

Research Statement

I write extensively about self-knowledge, self-expression, and the implications of these states and capacities for our epistemic relationships to ourselves and others. For instance, I often write about *first-person authority*. This is a social-epistemic phenomenon concerning your hearer's entitlement to defer to you when you ascribe mental states to yourself. First-person authority has long puzzled epistemologists: self-ascriptions of mental states concern psychological contingencies that are, in this particular respect, no different than ascriptions of mental states to *other* people, and yet we are generally prepared to regard only *self*-ascriptions as authoritative.

Another phenomenon of abiding interest in my work is the *privileged and peculiar* self-knowledge that agents often seem to possess. Roughly, in having privileged self-knowledge, one knows one's own mental states better than anyone else can know them and, in having peculiar self-knowledge, one knows one's mental states in a way that no one else can know them. These phenomena are puzzling because the basis for such self-knowledge is not transparent to us from the first-person point of view: we often seem to know *immediately* or *effortlessly* what we think, feel, or desire. Thus, self-knowledge seems different from our knowledge of others' minds.

On these topics, my existing publications make the following contributions:

1. Explaining at a fine-grained level [what exactly first-person authority amounts to](#), thus arriving at a [pluralist conception of the phenomenon](#)
2. Extending a “neo-expressivist” explanation of first-person authority—one that, perhaps surprisingly, does not depend on any theory of self-knowledge—to [self-ascriptions of one's imaginings](#)
3. Accounting for some of the social-cognitive roles of privileged and peculiar access, such as [making us better interpreters of others' speech](#), and enabling us to more effectively reason with other people.
4. Arguing that [privileged and peculiar self-knowledge is not particularly important for our non-social reasoning capacities](#).
5. Considering the relationship between our inferential capacities and [certain “transparency-theoretic” accounts of self-knowledge](#)
6. Arguing that we can obtain one form of privileged and peculiar self-knowledge by [committing to our mental states through self-ascribing them](#)
7. Arguing that self-knowledge and knowledge of others' minds may differ in several important epistemic respects, [even if both are acquired inferentially](#)

Many of my ongoing projects also manifest my desire to better understand the nature, sources, and value of self-knowledge and self-expression.

In one paper (in progress) I evaluate two expressivist explanations of first-person authority. All expressivists agree that speakers' mental state self-ascriptions are first-person authoritative because of what such ascriptions are taken to express. However, expressivists disagree about the relevant expressed feature. “Neo-expressivists” argue that the relevant expressed feature is the very mental state self-ascribed, whereas “agency-based expressivists” argue that the relevant expressed feature is the speaker's *cognitive agency* with respect to (at least some of) her self-ascribed mental states. I defend neo-expressivism against objections from the agency-based expressivists. I then argue against agency-based expressivism directly.

In another paper (in progress), I consider the relationship between neo-expressivism and the extended mind hypothesis. This is an interesting relationship to consider in light of the neo-

expressivist's frequent remark that *only you* can express your own mental states—an important point, if true, insofar as it helps to explain first-person authority. However, I argue that the extended mind hypothesis, if true, undermines this claim. I do not conclude that this undermines neo-expressivism on the whole, though I do conclude that this undermines one putative advantage that neo-expressivism has over other accounts of first-person authority.

Most recently, I have begun to pursue the topic of self-deception in deeper detail than what has been offered by my prior work. I am now writing a paper that discusses a novel way in which self-deception can undermine self-knowledge, not by rendering one's second-order beliefs about one's first-order mental states false, but by generating *third-order* beliefs about one's self-knowledge that destabilize one's self-conception. After arguing that this “overriding threat” of self-deception is, in fact, an issue for many agents, I discuss two types of solution: one preventative, and one reparative.

Finally, within my primary research program, a larger work in progress is in its earlier stages. This is a monograph titled *The Value of Knowing Your Own Attitudes*. The monograph will contain six chapters: one chapter introducing common intuitions about the privileged and peculiar nature of much attitudinal self-knowledge, another chapter describing skeptical responses to these intuitions, three chapters comprising a critical survey of extant accounts of the value of such self-knowledge, and one chapter expanding upon my existing accounts of its social-cognitive value. A précis of this monograph (~2000 words) is available upon request.

Here are some related topics that I am beginning to work on:

- 1) Whether privileged and peculiar self-knowledge has both *standing* and *occurrent* cases
- 2) How first-person authority and privileged, peculiar self-knowledge are related, given that I do not relate them (in either direction) as explanans to explanandum
- 3) A potential role for memory in the acquisition of self-knowledge
- 4) Whether gaslighting provides a distinctive obstacle to self-knowledge (perhaps by constituting an epistemologically interesting route to self-deception)

Moving beyond my primary research program, I have been deepening my interests in social and digital epistemology. I have recently published on some [underdiscussed epistemic problems caused by the spread \(or believed spread\) of deceptive bot-accounts on social media](#).

I am also writing about epistemic manipulation, specifically with a view to a type of manipulation that I call *obfuscation*. Epistemic obfuscators try to convince their victims that certain ideas are (a) too complicated for the victim to grasp, but (b) not too complicated for the manipulator to grasp, thus creating illicit epistemic dependency relations between the manipulator and victim. Sometimes, these illicit dependency relations can be generated even when the epistemic manipulator has little to no genuine expertise on a topic, and even if the content of the epistemic manipulator's obfuscations is mere pseudo-profundity.

- 1) The importance of thinking for yourself even when you are a novice in a domain of inquiry (focusing on its importance for those around you, rather than yourself)
- 2) Whether deepfake technologies can provide significant epistemic benefits to our epistemic communities (contra the prevailing narrative, according to which deepfakes hearken an impending epistemic disaster)

For further information about my research, please contact me at ben.i.winokur@gmail.com.