*Silencing, Epistemic Injustice, and Epistemic Paternalism*

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Abstract: Members of oppressed groups are often silenced. One form of silencing is what Kristie Dotson calls “testimonial smothering”. Testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker limits her testimony in virtue of the reasonable risk of it being misunderstood or misapplied by the audience. Testimonial smothering is thus a form of epistemic paternalism since the speaker is interfering with the audience’s inquiry for their benefit without first consulting them. In this paper, we explore the connections between epistemic injustice and epistemic paternalism through the phenomenon of silencing. We argue that when you silence your testimony as a result of epistemic injustice it is an act of epistemic paternalism and that it is epistemically permissible. In fact, self-silencing resulting from epistemic injustice is a particularly clear example of permissible epistemic paternalism.

*Introduction*

Members of oppressed groups are often silenced. One form of silencing is what Kristie Dotson calls “testimonial smothering”. Testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker limits her testimony in virtue of the reasonable risk of it being misunderstood or misapplied by the audience. Testimonial smothering is thus a form of epistemic paternalism since the speaker is interfering with the audience’s inquiry for their benefit without first consulting them. In this paper, we explore the connections between epistemic injustice and epistemic paternalism through the phenomenon of silencing. We argue that when you silence your testimony as a result of epistemic injustice it is a form of epistemic paternalism and that it is epistemically permissible. The paper will explain epistemic paternalism and the criteria for permissible paternalism, explain the phenomenon of epistemic injustice and testimonial smothering, and proceed to demonstrate how silence due to testimonial smothering is a permissible form of epistemic paternalism. In doing so, we bring together work in two emerging literatures, the literature on epistemic paternalism and the literature on epistemic injustice in a way that is fruitful for debates in each area.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Epistemic Paternalism*

Our epistemological endeavors are inherently social. We rely on the inquiry and testimony of others for a great deal of what we believe. The beliefs of others place checks and balances on our own beliefs.[[2]](#footnote-2) Alvin Goldman, a leading figure in social epistemology, maintains that these social features of our epistemological projects make epistemic paternalism necessary, and at least sometimes desirable. (127) While broader paternalistic practices have been scrutinized for some time, it is only fairly recently that *epistemic* paternalism has been analyzed. Goldman coined ‘epistemic paternalism’ to capture the phenomenon that occurs whenever a communication controller interposes their own judgment (in place of the audience’s) in order to improve the epistemic states of the audience. (119) Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij (2013) further develops epistemic paternalism and advances three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a practice to be epistemically paternalistic: i) the interference condition, ii) the non-consultation condition, and iii) the improvement condition. According to these criteria, S acts in an epistemically paternalistic way toward H just in case:

1. *The interference condition*: S affects H’s inquiry regarding some matter,
2. *The non-consultation condition*: S interferes with H’s inquiry without consulting H on the matter or receiving H’s consent, and
3. *The improvement condition*: S interferes, at least in part, so as to make H epistemically better off. (39)

The interference condition can be satisfied in a number of distinct ways. First, information can be paternalistically *given* to someone. An example of such interference in inquiry is some health education measures. In such cases, the subject is given a great deal of information, where perhaps there was no interest on the subject’s part to receive that information.[[3]](#footnote-3) Second, information can also be paternalistically *withheld* from a subject. Common examples here are when evidence is withheld from jurors during a trial, or certain information (like young earth creationism) is left out of a school’s curriculum.[[4]](#footnote-4) In both cases, the relevant subject’s inquiry has been affected, with the likely result of the subject having different beliefs than they otherwise would have—having new beliefs they otherwise would not have had, or failing to have beliefs they otherwise would have had.

The non-consultation condition is familiar enough. Paternalistic practices, epistemic or otherwise, do not involve getting prior consent from the subject. Paternalistic practices remove the subject’s own agency from the picture in that they do not first consult the subject for their prior approval regarding the intervention. For instance, in the school curriculum example above, the students were not first consulted regarding what should be in the curriculum, nor was their prior approval sought. The decisions to interfere in their inquiry were made by independent parties—the communication controllers.

Finally, the improvement condition requires that the epistemically paternalistic act be aimed at the epistemic improvement of the subject. Paternalistic practices must aim to make the affected parties better off, and *epistemically* paternalistic practices concern *epistemic* improvements, even if the subject may be affected in other ways as well. What makes a subject epistemically better off will depend upon one’s account of epistemic value. In the literature on epistemic paternalism, epistemic improvements have typically been cashed out in a veritistic way. On the veritistic picture, a subject is made epistemically better off in terms of acquiring true beliefs and/or avoiding false beliefs. For the veritist, all other epistemic goods are merely instrumentally valuable—valuable only in their propensity to bring about true beliefs or avoid false beliefs. However, epistemic paternalism can also accommodate broader accounts of epistemic value.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is necessary that an epistemically paternalistic act aims to make the subject better off epistemically, but epistemic paternalism itself is silent as to what counts as an epistemic good.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Examples of epistemic paternalism can make the satisfaction of these conditions clear. Goldman’s core example of epistemic paternalism comes from the Federal Rules of Evidence—a set of rules set to provide fair, speedy, and just trials, where the truth is ascertained. According to Goldman,

[…] it is apparent that the framers of the rules, and judges themselves, often

wish to protect jurors in their search for truth. If, in the framers’ opinion, jurors

are likely to be misled by a certain category of evidence, they are sometimes prepared to require or allow such evidence to be kept from the jurors. This is an example of what I shall call epistemic paternalism. The general idea is that the indicated rules of evidence are designed to protect jurors from their own “folly,” just as parents might keep dangerous toys or other articles away from children, or

might not expose them to certain facts (Goldman 1991: 118).

So, the Federal Rules of Evidence provide an *epistemic* rationale for excluding various pieces of evidence from doxastic decision makers, in this case, the jurors. (116) Since jurors are likely to misevaluate the evidential import of certain pieces of evidence (e.g. the past criminal record of the defendant, a withdrawn guilty plea, testimonial hearsay, etc.), such evidence is allowed to be withheld from the jury, and it is often *required* to be withheld. Rules to this effect, thus *protect* jurors in their role as inquirers; these rules are in place for the *epistemic* benefit (protection) of the jurors.[[7]](#footnote-7)

It is also worth noting that in this example *truths* are being withheld from the jurors. The Rules of Evidence differ from other epistemically paternalistic legislation like laws against false advertising. Legislation prohibiting false advertising is in place to prevent *falsehoods* from negatively affecting the audience’s beliefs. It is easy enough to see how preventing the spread of falsehoods can have positive epistemic effects. However, in the Federal Rules of Evidence, certain *truths* are withheld from the jurors. Truths about a defendant’s criminal past, and truths regarding a withdrawn guilty plea can all be withheld from the jury for their own epistemic benefit. In these cases, it is these further truths that can reasonably be thought to epistemically harm the subjects (the jurors), by making certain epistemic errors on their part more likely.

Is epistemic paternalism *epistemically* justified? Ahlstrom-Vij gives two jointly sufficient conditions for an epistemically paternalistic act to be justified:

1. *The alignment condition*: The epistemic and non-epistemic reasons S has for so acting are not in conflict (117).
2. *The burden-of-proof condition*: The evidence S has indicates that it is highly likely that the paternalistic act will epistemically benefit all the affected parties (122).

The alignment condition ensures that the epistemic rationale for an epistemically paternalistic practice is not trumping other non-epistemic normative considerations (moral, prudential, etc.) that push in another direction. Two reasons are aligned when they either point to the same end, or one points to an end that the other is silent about. (117) The alignment condition thus avoids any worries about how to weigh reasons of different kinds against one another. When there are no non-epistemic reasons in conflict with the epistemic reasons, the alignment condition is met. So, while there may be justified acts of epistemic paternalism where one does have non-epistemic reasons that are in conflict (though outweighed by the epistemic reasons), the alignment condition would not be met in those cases. Recall that the alignment condition is simply one of two jointly sufficient conditions for an epistemically paternalistic act being justified. Meeting the alignment condition is not necessary for an epistemically paternalistic act to be epistemically permissible.

The burden-of-proof condition requires that the communication controller be reasonable in believing that the improvement condition is met for all affected parties. Rationality is fallible, so a justified act of epistemic paternalism needn’t be successful. However, the burden-of-proof condition requires that from the intervening subject’s perspective, the intervention is highly likely to succeed in bringing about its intended epistemic improvements. Here too, it may be that other epistemically paternalistic acts are justified since they overwhelmingly benefit the affected parties though it is clear that some will not be benefitted. The burden-of-proof condition too is not a necessary condition for a justified act of epistemic paternalism, but simply one of two jointly sufficient conditions.

Applied to the case of the Federal Rules of Evidence, it looks like both jointly sufficient conditions for the permissibility of an epistemically paternalistic act are met. First, withholding certain pieces of evidence is not in conflict with the non-epistemic reasons present. In fact, the epistemic reasons here align with the moral reasons we have to arrange for a fair trial and to have the jury arrive at the correct verdict. Second, it is reasonable to believe that the restrictions placed on jurors will have their intended epistemic benefits. Given what we know about the common cognitive errors that we make, a misevaluation of the excluded evidence is sufficiently likely.[[8]](#footnote-8)

*Epistemic Injustice & Silencing*

Philosophers have become more and more concerned with how one’s social position can affect one’s epistemic position.[[9]](#footnote-9) One issue here is how one’s social position has epistemic effects in testimonial exchanges. The term ‘epistemic injustice’ was introduced by Miranda Fricker to refer to “a kind of injustice in which someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower” (2009, 20).[[10]](#footnote-10) At the core of this idea is the thought that power structures create or preserve a given social order which impedes a speaker’s capacity as an epistemic agent by restricting her access to epistemic exchanges. Fricker argues that the epistemic injustice that results from such a social order is originated and sustained by identity prejudices held by the audience. The kind of identity prejudices that are important for epistemic injustice are “tracker prejudices” about the social group to which the speaker belongs. These prejudices are systematic in that they “track” a speaker of a particular social group across various contexts of social activity (e.g. economic, professional, political, religious, etc.) (27). When tracker prejudices lead to epistemic injustice, the injustice is *systematic* because it is systematically connected to other types of injustice.

Fricker distinguishes two kinds of injustice: *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker is given an unjustified, unfair credibility assessment—for Fricker, that is a c*redibility deficit.*[[11]](#footnote-11) That is, when the speaker is given less credibility than she deserves. Fricker claims that, “the speaker sustains a testimonial injustice if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer.” (28)An example discussed by Fricker is Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where an all-white jury fails to believe the black defendant’s testimony because of the racial prejudices they hold. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when there are conceptual lacunae in which members of a social group lack the conceptual resources to understand and describe particular social experiences. An example of this kind of injustice is the one suffered by victims of sexual harassment before the 1970s who had trouble making sense of and expressing the behavior they were subject to given that the term ‘sexual harassment’ had not yet been coined.

Kristie Dotson (2011)expands on Fricker’s account of testimonial injustice, distinguishing two ways in which members of oppressed groups are silenced with respect to giving testimony: *testimonial quieting* and *testimonial smothering*. Testimonial quieting occurs when the audience fails to recognize the speaker as a knower, thus failing to fairly assess the speaker’s credibility. Testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker recognizes her audience as unwilling or unable to appropriately interpret her testimony, and in response, limits her testimony in virtue of the reasonable risk of it being misunderstood or misapplied by the audience. While Dotson argues that both of these silencing practices are forms of epistemic violence[[12]](#footnote-12) with comparable epistemic effects, given the purpose of this chapter we focus here on the latter species of silencing—testimonial smothering.

Dotson defines epistemic violence in testimony as a “refusal, intentional or unintentional, of a hearer to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange owing to pernicious ignorance.” (238)According to Dotson, *reciprocity* is a necessary condition for a successful linguistic exchange. She takes this from Jennifer Hornsby’s (1995) model, in which reciprocity “requires that an audience understand a speaker’s words and understand what the speaker is doing with the words.” (237) Thus, epistemic violence in testimony takes place in failed linguistic exchanges. That is, when the audience fails to understand the speaker’s claims due to pernicious ignorance, which refers to “any reliable ignorance that, in a given context, harms another person (or set of persons).” (238)[[13]](#footnote-13)

Dotson describes testimonial smothering as a coerced self-silencing that amounts to the “truncating of one’s own testimony in order to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one’s audience demonstrates testimonial competence.” (244)According to Dotson, there are three conditions for a case of testimonial smothering:

1. the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky,
2. the hearer must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony to the speaker, and
3. testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance. (244)

In cases of testimonial smothering, a speaker “smothers” her own testimony due to these factors being met. Regarding the first condition, Dotson defines unsafe and risky testimony as one that “an audience can easily fail to find fully intelligible”, running the risk of “leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm.” (244) Thus, in cases of testimonial smothering, the omitted testimony is unsafe and risks causing negative effects in virtue of being unsafe. Dotson gives the example of women of color’s silence around occurrences of domestic violence.[[14]](#footnote-14) There is often a possibility for women of color’s testimony about domestic violence to be understood as corroborating the stereotype of the “’violent’ black male” (245). The distorted public perception brought about by this stereotype in turn brings about harm to the African American community as a whole. It is because of this harm that testimony about domestic violence by women of color is often unsafe and risky. Further, it is because this testimony is often unsafe and risky that the pressure to remain silent about domestic violence exists for women of color.

To explain the second condition of testimonial smothering, Dotson introduces two terms: ‘accurate intelligibility’ and ‘testimonial competence’*.* ‘Accurate intelligibility’ refers to the audience’s ability to understand the content of a speaker’s testimony, as well as their own ability to detect a failure to understand. Thus, a testimony that is accurately intelligible is one that is comprehensible and defeasibly intelligible to the audience. ‘Testimonial competence’ refers to the speaker’s positive assessment of an audience’s ability to find potential testimony accurately intelligible. Thus, the audience demonstrates testimonial *incompetence* with respect to the content of the speaker’s testimony (condition (2)) when they fail to demonstrate accurate intelligibility.[[15]](#footnote-15) To make this condition clear, Dotson uses one of the stories from Cassandra Byers Harvin’s article “Conversations I Can’t Have.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Here Harvin describes an encounter with a white woman who demonstrated a racial microaggression by asking her how is raising black sons any different from raising white sons? The tone in which the woman asked the question indicated that she believed Harvin was “making something out of nothing,”[[17]](#footnote-17) which in turn demonstrates that the woman is not equipped to have such conversation. Further, Harvin’s encounter also meets condition (3) because the woman’s testimonial incompetence seems to follow from pernicious ignorance on her part. The woman is ignorant with respect to racially different experiences of child-rearing in the United States. According to Dotson, the woman’s ignorance is pernicious because her differing social situations (e.g. economic, educational, political, cultural, etc.) is what have led her to have a different understanding of the world as one in which the difference at question is nonexistent. Important to Dotson’s argument is that if the testimonial exchange were to happen, it would be worse than merely unfruitful due to the audience’s ignorance—it would also be harmful.

In summary, Dotson argues that testimonial smothering takes place when there is a failed linguistic exchange in which the content of the potential testimony is unsafe and risky, and the audience demonstrates testimonial incompetence to the speaker grounded in their own pernicious ignorance.

*Silencing as Paternalism*

When someone self-silences as a result of testimonial smothering, they act in an epistemically paternalistic way toward their audience. Cases of withheld testimony due to testimonial smothering meet all of Ahlstrom-Vij’s three conditions for epistemic paternalism. *The interference condition* is met because the speaker affects the audience’s inquiry regarding some matter. As outlined above, the interference condition can be met by giving or *withholding* information, as is the case when certain types of evidence are withheld from jurors in a trial. In cases of testimonial smothering, the speaker limits her testimony and thus withholds information from the audience, interfering in their inquiry. Since the withheld testimony affects which beliefs the audience would have, the speaker has affected the audience’s inquiry. *The non-consultation condition* is met since the speaker withholds their testimony without first consulting and receiving the consent of the audience. In cases of testimonial smothering, the speaker makes an evaluation of the audience’s conversational fitness and makes this assessment on their own. While this assessment of conversational fitness is informed by how the audience has conducted themselves in conversation, the audience is not also consulted as to whether they could correctly handle the potential testimony. Finally, cases of withholding testimony due to testimonial smothering also meet *the improvement condition.* This conditionis met when the speaker withholds their testimony, at least in part, to make the audience epistemically better off. In cases of testimonial smothering, testimony is withheld because it is likely to lead to a false and harmful belief. Recall that for Dotson, testimony is withheld in such cases due to the risk of it “leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm.” (244)

Recall Dotson’s domestic violence example. Dotson claims that self-silencing like this often occurs because of the possibility for it to be understood as corroborating the harmful stereotype of the “violent black male.” This makes the aim of the silence primarily about protecting the image of black men rather than about making the audience epistemically better off. Nonetheless, the audience ends up being epistemically better off because the silencing protects them from having, or reinforcing, a false belief. As with the jurors who are likely to misevaluate the evidential import of certain pieces of evidence, the audience in this case is likely to misevaluate the testimony coming from women of color regarding instances of domestic violence. While the epistemic betterment of the audience is not the *primary* goal in such self-silencing, it does still occur, and it is the means by which the primary goal is achieved. So long as the epistemic betterment of the audience is *at least in part* the reason why the speaker withholds her testimony, the third condition of epistemic paternalism is also satisfied.

In addition, when someone self-silences as a result of testimonial smothering, their paternalistic withholding of information is a particularly clear case of permissible epistemic paternalism. Such withholding of testimony meets Ahlstrom-Vij's proposed set of sufficient conditions for an epistemically paternalistic act to be epistemically permissible. Recall, Ahlstrom-Vij claimed that acts of epistemic paternalism are epistemically justified whenever they meet both the alignment condition and the burden-of-proof condition. *The alignment condition* is met in these cases, since in being silent, the speaker’s reasons for withholding their testimony do not conflict. In cases of testimonial smothering, the speaker has both epistemic and moral reasons to withhold their testimony. They have epistemic reasons to withhold their testimony because their testimony would bring about a false belief in the audience or raise their confidence in a false proposition. These are epistemically bad outcomes that are being avoided. The speaker also has moral reasons to withhold their testimony. Since the audience’s testimonial incompetence is due to pernicious ignorance on their part, the speaker’s testimony comes with moral consequences as well. Recall that for Dotson, in cases of testimonial smothering there is a reasonable risk that one’s testimony would have led to beliefs that “cause social, political, and/or material harm.” (244) So, the harms that are avoided by self-silencing are not merely epistemic harms, there are also possible moral, social, political and material harms to be avoided. In cases of testimonial smothering, these reasons to remain silent all align. There is no need to weigh the epistemic reasons against the moral reasons since all the relevant reasons point in the same direction—to restrict one’s testimony.

In cases of testimonial smothering, *the burden-of-proof condition* is also met. In such cases, the speaker is reasonable in believing that the audience would misinterpret or misapply their testimony. According to Dotson’s second condition, for an instance of testimonial smothering, the audience must have demonstrated their testimonial incompetence to the speaker with regard to the content of the potential testimony. If the audience has demonstrated such an incompetence, then it will be reasonable for the speaker to believe that the improvement condition is met. Since the audience has demonstrated their incompetence, it is reasonable for the speaker to believe that further testimony would only lead to bad outcomes—that self-silencing would lead to better outcomes (epistemic and moral). These reasons do not *guarantee* that the audience would have misinterpreted or misapplied the testimony, but they do suffice for making the intervention epistemically permissible.

Dotson’s domestic violence example is again helpful in making this clear. First, in many cases the women’s non-epistemic reasons to withhold their testimony are not in conflict with their epistemic reasons. Their epistemic reasons to remain silent are to prevent their audience from acquiring or reinforcing a false belief about black males. Women of color often self-silence to prevent the audience from believing the “violent black male” stereotype, or from reinforcing this false belief of theirs. Their non-epistemic reasons to be silent are to avoid further unnecessary harm to their community: harm that would result from reinforcing the black male stereotype. Thus, their epistemic and non-epistemic reasons are not in conflict because they both point towards self-silencing. Second, in many cases it is reasonable for the women of color to believe that their silencing about occurrences of domestic violence will have the intended epistemic benefits. Given what they know about how people misevaluate the relevant testimonies, it is often reasonable for women of color to believe that their silencing will prevent false beliefs, and thus prevent the reinforcement of the “violent black male” stereotype. This is particularly true when the audience has demonstrated their unfitness for such a conversation. Since such a demonstration is a necessary condition for a case of testimonial smothering, the burden-of-proof condition will be met whenever one self-silences due to testimonial smothering.

*Conclusion*

Recent epistemology has seen a greater attention paid to issues concerning epistemic paternalism and issues concerning epistemic injustice. However, these developing literatures have not yet been brought together. In this paper we have shown how a kind of epistemic injustice, self-silencing due to testimonial smothering, offers a vivid case of permissible epistemic paternalism. Such self-silencing clearly meets the criteria for an epistemically paternalistic act, as well as Ahlsrom-Vij’s set of sufficient conditions for the permissibility of an epistemically paternalistic act. Further, the epistemic permissibility of such self-silencing is independently plausible. When someone is the victim of epistemic injustice, it is clearly permissible for them to withhold further testimony to those who have demonstrated testimonial incompetence regarding the subject due to their pernicious ignorance. To think otherwise would be to think that individuals are required to provide testimony that will contribute to even more epistemic injustice (as well as non-epistemic injustice) when they are in the midst of experiencing epistemic injustice themselves. Such a requirement is simply not plausible. So, cases of self-silencing due to testimonial smothering help us see the permissibility of some acts of epistemic paternalism.

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1. Riley (2017) brings insights from the literature on epistemic injustice to debates about paternalism more broadly (and nudging in particular), but insights from epistemic injustice have not yet been brought to bear on debates about epistemic paternalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The epistemology of disagreement is relevant here. See Matheson (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Bullock (2016a and 2016b). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Bullock (2016a), Goldman (1991), and Ahlstrom-Vij (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Additional epistemic improvements may come from the subject becoming more reliable (see Ahlstrom-Vij 2013) or developing in epistemic virtue/understanding (see Pritchard 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Pritchard (2013) for more on the connection between epistemic paternalism and epistemic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Goldman (1991), p. 118. As Goldman notes, in the legal case, the defendant is the primary object of protection, but the defendant’s protection comes by way of protecting the jurors from their own biases and errors in judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For Goldman, the permissibility of an act of epistemic paternalism is a matter of the veritistic outcomes. Goldman lists the following factors as relevant to the epistemic outcomes of a case of epistemic paternalism:

   A number of variables are relevant, especially: (1) the characteristics of the controller (or "gatekeeper"), (2) the characteristics of the speakers who wish to send messages via the communication channel, (3) the controller's criterion of selection among speakers or messages, (4) the characteristics of the audience, and (5) the availability of alternate channels that address the same topic. (124) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Collins (2008), Fricker (2007), Medina (2012), Mills (1997), Pohlhaus Jr. (2012), Toole (forthcoming), and Wylie (2003) for some examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. More recently, Gerken (forthcoming) persuasively argues that epistemic injustice is better captured by a broader account. According to Gerken, epistemic injustice occurs when someone is harmed as an epistemic subject. Since there are ways to be harmed as an epistemic subject that do not involve knowledge, Gerken’s account is more inclusive and does better at capturing the intended phenomenon. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Medina (2011) and Lackey (2018) forcefully argue that credibility excesses also lead to epistemic injustice. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Dotson uses the term ‘epistemic violence’ instead of ‘epistemic injustice’. However, the way in which she defines and uses the concept bear similarities to Fricker’s broad account of epistemic injustice. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Reliable ignorance* here refers to ignorance that is consistent or follows from a predictable epistemic gap in cognitive resources. This kind of ignorance need not be harmful. Reliable ignorance may be benign in one epistemic agent while being pernicious in another. Dotson argues that whether the ignorance is pernicious depends on the context, where the social location and power level of the agents is relevant. She argues that pernicious ignorance should be determined according to the ways that the ignorance causes or contributes to harmful practices of silencing such as testimonial smothering. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. She takes this example from Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Note here that the speaker’s assessment of her audience’s testimonial competence is not contingent upon the audience’s *actual* ability to find the speaker’s testimony accurately intelligible. It depends only on whether the audience gives the appearance of being able to find the testimony accurately intelligible (whether this is the case or not). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Harvin (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Harvin (1996), p.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)