

Research Statement

My primary research program focuses on how we know ourselves, how others know us, and why these knowledges matter. My work emerges out of my dissertation, where I examine two peculiar epistemic phenomena. The first phenomenon often goes by the name of *first-person authority*. To be first-person authoritative is to be owed, or to receive, a special sort of deference from others when attributing mental states to yourself. The second phenomenon is that each of us seems to have *privileged self-knowledge* of our own mental states. As privileged self-knowers, we tend to know our own mental states in a distinctively first-personal way, without (what seems like) much or any epistemic effort. I offer explanations of first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge, and I offer an account of why they necessarily come together in important social-cognitive contexts. Specifically, I argue that these phenomena jointly contribute to the possibility of interpersonal discursive agency, which is agency that requires treating others as, and being aware of oneself as, a possible or actual interlocutor.

In one paper, soon to be under review, I develop and defend my account of the social-cognitive functions of first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge. I begin with privileged self-knowledge and argue that possessing such knowledge is a necessary prerequisite for interpersonal discursive interactions because these interactions minimally require us to have a grasp of our epistemic position relative to our epistemic peers. The reason such knowledge must be privileged is that we are only disposed to interpersonally defend those attitudes of ours that we are *committed* to, and these are not attitudes that we can merely *discover*, in a third-personal way, about ourselves. I then turn to first-person authority and argue that we must defer to what other agents say about *their* minds if we are to understand them as committed to what *they* say, such that entering into discursive contact with them can be rational.

In additional papers I offer further contributions to the literatures on first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge. In one paper, currently under review, I respond to a recent skeptical argument against the existence of first-person authority (Barz 2018). In a second paper, also under review, I argue that a recent account of the source of our privileged self-knowledge is untenable because it attempts to explain the acquisition of privileged self-knowledge via social-cognitive capacities that already require it (Coliva 2009, 2012, 2016). In a third paper, nearing completion, I argue that the agent's need to "take" her premises to support her conclusions when engaging in agent-level reasoning (Boghossian 2014) does not require her to view her premises as the contents of her own mental states. Nevertheless, I argue that the situation is different when we examine cases of agent-level reasoning in social contexts.

In a fourth paper, currently in development, I bring my work to bear on recent work examining the impact of testimonial injustice on first-person authority. A recent skeptical suggestion is that testimonial injustice is ubiquitous even as regards what people say about their current mental states (Borgoni 2018). I argue that these cases could not be ubiquitous and that they, at most, place limits on the reach of certain *forms* of first-person authority. Finally, in a fourth paper, currently in development, I defend a mereological account of the ontological relationship between the first-order propositional attitudes and self-beliefs of rational agents.

I intend to remain deeply invested in ongoing conversations about first-person authority and privileged self-knowledge. Beyond my primary research program, however, I am also deepening my interest in digital epistemology. Two questions I am researching are these. First, are some forms of testimonial injustice intrinsic to online discourse? Second, can our capacities to *express* our mental states to others—which we often do through a range of perceptible behaviours—be compromised by the expressive limitations of digital communication mediums?