventions”.

Here, Harding’s discussion on gender and group identities clarifies the construction of schemas.

In Harding’s view, “Gender marks a reliable pattern of difference in experience within a culturally specific social group because the substantive features that characterize any given gender identity will be dependent on cultural practices.” An individual’s positionality directs the schemas she finds valuable. An individual’s group identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) inform her identity. As a result, an individual’s experience forms her schema for how she perceives and interprets others’ behaviors; every individual’s schema dictates how she interprets evidence. Therefore, the knowledge of “knowers,” in our case implementers, is subjective, not objective. Trouble arises when “knowers” refuse to consider how their positionality can lead to subjectivity. A knower’s inability to recognize the limits of their own positionally can lead to not only immaterial injustice but also failures within the built environment.

Such was the case, in February of 2019, when New York City Transportation officials dealt with the limitation of their own positionalities in the aftermath of Malaysia Goodson’s death. Goodson, like many New York parents, Goodson struggled to juggle her stroller and daughter down the steps of a Manhattan subway station. Without an

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25 Harding, 45.
elevator, people who are disabled and city-goers with strollers like Goodson regularly navigate crowded subway stairs. Walking down the steps, Goodson tumbled down a flight of stairs and onto the subway platform. Although Goodson’s daughter survived the accident, Goodson did not.

Malaysia Goodson’s death highlighted existing conversations about the inaccessibility of New York Subway stations. Only about a quarter of the subway system’s four-hundred and seventy-two stations have elevators, and the ones that exist are often out of order. Just two years before Goodson’s death, New York City disability advocates filed a lawsuit against the transit authority that operates the subway. Advocates described New York’s subway system as “one of the least accessible in the country and accused the agency of violating the federal Americans With Disabilities Act.” A New York Times analysis found there are approximately 550,000 residents in New York City who have difficulty walking; two-thirds of them live far from an accessible subway station. Goodson’s story demonstrates the dire consequences involved in neglecting marginalized voices within the design and planning process. As such, our discussions in the next two sections are not irrelevant to the actual lives of the people in the communities we discuss in this project.

27 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
Also, consider the incompatibility of black and white schemas demonstrated in black women’s metrics for self-evaluation. Patricia Hill Collins’ discussion of these metrics for self-evaluation highlights the misalignment between black and white schemas. Black women create their definitions of what it means to be black women, regardless of white perceptions. For example, a black woman’s “assertiveness” and “sassiness” are valued by other black women because they understand its necessity to endure the circumstances she faces. Though black women hold their evaluation metrics, they are still evaluated relative to white male schemas in mainstream society. Therefore, according to Collins, a white male schema may deem black women as animalistic, promiscuous, and defiant because they refuse to conform to white male values. Similarly, black students will still be evaluated as ‘less than’ on white terms; this is often seen when considering K-12 students for gifted programs.

Clarifying Hardings’ and Collins’s insights, consider the “objective metrics” of college admissions or gifted student programs in the United States. Metrics for talent are socially constructed by an epistemic agent, also known as a “knower,” who uses their positionality to determine “model candidates.” Therefore, metrics for talent outlined by institutions may not be compatible with the experiences of non-white students who do not fit into traditional conceptions of a “model candidate.”

A teacher uses discretion to screen and refer students for gifted programs. Gifted programs provide students with advanced classes, individual attention, and extra learning.

32 Ibid, 16.
33 Ibid, 24.
opportunities outside of a standard classroom. Protocols to identify these students vary by the school district. Some school districts choose to evaluate students solely by their test scores, while others leave it to teacher discretion. A student identified as “gifted” is perceived as a “model student” amongst their teachers and peers. While the program offers individualized learning opportunities, white students are twice as likely to be identified as gifted than black students. The relationship between knowers and schemas can explain discrepancies in black student identification for gifted programs.

A teacher is more likely to present different interpretations of her students’ behaviors based on her perception of a “model student.” The “model student” is a constructed perception informed by the teacher’s schema. For instance, if a teacher is white, she might evaluate students based on white male talent values, as these characteristics are viewed as standard. Subconsciously, the teacher might pay more attention to white students who show these attributes. On the other hand, if the teacher perceives black students as troublemakers, she is less likely to link their characteristics to giftedness. The teacher’s metric for evaluation relies on criteria that favor one student’s attributes over another’s. Therefore, if a teacher identifies students based on their ability to conform to white male schemas, students of color will have difficulty meeting those standards.

When observing a student’s behavior, each student is deemed gifted relative to the teacher’s model behavior metric. Suppose two students, one white and one black,


demonstrate gifted attributes like being curious, outspoken, and energetic. In that case, the black student’s behavior will likely be perceived as disruptive by a white teacher. In contrast, the white student is perceived as gifted. White and black students present the same evidence. Still, confirmation bias is valuing white students as gifted because their attributes align with white schemas.

Furthermore, the teacher’s metric for determining talent is not compatible with blackness. Blackness, in the teacher’s interpretation, is often equated with deviancy. The teacher’s perception of valued schemas clouds her ability to reconcile blackness with talent. An individual’s positionality cannot be divorced from their epistemic contributions. Evidence is not held in a vacuum. It requires interpretation - and interpretation subject to dominant schemas deemed valuable by dominant knowers.

Now, let us apply this concept of schemas and the subjectivity of evaluation metrics to the process of urban planning. Who is considered a “knower” may vary by institution, but, for this paper’s purpose, I will focus on the dominant population of knowers, as articulated by Darnell L. Moore and Leslie Weisman, which I explored in the previous chapter: that is, implementers are usually straight, white men. Consequently, objective metrics for determining necessary stakeholders in a given project rest on white, male, and heteronormative schemas. Individuals who develop metrics for essential stakeholders in planning processes are considered “knowers” (i.e., epistemic agents).

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Since epistemic agents can separate bias from fact, their decisions are absolute. And in turn, dominant epistemic norms inform traditional epistemology.

As the dominant group in mainstream epistemological scholarship, “essential stakeholders” reflect the attributes of white men.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, in Moore and Weisman’s view, an “essential stakeholder” in planning processes is objective, rational, detached, and non-emotional.\textsuperscript{40} The importance of a resident’s opinion in planning decisions is evaluated relative to straight, white male values for “relevance.” Yet, since knowers believe they are objective, they do not consider how their schema influences their metric for relevance. Like the teacher evaluating the “giftedness” of a student, in determining a metric, an know (e.g., implementer) will intentionally, or unintentionally, create requisites that align with how they interpret evidence.\textsuperscript{41}

If this is the case, I am concerned implementers are incapable of evaluating the merit of contributions made by marginalized residents whose experiences may not align with our outlined “knower’s” evaluation metric. Ignorance about a knower’s biases subverts their ability to evaluate all resident’s contributions equally. Suppose knowers are ignorant that their white schemas influence their metrics for relevance. In that case, they cannot genuinely identify the value in resident donations that do not align with their biases. Since “essential stakeholders” rest on straight, white male schemas, metrics for relevance are exclusionary. Regardless of a resident’s contribution to the process, their value is relative to the white male ideal. If implementers hope to cultivate a diverse pool

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid
of “essential” stakeholders, they must question their conceptions of acceptable metrics and revise them to accommodate varying schemas.

In the next section, I will consider how an implementer’s theoretical evaluation metrics inform a user’s experience in the built environment. In analyzing the consequences of a lack of diverse contributions in the planning process, I point to epistemic privilege as a possible mechanism to re-configure the implementer’s evaluation of essential stakeholders.

**Epistemic Privilege**

In the previous section, I considered how epistemology’s dominant frameworks constrain an individual’s interpretation of others’ behavior and epistemic contributions. Our epistemic practices hold the potential to perpetuate epistemic harms that facilitate immaterial injustice. Immaterial injustice occurs when dominant knowers fail to recognize how, through the practice of spatial noticing, marginalized knowers internalize a more significant body of evidence about the needs of their neighborhoods. The act of spatial noticing grows with everyday lived experience, not through structured means of empirical observation. As such, dominant knowers should defer to the testimony of marginalized knowers. By viewing marginalized knowers as epistemically privileged knowers, dominant knowers (i.e., Implementers) can begin to capture a more holistic picture of communities’ spatial imagining of their neighborhoods.

My discussion of the epistemic privilege thesis relies on Briana Toole’s insights on the connections between consciousness-raising and epistemic peer hood. In line with Toole, I define the epistemic privilege thesis as an epistemic case where one’s social
identity reveals a “particular and privileged vantage point” or affords one “special perspectives and insights.” In this section, I consider the “weird wisdom” that comes from navigating one’s spatial arrangement and the communities within as part of one’s social identity. Their relationship to the built environment and its people situate these individuals as individuals with a more precise grasp of their neighborhood’s material and immaterial needs.

Still, the epistemic privilege thesis is constrained to contexts where “social features may be epistemically relevant to the question or evidence at stake, how we interpret a body of evidence, or what hypotheses we entertain to explain that body of evidence.” For example, a fashion designer is going to be epistemically privileged in regards to what fashion trends will look like next year. In contrast, the epistemic privilege does not extend to “domains where social features are epistemically irrelevant, (for example, to nuclear physics or quantum mechanics).” By situating “place” within Toole’s restricted scope of the social domain, I establish how urban planning processes centered in marginalized communities fit within the constraints of the epistemic privilege thesis.

In past sections, I discuss how ignoring marginalized knowers in the planning process can lead to planning and design outcomes that are not contextually situated and

45 Ibid.
epistemically harmful. Foundational to the scope of the epistemic privilege thesis are Miranda Fricker and Kristie Dotson’s insights that suggest social factors, like one’s race or gender, inform whether one’s knowledge is recognized and received. This section assumes “place” as a potential social factor that informs marginalized knowers of epistemic privilege in the social domain. Marginalized knowers who practice spatial noticing hold marginalized standpoints that are epistemically privileged. This assumption rests on Tommie Shelby and Will Kymlicka’s discussion about the intrinsic value of bonded capital to one’s social identity. As such, one’s association to place is a social factor shaping one’s consciousness.

The act of consciousness-raising within communities facing spatial injustice challenges the epistemic peerhood amongst marginalized residents and implementers. Planning in neighbors facing spatial injustice falls within the limited cases where marginally situated knowers and dominantly situated knowers are not epistemic peers. Through the act of consciousness-raising, individuals begin to acknowledge the relationship between one’s social situatedness (i.e., one’s race, gender, class, place, etc.) and how their situatedness informs their experiences. For example, being female-identifying individual frames how I negotiate my salary with my employer. Being female, I am aware that my work may be undervalued relative to the actual worth of the work. As in the United States, women are disproportionately paid less than men for similar employment. In becoming “aware of patterns in your experiences, patterns which may escape the attention of others,” we begin to develop our critical perspectives.


47 Briana Toole, (Manuscript) On Social Identity and Epistemic Peerhood: In Defense of Epistemic
In the case of the marginalized, the act of consciousness-raising includes becoming “aware of patterns of oppression that one experiences in virtue of one’s marginalization.” To add to the previous example, being a Mexican female-identifying individual offers me insights into the possible reasons why my employer underestimates my epistemic contributions and denies my salary bump. In this example, my critical perspective provides me with resources for understanding my employer’s behavior and acknowledging his patterns of oppression. In this case, my marginalization adds a layer of insight that may not be available to my employer. This is a case where my employer and I are not epistemic peers, as epistemic peers have equal amounts of evidence. Toole notes that there is a narrow range of cases in which a dominantly situated knower is not the epistemic peer of a marginally situated knower.

**As an illustration of this concern, consider the following case:**

A Latina female runner named Amada enjoys running in the evenings at Kenneth Hahn Park in South Los Angeles. Amada runs the same route through her local park. The trail is well-lit, always mildly populated, and has clear entrances and exits. Amada heard about a longer trail located in the darker and less populated section of the park. Amada would love to change her running route, but she feels unsafe being alone in the park’s lonely area. Until she can find a running partner, she decides to stick to her current route.

Based on this example, I argue that the designer does not have equally strong evidence as Amada about the accessibility of the park to females. First, Amada holds a

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*Privilege, 3.*  
48 Ibid.  
49 Ibid, 4.
different critical perspective as a woman than men. As such, she will have considered how she and other women are treated from men’s views on the trail. It is common for women to experience cat-calling when running. Additionally, as a woman of color and South Los Angeles resident Amada understands specific oppression patterns that inform how she navigates her daily trail route. Amada has an intersectional perspective that other users or designers may not hold. These social factors that shape Amada’s social identity structure her habits of attention.

Habits of attention better position marginalized people to notice certain immaterial harms that the dominant knowers are not accustomed to. An individual’s embodied identity shapes her habits of attention. For instance, a physically disabled person on the subway will notice how the physical environment (e.g., stairs, escalators, ramps, elevators) poses as possible obstacles to their accessibility of public transportation, whereas a non-disabled person does not practice these habits of attention.

In Amada’s case, through consciousness-raising, Amada is unconsciously accustomed to noticing areas where she feels safe and unsafe. For instance, she will think about it, whereas a man who does not have to worry about being sexually assaulted on his run will not develop that habit of attention.

The designer may believe this park’s design is reasonably safe because, given the specifications, they have to meet, the park satisfies safety requirements. But from the perspective of a particular vulnerable user that the designer did not think about, she will realize that there are no safety lights and no emergency call button if she gets attacked. As such, immaterial and epistemic harms arise in this scenario because a dominantly situated knower assumes to be epistemic equals with a marginalized knower when
evaluating the park’s safety. However, designers and planners are superior knowers about the technicality of designing a park.

Amada’s marginalized standpoint falls within Toole’s narrow cases where the user (e.g., Amanda) holds certain information that the designer may not. In this case, Amada and the park designer are not epistemic peers, as Amada has more robust evidence about the park that allows her to be a more sophisticated reasoner about the inclusivity of the park’s design.

**Epistemic Toolsets**

Although I claim that Amada is epistemically privileged in this scenario, I am not arguing that dominantly-situated knowers (i.e., implementers) cannot engage in consciousness-raising. Questions about individual knowers in relation to collective group membership are raised in Heidi E. Grasswick’s *Individuals-in-Communities*. Grasswick’s section on development provides an insightful lens for evaluating whether implementers can expand their epistemic tools sets through consciousness raising. In addition to underscoring the importance of early-childhood consciousness raising, Grasswick sketches out how socialization and dependency relations are critical to the development of individual epistemic agents.50 An individual knower’s knowledge stems from their interactions with other knowers and their positionality within their respective communities—this is essentially Grasswick’s theoretical framework called individuals-in-communities (linC). According to Grasswick, good knowing involves critical

engagement with the members and practices of one's communities.\textsuperscript{51} In short, an implementer’s participation within and across their communities of membership dictates how they think, speak, and act.

In Grasswick's view, epistemic skills like standards for evidence and frameworks for interpretation are learned within our communities.\textsuperscript{52} As such, if implementers seek to recognize the epistemic privileges of other knowers, then they must actively expose themselves to community culture and create channels to critically engage with others who are a part of existing neighborhood networks. Only through active engagement can implementers begin to understand the history of a community and grow the tools necessary to support spatial injustice efforts.

Still, dominant knowers will face struggles building their critical perspective that the marginalized do not. Toole suggests that this is in part because “the experiences they have in virtue of their dominant positioning will not ‘cut across’ the prevailing ideology in the same way that the experiences of the marginalized do.”\textsuperscript{53} Dominant knowers lack the conceptual resources marginalization makes available to those who have experienced oppression across various social factors. In the case of place, dominant knowers have not developed the “weird wisdom” (i.e. spatial noticing) that evolves from frequenting a neighborhood or building bonded capital with your neighbors. If planning and urban design professionals seek to create culturally competent people-based procedures, then what matters is not simply the equality of treatment across residents of different social


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 100.

identities, but the quality of their interactions with residents who are epistemically privileged.
3 Asset-based Pedagogies for People-based Procedures

It is no longer acceptable to impose a planning solution upon a community or to assume that all communities are alike and require the same pattern of provision. Rather, the challenge now for planning is to capture the rich diversity of communities and to reflect this diversity in intercultural strategies and actions.¹

This call to action on behalf of Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities programme (ICC) reflects the work of Iris Marion Young’s work in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Young’s scholarship in classic feminist political thought outlines methods for group representation in procedures like urban planning. For instance, in the case of planning, Young would argue that planning and design professionals carry an ethical duty to become informed about intracultural dynamics and how their own conscious and unconscious assumptions, beliefs, and preferences inform their ability to genuinely understand and serve other cultures.² Young defines this praxis as cultural competency, an implementer’s ability to “recognize, understand, and engage in difference, diversity, and (inter)cultural heterogeneity as an advantage.” By embracing this praxis, implementers can collaborate with epistemically privileged communities in creative and productive ways within urban planning and design processes and practices.

To practice cultural competency, Young outlines five systemic elements to his praxis: (1) valuing diversity, (2) the capacity for cultural self-assessment, (3)

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² Ibid.
consciousness of the ‘dynamics’ of cultural interaction, (4) the institutionalization of cultural knowledge, and (5) the development of adaptations to service delivery based on understanding diversity inter- and intra- culturally.\footnote{Young, Iris. 1990. \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference}. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press.} Together, these essential elements inform an implementer’s ability to develop their own inter-cultural conceptual resources and create participatory procedures that integrate cultural competency. To develop one’s cultural competency, a dominant knower must overcome issues of assumed cultural homogeneity, cultural incapacity, or unwarranted cultural competence.\footnote{Ibid.}

A major challenge to some implementers seeking cultural competency is recognizing the nuances in power distributions within communities of similar social identities and practicing asset-based pedagogies when evaluating epistemically privileged residents' knowledge. Culturally sustainable planning practices warrant patience and flexibility on part of implementers who may face competing values of universality and efficiency. Still, when implementers preserve the integrity of these practices, their work in communities challenged by spatial injustice can create physical landscapes that build community capacity.

In this chapter, I will explore the dyadic epistemic pitfalls implementers should avoid when practicing culturally competent planning, and provide examples of firm and community-based organizations that integrate asset-based and culturally competent pedagogies in a meaningful and practical way. To begin, it is important to explain two concepts of testimonial injustice: credibility excess and credibility deficit. After presenting potential epistemic obstacles to cultural competency, I offer asset-based
pedagogies exhibited by firms like the Kounkuey Design Initiative, Unity Council, and Harlem Children’s Zone as exemplar culturally-informed participatory planning models.

Possible Pitfalls in Participatory Planning

Dyadic Epistemic Pitfalls

Questions about the interactions between knowers and epistemic dependence on each other for knowledge creation are raised in Grasswick’s *Individuals-in-Communities*. Grasswick explains that dependence and socialization are central to robust knowledge creation. Yet, Grasswick’s model does not consider those dominant knowers only interact with individuals as part of their epistemic communities when they want to take advantage of a certain type of knowledge. And, there is a certain kind of knowledge that we do not respect in other cases. Miranda Fricker refers to these cases as testimonial injustice—instances in which a knower receives a credibility deficit or credibility excess based on the prejudices of another knower.\(^5\)

Emmalon Davis describes one form of testimonial injustice as credibility excess, a citation where a knower receives more credibility than they would otherwise have; unwarranted credibility.\(^6\) In contrast, Miranda Fricker presents a credibility deficit as an instance of testimonial injustice, situations in which the knower receives less credibility than they would otherwise have.\(^7\) Both credibility excess and credibility deficit are examples of epistemic injustice where unwarranted prejudice is placed against a speaker based on their social identities. Cases of testimonial injustice restrict the knower of their

\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid., 18.
capacity to share their knowledge and can be systemically connected to other forms of injustice like spatial injustice.\(^8\)

In this section, I highlight the importance of dominant knowers in accrediting and discrediting the testimony of marginalized individuals. To situate our conversation on testimonial injustice, I begin with a critique of Grasswick’s theory of individuals in communities. Then, I examine how Grasswick work considers cases of testimonial injustice like Emmalon Davis’s credibility excess and Miranda Fricker’s credibility deficit. Our conversation about dyadic epistemic harms is grounded in the realities marginalized knowers face during urban planning processes where their social identities dictate the legitimacy of their epistemically privileged knowledge.\(^9\)

As presented in the previous chapter, Grasswick’s work on pluralistic communication offers implementer’s entry point into cross-cultural mutual understanding and an opportunity to grow their conceptual toolkit. She argues knowers rely on other knowers to expand their perspective. According to Grasswick, “Because each community is particularized, with a limited set of epistemic resources, knowers' membership in multiple communities proves central to opportunities for better knowledge.”\(^10\) In other words, our narrow scopes of perspective require us to depend on others to learn different perspectives that fill in the gaps in our judgment. Thus, Grasswick suggests “that both socialization and dependency relations are crucial for the development of individual

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\(^8\) Ibid, 19.
\(^9\) Dyadic epistemic harms are instances of face-to-face testimonial exchanges where a dominant knower makes some attribution of credibility regarding the speaker.
epistemic agents.”

If Grasswick’s conclusion stands, then a discussion of across groups dynamics is warranted. Though Grasswick does offer some concessions, she does not rigorously confront the various challenges that come with epistemic dependence for both knowers and listeners, especially between marginalized and dominant groups.

Grasswick does not acknowledge that dominant epistemic agents set standards for knowledge production. To be fair, she does note that “authority within communities is rarely distributed evenly”, but she does not address how authority is distributed amongst separate, interacting communities. Since epistemic authority varies by community, so do epistemic values. For example, while a child raised in Western culture may value empirical knowledge, a child raised in an indigenous culture may value narrative-based knowledge. That being said, some communities hold more epistemic authority across groups than others. Lorraine Code explores this idea in “Taking Subjectivity in Account.” She writes, “Women—and other “others” are produced as “objects of knowledge-as-control.”

The identity of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups are not subject to their own understandings, but to the understandings of the dominant knower. In our case, and in Code’s, that is a western male. The dominant conception of knowers is inherently discriminatory and leaves marginalized groups at an epistemic disadvantage.

As such, the values of the dominant community permeate into the testimonies marginalized knowers offer in across-community spaces of knowledge production. As the

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11 Ibid., 100.
14 Ibid.
dominant community, knowers of this group have the authority to credit or discredit the testimonies of non-dominant groups. This occurrence becomes especially problematic when the testimony of marginalized knowers is treated as generic and interchangeable. Instead of creating a space for marginalized knowers to speak about their distinct experiences, dominant knowers expect speakers to describe the broad experience of the speaker’s presumed community. And, if the speaker’s account does not align with the dominant knower’s perception of her community, then the dominant knower has the authority to deflate or inflate the credibility of the speaker. Emmalon Davis expands Fricker’s work on testimonial injustice and credibility deficits to include cases of credibility excess.\(^{15}\) Davis identifies this phenomenon as “identity-prejudicial credibility excess” (PCE).\(^{16}\) PCE occurs when “a speaker is assessed to be credible with respect to some bit of knowledge on the basis of prejudicial stereotypes associated with the speaker’s social identity.”\(^{17}\)

The experiences of marginalized knowers who experience credibility excess do not exist in a vacuum. In some instances, marginalized knowers are positively stereotyped by well-intentioned dominant knowers who value their input in conversations that impact their communities. However, in other instances, dominant knowers use marginalized individuals who legitimize their perceptions about marginalized groups without offering a platform for group members to voice concerns. Let’s call this distinction: platform or no platform. Both are examples of testimonial injustice but occur

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{17}\) Ibid, 487.
by different means. For the purpose of this project, I will only explore cases where a platform is offered since that is more relevant to our discussion about participatory planning.

In a platform scenario, a marginalized knower is perceived as an expert based on their external attributes. Here, the dominant knower chooses to give authority to the speaker based on her appearance—race, gender, etc.; Davis calls this “positive stereotyping.”¹⁸ To illustrate this idea, imagine asking a person who looks Asian to help with the math problem based on the stereotype that Asians are good at math. It is not her actual insight that is sought, but rather the perceived insight she holds by the authority figure. By evaluating the merit of the speaker based on her appearance, dominant listeners can ignore the individual perspective of the member of the social group she believes the speaker belongs to. In this scenario, the speaker is treated as interchangeable with others of her group.

As a result, choosing the speaker solely on their external appearance does not acknowledge the limitations of her situatedness and the plurality within her group experience. This may leave the speaker to believe that the positive stereotyping of her identity effectively erases her specific situatedness. Instead of being valued for her individual perspective, she is valued for her perceived collective group perspective.

This idea is exemplified by the mixed feelings of some Latinos who move back to gentrifying Chicago neighborhoods. Like Logan Square, Gente-ficiaton, a term created by East Los Angeles activists, describes the phenomenon of gentrification by a

community’s own people.\textsuperscript{19} The term has become popularized by Netflix’s hit TV show “Gentefied,” the story of another Latino neighborhood struggling with gentrification, East Los Angeles’ Boyle Heights. Gente-fiers, often young, upwardly mobile, and college-educated, can afford rising rents in their rapidly gentrifying childhood neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{20} Ethnically, Gente-fiers identify with the neighborhood’s Latino composition, yet economically, they match newly settled higher-income residents. Scholars like Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum, argue that Gente-fication can actually support the preservation of existing social networks, she writes,

\begin{quote}
[Some of the children of existing low-income residents] are upwardly mobile and are now moving back, or other upwardly mobile Latinos moving in, it still helps to preserve the Latino identity of those neighborhoods, preserve the Latino cultural institutions, and preserve, hopefully, the economic development in those neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Yet, for neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and Logan Square, the rise of upwardly mobile residents, Latino or not, creates divisions about who the neighborhood is for and how to remedy historical spatial injustices. This conflict contradictions Puente’s comments about high-income Latino settlement into low-income neighborhoods.

For instance, since 2000, 20,000 Latinos have been displaced from Logan Square,


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

a predominantly Latino neighborhood in Chicago.\textsuperscript{22} The popular, newly-developed, 606 trail continues to contribute to the conversation of historic multi-family units into single-family homes and luxury developments.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the fragmentation of the existing community, new housing stock caters to higher-income buyers, leaving less affordable housing stock for long time, low-income residents. As the neighborhood population begins to shift, higher-income residents and homeowners stand to benefit from new public amenities like the 606 trail that cater to their tastes and preferences.

In creating new social hubs, developers also contribute to the erasure of existing ones. Exposed in the demographic changes in neighborhoods are questions about who the neighborhood and its public services serve. When residents with more social and economic capital settle into disadvantaged neighborhoods, they also re-distribute power over the maintenance of the neighborhood. The competing imaginations of the neighborhood (in this instance, Latino cultural institutions and affluent cultural institutions) threaten existing residents' ability to preserve community identity and established social networks.

Some development firms claim to embrace participatory planning tools like community hearings, yet their workshops cater to wealthier Latino residents who benefit from their investments. This prioritization of new residents over existing residents can become a concern when some housing advocates argue new Latino residents should become liaisons for long time, low-income residents. According to Christian Diaz, the lead housing organizer at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, “As a

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
homeowner, you have a lot of power, maybe even a responsibility, to advocate for the people, the neighbors who are more vulnerable.”

Although Diaz may be well-intentioned, he does not foresee how a higher income Latino resident’s input can be equated with the testimonies of existing residents if development firms see the community endorsing a single perspective. This act may be perceived as its own form of testimonial injustice.

In this instance, developers are the implementers who assume genericness in a way that assumes that a wealthier Latino resident would have the knowledge that their ethnic community must know. Once the implementer denies the concept of a generic knower and understands that the speaker is not interchangeable, can they realize they did something epistemically reprehensible. Their assumptions about the Latino resident’s experience may have forced them to speak on experiences that the resident might not have believed they had the legitimacy to speak about. Davis would argue that this is an epistemic burden for Latino residents that dominantly positioned residents in their class do not have to carry.

The reliance on the input from higher-income Latino residents ignores the ways in which “the preservation of Latino identity extends beyond Latino demographic and physical representation to include affordable housing for longtime low-income residents.”

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income Latinos also poses an obstacle to an implementer’s intentions to rectify spatial injustices. Spatial justice, both material and immaterial, can only be accomplished if low-income residents with bonded social capital feel empowered within the planning process.

In neighborhoods facing spatial injustice, both credibility excess and credibility deficit, are obstacles to residents' recognition and collaboration in the planning process. Still, contrary to Emmalon Davis’s categorization of testimonial injustice in cases of credibility excess like in Logan Square, feminist scholars like Miranda Fricker maintains that credibility deficit causes more epistemic harms to marginalized users. According to Fricker, epistemic deficit occurs when a dominant knower grants a non-dominant knower less credibility based on “prejudicial attributions of insincerity, irrationality, and incompetence.” According to Fricker, such cases of testimonial injustice are motivated by prejudicial stereotypes that “track subjects qua social type across a variety of social contexts.”

A dominant knower's assumptions about the legitimacy of a non-dominant knower's contributions are also categorized as negative identity prejudice (also referred to as negative stereotyping). Fricker defines negative identity prejudice 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 counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment.”

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Fricker notes that prejudices can be held based on a non-dominant knower’s external appearance (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, gender). For example, a sexist dominant-knower disregards the epistemic value of his female colleagues' contributions at work based on his sexist assumptions about her capability as a woman. An additional layer of prejudice, such as the manner in which one presents their knowledge, can lead dominant knowers to dismiss a non-dominant knower’s testimony. A dominant knower may value empirical forms of knowledge over affective (or intuitive) forms which foreground the importance of the body and emotional feeling. An instance of such emotion might arise in feeling pride from living in, while also feeling a sense of surprise, curiosity, or confusion simultaneously.

Space leads people to hold different emotions and memories across time. For example, a long-time resident in a gentrifying neighborhood may say that they feel like a stranger on their street block. Or, a non-White resident in a predominately White neighborhood might say that they do not feel comfortable taking their kids to the local park because White residents stare at her family. By sharing one’s emotional ties to space, a knower’s testimony is categorized as personal and qualitative. In contrast, empirically-based knowledge, like the absence of a stop sign on a busy street, is objective.

and quantifiable in nature. For some dominant knowers, empirical and affective knowledge frameworks are incompatible, leading dominant knowers to blatantly de-legitimize non-empirical forms of knowledge.

New York’s controversy over community gardens in the 1990s is an example of both the consequences of a credibility deficit and of delegitimizing affective-based knowledge. At the time, a long battle over privatizing New York’s recreational community gardens in disadvantaged neighborhoods across the five boroughs fueled criticism about disregarding community input in development decisions. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s political agenda favored the privatization of public lands and services. At the time, there were over 1,000 community gardens on city-owned lots in New York, predominantly in low-income, colored neighborhoods.33

In 1999, the city of New York planned to auction 114 of these community gardens for private development.34 Giuliani intended to bypass public input and directly place the garden lots into market circulation. His dismissal of resident concerns about losing the social value of the gardens pushed the controversy over his actions into broader political and public arenas.35 Ultimately, the gardens were purchased by two community land trust organizations, the trust for public lands and the New York Restoration Project (NYRP), which promised to maintain the empty lots as community gardens. Still, the detail of the conflict between Mayor Giuliani’s office and garden advocates demonstrates how credibility deficit can be perpetuated in urban planning.

34 Ibid, 193.
In the late 1970s, the New York City municipal government established Project Green Thumb, a new operation within the parks department aimed at repurposing empty lots into flourishing community gardens.\(^{36}\) Since the city lacked funding to build new public spaces, their office provided neighborhood residents with the permits, materials, and land to create their own low-cost public spaces. Although the operation continued into the 1990s, Green Thumb faced severe budget cuts once Mayor Giuliani entered office.\(^{37}\)

Still, individual gardens and the collective New York City Garden network held significant social value for residents, not in proximity to public spaces.\(^{38}\) Garden advocates stressed the immaterial importance of community gardens. From a gardener’s perspective, community gardens “create[d] holistic harmonious anchors in the rest of the metropolis that affects, in a beneficial way, everybody because at least there are a few places where birds and people can be connected.”\(^{39}\) Additionally, the Green Guerillas, a community activist group in favor of preserving the projects, developed promotional materials that articulated the fiscal consequences of losing more than 100 community gardens. The Green Guerillas painted the planned auction of space as:

… a bad deal for New York City [because] the surrounding communities will lose hundreds of thousands of dollars of free services [such as community gathering spaces, spaces to grow food, and job skills training] provided by the garden

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 213.
\(^{37}\) Ibid, 197.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 203.
Although these community spaces nurtured urban agriculture, job creation, and social capital, their use-value did not align with Mayor Giuliani’s exchange values.

In order to justify the sale of the gardens, the mayor’s office framed the auction as a necessary step toward alleviating the housing shortage in the City. The Mayor’s office argued that the gardens were intended for temporary land usage and that these parcels should now be used for housing. Giuliani pitted housing needs against community gardens. The implication was that the community gardeners should purchase the lots on the free market if they wanted to maintain access to the gardens they had created. The Mayor’s comments represent a sharp reaction to liberal urban policies that allowed citizens to use vacant lots as community gardens and highlights the ideological distance between the values of the community garden advocates and those of the Mayor.

The potential for the housing versus gardens argument to fragment the political left was further undermined by Mayor Giuliani’s defense of a neoliberal stance toward the vacant lots and dismissal of garden activists as communists. Giuliani considered the upkeep of community gardens as outside of the bounds of his office, and therefore, a nuance to his exchange-based political agenda. When a reporter asked the Mayor why he wanted to auction the gardens, he responded, “this is a free-market economy; welcome to an era after communism.” By framing the conflict as a tension between communism

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and capitalism, Giuliani used language that neutralized the laws of the market and justified the privatization of the urban landscape through the sale of publicly owned community gardens.

In response, garden advocates did not deny the housing shortage; rather, they insisted that the city needs both gardens and housing, presenting housing and gardens as complementary elements of a healthy city. One activist said, “Community gardens are important to the vitality of life, and community gardens and housing co-exist.”

Here, activist both appeal narrative-based forms of knowledge that stress the immaterial importance of gardens in neighborhoods. Similarly, in testimony before the city council’s cultural affairs committee in the weeks before the scheduled auction, a garden advocate from the municipal art society berated the city for taking a narrow view of New York’s community gardens, stating, “This auction clearly shows that the city has failed to recognize the significant contributions that the gardens make to scores of neighborhoods and the city as a whole.”

Both activists raise possible concerns that the city is actively choosing not to take seriously the concerns of local residents who are come from predominantly marginalized social identities and face a credibility deficit.

Acknowledging the impact of dominant knowers in cross-community spaces of knowledge production, like in fields of planning and development, is central to understanding how Grasswick’s ideas of dependence and socialization occur in practice. The ways in which our groups perceive ourselves are not always accurately portrayed by

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44 Ibid, 205.
dominant narratives. As our urban landscapes become more diverse, dominant knowers must become aware of their limited epistemic skill sets that may leave them ignorant of their epistemically harmful. If implementers do not practice asset-based pedagogies, think of all of the rich stories we miss out on when we consider all group experiences as interchangeable. Pluralistic communities are nuanced and that is something that ought to be celebrated. In the next section, I offer firm and community-based examples of socially and culturally competent planning procedures that mitigate possible issues of credibility excess and credibility deficit in their models.

Asset-based Pedagogies in Participatory Planning

**Asset-based Pedagogies**

In 2009, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) updated their Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct to include planners’ overall responsibility to “social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration.”

The need for planning and design procedures and practices to become more diverse and inclusive is not simply a moral imperative, but one of organizational effectiveness. Recognizing one’s own ignorance about the nuance of social identity is not an easy feat; unlearning can take more critical reflection than learning. The “politics of recognition” and “negotiation of difference” are often uncomfortable conversation topics.

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for implementers who are unaware of their own epistemic values or aim to maintain the status quo.\textsuperscript{46} As our neighborhoods, schools, medical facilities become more diverse, professionals must re-imagine procedures in favor of social inclusion and intercultural collaboration.

Procedures for culturally competent care are often tied to asset-based pedagogies, a framework that helps implementers reflect on their own biases and in turn, mitigate testimonial injustice issues like credibility deficit and credibility excess. Asset-based pedagogies focus on the strengths that diversity brings to a given scenario.\textsuperscript{47} In this model, dominant-knowers identify ability biases and mismatched interactions that are related to how implementers engage with different social identities.\textsuperscript{48} By identifying how a dominant knower makes judgments using their own abilities as a baseline, one can identify their ability biases. The model for intercultural collaboration is a direct response to deficit-based and monolithic-based models in past community engagement.

Standards of asset-based pedagogies are growing in fields like education where teachers must work with students of varying social identities and needs. For example, asset-based education standards outlined by California’s Department of Education acknowledged that the “diversity that students bring to the classroom, including culture, language, disability, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and sexuality are

characteristics that add value and strength to classrooms and communities. In short, student differences are considered assets and not deficits. Asset-based pedagogies recognize that the students, or in our case residents, do not exist in a vacuum. Planning and development organizations like the Kounkuey Design Initiative, Unity Council, and Harlem Children's Zone integrate asset-based pedagogies into their procedures and practices, in order to expand their organizational cultural competency when working with marginalized communities.

**Firm-based Procedures**

The Los Angeles based Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) is an urban design and planning non-profit firm known for its deep commitment to culturally sustainable practices. KDI is known globally for their robust, community-led design process that result in beautiful, functional physical landscapes. Under KDI’s vision, a park is more than just a collection of swings and slides, it’s a social hub for cultural learning and preservation. KDI describes their integrated “Productive Public Space” as a model in which “physical amenities and green infrastructure are activated by cultural and income-generating programs, meeting a range of residents’ priorities while creating a self-sustaining community space.”

KDI recognizes that participation is essential to solving issues like poverty and inequity in neighborhoods. Building authentic relationships is key to KDI’s

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success. The firm only works with select neighborhoods across Los Angeles, the San
Gabriel Valley, and settlements outside of the United States. By narrowing their client
list, the firm’s work is rooted in communities rather than projects.

The direction of projects is guided by KDI’s engagement with residents. In KDI’s
mission statement, they note that “residents not only deserve a say in decisions that affect
them but also have the most sophisticated understanding of what they need and why.”

The firm realize this mission by:

1. Adopts a more flexible definition of a designer
2. Opens their planning processes and inviting contributions from people with
   relevant but non-traditional skills
3. Creates diverse opportunities for community members to participate in the design
   process
4. Offers community-specific solutions that are relevant to a location’s particular
   context and set of issues
5. Uses micro-interventions (like parks and bus stops) to nurture the missing links
   between institutions and communities

Every KDI project is led by residents and their vision for the community. The firm
collaborates with community stakeholders throughout the project to build on local
knowledge and connect it to technical and political resources. Local residents are hired
and trained as consultants during the project process to provide creative direction and
maintain the project post-construction. This community-driven process “enables residents
to transform their neighborhoods and grow their long-term capacity to make the changes

51 Ibid.
they prioritize.” KDI presents a framework for how outside organizations can begin to build culturally competent relationships with residents and in turn, expand their professional understanding of a community’s needs.

Community-Based Procedures

Unlike firms like KDI, community development corporations (CDCs) are established and maintained within communities by community members. In the past decade, a number of CDCs have become interested in building community capacity through the practice of re-developing their neighborhoods. The Fruitvale Transit Village and Harlem’s Children’s Zone projects are two examples of CDC-driven developments that consider credibility excess and credibility deficit in their engagement with local residents.

In the 1990s, East Oakland’s Unity Council became the Bay Area Rapid Transit’s (BART) collaborator on the Fruitvale Transit Village. At the time, Fruitvale had the highest crime rate in Oakland. The predominantly Latino neighborhood also suffered from low graduation rates, household income, and property values. Eager to address the social and economic challenges of its neighborhood, the Unity Council initiated improvements of urban spaces through real estate acquisition and small-scale development projects. Much of the Council’s staff were involved in local organizations.

54 Ibid.
and considered trusted leaders within the Fruitvale community.\textsuperscript{55} At its core, the Unity Council, established in 1964 as a byproduct of the Civil Rights Movement, is committed to promoting the cultural, social, political, and economic elements of Fruitvale.

Though the Unity Council held legitimacy in Fruitvale, the nonprofit did not hold the financial capital to develop large-scale projects on its own. In 1991, BART set out to build a multi-story parking lot on its vacant land adjacent to the station, however.\textsuperscript{56} Recognizing the fact that the project did not align with the needs of the community, the Unity Council, in collaboration with Fruitvale residents, organized protests against the BART parking lot development.\textsuperscript{57} Hearing protestors calls for a more community-minded project, BART enlisted the Unity Council to facilitate the development of what would become BART’s first mixed-use Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). BART’s model transit village was based “around nodes of the region’s public transportation system in an attempt to directly link low-income communities to opportunities in the region.”\textsuperscript{58} The Unity Council’s goals for the development were to:

1. Create 500+ jobs for local residents
2. Incorporate social providers like a nonprofit health clinic, bilingual library, senior center, career development office, and childcare facilities as “anchor facilities” in the village
3. Develop consistent programming that included farmers’ markets, family

\textsuperscript{55} Barreto, 27.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 335
services, child literacy education, businesses development, and immigration services

The $100 million mixed-use project took 14 years to complete but continues to have a profound impact on Fruitvale’s Latino-dominated community twenty years later. The Fruitvale Transit Village’s Project Manager touted the development as a “social services project wrapped within a real estate project.” The project met its three goals in the first two years, and Fruitvale continues to surpass similar Oakland neighborhoods on GED education attainment, median household income, and poverty values; Fruitvale’s crime rates have also significantly declined. The Fruitvale Transit Village, the first of BART’s now expansive transit village projects, is a model for culturally competent development that centers community in economic and spatial planning.

Planning professionals and city officials have attributed the tremendous success of Fruitvale’s Transit Village to the Unity Council. The Council created meaningful avenues for citizen participation throughout the planning process. To aid the community effort, the Council secured “federal and state grants totaling $655,000 for workshops designed solely to gauge community concerns about BART’s proposed development.” The council was adamant that the community’s vision of the physical and economic plans of the development were the guiding force of the project. The immense civic involvement in the project’s development and maintenance can also help explain Fruitvale’s low

59 Kirkpatrick, 337.
60 Ibid., 336
61 Barreto, 22.
63 Kirkpartick, 341.
residential displacement, despite the neighborhood’s improvements.\textsuperscript{64} The expansive array of social services and programming put on by the Council and “anchored” nonprofits continue to meet the social and economic needs of the community.\textsuperscript{65}

By staying attuned to Fruitvale’s communal needs and incorporating social outcomes as metrics for the project’s success, the neighborhood continues to sustain itself. The project also shifted BART’s goals for its other Transit Oriented Development project in the Bay Area. The Council created a precedent for community collaboration across TOD projects.\textsuperscript{66} BART now relies on robust community participation in the process of selecting developers and designing outcomes.\textsuperscript{67}

Unlike the Unity Council, which focuses primarily on spatial planning, the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) is a multi-effort project. HCZ’s main objective is to eliminate generational poverty in Central Harlem. Similar to the Unity Council, the HCZ is founded on the objectives of the Civil Rights Movement.\textsuperscript{68} The nonprofit started in 1970 but began to formalize itself in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{69} The HCZ main staff are Central Harlem residents with backgrounds in community organizing, education, healthcare, and economic development.\textsuperscript{70} The diversity of HCZ’s leadership informs its multi-pronged approach to spatial planning and economic development. The CDC’s five core principles are:

1. Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively and at scale to create a

\textsuperscript{64} Kirkpatrick, 339. 
\textsuperscript{65} Barreto, 25. 
\textsuperscript{66} Cervero,123. 
\textsuperscript{67} Cervero,123. 
\textsuperscript{68} Barreto, 22. 
\textsuperscript{69} “About HCZ - Helping Kids Succeed.” Harlem Children's Zone, 4 Mar. 2020, hcz.org/about-us/. 
\textsuperscript{70} Barreto, 22.
tipping point and definitively shift the culture of the community

2. Create a pipeline of coordinated, best-practice programs to give our children and families seamless support from birth through college and maximize their outcomes

3. Build community among residents, institutions, and stakeholders in order to create a healthy, positive environment where our children can thrive

4. Evaluate program outcomes and create a feedback loop to provide managers with real-time data and strengthen services

5. Cultivate an organizational culture of success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork

In 1997, HCZ started its pilot program guided by these five principles on 24 street blocks of Central Harlem. The program includes small-scale development projects like introducing local health clinics, pre-schools, and community centers across the 24 blocks. Since 1997, HCZ has led planning efforts across hundreds of blocks of Central Harlem. All of their development projects are centered on increasing healthy habits, educational attainment, and community through comprehensive programming of new or renovated spaces. According to the HCZ, they believe their “comprehensive, place-based approach to educating children and rebuilding an entire community will help transform neighborhoods struggling with issues like poverty, poor health, failing schools, and high crime rates.”71 This far, HCZ has held true to its commitment to build community capacity in its neighborhood through the CDC’s programming.

HCZ’s community development model served as the inspiration for Obama’s

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Promise Neighborhoods initiative through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that aimed to recreate HCZ’s model in other urban and rural neighborhoods. When the initiative was active, it provided over $550 million in financial capital to CDCs and local municipalities across the nation.72

Both the Fruitvale Transit Village and the Harlem Children’s Zone have centered social outcomes in the economic improvements of their neighborhoods. Under Sandel’s framework, CDCs must be “nonprofit corporations’ destined to give low-income communities a voice in shaping their economic destinies.”73 These projects continue to do exactly that by creating channels for citizen participation and ownership over the destinies of their communities. In turn, both neighborhoods have grown their capacity for self-government and designed urban spaces that meet their needs. Instead of relying on market forces to better their neighborhoods, Fruitvale and Central Harlem have created economic, social, and political arrangements that are sustained by community efforts and appreciate the multiple elements that make their neighborhoods their own.

Let’s narrow in on internal and external organizational aspects key to the success of both CDCs and demonstrate the ways in which many CDCs fail to include such elements in their planning efforts. Both the Unity Council and Harlem's Children’s Zone have made concerted efforts to develop citizen capacity by continued resident participation and action in their projects. To adhere to this lofty goal is a challenge. Both

73 Sandel, 377.
CDCs are all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck types of organizations whose model can seem difficult to replicate. It is the organizational aspects of these CDCs that make them so successful at designing high-quality urban spaces.

For one, both of these CDCs’ institutional structures clearly accommodate processes for inclusive broad participation. Different levels of community engagement are facilitated in both CDCs. Engagement can consist of participating on a community board, attending a public hearing, participating in a participatory development event (like mood boarding or design brainstorming), and other forms that meet the varying needs of community members. This model of citizen engagement is advocated for by Jacob Torfring, a Danish planning theorist. He writes,

The citizens’ choice of level of participation depends on their capacities and sense of political obligation, their assessment of where the binding political decisions are made, and their perception of the costs and benefits of engaging themselves in the available arenas of participation.

By embracing different levels of citizen participation, both CDCs enjoy more expansive participation that helps them gain a better grasp of community concerns. Other CDCs do not offer comprehensive processes for civic engagement; nor, do they prioritize community member involvement in decision making. For instance, a recent report on CDC representation found that most CDC boards are occupied by non-resident stakeholders.

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74 Healey, 395.
75 Ibid.
Though both CDCs rely on private and public investment, they are clear with stakeholders about the priorities of their neighborhoods. For example, to be on the Unity Council’s board, a stakeholder must be “open” about their interests, which allows for a meaningful discussion about how individual motives contribute to the collective goals of the project. A major concern for CDCs is the viability of meaningful deliberative collaboration, especially when disagreement is inevitable— with so many varying interests it is nearly impossible to create a project that will satisfy everyone. For some CDC stakeholders, it is simpler to foster cooperation rather than collaboration with project residents.

To this sentiment, Torfring argues that an “agnostic version of deliberative democracy” best meets the challenge of participatory democracy in pluralistic environments. According to Torfring, an “Agonistic democracy is a democracy that appreciates difference, but where the political opponents identify with democratic rules and norms that transform their perception of each other from enemies to adversaries”. By framing deliberation as a conversation among adversaries, CDCs can manage to facilitate discussions in which participants “engage, problematize, and passionately contest” the opinions of others, but “whose right to voice and fight for their opinions we respect as a necessary condition for a plural democracy.”

Furthermore, both CDCs focus on use value rather than exchange value when evaluating the progress of their projects. Use value organizes economic arrangements

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77 Healey, 397.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
based on their benefit for residents, while exchange value focuses on how economic investments will benefit outside investors or neighborhood visitors.\(^81\) For example, in the Fruitvale development, the Unity Council has “turned away more than 120 national chains (including Starbucks, twice) and “big box” stores in favor of locally owned businesses and has no intention of relocating the social service “foundations” of the project (nonprofits).”\(^82\) Of course, exchange value is a necessary component of any prosperous development, but many CDCs completely prioritize use value over exchange value.

Many times, exchange value is prioritized when there is unequal representation among residents and other outside stakeholders. For instance, in a nearby West Oakland TOD transit village, market maximizing economic arrangements were prioritized because of the weak community involvement. If CDCs are committed to prioritizing social sustainability and building community capacity, then it is essential that they bridge use and exchange values. Without this effort, their projects will fail to meet both their social and economic goals. The Unity Council and the Harlem Children’s Zone clearly value the input of their community members and continue to build trust in their communities with their adherence to their social values, project goals, and stakeholder expectations.

Theoretically, the relationship between asset-based pedagogies and cultural sustainability in the CDC model seems clear. However, in practice, the internal organization of CDCs and their external contexts matter greatly in their ability to meet the robust social outcomes. Attention to varying levels of citizen representation and the

\(^81\) Kirkpatrick, 351.
\(^82\) Barreto, 28.
prioritization of use value economic arrangements will lead CDCs to build urban spaces that capture the complexity of their neighborhoods.

Civic engagement in spatial planning can infuse asset-based pedagogies into the built environment. Yes, it is challenging. But, ultimately, community-directed planning projects will activate public life and catalyze communal understandings of the neighborhood. There is great power when a resident feels ownership and pride over the improvements of their neighborhoods. If urban spaces do hint at power dynamics as Ward suggests, then why shouldn’t residents feel empowered to imagine physical, social, and economic landscapes that truly encapsulate elements that make their neighborhoods, their neighborhoods.

Places are about people. Whenever designers, planners, or city officials improve the human experience, they improve people’s spatial experience in their neighborhoods and at a broader scale, their cities. Yet, whenever implementers ignore, generalize, or delegitimize resident input, they further epistemic and spatial injustices in a given community. The inherent power of neighborhoods is that they are shared, which can help everyone (including implementers) realize greater material and immaterial benefits.
Conclusion Reflecting on a Just City

“The Feminist City is an aspirational project, one without a “master” plan that in fact resists the lure of mastery. The feminist city is an ongoing experiment in living differently, living better, and living more justly in an urban world.”

- Leslie Kern, Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-made World

Our physical landscapes reflect our values. Unjust cities limit our imaginations to the values of a few, while just cities invite us to expand our imaginations of what our neighborhoods can look like. This thesis explores how urban planning and design can perpetuate injustice or strategically facilitate justice. Implementers (e.g., urban planners, designers, architects, and city officials) must use an interdisciplinary lens focused on how community context and normative values shape planning methodologies and the built environment. By beginning to recognize and avoid the harm in “one-size-fits-all” approaches, implementers can begin to introduce holistic, place-based planning methodologies and interventions across scales, stakeholders, and systems.

Project Review

The main objective of this thesis was to highlight the benefits of feminist epistemologies in exposing current unjust structures hindering spatial justice in the urban planning process. Additionally, I explored what a participatory planning process that embraces feminist epistemologies would look like—a practice that prioritizes epistemically privileged residents in an asset-based, culturally competent procedure. In short, a feminist re-imagining of participatory planning is one where feminist
epistemology serves as a tool for evaluating unjust spatial arrangements and aids implementers in re-constructing their relationships with marginalized residents. Also foundational to the feminist epistemological approach is the prioritization of lived experiences to understand a dynamic community and bring dimension to the built environment that holds it. Feminist epistemologies invite implementers to evaluate how certain methodologies best address a community’s challenges and why their intervention facilitates social gains. This thesis reaches these conclusions by answering the following questions:

1. How do urban planners’ and designers’ biases and values shape American neighborhoods’ physical and social landscapes?

2. Why traditional government or private planning approaches historically chose not to encode community-making functions into their frameworks for community input?

3. Does a substantively inclusive and equitable urban planning project require a rigorous context-based understanding of people?

These questions drew the contours for this project and highlight the main three discussions of this thesis. In the first chapter, “The Social Construction of Public Spaces,” I conclude that traditional epistemologies prioritize the values of white, straight men whose biases shape the physical and social landscape in the United States. I come to this conclusion by exploring how feminist epistemological concepts of social construction underpin concepts of spatial theory. The limits of our spatial imaginations challenge our ability to re-configure our urban landscape and give them new meaning. Yet, if we build
our capability to spatially notice, we can begin to identify who our neighborhoods are designed to serve.

The second chapter, “Imagining the Neighborhood: a Community Praxis,” investigates marginalized users who are epistemically privileged individuals when it comes to conceptualizing a community’s needs and collective vision. I explained why bonded capital within marginalized communities should be valued as an intrinsic good worthy of preservation. By prioritizing the knowledge of epistemically privileged users, implementers can rectify material and immaterial harms of spatial injustice.

I explain in the third and final chapter, “Asset-based Pedagogies for People-based Procedures,” the common epistemic pitfalls implementers can perpetuate if they do not practice asset-based pedagogies ingrained in culturally competent planning practices. Testimonial injustices like credibility deficit and credibility excess hinder implementer’s capability to remedy harms associated with spatial injustice, and in some instances, lead them to exacerbate spatial and epistemic injustices. I present urban planning and design non-profits like the Kounkuey Design Initiative, and community development corporations like the Unity Council and the Harlem Children’s Zone, as exemplar participatory practices and procedures that weave together feminist epistemology, asset-based pedagogy, and community capacity building. Together, these chapters answer the three questions I pose at the beginning of the project and present a case for the role of feminist epistemologies in creating more inclusive and just planning practices and procedures.
Project Repercussions

Along with these conclusions, the analyses contained within this thesis have repercussions on at least three levels. Most importantly, they demonstrate the shortcomings of traditional planning and epistemological frameworks, rejecting the idea that monolithic, objective planning procedures are capable of remedying spatial injustices. This, alone, is a notable conclusion. However, there are three other, broader possible implications that flow from the arguments in this thesis, and one merits further consideration.

First, the argument in favor of feminist epistemological methodologies in urban planning can be tied to broader conversations of democratic citizenship. The constraints of my thesis as primarily a work of feminist epistemology limited my ability to make assertions situated in political and ethical theory. Yet, my discussions in this thesis are likely applicable to arguments about the connections between social capital, social identity, and spatial location. This logic can most easily be transferred to arguments in favor of the preservation of public spaces in neighborhoods with higher bonded capital, the usage of community land trusts to mitigate the impacts of gentrification, and the importance of participatory planning as a tool for growing democratic habits.

These topics are particularly relevant today given pressure from the Biden administration and federal offices like the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) for local and state governments to use planning and development to remedy historical racial inequities. As government institutions begin to standardize inclusive planning procedures and practices,
implementers will be tasked with re-conceptualizing their missions and procedures, as a matter of organizational effectiveness and survival. This thesis provides a possible handbook for reflecting on how space and knowledge define our roles as users and implementers.

Second, throughout this project I present public spaces as a third space central to social capital and cultural preservation. All of the case studies I explore in this project are examples of public spaces in the United States. Public spaces like parks, libraries, sidewalks, and subway stations are places where culture is preserved and shared. It is important that residents are given an opportunity to maintain these public spaces that are foundational to their dignity and self-respect. For people living in all types of bodies (e.g., female bodies, colored bodies, physically-disabled bodies), home is not simply a place, it is a feeling. It is the role of implementers to recognize the value of public space as a foothold into community life and commit to including all bodies in the designing of physical landscapes.

Lastly, the arguments revealed over the course of this thesis suggest a number of themes regarding how spatial injustice interacts with power distributions in the planning process. I expand spatial injustice to include immaterial and material harms. Simply remedying materials harms endured by marginalized neighborhoods is insufficient in redistributing the immaterial goods of society like respect, trust, and recognition. Implementers must learn to create planning processes that balance institutional constraints and community needs. Listening to residents share about their pride in their neighborhoods, describe challenges that hinder improvement, and imagine possibilities is required time and effort that should not squandered. Planning and urban design
professionals must learn how to negotiate these essential elements, so that they complement each other rather than compete against one another. Additionally, public officials must recognize the role of institutions in creating just planning procedures and outlining what it means to be a responsible planner in neighborhoods that have faced spatial discrimination.

Our cities are alive. Their parks, sidewalks, roads, train tracks, and streetlights listen to requests, respond to changes, and evolve. We must tend to their health and nurture their souls. In planners, designers, and city officials, we entrust the responsibility to care for the soul of the city, as well as its physical being. As implementers create physical landscapes, they must also promote public life through the intentional design of the built-environment. As users, we must question how urban planning can be a means to promote just outcomes by building the capacity of everyday people. Urban planning interventions are not spared from needed contextualization and justification. We must expect implementers to harness the strengths of their fields to address challenges of community fragmentation and resource misdistribution. Urban planning and design can serve as a mechanism for expanding community access and repairing systemic spatial inequities in the public realm.

**Final Words**

I began this thesis stating that this work was primarily an exercise in discovery and reflection. As I looked at the spatial injustice around me, I felt inadequate in articulating why issues like gentrification are ethically and epistemically reprehensible. I, too, hoped to turn inward and reflect on my own limited perspective, while
simultaneously looking outward for conversations between feminist epistemology and spatial injustice in the urban landscapes around me. In working on this thesis, I now realized that the built environment is not value neutral, but rather an artifact of political power and social strife. As I continue to learn about the potential of built environment to contribute to equity, justice, and inclusivity, I will continue to explore the relationship between social and physical infrastructures.

I hope the discussions written in this text invite you take in the physical landscapes around you, notice limitations, and re-imagine capabilities. We must expand our limited imagination of what our neighborhoods can look like and how public life can serve diverse purposes in different contexts. Only when we immerse ourselves into the everyday lives of communities with humility, can we identify the unique attributes of every neighborhood. Once we, as individuals in a collective society, begin to recognize how exclusionary values manifest themselves into our epistemological frameworks, can we start to design a more just, inclusive, and innovative future.
This thesis is primarily a work of feminist epistemologies. As such, this project does not attempt to suggest any policy prescriptions nor explore in-depth case studies of urban planning. They require far more space and time to explore fully and, as such, my discussion in this project does not aim to issue any certain conclusions in these areas. However, it does provide a robust account for how urban planning and feminist epistemological frameworks in conversation to expose the potential consequences of undervaluing a community’s historical context, knowledge, and trust when designing physical landscapes.
Takeaways: Why is Feminist Epistemology Relevant to Designing the Built Environment?

The Built Environment

The built environment is socially constructed, and therefore, can be changed.

Users

Marginalized users are epistemically privileged and provide valuable insights into the needs of their neighborhoods.

Implementers

Culturally competent and asset-based procedures and practices are essential for implementers to mitigate issues of testimonial injustices like credibility excess and credibility deficit.
References


References


Suggested Reading


