

DEFAULT ACCEPTANCE AND SOCIAL SCRIPTS

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Regarding the question of how social contexts influence our acceptance of testimonial claims, there are two competing perspectives. The first, put forth by the fundamentalists, argues that we are inclined, initially, to believe any claim regardless of the context. The second, put forth by the global reductionists, also rejects the influence of context, but in favor of the view that the acceptance of a claim requires justification by evidence from outside of the context. Both approaches fail to recognize that contexts shape our predisposition to accept testimonial claims. In this paper, I argue that certain contexts induce the acceptance of testimony because they are engineered to facilitate cultural practices that depend upon reliable exchanges of information. Within such contexts, it is common for social scripts to emerge – that is, generic conversations consisting of predictable sequences of utterances – which reflect shared expectations among interlocutors about the content, relevance, and reliability of the testimony involved. . I draw upon research in linguistics, psychology, and philosophy to support my view that the infrastructural layouts, the social roles, and the cooperative goals embedded into the design of particular contexts can predispose people to accept certain types of testimonial claims. In doing so, I illustrate that context plays a central role in the processing of testimonial belief.

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