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A TAXONOMY OF TESTIMONIAL SMOTHERING

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

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I confirm that I have written the Master Thesis myself, independently. All the other authors' text, main viewpoints and all data from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

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1. Introduction

This thesis concerns testimony. Jennifer Lackey defines a speaker's S testimony such that: "S testifies that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p* (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content" (Lackey, 2006, p. 188)[1]. When testimony goes right, there is a transfer of belief or knowledge. In some instances, however, speakers can be unjustifiably prevented from providing their testimony. When this happens, the speaker is silenced.

Coerced silencing can happen when a speaker is not considered a credible source of testimony due to systemic prejudice on the hearer's part (Fricker, 2007) or is not recognized as a knower due to stereotypical beliefs (Dotson, 2011). A speaker can be silenced because she is not able to perform certain speech acts (Langton, 1993; Hornsby & Langton, 1998) as her acts are not recognized by the hearers, which is a necessary condition for acts to be successful (Austin 1962) or when the inability to perform certain speech acts results in the speaker producing other speech acts that compromise the speaker's social status and agency (R. Kukla, 2014)[2].

In this thesis, I am interested in one particular form of silencing: the notion of testimonial smothering forwarded by Kristie Dotson. Testimonial smothering, as Dotson describes it, occurs when a speaker truncates her testimony so that the content of testimony is only content to which hearers demonstrate testimonial competence (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). Hearers are testimonial-ly competent to the content of testimony if they can generally follow the speaker's testimony, understand the speaker's intentions, and can detect any failures in their understanding. According to Dotson (2011), the speaker will smother her testimony, removing content in respect to which hearers are incompetent if the speaker recognizes her hearers as incompetent to that content. She specifies three different circumstances in which testimonial smothering can and does occur. These circumstances are ones in which 1) the content of the speaker's testimony is unsafe or risky in the context of her linguistic exchange, 2) the audience shows testimonial incompetence to the potential content of the speaker's testimony, and 3) the testimonial incompetence of the audience follows or appears to follow from harmful ignorance. I further explain these circumstances in section 2.

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[1] Lackey (2006) points out that testimony about P does not need to be in the form of a statement that P. Therefore, Lackey uses "an act of communication". For example, when someone is asked if there is coffee left, they nod. Their nodding counts as a testimony even though it does not qualify as a statement (Lackey, 2006, 186). This treatment of testimony becomes essential in cases I mention later in the thesis where the speaker objects or disagrees without making statements.

[2] Quill Kukla (writing as Rebecca Kukla).

In her work, Dotson focuses on cases where the speaker removes *all the content that is relevant to the domain of discussion* from her testimony (See examples, Dotson, 2011, p. 244 & 247), leaving the speaker's testimony as one that does not necessarily contribute to the domain of exchange[3]. However, if we examine the circumstances or conditions of testimonial smothering, we can find that these circumstances allow for cases where the speaker, who is testimonial-ly oppressed, smothers her testimony by eliminating content that the audience is not competent to *but without emptying her testimony from all content that relevant to the domain of exchange*. In this thesis, I explore the possibility of such cases by introducing a taxonomy of three kinds of testimonial smothering. I take Dotson's notion of smothering as one form of testimonial smothering, which I call smothering via emptying. I introduce two other types of smothering, smothering via altering and smothering via echoing, to encompass cases where a speaker's smothered testimony is not empty from content relevant to the domain of exchange. Moreover, I show how oppressed speakers can use the act of testimonial smothering, depending on the circumstances of the linguistic exchange they are part of, to perform certain acts (such as disagreeing and objecting).

The thesis proceeds as follows: In section 2, I review Dotson's analysis of testimonial smothering and show how new instances of testimonial smothering can be identified.

In section 3, I introduce a taxonomy of testimonial smothering, where I divide testimonial smothering into three different kinds: smothering via emptying (3.1), smothering via altering (3.2), and smothering via echoing (3.3). Then in 3.4, I discuss the harms and upshots of testimonial smothering. In 3.5, I discuss why the speaker performs one kind of smothering over another.

In section 4, I show how speakers can perform certain acts while smothering their testimony. In 4.1, I explain the non-ideal approach I adopt for testimony. In 4.2, I develop principles that capture different ways of disagreeing. In 4.3, I show how speakers can disagree/object while smothering via emptying and altering and discuss why the speaker cannot perform similar acts while smothering via echoing.

In section 5, I address four critiques that arise against the notion of testimonial smothering. Finally, in section 6, I offer some concluding remarks.

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[3] Although all the examples Dotson uses are of this kind. She does not explicitly state that the smothered testimony needs to be empty from any content relevant to the domain of exchange. However, as Dotson's paper introduces the notion of testimonial smothering without discussing explicitly if there are different forms of smothering, I consider the taxonomy of testimonial smothering to be an addition that builds on Dotson's work.

2. Testimonial Smothering by Dotson

In this section, I first present my reading of Dotson's formulation of testimonial smothering. Secondly, I argue that there are instances of smothering that Dotson's treatment does not cover and show why they should be covered.

Testimonial oppression is when a speaker is oppressed in relation to the content of their testimony. To say that a speaker is oppressed in this way is to say that they are not able, or not allowed to voice their testimony freely due to their hearers failing to treat their testimony as credible for one reason or another, where those reasons do not relate to the competence of the speaker in the relevant domain. Among the ways that this can happen is when the hearers demonstrate testimonial incompetence toward the speaker's testimony. According to Dotson (2011, p. 244), testimonial smothering is a form of testimonial oppression that happens when the speaker perceives her audience as unwilling or unable to provide her testimony the uptake required. For any testimony to be successful, it needs to produce an understanding effect in the addressee; this understanding effect is what Austin (1962) refers to as "uptake". To say there is uptake is to say that the speaker's speech act is recognized or understood by the hearer. "The understanding effect" then can be defined as the ability of the hearers to recognize and understand the content of the speaker's testimony in the way the speaker intended it to be. Thus, for testimonial smothering to take place, the speaker must recognize that her testimony will fail to acquire uptake from the audience. In other words, the linguistic exchange in which testimonial smothering can occur is one where the speaker recognizes that her testimony will not produce an understanding effect in her audience due to their being likely to fail to recognize her testimony for what it is intended to be. With these basics in place, we can move forward to consider the three distinct circumstances that Dotson claims are necessary for testimonial smothering to occur.

The first circumstance is when the content of testimony is unsafe or risky. Unsafe testimony is testimony where the hearers can fail to find it fully intelligible (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). Unsafe or risky testimony can lead to the formation of false beliefs on the part of the hearer; such beliefs can cause political, social, or material harm for the speaker. If a speaker finds herself in an exchange where she recognizes the content of her testimony as unsafe in that exchange and that the content of her testimony will not be fully intelligible to her audience, she may smother her testimony. According to Dotson, such testimony is omitted by virtue of being unsafe (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). The example that Dotson provides is one concerning the silence of women of color regarding domestic violence in their communities. The testimony of women of color on domestic violence can be understood as evidence that

aids the stereotype of black men as violent or aggressive. Therefore, women will be pressured into silence out of fear that their testimony will lead to harm. As explained by Dotson:

> It is because testimony about domestic violence within a given context can be seen as unsafe and risky that there is pressure to remain silent with respect to it. It is not unusual for some types of information to be risky and unsafe in different contexts. However, when a speaker capitulates to the pressure to not introduce unsafe, risky testimony, then it is possible that testimonial smothering or some other form of coerced silencing is afoot. (Dotson, 2011, p. 245)

The second circumstance present in cases of testimonial smothering is when the audience shows testimonial incompetence to the content of a potential testimony (Dotson, 2011, p. 245). Hearers are incompetent to the content of testimony if and only if they are unable to comprehend the content of the testimony and are unable to detect any failure in their comprehension. Hearers do not need to find a testimony fully intelligible to demonstrate testimonial competence. For example, if I am a philosophy student and attend a class on neuroscience while having no prior knowledge of neuroscience, it is unlikely that I will be able to find the content of the class *fully* intelligible. I will be able to follow the content, comprehend it to a degree, but I should realize and be aware that there will likely be failures in my understanding due to my lack of prior familiarity and understanding of the topic. Crucially, although my comprehension of the content of the lecture given on neuroscience is not full, I still possess testimonial competence to that lecture so long as I can detect that I am failing to understand a part of that topic.

A speaker, then, might smother her testimony in circumstances where her audience shows incompetence to her testimony's potential content. To illustrate, Dotson uses the article of Cassandra Byers Harvin, "Conversations I cannot have", to show a case of testimonial smothering due to an audience's testimonial incompetence. The case is presented as follows:

Cassandra Byers Harvin's case
> [Harvin] describes one encounter in a public library with a white woman, "early-50s-looking," who asks Harvin what she is working on. Harvin responds by indicating she is researching "raising black sons in this society" (16). The white woman promptly asks, "How is that any different from raising white sons?" Harvin notes that it is not only the question that is problematic, as it indicates a kind of lack of awareness of racial struggles in the United States, but also the tone of the question that indicated the white woman believed that Harvin was "making something out of nothing" (16). Harvin explains that in response to the question, she politely pretended that she was running out of time to extricate herself from the situation. (Dotson, 2011, p. 247)

In Harvin's encounter, the woman talking to Harvin signaled her testimonial incompetence by her question and the tone she used to carry it out. By pretending that she needed to leave to relieve herself from that situation, Harvin smothered her testimony that would have been about raising black sons in American society and how it differs from raising white kids. The original content of Harvin's testimony concerning her research and which may address the question asked by the woman, was removed by Harvin from her testimony, and instead of

voicing that content, she responded by pretending that she had no time to answer the question. In summary, due to the woman's question, Harvin realized that the woman would be incompetent to the potential content of her testimony and thus smothered her testimony by pretending she was running out of time.

The third circumstance that is present in cases of testimonial smothering is one where testimonial incompetence tracks or appears to track from pernicious ignorance (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). Ignorance, as Dotson uses the term, is an epistemic state where a person is incompetent with respect to a particular domain of information and is not aware of their incompetence. Situated ignorance arises from one's social and epistemic location with respect to some domain of knowledge. Situated ignorance is a kind of unknowing that arises due to epistemic differences between different social groups. If situated ignorance leads to harm, then it becomes pernicious ignorance. Pernicious ignorance is harmful ignorance that contributes to harmful practices; in instances of interest here, ignorance is harmful because it contributes to silencing. The case from "Conversations I cannot have" illustrates smothering that tracks pernicious ignorance well because it shows a case of situated ignorance that is harmful to Harvin. This instance of ignorance is harmful for different reasons. Firstly, the ignorance made the woman dismiss Harvin as a knower or, at the very least, doubt that Harvin can contribute as a knower by doubting that her research (raising black kids in the US) offers any worthy insights into the relevant domain. Secondly, the fact that the ignorance led to silencing shows that it is harmful ignorance because it affects the speaker, forcing her to be silent.

Given the tone of the question, Harvin's interlocutor not only shows that she is testimonial-ly incompetent but also, it can be inferred that this testimonial incompetence stems from pernicious situated ignorance. This inference would track the likely facts of the case. I.e., the woman talking to Harvin was unlikely to have been in a position where she had to raise a black kid and experience that phenomenon in the USA. Thus, she is unlikely to be aware of how raising black kids differs from raising white kids in the USA, but also, she is unlikely to be aware that she is ignorant of those issues. In this case, then, we can say that the interlocuter testimonial incompetence followed from harmful reliable ignorance. Reliable ignorance is "ignorance that is consistent or follows from a predictable epistemic gap in cognitive resources" (Dotson, 2011, p .238)[4]. It is, then, Harvin's recognition of this ignorance that leads her to smother her testimony.

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[4] Reliable ignorance arises from an epistemic gap, meaning it can arise due to different kinds of ignorance (for e.g., situated ignorance).

Let us recap Dotson's analysis of testimonial smothering. Testimonial smothering is a form of testimonial oppression that happens when the speaker perceives her audience as unwilling or unable to grant her testimony uptake. Testimonial smothering "is 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" (Dotson, 2011, p. 249). There are three circumstances that should be present in cases of testimonial smothering. These circumstances are 1) the content of the speaker's testimony is unsafe or risky in the context of her linguistic exchange, 2) the audience demonstrates testimonial incompetence to the potential content of the speaker's testimony, and 3) the testimonial incompetence of the audience follows or appears to follow from harmful ignorance[5].

Though it is not explicitly included in Dotson's formulation of testimonial smothering, there is one more feature common to all the cases she discusses. This is that, in each case, there is a complete absence of testimonial content that is relevant to the domain of exchange in the speaker's smothered testimony. Take, for example, Harvin's case. In this case, Harvin's smothered testimony is empty of any content relevant to the domain of discussion. I.e., her response to her interlocutor's question contains no reference to the topic of raising children, of any kind, in the US[6]. Instead, Harvin truncates her testimony in the sense that she simply excuses herself from the situation by pretending that she is busy or running late. This *emptying* of any content relevant to the domain of discussion–to make the testimony such that the audience can comprehend it—is common in all of the cases Dotson discusses. But, as I shall show in the next section, ensuring the only content that is available is one that the hearers will be able to comprehend is not only achievable by removing all the content that is relevant to the domain of discussion; there are also other means in which one can include content to the

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[5] As pointed out by Jaana Eigi-Watkin, it is worth discussing if testimonial smothering can happen when one or two conditions of smothering are missing. In my reading of the phenomena, I take it that at least two circumstances need to be present. These are: the hearers need to signal their testimonial incompetence and that the potential content of testimony is risky or harmful. Testimonial smothering is necessarily a form of epistemic violence. Therefore, the hearer needs to signal to the speaker their incompetence, or else no epistemic violence is committed. This condition makes testimonial smothering different from choosing not to talk about a specific topic because it might raise conflict with the hearer. In smothering, you are coerced to not offer your potential testimony on a specific topic; thus, you are harmed as an epistemic agent. The second condition follows the first condition. When the hearers signal their testimonial incompetence toward a specific topic, call this topic X; it means that the testimony about X carries certain risks. The potential content of the testimony of X carries an epistemic risk (it might lead to the hearer's forming wrong beliefs, or/and it carries a harm to the speaker (material or epistemic harm). Testimonial incompetence usually tracks harmful ignorance (condition three). If it's possible that testimonial incompetence tracks from something other than harmful ignorance (maybe from prejudice), then it can be a case of testimonial smothering. Thanks to my reviewer for pointing out that this needs more attention.

[6] To empty the testimony in this context means to not include the content that is relevant to the domain of exchange in this case it is: raising black kids in the US. Empty also can mean to keep that specific content to yourself to disengage from the conversation. Thanks to María Jimena Clavel Vázquez for pointing this out.

testimony to which the audience demonstrate testimonial competence, yet that content be relevant to the domain of exchange.

3. A Taxonomy of Testimonial Smothering

In this section, I will expand on the notion of testimonial smothering, differentiating between three types of smothering. On this expanded taxonomy, the concept of testimonial smothering covers not only instances where smothered testimony is empty from content relevant to the domain of exchange but also instances where the smothered testimony is not empty from content relevant to the domain of exchange. In this light, I distinguish between three types of smothering. I call these: smothering via emptying, smothering via altering, and smothering via echoing[7]. I will first provide a rough definition of each, then provide examples that fit these descriptions and then explain how these are cases of testimonial smothering.

> *Smothering via emptying (SE):* A speaker smothers her testimony via emptying by removing the original potential content of her testimony C, where C is the content relevant to the domain of exchange, and removing C removes from her testimony any content relevant to the domain of exchange[8].

> *Smothering via altering (SA):* A speaker smothers her testimony via altering by replacing the original potential content C of her testimony with another content C', where C' is *compatible* with C, both C and C' are content relevant to the domain of exchange and including C' makes her testimony intelligible to her audience, at least to a degree.

> *Smothering via echoing (SEC):* A speaker smothers her testimony via echoing by replacing the original potential content C of her testimony with another content C', where C' is *incompatible* with C, both C and C' are content relevant to the domain of exchange and including C' makes her testimony intelligible to her audience, at least to a degree.[9]

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[7] As Dotson uses the term, whilst it will only count as smothering if the relevant circumstances hold, it is the speaker who smothers their testimony. (And not the circumstances). At times Dotson also refers to the truncation of testimony. As I read her, this is effectively synonymous with smothering. Thanks to María Jimena Clavel Vázquez for urging me to clarify this point

[8] Domain of exchange is the domain that the content C is relevant to. For example, if C is content that discusses topics of injustice, then the relevant domain is discussions of injustice. Thanks to María Jimena Clavel Vázquez for pointing out that I needed to clarify this.

[9] Note the hearer is testimonial-ly incompetent to C in all cases and needs to signal that to the speaker for these to be considered cases of testimonial smothering.

As per how I understand testimony in general in this thesis, the new content C' can also include things other than words (for example, hand gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions).

Let us now describe smothering via emptying.

3.1 Smothering via Emptying

Harvin's story (from section 2) is an instance of smothering via emptying. When Harvin smothered her testimony, she told the woman that she was running late and had to go. Thus, she removed from her utterance any content relevant to the domain of exchange, which concerned raising black children in the USA. Assume the original content of Harvin's testimony includes her findings on differences between raising black and white sons in the USA, as well as relevant studies and relevant statistics; call this C. When Harvin realized that her interlocutor is testimonial-ly incompetent to her potential testimony with content C, she removed C from her testimony. In this instance of smothering, the speaker smothered her testimony via emptying because her smothered testimony does not contain any content relevant to the domain of exchange[10]. I will not expand further on smothering via emptying because I take Dotson's examples of testimonial smothering to cover smothering via emptying.

3.2 Smothering via Altering

In contrast to smothering via emptying, smothering via altering and smothering via echoing do not produce testimony empty of content in the relevant domain of exchange. Rather, both forms of smothering produce testimony with content relevant to the domain of exchange. However, in both cases, this content differs from the original content of the speaker's testimony. In smothering via altering the new content is compatible with the original content of the speaker's testimony, while in cases of smothering via echoing, the new content is incompatible with her original content of testimony. Crucially, both altering and echoing can occur within and in response to the three circumstances of smothering described by Dotson. I will first illustrate smothering via altering.

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[10] As pointed out by María Jimena Clavel Vázquez, there can be cases of smothering via emptying where the speaker responds to the relevant circumstances with little or no verbal content (e.g. by simply walking away). As per footnote 1 the range of communicative exchanges that can be considered as testimony are not exhausted by verbal exchanges. Moreover, the speaker usually will be in situations where the linguistic exchange is not only focused on a specific topic of domain, so even if she smothers her testimony about a specific topic, she might be providing testimony about other things in the discussion. The reminder of cases will be a small subset of all linguistic exchanges where the speaker does not offer any testimony at all. Due to the definition of testimony I adopt (wide view of testimony), I define the types of smothering in terms of testimony. Thanks for the reviewer for pointing out this important note.

In her essay "Western Ethnocentrism and the Perceptions of the Harem", Leila Ahmed writes about a presentation she attended in 1980 on women in Islam at the National Women's Studies Association conference. She found herself speaking up from the audience on many occasions because she believed that the panel, which consisted of three Arab women, was presenting a moderated account of women's oppression in Islam (Ahmed, 1982, p. 521). Although Ahmed acknowledges that Islam has brought certain rights to Arab women, Ahmed felt such rights did not warrant how the panel presented Islam's endorsement of men's superiority over women. After two years of attending the presentation, however, Ahmed says that, in retrospect, she understands why the panel presented the talk the way they did. As Ahmed points out, "If one is of Arabic or Islamic background in America, one is almost compelled to take such a stand" (Ahmed, 1982, p. 521). According to Ahmed, one must present topics related to Islam and Muslims in this way because Americans "know" or "know without thinking about it" that Islamic people are backward, uncivilized, and incapable of rational conduct. In addition to that, Americans "know" with no doubt that Muslim women are oppressed and degraded to the extreme.

As I shall explain, Ahmed's case is a case of testimonial smothering; more specifically, it is a case of smothering via altering. To show this, I first show that all the circumstances of testimonial smothering are present and then show how the panel members altered testimony can be seen as a response to those circumstances in the way of smothering.

As we saw, the first condition or circumstance that needs to obtain for testimonial smothering is that the content of the speaker's testimony is unsafe or risky in the context of her linguistic exchange. The content of the Arab panelists in Ahmed's example is risky and unsafe because the content of the testimony is such that it can be wrongly understood by the interlocutors and thus lead to the formation of false beliefs or solidify the harmful stereotypes that associate Arabs or Muslims with "Uncivilized" or "backward". More generally, any testimony that is not carefully or moderately presented by Arab women about the oppression of women in Muslim societies may lead to a false understanding of why women are oppressed in that region. As Ahmed (1982, p. 522) points out, Americans "know" that Muslim women are oppressed, not in the sense of acknowledging that women are oppressed anywhere, but rather because they believe Islam radically oppresses women more than other religions. What Ahmed refers to here is not actual knowledge but rather the kinds of incorrect and unjustified stereotypical beliefs about the nature of Muslim societies that are widespread in the USA. It is within this context that the panel's un-smothered testimony about women's oppression is unsafe or risky – and so, to avoid that risk, the women had to discuss their issues of

oppression in a more moderate way, fearing the formation of false beliefs or stereotypes by their interlocutors.

The second circumstance that needs to obtain for smothering to occur is that the audience show testimonial incompetence to the potential content of the speaker's testimony. As Ahmed mentioned, the audience showed that they are incompetent to the content of the panelist's testimony because it seems that the audience presupposes a set of known "facts" that women are oppressed in Muslim societies by the merits of Islam. However, if the audience is asked about these societies, they are likely to admit not knowing anything about these societies except knowing that these societies oppress women or are uncivilized. Because of this, discussing Muslim women's issues in American society becomes nothing but applying western context, western presuppositions, and western ideologies to conversations about Muslim or Arab women. This inability to recognize that their ideologies, their beliefs, and their presuppositions are either false or inapplicable to topics concerning Arabic and Muslim women demonstrates the audience's testimonial incompetence toward the potential content of the speakers. As Ahmed mentions, "An American feminist said to me - and maintained it at a great length that women, according to Islam, had no souls and were simply thought of as animals" (1982, p. 522). According to Ahmed, not only did the feminist mention and use only resources that are incorrect and reflect Western presuppositions and assumptions but also, she kept trying to push her belief onto Ahmed, unaware of her own failures to comprehend the actual nature of women's status in Muslim societies.

As mentioned above, when Ahmed refers to what the audience "knows", she does not refer to actual knowledge, but rather unjustified and incorrect stereotypical beliefs. These can be understood as representing a form of pernicious situated ignorance. In this light, then, Ahmed's case is one in which the third of Dotson's circumstances of smothering obtains – i.e., smothering occurs when the audience's testimonial incompetence stems from harmful ignorance. In this case, the audience suffers from situated ignorance regarding Muslim women and Muslim societies because they have never lived in such a society or understood the context of such a society; they are relying solely on the western presentation of Muslim societies informing their beliefs. This ignorance is harmful for four reasons: (i) it helps in the formulation and continuation of stereotypes about Muslim societies. (ii) It does not allow for the "other", in this scenario, Muslims, to participate in the formation of facts and knowledge about their own society, (iii) due to such ignorance, there are common (false) beliefs that Arabs and Muslims are uncivilized, oppressing women, and preventing them from

contributing to rational discourse, and (iv) the speaker is harmed by virtue of having to smother her testimony.

The panel recognized their audience to be testimonial-ly incompetent in discussing the situation of women in Islam and Muslim society. As a result, the panel was, to a degree, coerced to present a moderated account of their testimony in that context. In other words, the panel was oppressed in relation to their testimony on the matter of women's position in Arab and Muslim communities. As I have shown, all of the circumstances that Dotson argues to have to be present in the case of testimonial smothering are present in Ahmed's example (Risky testimony, hearers' testimonial incompetence, and harmful ignorance). Where Ahmed's case differs from those presented by Dotson, however, is that in Ahmed's case, the panel's testimony still includes content relevant to the domain of exchange. However, as Ahmed explained, this content is altered in such a way that the audience might be able to comprehend it. The panel did talk about the oppression of women in Muslim Islamic societies, but a more moderated account of the original content of their testimony was presented. They contributed to the domain of exchange, which in their case is related to Muslim women's status. Their contributions were compatible (do not contradict the original content of their testimony) because they talked about women's oppression. This moderated account of oppression is still compatible with content about oppression. I take Ahmed's example to be that of a smothering via altering because the speakers altered the original content of their testimony C (non-altered and non-moderated content of testimony about women's oppression in Islam) with content C' (altered and moderated testimony about women's oppression in Islam) where C', is relevant to the domain of discussion and compatible to a degree with their original content C.

3.3 Smothering via Echoing

In her paper "Testimonial smothering and pornography", Rosa Vince (2018) uses the concept of testimonial smothering to explain cases where women say "Yes" to sex instead of "No", although they would have said "No" if they felt that they were able to. Let us consider her example, which I take to be an example of smothering via echoing:

Edina's case:

> Edina does not want to have sex, but she consents to sex with Franco because she is afraid of the consequences of refusal; she has reason to suspect Franco may be violent or end their relationship if she refuses. (Vince, 2018, p. 10)

Vince (2018, p. 11-14) shows that this is a case of testimonial smothering by showing how the case has the conditions of testimonial smothering put forward by Dotson. The content of Edina's testimony is risky or unsafe because if she said no, Franco might become violent toward her or leave her. Edina understood that Franco was incompetent to potential attempts

to refuse sex, maybe because Franco signaled testimonial incompetence in previous interactions to Edina's attempted refusal by thinking it was not a real refusal, or he got offended by the refusal, thinking it was about her harming his ego and not just reflecting her desires. Franco's incompetence tracks harmful ignorance – i.e., because it voids any attempt Edina might make to refuse and results in Edina's consenting to unwanted sex.[11]

  I take Edina's case as a clear case of smothering via echoing. The new content is relevant to the domain of exchange; however, it contradicts and is incompatible with the original content[12]. Indeed, the new content echoes exactly what Franco expects Edina to say. Edina had to smother her testimony to the point of radical alteration, where she uttered something incompatible with her original testimonial content.

Consider another example for smothering via echoing:

Ali in office

> Ali is an Arab man who works in a company where he is the only non-white employee. The company runs a diversity workshop monthly. Ali believes that the diversity workshop is just a safety move that the company does to be able to call the workspace an "all-inclusive environment". Ali believes that there are no actual solid actions that the company is doing to maintain an inclusive environment. One day, the company's CEO meets with all employees and asks them what they truly think about the diversity workshop? Followed by the CEO saying: "the company is really becoming more inclusive since the diversity seminar began". The majority of the employees respond that they think the workshop is great. When it's Ali's turn, he fears being the only one that challenges what the CEO says. Fearing losing his job, Ali smothers his testimony. Instead of saying, "I believe that the company is not doing any solid actions to be inclusive," he says: "Yes, the company is becoming more inclusive"[13].

In this scenario, the hearers—in this instance, the CEO and Ali's peers—signaled their incompetence on inclusivity issues in workspaces by uttering that they think the company is all-inclusive by just running a monthly diversity workshop, especially since there is only one non-white employee in the company. Moreover, Ali did not express his opinion truly. Fearing material harm, like being fired from his job, Ali had to smother his talk. Nonetheless, Ali still

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[11] In Vince's articulation of this case, Franco believes in rape myths, and it is because of this that the case involves Franco's testimonial incompetence (and it is her recognition of this that leads Edina to smother her testimony). Rape myths are false beliefs about the nature of rape, these beliefs portray victims in a negative light, while rapists are portrayed in a more positive light making it so that the victim is not a victim and the rapist is not a rapist (Vince, 2018, p. 12). According to Vince (2018, p. 12-13), rape myths are a form of harmful ignorance, because it is the case that there is a false belief about victims, which is a form of ignorance. Moreover, rape myths are widely accepted, which makes this ignorance reliable, and it is a harmful ignorance because rape myths contribute to the perception that rape is not committed (when it is) and to the blaming of the victim both when it is recognized that rape occurred and when it is not.

[12] In cases of smothering via echoing, the speaker may also offer non-verbal content, however, since testimony can be constituted by non-verbal actions this content must also be incompatible with the speaker's original content. If not, then, the case would be one of altering not echoing. Thanks to by Jaana Eigi-Watkin for pointing out that I needed to clarify this point.

[13] As pointed out by one of the reviewers there can be different pressuring mechanisms in this case, one of which is conformity due to peer pressure. Ali might have felt pressured to echo his peers' words. In my explanation of the circumstances present in this case I only focus on showing that three circumstances of smothering are present. Thanks to María Jimena Clavel Vázquez for pointing this out.

included content (i.e., 'the company is becoming more inclusive') relevant to the domain of exchange. However, similar to Edina's 'Yes' in the previous case, Ali's statement that the company is becoming more inclusive is incompatible with the original content of his testimony ('the company is not doing a real effort to become inclusive'). In altering his testimony in this way, Ali's testimony simply echoes or repeats the CEO's utterance that the company is becoming more inclusive. Ali's case, thus, is a case of smothering via echoing.

After introducing the different kinds of testimonial smothering, I will, in the remainder of this section, address the harms and upshots of different kinds of smothering and why the speaker is smothering her testimony in a way that makes her contribute to the domain of exchange.

3.4 Harms and Upshots of Different Kinds of Smothering

The types of harm associated with testimonial smothering are similar to the harms associated with other kinds of silencing discussed in the introduction of the thesis. First, there are epistemic harms. The speaker is unjustifiably viewed as a non-knower in the context of her exchange due to ignorance on the hearer's behalf. The speaker may feel some form of epistemic risk, meaning they might doubt the importance of their testimony and the content of that testimony. Moreover, in cases of testimonial smothering, the speaker is not contributing to the exchange to their full-potential contribution. For example, instead of providing a fully developed testimony on women in Islam, the panel of women provided a more moderated version of that testimony. If the circumstances of smothering were not present, the panel of women would have been able to provide a full testimony, thus fulfilling their potential of contribution.

In addition to epistemic harms, there are other mental and emotional harms. The speaker is not experiencing her full freedom of expression. She has to actively empty, alter or radically alter her testimony. The speaker is testimonial-ly oppressed; such oppression can affect her well-being.

So much so general of testimonial smothering. However, one thing that is revealed by the taxonomy of testimonial smothering is the subtle differences between each type of smothering. It is true that all types of smothering are harmful and that the speaker is, in a sense, forced to smother her testimony. However, that does not mean that the speaker is completely silenced; at least, it will depend on the type of smothering she is forced to do.

In cases of smothering via emptying and smothering via altering, we can observe some sort of freedom; it is limited freedom compared to situations where there is no coerced silencing. In smothering via emptying, the speaker can, by emptying her testimony, relieve

herself from certain burdens, like the burden of having to explain (and sometimes overexplain) her experiences or her knowledge to the hearers that signaled their incompetence. Similarly, smothering via altering can relieve the speaker from the burden of deep-diving into certain topics that her audience signaled ignorance toward.

One important upshot of smothering via emptying and altering is that the speaker, in both cases, does not have to utter, conform or contribute with content that goes against her beliefs and her original testimony. The speaker, in such cases, exercises the ability to maintain her position on a certain topic without having to conform to the other position. So, in cases of smothering via emptying and altering, the speaker maintains a form of autonomy that is not present in cases of smothering via echoing (a feature of echoing that I shall elaborate on shortly).

Moreover, as I discuss in the next section, the speaker can do things while smothering via emptying or altering; she can, depending on the context of the conversation, contribute by performing certain acts. She can use the limited resources she has in that exchange and turn the disadvantageous position to her advantage (at least to a degree).

Another upshot of smothering via emptying and smothering via altering is that in addition to allowing the speaker to perform certain acts in the conversation or add certain propositions to the common ground[14], the speaker can maintain plausible deniability about her smothered testimony in case of confrontation. Suppose a speaker smothered her testimony via altering and was able to voice disagreement toward something in the common ground via her altered testimony. If her interlocutors confronted her about her disagreement, and they would harm her if she confirmed that she was disagreeing, then the speaker can deny that she disagreed. Smothered testimony introduces subtle (indirect or implicit) disagreements. So, it allows the speaker to deny, if needed, the content or the intention that constitutes her smothered testimony. So, smothering via altering and emptying provides a form of protection for the speaker in case her smothered testimony signals something that is still risky or can lead to harm[15].

However, the taxonomy of testimonial smothering also reveals the amount of harm that the speaker is enduring during cases of smothering via echoing. Contrary to smothering via emptying and via altering, smothering via echoing happens when the speaker has no freedom

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[14] Common ground is the set of information that is assumed to be accepted by all interlocutors. More on common ground in section 4.

[15] In section 4, I discuss how speakers can object while smothering via emptying. This will be an instant of a case where smothering via emptying is producing an act that can be risky, only in such cases that smothering via emptying offers the speaker with plausible deniability. Thanks for Jaana Eigi-Watkin for recommending that I clarify this point.

at all in the linguistic exchange. The speaker is forced to silence her original testimony and, in a sense, echo what the hearer wants to hear. The speaker is forced to utter something that goes against her original testimony and goes against her beliefs. In such cases, she does not have the freedom to be silent nor utter a modified version of her original testimony.

Moreover, in cases of smothering via echoing, the speaker faces additional harm. This is the harm of being held accountable for what she says even though she is forced to say it. For example, when women say "yes" to sex instead of "no," she is, in a way, consenting, so she will be held accountable for saying "yes," and it will be perceived as consent. In general, in cases of smothering via echoing the speaker will be seen as affirming the hearer's beliefs or presuppositions, and this is key to the greater harms associated with this form of smothering.

3.5 Why an Extra Step?

Altering or replacing the original set of potential propositions with new ones is an extra step that an oppressed speaker does in cases of smothering via altering or smothering via echoing. It is worth briefly considering why the speaker might do that. Here are three possible reasons.

Firstly, the speaker may not have the option to empty her testimony from content relevant to the domain of exchange, so she must provide testimony relevant to the domain of exchange. Yet fearing negative consequences or harms that might arise from her potential original content, the speaker alters the content of her testimony. Both the cases of Ali in the office and Ahmed (1982) show this. Ali was in a meeting where he was asked directly by the CEO about the inclusiveness of the company. Fearing losing his job, Ali radically altered rather than emptied his original testimony. The panel of Arabic women had to talk about women's oppression in Islam[16]. They were at a conference and had no option of being silent about the topic. Thus, the only option that the panel and Ali had was to smother their testimony in a way that makes them contributors to the domain of exchange. In the panel's case, they smothered via altering while Ali smothered via echoing.

Secondly, the speaker may change her risky or unsafe content of testimony to a less risky or safer one. As discussed above, risky or unsafe content may lead to false harmful beliefs like stereotypical beliefs. If a speaker knows that the content of her potential testimony might lead to the formation of such beliefs, she might alter it to less risky content. If we recall the example by Ahmed regarding the panel on women in Islam, the panel of women presented a more moderated account of women's status in Islam in their testimony because

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[16] As pointed out by María Jimena Clavel Vázquez, the panelists could have chosen to not participate in that conference. However, such option of opting out completely seems to be a harder choice for the panelists given their academic responsibilities.

they were aware that their audience would probably perceive the non-moderated version of their testimony as evidence to strengthen their stereotypical beliefs regarding Muslims.

Thirdly, the speaker might be attempting to adapt to the hearer's incompetence because she wants to contribute to the domain of exchange for one reason or another[17]. Suppose the speaker recognizes that hearers are incompetent to her original content or original set of propositions. In that case, she might change this set of propositions to another set that maybe her audience is competent or has higher chances of being competent toward. Paralleling the classroom example from before, we can imagine a high school teacher who recognizes that her students are not competent enough to understand her testimony on molecular biology, especially since it is their first class. In this situation, it is very likely that she will change her set of complicated propositions that are likely to be unintelligible to her audience with ones that are to a degree intelligible to them. Such altering of content to suit the audience is something we practice regularly, adults when addressing children, specialists when addressing the public, etc. So similarly, in cases of smothering via altering, the speaker might alter her original content to content that the hearers are competent toward, allowing herself to be a contributor in the exchange, even if she is testimonial-ly oppressed. This contribution can be for different reasons or aimed at achieving certain goals. In the next section, I will focus on how the speaker can object or disagree while smothering her testimony; therefore, in such cases, the speaker is doing an extra step (altering), for example, to be able to voice an objection or disagreement.

To sum up. In this section, I have shown that there are three different types of testimonial smothering. These types are smothering via emptying, where the speaker empties her testimony from any content that is relevant to the domain of discussion; smothering via altering, where the speaker alters the content of her testimony with another content that is relevant to the domain of exchange and compatible with her original testimony; and smothering via echoing, where the speaker alters the content of her testimony with content that is relevant to the domain of exchange, yet is incompatible with her original testimony. I also discussed the harms and upshots associated with testimonial smothering. One of the upshots that I argued are present in smothering via emptying and smothering via altering is that the speaker has limited freedom; in this limited freedom, they can use their smothered testimony to do certain acts. In the next section, I will discuss how a speaker can in case of smothering via emptying and altering voice disagreement or object.

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[17] These reasons might be that the speaker is resisting her silencing, attempting to educate the interlocutors, trying to preserve her right to be a knower, or because of an obligation on the speaker behalf. This is however out of the scope of my thesis and therefore I won't expand on it.

4. How to do Things with Testimonial Smothering

In the previous section, I introduced three different ways a speaker smothers her testimony when she is in a conversation where her audience exhibits testimonial incompetence to her testimony's potential content.

In this section, I will use the taxonomy of testimonial smothering to illustrate the possibility of disagreeing or objecting while uttering a smothered testimony, specifically when the speaker smothers via altering and emptying. I aim to show that the smothered testimony is, in a way, a (limited) linguistic and conversational resource that testimonial-ly oppressed speakers can utilize to contribute to the conversation in which they are oppressed.

This section is divided as follows. In 4.1, I introduce the framework I use to discuss what it means to disagree/object and what common ground is. I will focus specifically on how disagreement and objecting are acts of challenging (denying) a proposition(s) in the common ground of the conversation. In 4.2, I mention different ways in which speakers can object or disagree in a conversation by listing a set of principles concerning methods of disagreeing. Then, in 4.3, I will apply these disagreeing principles to showcase how a speaker can disagree or object while smothering via altering and smothering via emptying. I will also discuss whether disagreement and objecting can be done whilst smothering via echoing.

4.1 Non-Ideal Approaches to Testimony

In this section, I will introduce a non-ideal approach to testimony. A non-ideal approach to a topic, as that term is used in social epistemology, acknowledges the reality of social power and incorporates it as part of the phenomena in question. According to Charles Mills, ideal theory excludes or marginalizes actual reality, leading to exclusion or dismissal and silence about cases involving oppression. As Mills wrote:

> What distinguishes ideal theory is the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual…ideal theory either tacitly represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal, not worth theorizing in its own right, or claims that starting from the ideal is at least the best way of realizing it (Mills, 2017, p.75)

A non-ideal approach to social epistemology attempts to overcome the exclusion of cases that are excluded by ideal approaches. Such an approach acknowledges the importance of studying cases where biases, injustices, and marginalizing are present as distinct worthy cases concerning knowledge and knowledge formation. A non-ideal approach to testimony then considers speakers' social status when discussing phenomena that happen in a linguistic exchange. One advocate for such an approach is Jennifer Lackey.

Lackey (2018) discusses a non-ideal duty to object, where the duty to object becomes directly influenced by someone's social status. She also discusses how silence can be seen as an act of objecting depending on the context of a conversation.

Casey Rebecca Johnson (2018) also discusses disagreement and frames the duty to disagree as dependent on factors such as social status. Moreover, Johnson provides a frame for discussing different ways to achieve successful disagreements, refusing the idea that disagreement is only discharged when a person utters explicit disagreement (¬P). The link between such discussions and my discussion on testimonial smothering is evident. For one, testimonial smothering as a concept will not be a phenomenon worth theorizing about in ideal approaches to testimony because it is primarily happening because of one's positionality in relation to power in a context where there is testimonial oppression. In my thesis, I adopt a non-ideal approach to testimony by focusing on how one, given her social status, can do certain acts like objecting and disagreeing. I will be using disagreeing and objecting here interchangeably. As roughly, I take both words to mean: the act of expressing disapproval, dissent, or refusal toward a proposition or a set of propositions that exists in the context of a certain conversation[18].

4.1.1 Common Ground and Assumptions

In this subsection, I will first introduce the concept of common ground as formulated by Robert Stalnaker (2002). I will also introduce the speech act of denial formulated by Bart Geurts (1998). These concepts are essential to show how speakers can object and disagree by focusing on propositions in the common ground.

In a conversation, there is information (a set of propositions) accepted by all interlocutors for the purpose of the conversation. This information is believed to be accepted and believed to be believed to be accepted by all interlocutors. This information is the common ground of a conversation. In a conversation, for a speaker S to utter a statement U, the speaker must make different assumptions about the hearer H's ability to understand U. These assumptions include the topic, language, style, level of presentation (Allan, 2013, p. 285), assumptions about the hearer's knowledge and beliefs, and the context of the discussion. These assumptions also constitute the common ground of a conversation.

> It is common ground that φ in a group if all members accept (for the purpose of the conversation) that φ, and all believe that all accept that φ, and all believe that all believe that all accept that φ, etc. (Stalnaker, 2002, p.716)

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[18] One difference between objecting and disagreement is that objecting can be seen as doing something more than just disagreeing. To object implicitly includes disagreeing with a proposition, but then doing more than that. To object involves doing more, like leaving a discussion, or gesturing disapproval. Which can be observed in the case of objecting while smothering via emptying.

Acceptance here, as formulated by Stalnaker (2002), is a non-factive propositional attitude toward the information that encompasses the background information. Acceptance of X information in the common ground does not entail that X is true, nor that the speaker believes that X is true (Stokke, 2013, p. 45).

The speaker's utterances update the common ground as the conversation continues. If a speaker utters a sentence, and other interlocutors accept it, then the proposition of that sentence is added to the common ground, updating the set of propositions, thus updating the common ground. Sentences can have presuppositions (a set of implicitly assumed background information about the world). If a speaker's utterance is accepted in the common ground and the sentence has presuppositions, then these presuppositions also update the common ground.

Interlocutors in a conversation can deny information from speakers' uttered sentences by performing certain speech acts such as disagreeing or objecting to a particular proposition. Brat Geurts (1998) introduced the speech act of denial, which is used to deny information in the common ground. Geurts divides the denial act into four types: proposition denial, presupposition denial, implicature denial, and form denial (1998, p. 275). In this thesis, I will focus on the first two types of denial. A Proposition denial is the rejection of an earlier utterance, and a presupposition denial is the denial of an earlier utterance presupposition. The targets of both denials are part of the common ground. Thus, in a way, if a speaker's utterance is intended to be an act of denial of a proposition or a presupposition in the common ground, then the speaker is objecting to that proposition or presupposition. Similarly, Johnson (2018, p. 126) suggests that any content in the common ground or content that one of the speakers is trying to add to the common ground is objectionable content. In other terms, speakers can voice disagreements about any content (proposition) in the common ground.

We can illustrate what common ground is by re-using the biology teacher example from section 3.5. Suppose the teacher teaches an advanced biology course for high-school grade 10 students. There are a set of pre-assumptions that—when acting as a speaker—the teacher will have to consider for the context of her class, as it will guide how she speaks and guide what statements she utters. Assume the following are some of the pre-assumptions that the teacher has. For example, one assumption is that everyone attending is a grade 10 student (P1), that most students have only general or no knowledge about molecular biology (P2), that these students are interested in learning about advanced biology (P3), and that all of her assumptions to a degree constitute the common ground of any conversation she will be part of that is related to her advanced biology class (P4). These assumptions will guide the teacher

in a way about how to give her lecture. For example, how she talks about molecular biology to her students will be different from how she would talk about it to her peers.

Unless something is raised in the context of the conversation to challenge one of these assumptions, all interlocutors will be assumed to accept such assumptions. Now imagine that only one student showed up to the class on the day of her lecture. Unknown to the teacher, this student has a strong background in molecular biology. The teacher will start discussing the course in a fashion that is compatible with her assumptions. She assumes that the student does not know that much about molecular biology. Call this assumption P5. The student catches up quickly, and once the teacher mentions molecular biology, he proceeds to define it and talk about the pioneers in the field. What the student did with his utterance are two things. Firstly, he is actively attempting to change the flow of the conversation. In other words, he is trying to update the common ground. He is trying to inform his teacher that she can provide more advanced explanations instead of explaining the basics to him.

Secondly, part of his attempt to update the common ground is denying (signaling rejection) the teacher's assumption P5. He is denying information in the common ground to indicate that it might not be a correct assumption or that it is not something that is taken for granted by all the interlocutors in the conversation. It is important to note that the student did not directly deny the assumption by saying "not P5" rather, his utterance is denying it because it is incompatible with P5. The speaker's act of denial is successful if the other interlocutors notice it. So, the student succeeded in denying the assumption by defining molecular biology because, in doing so, he signaled to his teacher that he knew what molecular biology is. This can lead the teacher to either inquire about how much knowledge he has about molecular biology (to accept his act and update the common ground) or immediately comment on his answer (accepting that he knows what molecular biology is).

Therefore, an interlocutor can update the common ground of the conversation by challenging an assumption in the common ground. This will be the basis of discussing how speakers can object and disagree while smothering. As I shall understand it, to challenge an assumption in the common ground is to—in some way—introduce a new proposition to the common ground with which the assumption is being challenged. Doing so involves either an attempt to remove the assumption from the common ground completely (e.g., with a flat denial) or registering doubts about the truth or appropriateness of the assumption in question. Objections can have different functionalities. Objections can be added to correct the record (by rejecting a proposition), present doubt about a proposition, or be factored as evidence for the audience's belief formation (Lackey, 2020, p.46). So, objections do not always have to

reject a proposition immediately; instead, it can also weaken its validity, which I am referring to as challenging P.

I can conclude the above by the following principle

§**1**: To challenge P or set of propositions {P1, P2, … Pn} that are part of the common ground of a conversation is to produce an utterance with content that is incompatible with P/ {P1, P2, …, Pn}.

Objecting to P or disagreeing with P is a specific type of challenging proposition P. It involves the intention of rejecting or denying P, which I will be focusing on in this section. However, challenging P can also be seen as further inquiring about P without the intention to deny or disagree with P.

In 4.2, I will show how propositions in the common ground can be challenged (disagreed with or denied) in different ways by introducing principles to capture these methods of challenging the proposition, which will then be used to show how speakers can use their smothered testimony to disagree or object to assumptions in the common ground.

4.2 Principles of Disagreeing

As mentioned above, to deny, disagree or object to a proposition P in the common ground is a specific way of challenging the proposition, one that involves the intention to deny it. So, we can narrow down §1 (mentioned in 4.1.1) to §2 to represent disagreeing or objecting.

§**2**: To disagree or object to P or set of propositions {P1, P2, … Pn} that are part of the common ground of a conversation is to produce a testimony with content that is incompatible with P/ {P1, P2, …, Pn}, with the intention of denying or rejecting P/{P1, P2, …, Pn}.

Before continuing this section, I will list the remaining principles of disagreeing, then expand on each respectively below

§**3**: To disagree or object to P or set of propositions {P1, P2, … Pn}, a speaker may be able to find a way to voice their objection so that it does not lead to harm or does not result in a risky testimony.

§**4**: To disagree or object to P or set of propositions {P1, P2, … Pn}, a speaker can express disagreement by signs, signals, notes, gestures, and silence just so as long the method of expressing disagreement involves the intention of denying or rejecting P or set of propositions {P1, P2, … Pn}.

Now let us expand on each principle.

What different statements can a speaker use to deny P in the common ground? The most straightforward way is to utter "¬P". For example, if a friend says, "the king of Estonia

is visiting the University of Tartu," they pre-assume P, which is "there is a king of Estonia" to be in the common ground. If I heard my friend and wanted to deny P, I can utter explicit disagreement (¬P): "there is no king of Estonia!". However, to Johnson (2018, p. 124), it is demanding and too specific to assume that the only way to voice disagreement is by uttering ¬P. One can express disagreement by voicing other utterances. As Johnson argues:

> It is too specific to require speakers to voice not p when they disagree with an expression of p, or that they make explicit that they are disagreeing… In addition to being unnecessary in some cases, this kind of direct rebuttal is probably not effective in many cases. Direct rebuttals may prompt defensiveness rather than uptake or reasonable conversation (Johnson, 2018, p.124 & p. 125)

To illustrate how one can disagree without uttering '¬p', imagine your friend is drinking the same juice you are drinking, orange juice. For some reason, they say, "This lemon juice is delicious." What they did is they added the following propositions to the common ground "This juice is a lemon juice," and "this juice is delicious." Suppose that the other friends at the table are influenced by this statement and decide to order lemon juice. Since you know that this juice is orange juice, you feel like you need to say something so that your other friends can order the correct juice. Nevertheless, you want to be polite, and maybe you do not like confrontation, so instead of disagreeing by saying, "I disagree, this is not lemon juice," you say, "didn't we order the same juice? Mine tastes like orange!". By such a statement, you introduced a new proposition to the common ground "this juice that we both ordered tastes like orange juice." Hence, you challenged the proposition "This juice is a lemon juice" by adding a proposition that seems incompatible with it, intending to deny P. This method of disagreeing with P is summarized by §2 that is mentioned above.

Although many times people tend to express disagreement in a way without explicitly saying I disagree with P out of social politeness or other reasons, some people do not express disagreement explicitly because they simply cannot; they are in a disadvantaged position in the conversation, they can only express disagreement by adding a proposition that challenges that in the common ground. If, for example, a student wants to disagree with a teacher, the student might choose to disagree in an indirect way, given that the teacher is in an authoritative position in relation to the student. According to Lackey (2018), one can have a duty to object – and this duty, in turn, can be directly influenced by one's social status. Lackey (2018, p. 92) formulates social status to encompass race, sex, authority, and expertise. Depending on the speaker's social status and the context of the conversation, they can have more or less responsibility (duty) to object. Oppressed speakers can find themselves in situations where their objections are less effective or come with a certain risk (Lackey, 2018, p. 93-94). Similarly, this affects their ability to voice objections. Although the discussion of duties to object is outside the purview of this thesis, Lackey's point illustrates why someone might wish

to avoid explicit forms of objecting/disagreement. Thus, if one is trying to accommodate objections in a power asymmetric conversation, one needs to discuss the different ways in which speakers can object, given their limited abilities to object.

As discussed above, uttering "I disagree with P" is unnecessary to voice disagreement. Moreover, sometimes, it can be impractical or harmful, especially in the cases I am interested in, the case of testimonial smothering, where the hearer signals their testimonial incompetence to the speaker. In situations where testimonial smothering happens, the speaker's social status plays a great part in what content they can express freely in a conversation. If the original content that the speakers want to express is incompatible with what is in the common ground, then it means that expressing the non-smothered testimony (objecting or disagreeing testimony) can be harmful, so speakers' ability to object or disagree will also be limited by their social status. Imagine if the speaker's original content of testimony is "I disagree with P," but the hearers signaled their testimonial incompetence to the speaker. In such a case, saying: "I disagree with P," knowing that the hearer will not comprehend it the way it is intended to be, will be a risky testimony, or will harm the speaker; saying such an utterance is not useful in that context, and sometimes is harmful. In cases of testimonial smothering that involves disagreeing or objecting, we need to consider the significance and effect of the social status on such acts and the speaker's ability to perform such acts. This aspect of disagreement is summarized by §3 mentioned above.

Finally, introducing a disagreement to a conversation does not necessarily involve the speaker's voice. "Signs, signals, notes, and gestures are all possible ways to discharge … obligations" (Johnson, 2018, p. 124). Moreover, the speaker's silence should not be interpreted as approval or acceptance. As Lackey (2020) argues, interpreting silence as acceptance by default does not consider the speaker's social status. Silence needs to be interpreted in relation to the context of a conversation and the interlocutors' social status. Silence can play competing roles (Lackey, 2020, p. 88). It can indicate approval in some contexts yet express disagreeing or objecting in another context. Therefore, silence functionality should be seen in relation to the context of a conversation. This brings me to the last generalization that I will use. A speaker can choose to express their disagreement with silence for different reasons. One of these reasons is that they do not have the luxury of expressing their disagreement in a direct way. Another reason for opting for silence is that some people from different marginalized groups can find it challenging or feel it is a burden to explain their experiences in each interaction or object directly to some racist/problematic propositions that exist in the conversation they are part of. This is summarized by §4.

With principles §2-§4 in hand, we are in a position to see how a speaker can voice disagreement while smothering her testimony via altering and emptying. If, whilst smothering her testimony, a speaker is able to perform any of the disagreeing methods captured in (§2-§4), then we can consider that the speaker is disagreeing while smothering.

4.3 Disagreement and Smothering

Before showing examples of how speakers can disagree or object in a context where they have to smother their testimony, I need to make a few clarifications. Firstly, testimonial smothering is an act that the speaker is coerced to do because they are testimonial-ly oppressed in a conversation. Suppose a speaker, for one reason or another, decides to utilize the act of smothering to overcome her hearers' testimonial incompetence; that does not mean that she is smothering out of her own free will. In that case, the speaker is simply using the limited resources available to her in the conversation to exercise her right to provide testimony.

Secondly, not all acts of testimonial smothering are acts of voicing disagreement. Only in a case of testimonial smothering where a speaker's smothered testimony challenges one of the propositions in the common ground and is intended as a denial or rejection of those propositions is it a case where the smothered testimony also serves the purpose of voicing disagreement. Moreover, a smothered testimony can also be used to do different acts (e.g., assertion), depending on the nature of the smothered testimony. For example, if the smothered testimony includes content that signifies or asserts a proposition in the common ground, then the speaker is performing an act of assertion or agreement.

Thirdly, in this thesis, I am not proposing any normative claims about what the speaker should do in cases where they can utilize their smothered testimony to voice disagreement. This section only points out the possibility of disagreeing using limited or truncated testimony. With these clarifications in mind, let us start with the case of smothering via altering as an act of disagreement.

4.3.1 Disagreeing and Smothering via Altering

In this section, I will show how the case of Ahmed (1982), which I discussed in section 3, as a case of testimonial smothering via altering, is also a case of voicing disagreement. Let us first recall Ahmed's case:

Laila Ahmed's case:

> Ahmed writes about a presentation she attended in 1980 on women in Islam at the National Women's Studies Association conference. She found herself speaking up from the audience on many occasions because she believed that the panel, which consisted of three Arab women, was presenting a very moderated account of women's oppression in Islam (Ahmed, 1982, p. 521). Although Ahmed acknowledges that Islam has brought certain rights to Arab women, Ahmed felt such rights did not warrant how the panel presented Islam's endorsement of men's superiority over women. After two

years of attending the presentation, however, Ahmed says that, in retrospect, she understands why the panel presented the talk the way they did. As Ahmed points out, "If one is of Arabic or Islamic background in America, one is almost compelled to take such a stand" (Ahmed, 1982, p. 521).

One of the reasons that the panel of Arab women in Ahmed's example (1982) ends up smothering their testimony by providing a more moderated account of women's rights in Islam is because the panel un-smothered testimony about women's oppression is unsafe or risky and can be used to feed into existing stereotypical or false beliefs, which is a common circumstance that is usually present in cases of smothering. To avoid that risk, the women had to discuss their issues of oppression in a more moderated way, fearing the formation of false beliefs or stereotypes by their interlocutors, which resulted in them producing a smothered testimony. I want to argue that not only is the panel altering their testimony, but through the content of smothered testimony, they are also disagreeing with some of the propositions that exist in the context of linguistic exchange.

Firstly, the panel is aware of certain harmful/wrong propositions in the common ground of the exchange, feeding the stereotypical narrative about Muslim women. These propositions are about Arabic women and the Arabic world. Imagine some of these propositions: "Arabic women are oppressed just because they are Arab", "Arabs are uncivilized," or other wrong/harmful assumptions. As Ahmed expresses, those who come from an Arabic or a Muslim background and live in the USA are *forced* to express such moderated stands on issues of Arabic and Muslim societies. In providing a moderated account of women's status in Arabic and Muslim societies, the panel adds to the common ground propositions that are incompatible with some of the pre-existing propositions in the common ground.

Let us assume that {P, P1, Pn} is the set of assumptions in the common ground that the panel wants to voice their disagreement toward, and they are a set of stereotypical beliefs about Muslim women. As Ahmed puts it (1982, p.523), these stereotypical beliefs are known to the panel audience because they are perceived as "facts" in Western culture. If the panel was not forced to smother their testimony, the content of their testimony would directly disagree with the pre-existing harmful stereotypical assumptions that exist in the context of their discussion. Since the panel is testimonial-ly oppressed, and this testimonial oppression stems from the hearers' testimonial incompetence, they cannot voice disagreement directly. If they did, their audience would not be able to comprehend their testimony for what it is.

Moreover, if they discuss their account of women in Islam the same way they would discuss it, for example, among themselves, their account might be wrongly comprehended as aiding the stereotypical assumptions {P, P1, Pn}. So, the panel needs to find a way to voice

their disagreement so that it does not lead to harm (§3). In this specific case, the panel moderated account is introducing propositions P's to the linguistic exchange, such that P' is incompatible (or appears to be incompatible (Johnson, 2018)) with propositions {P, P1, Pn} that exists in the common ground (§2).

From Ahmed's (1982) account, we can understand that the panel testimony is incompatible with {P, P1, Pn} because Ahmed is discussing the panel's moderated account as something those Arab women would be in a sense "forced" to use as a way of trying to get rid of or correct the wrong stereotypical narrative. If, for example, someone is used to the narrative that Islam oppresses women when the panel's moderated account focuses on women's rights in Islam and emphasis on such rights, then that person who is listening to them might start to have taken less confidence in the narrative he has heard before and become more open to a further understanding of women's status in Islam.

If the pre-existing propositions are all centered on how Arabic and Muslim women are oppressed. And that their oppression is different from the oppression of all women because it is due to being Muslims and Arabs and not due to being women, and if these propositions also assume Arabs to be uncivilized. Then the moderated version that the panel introduces to the common ground is indeed disagreeing with these propositions. If the moderated version provides a rosier picture of how women have rights in Islam and how women are respected in their countries, that goes against what is in the common ground.

Furthermore, if the moderated version avoids discussing oppression in a non-moderated way because doing so only feeds the narratives existing in common ground. Then the panel, through their discussion of how Arabic women have rights and through portraying these rights and women's status in Arabic societies in a specific way by 1) emphasizing in their testimony how women are rightfully treated in Arabic countries, and, 2) trying not to focus or discuss in their testimony the aspects in which Arabic women are oppressed, then, this moderated testimony brings doubt to what is in the common ground and introduces propositions that are incompatible with the content in the common ground. Moreover, their testimony is trying to redirect the focus of the discussion to another set of (moderated) narratives about Muslim women as an attempt of weakening or eliminating the wrongful propositions.

4.3.2 Disagreement and Smothering via Emptying

The case of smothering via altering as disagreeing showcases disagreeing while testimonial smothering is taking place to be possible. If the smothered testimony contains content that challenges some of the assumptions that exist in the common ground, then we

can consider it a case of voicing disagreement. But what about smothering via emptying as an act of disagreement. If we look at different cases of silence (that do not involve smothering), we can see how people can voice their objections by not saying anything. For example, when kids stay silent—as a protest –after their parents refuse to take them to a fast-food restaurant, or when parents do that with their kids as a way of showing disapproval about something they did, or even when a friend starts to become suspiciously silent after being told something that she did not like. In general, it is relatively easy for interlocutors to perceive and differentiate between different kinds of silence and whether silence is expressing something specific (mad, sad, objection, refusal, and so on) by appealing to context.

Silence as objecting in these contexts is recognized because of the familiarity between the interlocutors. This familiarity makes one realize when silence is portraying a specific message. The parents know their kids are always active in the car, so when they become completely silent and do not respond to their parents, the parents are able to view it as a form of objecting to not taking them to restaurant X. However, familiarity need not be present for silence to be seen as an objection, as I shall show in <u>Salwa in the workshop case</u> below. But first, let us consider a case of testimonial smothering where silence is interpreted as objection due to familiarity between interlocutors. Let us consider this case:

<u>Mona and her family:</u>

Mona is a talkative person; she is known to express her opinions in most discussions and participate actively in such discussions. Mona's family knows that about her. One day in a family gathering, the topic of male guardianship over women *Al Welaya Ala Al- Maraa* is brought up. Mona disagrees with how her family views the topic. Yet she fears saying her opinion because her family might harm her if she does. Rebelling against guardianship can be viewed by her family as a form of rebelling against Islam. So, Mona feels like she cannot say her opinion at all. Mona chooses to be silent. And every time this topic or any topic that Mona finds it to be unsafe to express her thoughts about, she opts to be silent.

Firstly, as discussed above, silence should not take to mean acceptance by default because it widely depends on the context and the person's social status. In addition, because of the familiarity between Mona and her family, especially as her silence increases or becomes a pattern with certain topics, her parents will be able to recognize it as a form of objecting. In her case, Mona disagrees with a certain set of assumptions in the common ground and disagrees about the discussion by smothering her testimony via emptying (§3 &§4).

Let us look at a more challenging example. One that does not have the familiarity aspect to it. Can someone object by not saying anything? Many people find themselves a part of conversations where they disagree with many aspects of these conversations to the point where they decide not to engage in the conversation and just be silent. There can be such cases where the hearer has signaled testimonial incompetence to the speaker, which will make it hard for the speaker to say anything that would make her hearer less ignorant about the

conversation. Thus, she will smother her testimony via emptying. Let us consider <u>Salwa in the workshop case:</u>

> Salwa is attending a workshop titled "Challenges that women face in workspaces" much to her surprise, many men were attending the workshop, and they felt obligated to control the discussion by expressing their opinions about the nature of challenges that women face in workspaces. The discussion shifted quickly from discussing problems such as wage gap, sexual harassment, issue of promotions, and the attitude of workers toward women in authority to issues such as women's pregnancy and its effects on work, how some jobs might just be unfitted to women, and harsh work environments. Moreover, many of these men highlighted that the discussions on women's challenges in workspaces stem from repeating western feminist narratives that are, according to these men, "feminist nonsense". So Salwa, instead of participating in the discussion as she previously planned to she becomes silent and leaves the workshop very early, although she previously confirmed that she would be attending the entire workshop, and although she indicated to the organizers that she would like to participate in the discussion.

Salwa smothered her testimony via emptying. This is a case of testimonial smothering as the circumstances of smothering are present. From the discussion, Salwa realized that the hearers (some men attending the workshop) are testimonial-ly incompetent about the topic, their incompetence stems from situated ignorance (they are men who were not put in a position of facing women's issues in workspaces), and Salwa felt like if she started to point out the problems in their discussions, she would face some stress or burden of having to explain, argue or justify her views and her experiences. Especially that Salwa knows that anything she says will be seen as "feminist nonsense". In this case, not only did Salwa smother her testimony via emptying, but she also objected to how the discussion was unfolding.

   Salwa, by emptying her testimony and leaving early, signaled to the organizers that she disapproved of how the discussion was unfolding (§3 &§4), especially given that the organizers assumed that Salwa would attend the workshop and participate, her lack of participation and leaving early signals to her organizers that she does not approve of the discussion[19]. Salwa might be able to signal her disagreement to the audience as well if for example, when asked about her opinion on women's pregnancy and its effects on women's careers, she answers something like "No comment", or "I am not commenting on this" while portraying certain facial expressions or signaling her irritation using body language or a specific tone of voice.

4.3.3 Can we Disagree While Smothering via Echoing?

   Given that testimonial smothering is a form of coerced silencing, it already indicates that the speaker is in a disadvantaged position, so her attempts of utilizing her smothered

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[19] As per footnote 1, Salwa's silent protest can be labelled as testimony given that her leaving the room is a communicable act that she intends to use-to signal her objections. Thanks to María Jimena Clavel Vázquez for pointing out that I need to specify whether smothering via emptying provides testimony.

testimony will depend directly on how much she is disadvantaged in a conversation. Let us consider if the speaker can utilize her smothered testimony in cases of smothering via echoing.

The instances where the speaker is smothering her testimony via echoing, as discussed in the last section, are the most radical and harmful instances of testimonial smothering because the speaker is put in a position where she has no other options except to echo her hearers' thoughts and have to change the content of her testimony to one that is incompatible with the original content of her testimony. In cases of smothering via echoing, the speaker does not have any freedom in the linguistic exchange.

In smothering via echoing, the speaker is, in a way uttering something she does not believe in, does not support, or does not think is true because she is in a position where uttering statements that are compatible with her original testimony or even providing an empty testimony is something she cannot afford to. Moreover, in cases of smothering via echoing the speaker does not have certain resources like those in cases of emptying or altering. For example, in smothering via altering the speaker might be able to use her tone of voice to express disagreeing. In smothering via echoing, the speaker is not able to use her tone of voice or other non-verbal expressions to make her new content of testimony compatible with her original content of testimony. Because if she does, then she will be offering testimony that is not incompatible with her original testimony. And if that is the case, then, she is not smothering by echoing but smothering by altering[20]. She can only communicate something that is totally incompatible with what she originally wanted to communicate. So, cases of smothering via echoing are plausibly cases in which the speaker cannot perform any acts apart from affirming what is already being said or agree with her interlocutor. Therefore, disagreeing and objecting might not be compatible with smothering via echoing[21] because in echoing, the speaker simply does not have any resources that she can utilize to her advantage because she is in a conversation where she has no advantages at all.

To summarize this section, I introduced a set of principles that capture different ways of disagreeing or objecting in a conversation. I showed how speakers could disagree while smothering via altering and object while smothering via emptying. Finally, I discussed why speakers could not perform such acts while smothering via echoing. In the next section, I present some critiques that can arise against testimonial smothering and address these critiques.

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[20] Thanks to Jaana Eigi-Watkin for urging me to clarify this.

[21] Maybe there are certain cases where the speaker's act of smothering via echoing will serve a better good for the collective, in which then the collective can use the results to object. However, these cases will require further analysis, which is out of the scope of my thesis.

5. Objections

Before I conclude this thesis, I will address four objections concerning testimonial smothering. The first objection is that there is no method of knowing whether a speaker is correct about identifying the exchange she is part of as one where the circumstances of testimonial smothering are present. In other words, a speaker can unjustifiably or unnecessarily smother her testimony. The second objection is that one can argue that if a speaker is truly oppressed in the conversation she cannot contribute to the conversation. She cannot object or disagree. therefore, smothering does not achieve much. The third objection is as follows, if the speaker is in an exchange where her testimony is risky, meaning, uttering her testimony can cause her harm, and she smothered her testimony, that does not mean that the harm is eliminated. If her smothered testimony is compatible with her original testimony, then it can contain factors of risk and harm, especially if her audience is in a position to cause her harm. This objection is concerned with whether smothering succeeds in protecting the speaker to a degree. Lastly, the fourth objection discusses whether smothering via echoing is a form of testimonial smothering at all, given the nature of that type of smothering.

5.1 Unnecessary smothering objection

Let me introduce the first objection in more detail. The act of testimonial smothering is an act that the speaker performs as a response to an incompetence signal that she receives from her audience. So, the speaker is the one that judges whether this is a case of coerced silence or not. The criticism that arises from this feature of testimonial smothering is that since the speaker is the one evaluating whether it is a case of coerced silence or not, the speaker may be wrong about her audience being incompetent or wrongly assume that the circumstance of the conversation is risky or harmful when it is not. So, there can be many cases where the speaker unnecessarily smothers her testimony.

5.1.1 Response

This critique overlooks the fact that the speaker is considered a credible speaker. It should be assumed that her judgment is, in most cases, justifiable and tracks from relevant reasons. This objection also diminishes the nature of ignorance that is present in cases of testimonial smothering. The type of ignorance present in testimonial smothering cases is reliable ignorance. The "state of reliable ignorance insures that an epistemic agent will consistently fail to track certain truths" (Dotson, 2011, p. 241). Reliable ignorance is more predictable and easily detectable. Thus, a credible speaker can accurately detect such ignorance more easily.

Furthermore, there may be cases where the speaker will wrongly judge her hearer to be incompetent, but this is only one of the circumstances that need to be fulfilled for testimonial smothering to happen. In my analysis of testimonial smothering, the other two circumstances need to be present, it seems unlikely that a credible speaker will wrongly evaluate all three circumstances of testimonial smothering. Assuming that a speaker makes a wrong judgment about her audience, then such a case is not one that this thesis is concerned with. In this thesis, the cases I am interested in are ones where the speaker's evaluation is accurate because then it becomes cases where the speaker is truly oppressed.

5.2 Smothered testimony does not achieve much objection

The second line of critique is as follows. If a speaker is suffering from testimonial smothering, then even if the speaker can alter her testimony, such alteration does not achieve much. Many reasons can lead to the speaker not being a *real contributor* to the conversation. For example, her audience might still be testimonial-ly incompetent toward her new altered testimony, or her attempts to object/disagree might be weak and not effective.

5.2.1 Response

I will respond to this critique in two parts. The first part of my response addresses whether smothered (altered) testimony can achieve much. The second part of my response discusses whether oppressed speakers can *really* object or disagree.

Let us start with whether altered testimony can achieve much. As mentioned in section 3.5, the speaker can do an extra step, such as altering her testimony for various reasons. Some of these reasons do not concern the audience in the linguistic exchange, rather, it concerns the speaker herself. A speaker can choose to alter her testimony in order to maintain a form of agency, self-expression, or for her wellbeing. This means that the smothered testimony is achieving something, allowing the speaker not to accept her oppression but rather be able to express some of her thoughts and beliefs; and practice her role as an epistemic agent. These are things that the speaker cannot do in that conversation without a smothered testimony. Thus, there are many things that can be achieved by smothered testimony.

Moreover, as mentioned in section 3.4, smothered testimony can provide the speaker plausible deniability in cases where the hearers confront the speaker about the content of her smothered testimony. This means that altered testimony allows the speaker to utter a testimony that contributes to the conversation (involves content relevant to the domain of exchange) and protects her from harm that can arise from the hearer's reaction. In addition, this altered testimony might be the speaker's attempt to overcome the hearer's incompetence. If there is no possibility of overcoming the hearer's incompetence with the un-smothered

testimony, then any possibility that the altered testimony provides in overcoming the incompetence of the hearer, even if it is a slight possibility, means that the altered testimony is achieving much.

The second part of the critique has to do with whether oppressed speakers can *really* object or disagree because the audience's views are very strong. Their views track from reliable ignorance, thus they are harder to change. Firstly, objections do not require the likelihood of acceptance (Lackey, 2020, p. 36). So, the speaker's audience does not need to accept the speaker's objection or disagreement. They just need to note that the speaker is objecting or disagreeing. As discussed in section 4, there are different ways in which speakers can object and disagree; as long as the speaker's utterance is playing a role in challenging a certain proposition, it can be considered to function as disagreeing or objecting. As Lackey argues:

> At a minimum, however, we might say that effective objections cannot be systematically ignored or silenced by the members of the conversational context. I emphasize "systematically" because we would be reluctant to say that an epistemic agent's objections are effective if they are merely not tuned out in every conversational context she finds herself in but never even rise to the level of factored into the evidential basis of the corresponding beliefs. (Lackey, 2020, p.46)

Moreover, raising the bar or the requirement for objecting goes against the idea that one social status can influence the ability to object and disagree. This takes us back to the problems that arise from ideal theories. If I say that both an oppressed speaker and a privileged speaker need to do X in a certain way to achieve a certain conversational goal, and that the oppressed speaker, by virtue of being oppressed, has minimal freedom that does not allow him to do X in this certain way, then it is like saying the oppressed speaker cannot do X at all.

5.3 Smothering does not protect the speaker objection

The third objection is critical because it addresses whether smothering protects the speaker from the harms that are associated with her original testimony. This critique is best explained by reflecting on an example. Let us reflect on the case of Mona and her family, that is mentioned in 4.3.2. In Mona's case, her smothering via emptying will signal to her family that she objects to what they are saying about male guardianship. However, the problem from the start was that Mona could not express her disagreement with her family on such a topic because if she did, they might harm her. If her smothered testimony successfully signaled that to her family, then her smothered testimony is also putting her in a dangerous position. I.e., if Mona's smothered testimony signaled to her family that she disagrees with their views, then they can still harm her because they became aware that she disagrees with their views. Then, what role does her smothered testimony play in protecting her?

5.3.1 Response

This objection is accurate in such that Mona's smothered testimony might still signal something to her family that could lead to her being harmed. However, one of the upshots of smothering via emptying and altering is that in case of confrontation, the speaker can maintain plausible deniability about the content of her smothered testimony, which can help in protecting the speaker from the harms that can arise given her smothered testimony. Take, for example, Mona's case. Let us assume her family realized that Mona's silence is a form of objecting, which they consider unacceptable. What Mona can do in such a scenario is deny that her silence was a form of objecting. Her denial will likely be plausible because she can come up with a story about why she was silent in these instances (for example, saying, "I did not have anything more to add", or "I was not paying attention"), given that Mona did not explicitly object, her smothered testimony allows her to plausibly deny that objection, making her safe from the harms that might arise from her family confronting her.

This is an interesting case because it can be understood as a contrast between smothering via emptying and echoing and how much freedom the speaker has. When Mona's family did not confront her, Mona objected by smothering via emptying. She had some freedom in the context of her linguistic exchange, but when her family confronted her, Mona had to opt for smothering via echoing to avoid definite harm that would occur if she confirmed that her act was objecting. In this case, Mona had no freedom at all. Thus, the response to the critique can be that the smothered testimony provides more believability to the speaker's deniability story, allowing the speaker to avoid harm when confronted and that such critique highlights the importance of the taxonomy of testimonial smothering because it illustrates when the speaker needs to perform different kinds of smothering.

5.4 Is smothering via echoing an act of smothering objection[22]

This objection is as follows. Testimonial smothering is, in a way, suppression of all or parts of one testimony. While in echoing, there seems to be no suppression of one's testimony, it is instead a loud negation of what one would originally want to say. Secondly, smothering via echoing is very different from altering and emptying in terms that it does not have any upshots (it does not provide freedom or plausible deniability or allow the speaker to commit acts of disagreeing).

5.4.1 Response

It is true that in cases of smothering via echoing, the smothered testimony includes loud negation of the speaker's original content of testimony C, call the loud negation C'.

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[22] Thanks to Jaana Eigi-Watkin for raising this concern.

However, it is still a suppression of that original content of testimony. The suppression happened prior to replacing the content C of testimony with content C' which is incompatible with it and thus, it is a case of testimonial smothering. So in cases of testimonial smothering via echoing, two things are happening. The speaker smothers (suppress) the original content of her testimony C and replaces it with content C' that is incompatible with C. Thus, if the circumstances of testimonial smothering are present, then such change in testimony counts as an act of testimonial smothering.

Moreover, it is true that smothering via echoing is different from the other kinds of smothering in that it does not have upshots and does not allow the speaker to do certain acts. However, this is why it is important to consider it as a case of testimonial smothering because it reveals that testimonial oppression varies in degrees, depending on the context. This analysis of testimonial smothering shows that speakers can in specific contexts, be fully coerced (like smothering via echoing) or have some freedom (smothering via altering and emptying) in other contexts.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, in this thesis, I expanded on the work done by Dotson on testimonial smothering by providing a taxonomy of testimonial smothering to cover situations where a speaker smothers her testimony yet contributes to the domain of exchange nonetheless. I took Dotson's examples of smothering to be one type of smothering, I labeled smothering via emptying. I introduced two other types of smothering: smothering via altering and smothering via echoing. In both kinds of smothering, the speaker smothered testimony includes content relevant to the domain of exchange. The main difference between both is that in the former type, the new content of testimony is compatible with the original content of testimony, while in the latter, the new content of testimony is incompatible with the speaker's original content of testimony. Moreover, providing a taxonomy of testimonial smothering reveals that oppressed speakers can/do communicate many things even while being coerced to silence, at least in some circumstances. In this thesis, I showed how it is possible for speakers to disagree/object whilst smothering via altering and smothering via emptying and explained why they could not object/disagree while smothering via echoing.

This thesis serves as a contribution to a better understanding of cases of testimonial smothering by providing a taxonomy of testimonial smothering. This taxonomy has strong explanatory power because it allows a more fine-grained analysis of cases depending on the conditions of the conversation and showcases that what the speaker is doing in that conversation may differ significantly. Finally, this analysis of testimonial smothering may help

frame a discussion of the normative aspects of smothering: i.e., what oppressed speakers ought or should do in conversations where they have to smother their talks and how they can do what they ought to do.

Abstract

Kristie Dotson formulates testimonial smothering as a form of testimonial oppression where a speaker truncates or removes the content of her testimony leaving the testimony empty from any content for which the hearers demonstrated testimonial incompetence. On Dotson's account of smothering, the speaker empties her testimony from all content relevant to the domain of exchange. However, Dotson's account does not include or cover instances where a speaker smothers her testimony, yet her smothered testimony contains some content relevant to the domain of exchange. In this thesis, I present a more detailed analysis of testimonial smothering to showcase different ways in which oppressed speakers interact in exchanges in which they are oppressed. I take Dotson's notion of smothering to be one form of testimonial smothering, which I call smothering via emptying. I introduce two other types of smothering, smothering via altering and smothering via echoing, to encompass cases where a speaker's smothered testimony is not empty from content relevant to the domain of exchange. Then I use the taxonomy of testimonial smothering to showcase ways in which oppressed speakers can contribute to conversations in which they are oppressed.

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