I'm Different Online: An Account of Differences between Face-to-Face and Online
Testimony

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This thesis focuses its analysis on modern feminist epistemology, within the field of epistemology of testimony. I acknowledge the significance of the field of epistemic transmission of testimony, but do not discuss this field as it is not within the scope of this thesis.

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Abstract: Why is Testimony important?

The field of testimony is a subdiscipline of the study of epistemology, the study of how we come to know things. Existing literature on testimony mainly focuses on face-to-face interactions. However, online communications have become an integral part of our daily discourse. The purpose of this thesis is to develop an account of testimonial injustices in the context of online testimony. First I will examine cases of face-to-face epistemic injustice which result from failures of knowledge transmission in communicative acts. I will then outline cases of online epistemic injustice. This showcases differences between the kinds of epistemic injustices that can arise in online and in face-to-face contexts. My intention is to identify epistemic issues unique to online environments, with the overall objective to hold agents accountable for acts of epistemic harm, such as intentional misinformation or trolling.¹ I will then be in a position to introduce key features of online testimony, and explain the significance of distinguishing online testimony as a space for shared knowledge from face-to-face testimony. Finally, I propose a viable framework for successful online testimony which holds agents accountable for epistemic harms.

Chapter Objectives

My thesis contributes to the existing literature on philosophical acts of testimony by comparing causes of testimonial failure in face-to-face and online environments. In addition, my thesis introduces new epistemic reasons for testimonial failure, and how to address them by accounting for online differences.

¹ Trolling is defined and discussed in the section: *What are differences between online and face-to-face testimony?*

Chapter one begins by outlining three key reasons that testimony fails in face-to-face interactions: 1) testimonial injustice, 2) epistemic exclusion and 3) identity prejudice. Exploring the nature of these reasons will allow me to develop my own novel position about online testimonial injustice. The reasons for testimonial failure in face-to-face interactions can help us understand the context of online settings. The structure of, and access to, information online differs from face-to-face interactions. For example, online testimony can be accessed through thousands of servers, accounts or geographical locations simultaneously. The organization of information is distributed differently in terms of testimonial data or knowledge. Karen Frost-Arnold has started the conversation about characteristic features of online testimony, but she has only explored its arguably superficial aspects.

In chapter two, my thesis will explore Karen Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust, which seeks to solve testimonial injustices online. I aim to provide a substantive account of the nature of online epistemic harms, such as protecting the vulnerable speaker from a reduced or negative credibility in cases of risky testimony. This is something that I do not consider Frost-Arnold does sufficiently. My thesis argues that internet norms are different to face-to-face norms, and so require a new framework to address epistemic accountability in online contexts.

In chapter three, I introduce differences between face-to-face and online testimony. My thesis makes the novel claim that at least sometimes, online speaker credibility can be impacted by non-epistemic reasons, leading to false credibility assessments and unjustified bias. An example of a non-epistemic reason concerns the speaker's popularity, and whether the speaker's testimony appeals to pre-existing beliefs of the audience. Other important differences include variations in the scope and type of testimony published online and the capacity of the hearer to engage in ongoing conversations with speakers over an unfixed period of time. This supports my final discussion, where I analyse the implications of these differences for hopeful trust in an online environment.

Introduction to testimony

Testimony is an act of communication, an exchange of information between a hearer and speaker. The field of testimony has largely focused on singular interactions, between a single hearer and single speaker in face-to-face situations. According to the traditional philosophical view, the act of testimony is defined as

“An act [where] a truth-bearer or speaker, S, openly declares or acknowledges what they know to be true... The way in which we receive testimony is variable depending on the content of the knowledge S imparts”.²

This definition draws attention to the individual roles of the hearer, one who receives testimony, and the speaker, one who gives testimony.

Miranda Fricker writes that in a case of testimony:

“S wouldn't have asserted that *P*, unless S believed S knows *P*, and S wouldn't have that belief if *P* weren't the case”.³

This tells us what is necessary for the speaker to *testify* to a hearer. However, this does not tell us the conditions under which the hearer *believes* that-*p* on the basis of the speaker's testimony. For that, we need more information. According to Fricker, the role of the speaker is to give testimony that is accurate and effective in transmitting knowledge to the hearer. The hearer is not required to be an expert in the area of testimony that the speaker gives, but the hearer should be able to understand (or remain receptive to) the content of the speaker's testimony.

² Jonathan Adler, "Epistemological Problems Of Testimony (Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy)", *Plato.Stanford.Edu*, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/testimony-episprob/>.

³ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Consider the following example. Suppose that Kelly is a famous civil rights activist speaking about protecting the rights of children with disabilities. She frames her speech in a clear and easy to understand format. George is a hearer of Kelly's testimony. He is receptive to Kelly's testimony despite having no background in disabled children's rights. Kelly is confident in her knowledge because she has spent many years researching and colluding with other knowers to gain her belief that disabled children in vulnerable situations require additional legal protections. George understands the content of Kelly's testimony. Kelly's testimony has resulted in a successful transmission of knowledge, even though George does not agree with Kelly's beliefs.

George's role as a hearer is to monitor the speaker and assess whether she holds reliable (accessible) knowledge, while remaining receptive to her claim that-*P*. The hearer is required to be receptive, without becoming gullible. To do that, the hearer must make a credibility assessment.⁴ The notion of credibility is based on

- a) The esteemed trustworthiness of the speaker, and
- b) What the hearer may gain from the speaker's testimony that-*P*.⁵

Let's return to the example of Kelly. George makes a positive credibility assessment of Kelly. This is partly caused by Kelly's effective communication and clarity of speech, and partly because George assumes Kelly is an expert on disabled children's rights because she is a famous activist. This positive credibility assignment results from the hearer's monitoring of the speaker. It is also possible that testimony fails as a result of a negative credibility assignment from the hearer. When a credibility is negative as a result of a speaker's inherent bias or subjective opinion of the speaker based on stereotyping, this is known as testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice affects vulnerable speakers, those who suffer from stereotyping resulting in negative credibility assignment from the hearer. When a

⁴ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Ibid.

speaker gives personal or particularly risky testimony, the threat to her credibility is dependent on the receptiveness of the audience. We should therefore recognize the potential risk to the speaker from exposing her vulnerabilities through potentially risky testimony.⁶

What makes testimony successful?

In successful linguistic exchanges, including testimonial ones, “reciprocation occurs between speakers and audiences”.⁷ Each individual has a responsibility to reciprocate, according to Kristie Dotson, who outlines two requirements for reciprocation between hearer and speaker:

- a. “Obligation on the speaker to successfully confer understanding among hearers.
- b. Obligation on the hearer to take the speaker’s words as they are meant to be taken”.⁸

These obligations do not force unreasonable expectations on the speaker or the hearer. The first obligation refers to the speaker’s primary role to speak with clarity and without undue bias. The second obligation refers to the receptiveness of the hearer, requiring that she keep an open mind.

Example of successful face-to-face testimony

To appreciate these additional elements of successful testimony, let’s consider an extended example. Imagine a scientist is giving a talk on nuclear physics to a

⁶ Risky testimony is typically characterized by recounting of a speaker’s personal experience of injustice, persecution, discrimination or that experienced by the speaker’s social group. John Beverley, *Testimonio: On The Politics Of Truth* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

⁷ Kristie Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression”, *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

⁸ Ibid.

class. The class listens to the scientist and correctly assigns her credibility as a qualified knower. The class generally understands the scientist's testimony. Sarah, one of the hearers, has difficulty understanding one part of the scientist's talk, so she raises her hand and asks for clarification. The scientist answers Sarah's question in a way that Sarah can understand easily, despite her not having a background in nuclear physics. Therefore, Sarah is confident that she has assigned positive credibility to the speaker. The speaker has successfully given testimony that shows her knowledge that-P.

We can see that this testimony has been successful because there has been

- a) An exchange of knowledge between hearer and speaker
- b) A correct credibility assignation from hearer to speaker
- c) Communicative reciprocity between hearer and speaker

It is important to understand what constitutes successful testimony before delving into testimonial failures. Testimonial failure occurs when there is a breakdown in communications between the hearer and speaker. The breakdown can be caused by several factors, including a lack of communicative reciprocity (or receptiveness) between hearer and speaker. The next section will examine the literature on testimonial injustice in order to construct an account for epistemic testimonial failures online.

Chapter One: What causes face-to-face testimonial failure?

Why Testimonial Injustice is a Reason for Testimonial Failure

In this section, I will detail one of the three main reasons for testimonial failure: testimonial injustice. This concept is interrelated with the other two main reasons for testimonial failure, namely, identity prejudice and epistemic exclusion. However, each factor can independently cause testimonial failure.

Testimonial injustice blocks understanding between speaker and hearer. It describes the phenomenon where the hearer undermines the speaker's capacity as a knower, and therefore, undermines her ability to contribute to any social form of knowledge.⁹ This phenomenon may convince the speaker that they are not qualified to share their hard-earned expertise or knowledge. This is an epistemic harm, causing harm to the speaker and potential hearer(s). The shutting down of dialogue reaffirms the hearer's wrongful belief that the speaker has no worthy testimony, and casts aside the speaker as a meaningful contributor to social knowledge.

Miranda Fricker defines testimonial injustice as an occurrence where

“A speaker, S, receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer, H. When H's stereotypes cause H to grant S's testimony less credibility than would have been granted in the absence of prejudice, **the speaker is unjustly undermined in her capacity as a knower**”.¹⁰

⁹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Ibid.

A credibility deficit or negative credibility assignation occurs when a given speaker is not credited as being trustworthy, based on assumptions about his/her social identity. An example of this would be:

Tom is playing baseball with his classmates at recess. He sees Sarah, one of his classmates, walking around on her own. He asks his classmate, "Why don't we let Sarah play with us?" His classmate replies, "No, because girls are bad at sports."

This is an example of a negative credibility assignation based on the false stereotype that "All girls are bad at sports." Tom trusts his classmate's inductive judgement, thereby gaining a negative perception of Sarah's abilities based on false assumption. If the same treatment were directed toward a speaker giving testimony, the speaker would be prevented from contributing knowledge. Given the inherently social nature of sharing knowledge between speaker and hearer, this constitutes epistemic harm. The speaker is denied epistemic agency as a qualified knower, and the attempted act of testimony fails.

Fricker states that testimonial injustice could be avoided if the hearer takes steps to revise her credibility assessments of the speaker, to accurately reflect her trustworthiness.¹¹ Testimonial injustice is epistemic, because giving testimony is a form of exchanging of knowledge. Knowledge is exchanged through social interactions, thereby contributing to shared epistemic resources. Fricker identifies this as the *social imagination*, which refers to the epistemological systems from which speakers draw when they **conflate** or contrast personal experience (i.e.: testimony) with the experience of wider society.

¹¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Face-to-Face example of Testimonial Injustice

Sarah gives a presentation on refugee rights as a guest speaker in a Politics class. The presentation details her experiences as a refugee and relies on a personal account of persecution to illustrate her argument that refugees face undue suffering as a result of displacement from their home country. However, the class shows little understanding of Sarah's content. The questions directed to Sarah at the end of the presentation twist Sarah's words, i.e.: "Why can't refugees fix their own country instead of burdening others?" Sarah has exposed personal vulnerabilities to her audience, but her attempt at a linguistic exchange has failed.

This example demonstrates reliable ignorance in the audience. Reliable ignorance occurs when a hearer has a "counterfactual incompetence or maladjusted sensitivity to the truth".¹² In this example, the truth refers to Sarah's testimony, which she recounts based on truthful personal experiences of discrimination as a refugee (both in and outside her country of origin). Sarah's audience chooses not to 'hear' Sarah's words, misinterpreting her testimony based on what they think to be true, rather than listening to or accepting her truthful account.

In Sarah's case, we might assume that the hearer has an ingrained prejudice against refugees which is causing testimonial failure. The hearer's question, "Why can't refugees fix their own country instead of burdening others?" shows Sarah that her audience has either not understood her testimony because she has not fulfilled her obligation as a speaker to confer understanding among hearers; or because the hearers understand Sarah's testimony but reject it: failing the hearer's obligation to reciprocate and to hear the speaker's words as she intends to be heard, avoiding unreasonable objections not based on her testimony.

¹² Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 242, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

In this example, the audience neglects to identify the speaker as a knower.¹³ Sarah is attempting to convince the audience of the truth of her lived experience. She shares several statistics based on surveys of violence towards refugees to back up her personal experiences of discrimination, to strengthen her desire to be recognized as a knower. Sarah is dependent on her audience of hearers to be acknowledged as a knower, but she has become a victim of testimonial injustice through lack of hearer reciprocation. The negative credibility assigned to her causes epistemic disadvantage, defined by Dotson as “only existing because of the speaker’s dependency and vulnerability on the hearer to be recognized as a knower”.¹⁴ The harm to Sarah from testimonial injustice undermines her agency as an epistemic knower, potentially impacting her intellectual courage.¹⁵

Why Epistemic Exclusion is a Reason for Testimonial Failure

We have seen how Sarah suffered as a result of testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs where a speaker is unable to convey knowledge as a result of a negative credibility assignment from the hearer(s). Sarah failed to gain hearer reciprocation when she gave her testimony. Her audience failed to recognise Sarah as a qualified knower, and she was therefore unable to reliably convey her belief that refugees (including herself) should not be discriminated against due to forced displacement.

Epistemic exclusion is another form of discrimination against the vulnerable speaker, which results in testimonial failure. Kristie Dotson explains the concept of epistemic exclusion, which she defines as persistent exclusion of a speaker from contributing as a knower to shared epistemic resources.¹⁶ To return to the

¹³ Dotson refers to this as *testimonial quieting*. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 243, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

example of Sarah the refugee, imagine that Sarah continues to travel and give testimony about her experiences of discrimination. However, no matter which country she goes to, she receives the same reaction. Her repeated experience of testimonial failure leaves her exhausted, and she loses motivation to continue speaking about her experience as a refugee. The main distinction is that Fricker tends to focus on individual instances of testimonial failure, while Dotson focuses on ongoing practices of epistemic exclusion which target social groups suffering from credibility deficit as a result of stereotyping.¹⁷

The silencing of one speaker based on his/her social identity is reflective of broader, institutionalized practices of silencing and oppression. Epistemic exclusion results in the prolonged suffering of individuals within stigmatized social groups, who struggle to cast off the burden of epistemic exclusion and reclaim status as qualified epistemic knowers.¹⁸ However, attempting to break a stereotype once it has been perpetuated by dominant social groups as a means of epistemic exclusion is a difficult process. This is due to the fact that a vulnerable speaker must not only recognize his/her own credibility deficit and act to dispel stereotypes, but there is added pressure from hearers who subscribe to pernicious ignorance and do nothing to counter inherent or confirmation bias. A speaker is further made vulnerable when attempting to retract or transform knowledge within shared epistemological resources which reinforce stereotypes.

Epistemic exclusion of social groups negatively affects the ability of those groups to contribute to shared epistemological knowledge systems.¹⁹ Epistemological systems are represented through a pool of shared resources that knowers draw from, before giving testimony. We appeal to this shared pool for justification of our beliefs. Dotson defines this system of shared knowledge as:

¹⁷ Epistemic exclusion may occur to an individual or group, but when exclusion is applied to groups, Dotson terms this epistemic oppression. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to epistemic exclusion as inclusive of epistemic oppression from now on. Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 236-257, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“[An epistemological system]... is a holistic concept that refers to all the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession. As such, epistemological systems are highly resilient. Resilience concerns the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before the system redefines its structure. To say that a given epistemological system is highly resilient is to say that it can absorb extraordinarily large disturbances without redefining its structure”.²⁰

Consider the following as an example of this resilience:

Katie sees her neighbor, Tom, walking down the street. Tom is holding an umbrella, but it is not raining. Katie yells out, “Tom, is it raining?” and Tom replies, “Not yet.” Katie is able to infer from Tom that it is likely to rain today, without having to check the weather report. Katie gains this knowledge from Tom, even though Tom did not explicitly state what he meant. Inference is one means of gaining information through social knowledge. Katie trusts in Tom’s shared knowledge, which qualifies him as a knower in her eyes.

However, when we widen the scale of interaction and sharing of knowledge, not everyone has the same respect for Tom as a knower. Irreducible epistemic exclusion occurs when a knower is unable to contribute to knowledge production because of bias inherent in our epistemological systems.²¹

Consider another example:

Tom’s brother, Charlie, sees Tom walking down the street holding an umbrella. Tom yells, “Watch out, it’s going to rain soon!” Charlie thinks to himself, “What an idiot! It’s clearly not going to rain, the sky is blue.” Here, Charlie is appealing to

²⁰ Kristie Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression”, *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

²¹ Ibid.

personal experience based on sensory observation. He rejects Tom as a knower and does not believe his attempt at communication. This is not significant, except for the purpose of distinguishing between individual knowledge and shared forms of knowledge. The latter is fuel for defining the epistemological system as part of the social imagination.

These examples show what happens when epistemic exclusion occurs in a single instance of testimony.²² Hearers may gain knowledge from listening to testimony, but not everyone has the same knowledge, or access to knowledge. Each individual or social group holds interdependent knowledge on epistemic resources. Therefore, an individual speaker contributes to the social imagination for shared knowledge through her personal testimony and experience.

Epistemic exclusion may occur as a result of a credibility deficit and conversely, a credibility deficit may occur as a result of epistemic exclusion. Dotson attributes pernicious ignorance as a contributing factor toward epistemic exclusion and testimonial failure.²³ She defines pernicious ignorance as resulting from

“Counterfactual incompetence, where the speaker consistently fails to track the truth of P with a maladjusted sensitivity to the truth”.²⁴

Pernicious ignorance is deliberate, and blocks meaningful communication between speaker and hearer. Dotson states that pernicious ignorance is caused by “an active unknowing”, in order to further one’s (harmful) beliefs.²⁵ This definition is useful for distinguishing epistemic exclusion from credibility deficit. A credibility deficit occurs when a speaker is the victim of stereotyping, which indirectly implies

²² Epistemic oppression is similar to Fricker’s account of hermeneutic injustice, which occurs when an agent “has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding owing to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation”. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²³ Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

that the speaker suffers from identity prejudice in some way. Epistemic exclusion refers to the direct harm experienced by the speaker resulting from the hearer's pernicious ignorance.²⁶ This results in the speaker being silenced, and prevented from making knowledge contributions.

Pernicious ignorance occurs where the hearer is aware of his/her own biases, yet chooses not to override them.²⁷ It describes an interaction between hearer and speaker where respectful reciprocation is not possible because the hearer forms a false assumption that the speaker is not qualified to give knowledge that-P. The speaker is made vulnerable by the presence of pernicious ignorance, causing epistemic exclusion over an extended period of time.

To return to my earlier example, recall when Charlie refuses to listen to Tom about the weather. Charlie's deliberate (pernicious) ignorance of Tom's advice is based on his subjective opinion that Tom doesn't know what he is talking about. After this incident, imagine further that Charlie talks to a group of his friends, and he tells them that Tom is an idiot. Charlie's initial epistemic exclusion of Tom as a knower has now spread throughout a larger group as a result. Charlie's friends later meet Tom and they do not believe him when he attempts to give testimony about the weather, because they reinforce Tom's pernicious ignorance in undermining Charlie's agency as a knower. Therefore, Charlie contributes to epistemic exclusion towards Tom, and a negative, ongoing credibility assignment is formed.

Face-to-face example of Epistemic Exclusion

Dotson clarifies the role of the hearer as someone who is open-minded, and respectfully listens to the speaker's testimony, even if she does not agree with said testimony or holds alternative views. This demonstrates that the hearer should indicate some form of testimonial competence to the speaker as an act of

²⁶ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

²⁷ Ibid.

reciprocation. Dotson states that if the hearer fails to meet this obligation, she commits epistemic violence to the speaker.²⁸ Epistemic violence occurs when the hearer refuses to reciprocate to the speaker's vulnerability as a speaker.²⁹ Testimonial exchange fails when the hearer does not meet her obligation to take the speaker's words as they are intended, thus failing to reciprocate.

Consider the following example to illustrate this point:

Terry chooses to tell his friend, George, about his repetitive nightmares. Terry trusts George as his confidante, because George and Terry have been friends for many years. However, George laughs at Terry and calls him a coward. Terry has exposed his vulnerability to George, but George has not fulfilled his role as a friend. This causes harm to the speaker through the act of silencing. If George has done this before, and continues to make fun of Terry's secret, he is committing pernicious ignorance through a harmful practice of silencing.

In this case of epistemic exclusion, it may not have been George's intention to hurt Terry. His mockery may have been intended as a joke, but the harm has been committed. George may not have the capacity to understand why or how he failed to acknowledge Terry's bravery in exposing a vulnerability. Nonetheless, an epistemic harm has occurred as a result of George's pernicious ignorance, resulting in a failed communicative exchange.

In summary, epistemic exclusion contributes to testimonial failure where a hearer fails to reciprocate towards a speaker as a result of negative credibility. Failed reciprocation occurs when a knower is excluded from knowledge production and from contributing to shared epistemological resources.³⁰ Dotson also explains the epistemic harms to social groups from exclusion, relating this to ongoing practices

²⁸ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

of epistemic exclusion. The harm caused to the speaker through exposing her vulnerability is epistemic because she risks becoming the victim of pernicious ignorance.

The aim of this section is to identify how instances of testimonial failure result in widespread practices of epistemic exclusion towards vulnerable speakers.

Ongoing epistemic exclusion towards social groups partly results from testimonial injustice, where the hearer(s) fail to recognize a speaker's credibility because of inherent bias. The aim of my account is to identify the ways in which testimonial failure occurs differently online compared to face-to-face examples, and then to develop an account of testimonial failure in online environments.

Epistemic exclusion and testimonial injustice operate differently online because the nature of online testimony is inherently different. The speaker and hearer have less defined roles to play because the scope for testimony is much wider.

Information and attention operate as a commodity, where a speaker may aim to reach a maximum number of hearers. Online communities are often more diverse, because testimony is not restricted to a specific time or place. I will expand on these features and their relevance in my account of online testimonial failure in chapter three. Next, I define identity prejudice as a contributing reason to testimonial failure, which follows from negative credibility assessment and epistemic exclusion.

Why Identity Prejudice is a Reason for Testimonial Failure

The third kind of testimonial failure is caused from identity prejudice. My definition of identity prejudice has been constructed partly based on Fricker's concept of credibility deficit and partly from Kristie Dotson's definition for epistemic exclusion.

Identity prejudice occurs when the speaker is denied credibility, because of the hearer's prejudice against her identity. This is related to Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice, where a speaker is undermined in her capacity as a knower, resulting in a credibility deficit caused by identity prejudice.³¹ Dotson's definition for epistemic exclusion is focused on instances where a speaker is hindered in her attempt to add to or challenge shared epistemological resources.³²

In cases of identity prejudice, the speaker suffers directly from a personal attack on her status as an epistemic knower. Identity prejudice is typically based on false assumptions regarding a speaker's personal identity, the factors that compose who they are as a person. To commit identity prejudice is to judge a speaker based on stereotyping or personal prejudice.³³ This distorts the hearer's perception of the speaker.

Fricker states that credibility misalignment can be positive or negative. Credibility deficit occurs when the speaker is not credited with believability, simply due to his/her identity or adherence to a stereotype.³⁴ In cases of testimonial failure as a result of identity prejudice, we typically refer to credibility deficit. However, I define identity prejudice as the act of judging a speaker based on stereotype (credibility assignation), with an *additional requirement* of silencing the speaker as a direct consequence of identity prejudice. The distinction between credibility assignation and identity prejudice is that identity prejudice entails epistemic exclusion.

Greg gives testimony about his run-in with the law for possession of class C drugs. Greg's identity is that of an African-American man. Despite his lack of prior convictions, Greg was found guilty by a jury and given the maximum prison sentence for the offence. Greg's friend Tom (who was a co-offender) received

³¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 44.

³² Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

³³ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

³⁴ Ibid.

more lenient treatment in conviction and sentencing on the same evidence. Tom was privileged over Greg given negative jury stereotypes that African-American males have greater propensity for crime and higher re-offending rates, and therefore merit harsher punishment. Tom did not receive equal punishment for committing the same crime, because he was not African-American. This is an example of identity prejudice. Greg's credibility deficit and resulting harsh punishment was based solely on the jury's distorted perception of the speaker's identity.

What matters in identity prejudice is not the variety of claims made by a speaker, but the underlying presumption of value that an audience assigns to a speaker.³⁵ Greg was assigned a negative value based on hearer prejudice. However, the value judgement of a speaker's testimony is dependent on the audience. If the jury which convicted Greg were prejudice cognizant of their inherent bias against his social identity as an African-American male, they would become more receptive to his testimony.³⁶

Fricker claims that

“Testimonial injustice may, depending on the context, exercise real social constructive power, and where such construction ensues, the primary harm of the injustice is grimly augmented—the epistemic insult is also a moment in a process of social construction that constrains who the person can be”.³⁷

Fricker is referring to the capacity of the hearer to assign identity prejudice to the speaker. She expands this definition to include practices of hermeneutic injustice.

³⁵ John Beverley, *Testimonio: On The Politics Of Truth* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

³⁶ John Beverley states that the intention of the speaker in testimony to speak his/her truth is paramount. However, the speaker requires authority and positive recognition to fulfil this intention. This is impossible while the speaker suffers from undue identity prejudice. Ibid.

³⁷ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 29.

Hermeneutic injustice describes a process where a social group suffers from identity prejudice, but a speaker who belongs to that social group is unable to dispel said prejudice because he/she lacks the conceptual resources to express their knowledge to an audience outside of their social group.³⁸ It is difficult for a speaker to convince a hearer to change her internal beliefs to defend against identity prejudice, while she suffers from a credibility deficit.

A speaker may self-suppress her testimony as a result of suffering from identity prejudice. The self-suppression of testimony arose in my previous example of Sarah the refugee, who was disheartened from giving testimony as a result of epistemic exclusion. She suffered from identity prejudice as a result of extended identity prejudice against her. It is unreasonable to expect a speaker to convince an entire crowd of the veracity of her testimony when suffering from identity prejudice. The speaker must acquire recognition as a qualified knower in order to give successful testimony, fulfilling her obligation as a speaker. This recognition is dependent on the hearer reciprocating the speaker's vulnerability and listening to her testimony absent of deliberate (pernicious) ignorance or other bad faith factors.

We have established that identity prejudice requires two steps: the formation of a negative stereotype directed towards the speaker, with the additional requirement that the speaker is silenced or blocked from being acknowledged as an epistemic knower, after giving testimony. This additional requirement describes the interaction between the hearer and speaker, whereas the first step focuses on the hearer's initial reaction to the speaker based on their social identity.

Face-to-face example of Identity Prejudice

An African-American male named James is standing before a jury. He has no prior convictions. The majority of the jury states that James is guilty without fully

³⁸ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

examining all the evidence. James is an ethnic minority and therefore assumed guilty by members with racial prejudice who point to incarceration statistics of that social group as evidence. On the other hand, some members of the jury argue that James should not be punished with jail time but instead community service because of his lack of prior convictions. James attempts to convince the jury that he would be worth saving from jail time, because he genuinely wants to make a positive difference to his community. However, his testimony is ignored by the majority of the jury because they have already assigned him a negative identity prejudice.

This example shows the use of identity prejudice as a reason for testimonial failure. There is not only epistemic harm being committed here, in this particular exchange, but an ongoing and long-term damage to James' reputation as an epistemic knower. Frost-Arnold proposes that it may be possible to help prejudiced hearers to overcome their ingrained prejudice by reciprocating the speaker's charitableness.³⁹ She requires that a speaker extend hopeful trust towards hearers by holding out a motivational vision of the non-prejudicial person that the hearer wishes to become. Frost-Arnold acknowledges that hopeful trust would only be effective towards receptive hearers, who are susceptible to prejudice cognizance.⁴⁰ This account implies the possibility of overcoming identity prejudice, which I will discuss in my next chapter, on Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust.

Chapter Summary

I have discussed three main reasons for testimonial failure found in the primary literature on testimony. I have examined Fricker's definitions for testimonial injustice and credibility assignation. My definition of identity prejudice draws on Fricker's concept of negative credibility deficit and partly from Kristie Dotson's

³⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

definition for epistemic exclusion. It might be argued that these concepts are all conceptually similar enough to group under testimonial injustice. However, one individual concept is necessary and sufficient for testimonial failure. I have given examples of face-to-face testimonial failures under each section to support this claim.

To recap, testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker is undermined in her capacity as a knower. A speaker is qualified as a knower where she holds reliable knowledge that-P, and the understanding that-P is accessible to the receptive hearer.⁴¹ Credibility assignation results from testimonial injustice when a hearer makes negative assumptions about a speaker based on a distorted perception of her social identity and/or traits. Testimonial injustice typically focuses on individual cases of testimonial failure, between a singular speaker and hearer. Epistemic exclusion may occur over a prolonged period of time, when a social group is continually denied from contributing to knowledge production. Dotson refers to a practice of silencing as continuous epistemic exclusion against a speaker from multiple hearers. The result of epistemic exclusion is that a speaker is halted from contributing to knowledge processes, and from accessing shared epistemological resources.⁴² Similarly to testimonial injustice, epistemic exclusion occurs as a result of the vulnerable speaker becoming undermined and blocked from giving meaningful testimony as an epistemic agent. It is integral to protect the vulnerable speaker in his/her capacity as a knower to defend against testimonial failure and increase epistemic diversity of knowledge claims within shared epistemological systems.

Identity prejudice occurs in two stages, 1) a speaker is discriminated against due to unfair credibility assignment based on her identity, and 2) the hearer making the unfair credibility assignment then fails to acknowledge the speaker as an epistemic

⁴¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). This condition is dependent on the speaker successfully conferring understanding among hearers.

⁴² Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

knower. This violates the obligation to reciprocate on behalf of the hearer. This obligation to reciprocate is exacerbated through the speaker's vulnerability in giving risky personal testimony. I make this distinction of a two-step process of identity prejudice to hold hearers accountable for epistemic exclusion of the vulnerable speaker. Our shared epistemological resources are constructed on social biases. We should address the sources and stereotypes behind identity prejudice if we are serious about stopping epistemic exclusion and testimonial injustice.

Fricker's account assumes that negative credibility assignation (which I believe is similar to identity prejudice but not the same) comes under testimonial injustice, which is why I want to distinguish identity prejudice as being a separate (although conceptually similar) reason for testimonial failure. Similarly to Fricker, Dotson's definition of testimonial failure occurs when the hearer fails to qualify the speaker as a knower because of inherent bias, or what I term identity prejudice. Dotson states that identity prejudice exemplifies a systemic means of discrimination against certain social groups of knowers on the perceived merits of his/her identity. Identity prejudice is the consequence of failed communicative exchange. I draw attention to identity prejudice for the purposes of examining how epistemic injustice is committed online.

The examples of unsuccessful face-to-face testimony that I have identified demonstrate the consequences of these different reasons for testimonial failure, in a way that shows both similarities and differences between each cause of failure. In summary, we have identified the main causes for face-to-face failed testimony. Karen Frost-Arnold suggests an alternative solution to failed testimony, which aims to relieve the oppressed speaker through engaging in hopeful trust within acts of online testimony. Her objective is to increase trustworthiness between the speaker and hearer. I will outline her account in the next chapter, and assess its suitability as a proposed solution to testimonial failure.

Chapter Two: A brief account of online testimony

Research on traditional testimony has focused predominantly on face-to-face interactions between a hearer and a speaker.⁴³ Moreover, this interaction is based on individuals, not groups, drawing attention to the singular roles of the hearer, one who receives testimony, and the speaker, one who gives testimony. Finally, traditional face-to-face testimony is typically restricted to formal settings, where the speaker gives testimony that-P.⁴⁴

Below, I explore how online testimony differs from traditional face-to-face testimony. Frost-Arnold gives the first account to explain these differences in online testimony. However, I shall argue that Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust does not capture the mechanisms of the online environment adequately. Let us consider Frost-Arnold's account.

Introduction to Hopeful Trust

Karen Frost-Arnold argues for *hopeful trust* as an effective method towards ensuring successful online testimony. Hopeful trust occurs where a speaker shares personal testimony in an online space, which motivates the hearer to become prejudice cognizant. Frost-Arnold uses McGeer's definition of hopeful trust as being

“A type of trust that can inspire trustworthiness”.⁴⁵

When we engage in acts of hopeful trust, we

⁴³ Jonathan Adler, "Epistemological Problems Of Testimony (Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy)", *Plato.Stanford.Edu*, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/testimony-episprob/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ McGeer, V. 2008. "Trust, Hope and Empowerment." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86 (2): 1-18

“Hold out to the [trustee] a vision of the kind of person they can be - a person who lives up to our hopeful vision of caring and competence over the domain of our trust. And this hopeful vision is motivating. The trustee responds to the trust by thinking “I want to be as she sees me to be””.⁴⁶

Hopeful trust aims to combat hearer prejudice through a speaker’s testimony. Prejudice occurs when “negatively charged, materially false” stereotypes are directed towards certain social groups and the individuals which comprise said group.⁴⁷ Consider the following example of hearer prejudice:

An employer, Greg, instructs two employees, Sarah and Tom, to complete the same work task within a specific period of time. Sarah finishes the task before Tom, although both employees complete the task to the same standard. However, her employer only congratulates Tom for his work, ignoring Sarah. Sarah attempts to convince Greg that she should be congratulated as well, but she is unsuccessful. Greg is prejudiced against Sarah because she is a female worker, despite her work standard being the same or higher than that of her male colleague.

In this example of hearer prejudice, Greg commits prejudice against Sarah because of her identity as a woman. This implies that Greg holds a credibility deficit against Sarah. There is a credibility excess assigned to Tom, her male colleague. This results in the privileging of his work. Frost-Arnold suggests that prejudice and the entailing privilege must be unlearned through the act of testimony. As we shall later see, I think this places an unreasonable burden on the speaker: an obligation to educate.

An example of successful hopeful trust occurs where:

⁴⁶ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 520, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 516.

A transgendered male, Mike, makes a post about his transition from a cis female online.⁴⁸ He posts a heartfelt testimonial account of the struggles he has encountered during his transition to a transgendered male, listing the obstacles that he has faced. Initially, the reaction to his testimony is broadly negative. The majority of comments are composed of hearers derailing the meaningful implications of his testimony. This first reaction is the result of negative publicity, where Mike's testimony was posted in a 'joke' forum intended for disparaging commentary.

However, the original post turns viral overnight, as a result of this negativity and hate-speech from commenters. The wider audience reading the post has an overwhelmingly positive reaction, appreciating the honesty of Mike's testimony. This wider audience has a more diverse range of users, with different values to attention-seeking trolls. Mike's testimony has been heard the way he wanted it to be heard, with an open mind. Hearer reciprocation is a positive result of Mike's acknowledgement by a wider community. He has been accredited as an epistemic agent/knower, by communities which accept his testimony as-is. Mike has made himself vulnerable to his audience, and the majority of hearers appreciated his vulnerability on speaking about a personal, controversial topic. The audience reciprocates Mike's hopeful trust, making it a successful linguistic exchange.

Frost-Arnold claims hopeful trust will help to reduce ignorance (even if it does not eradicate it) because only some hearers will be receptive to the speaker's hopeful trust.⁴⁹ She states that the speaker may motivate a hearer to visualize the non-prejudicial person that s/he could become.⁵⁰ This imposes an expectation on the hearer to re-align her internal beliefs with what the speaker believes in. According to Frost-Arnold, trust has two central features. The first is that the speaker relies

⁴⁸ The term 'cis' refers to anyone who identifies with their gender assigned at birth, whereas 'trans' refers to one who does not identify with one's gender assigned at birth. "Definition Of Cisgender", *Merriam-Webster* (Merriam-Webster, 2018), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cisgender>.

⁴⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 519, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

on the hearer to act in a trustworthy way upon hearing risky testimony.⁵¹ The speaker exposes vulnerability as a result of reliance on the hearer to reciprocate her trust. For example, Billy might rely upon Sarah to keep a secret. If Sarah betrays his trust, she is not trustworthy, and thus not reliable. This feature describes a behavioral expectation of the hearer, before the speaker gives testimony.⁵²

The second feature of trust is normative expectation. When Billy is betrayed, he is left vulnerable. He blames Sarah for betraying his expectation of her behavior. This is a reactive attitude, which occurs after the act of testimony. Normative expectation is where a speaker trusts that a hearer will hold herself accountable for her own actions.⁵³ This would necessitate that Sarah apologize for her actions, thus taking accountability.

Frost-Arnold's Account of Hopeful Trust

Frost-Arnold argues that it is rational to trust in others because it provides therapeutic value to the trustor. The purpose of hopeful trust is to guard against hearer prejudice and privilege through challenging and increasing awareness of a hearer's privilege and prejudice.⁵⁴ Her argument for hopeful trust rests on two assumptions: first, people generally do not want to take advantage of another's vulnerability.⁵⁵ Secondly, she assumes that people generally want to live up to

⁵¹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 519, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁵² However, this does not account for situations where it is appropriate for the hearer to betray the speaker's trust. In a situation where Billy tells Sarah that he wants to partake in dangerous activities, such as base-jumping or drug-taking, Sarah would be betraying Billy's reliance. Yet it is acceptable that Sarah is unreliable in this case because she saves Billy's life. Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 514. I refer to prejudice cognizance throughout most of this section, which should be taken to include privilege cognizance under Frost-Arnold's view.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 521.

another's expectations.⁵⁶ These conditions are emphasized in the following example, given by Frost-Arnold:

“Suppose you run a small shop. And suppose you discover that the person you have recently employed has just been convicted of petty theft. Should you trust him with the till? It appears that you can really decide whether or not to do so, and again it appears that you can do so without believing that he is trustworthy. Perhaps you think trust is the best way to draw him back into the moral community”.⁵⁷

Despite the shopkeeper not having any empirical evidence that her employee is trustworthy, she hopes that her employee will look after her shop because she engages in hopeful trust. Ideally, the employee would be inspired by the shopkeeper's faith and become motivated to fulfil her expectations. Frost-Arnold argues that engaging in hopeful trust requires some rational basis, where the shopkeeper must maintain realistic expectations of her employee. This provision further states that there must be no overriding incentives for the employee to defy the shopkeepers' hopeful trust. The shopkeeper should at minimum have an *absence of reason* to deny trusting the employee.⁵⁸

Hopeful trust is based on *therapeutic trust*, which aims to use trust as a mechanism to bring about trustworthiness in others.⁵⁹ According to Frost-Arnold, the shopkeeper's trust in her employee motivates him/her to live up to her normative behavioral expectations. This reinstates the employee's status in the moral community, because he has fulfilled his ethical duty. In terms of the Internet, the moral community, or ethical actions determined by a community, serve a similar purpose: to increase trustworthiness among members.⁶⁰ Online

⁵⁶ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 522.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 513-531

communities often form under a certain expectation to participate without causing undue harm to other members (whether epistemic harm or trolling). However, the behavioral norms imposed by hopeful trust are applied to a larger group of people online, potentially operating under greater conditions of anonymity, which means that it is typically harder to enforce. Some communities employ moderators or a code of conduct in the hope of improving trustworthiness through regulations. I will explain these methods in my modified account of hopeful trust in chapter three.

One of Frost-Arnold's case examples illustrates how a transgendered person combated taunts and online hate from ignorant cisgender people, through posting a personal recollection of the persecution they encountered in the past. Frost-Arnold claims that the speaker who attempts to address ignorance may help to reduce it. This implies an obligation on the speaker to expose vulnerability through hopeful trust in the audience, who should reciprocate by living up to the speaker's expectations. Hopeful trust imposes a normative expectation that

“[The hearer] will listen with an open mind, attempting to overcome whatever barriers may prevent him/her from giving due credibility”.⁶¹

Frost-Arnold argues that the hearer should substitute learned prejudice for a positive, alternative self-identity. In order to fulfil this normative expectation, the speaker must become a role model for the hearer.

The expected result of a speaker's hopeful trust is normative, where the speaker shares a vision of an unprejudiced person that she trusts the hearer to become. This normative vision (created by the speaker's motivational hope that the hearer is reliable or trustworthy) mandates that the hearer recognize or become aware of her own prejudices, and do something to combat them. The type of prejudice that

⁶¹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 520, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

Frost-Arnold aims to combat through hopeful trust is termed *socially constructed ignorance*. This refers to ignorance which is socially produced and maintained.⁶²

Frost-Arnold states that online forums such as social media may be used to invite hearers into a new community, one which hearers may not otherwise have a chance to join. Speakers are able to invite users to comment and interact with online testimony, giving the opportunity to continue the conversation. Creating a diverse, self-aware community provides a chance for a speaker to feel less isolated from their prior communities.⁶³ This also creates a chance for speakers to become more aware of hearer diversity among their audience, which may enable generalized trust from the speaker to the audience. Frost-Arnold argues that generalized trust in online strangers is evidence to believe in the power of hopeful trust.⁶⁴ However, she does acknowledge that generalized trust is context-relative. For example, a pro-choice activist would not generally trust in members of a pro-life forum to accept her testimony. Therefore the power of hopeful trust has clear limits, where “in some audiences, hopeful trust may be both ineffective and psychologically impossible”.⁶⁵

Frost-Arnold’s Concerns about Hopeful Trust

Frost-Arnold anticipates criticism of hopeful trust’s normative expectations, and she raises three main concerns, which she terms as *barriers to hopeful trust*. I detail her proposed solutions to these concerns here. The barriers are: testimonial injustice, defensive ignorance, and the absence of alternatives.

⁶² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁶³ Ibid, 525.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Frost-Arnold's first concern about hopeful trust is termed *testimonial injustice*. Frost-Arnold and Miranda Fricker use the same concept of testimonial injustice, as an occurrence where

“A speaker, S, receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer, H. When H's stereotypes cause H to grant S's testimony less credibility than would have been granted in the absence of prejudice, the speaker is unjustly undermined in her capacity as a knower”.⁶⁶

Testimonial injustice functions to block understanding between speaker and hearer. It describes the phenomenon where the hearer undermines the speaker's capacity as a knower, and therefore, undermines her ability to contribute to any social form of knowledge.⁶⁷ This mechanism may convince the speaker that she is not qualified to share her hard-earned expertise or knowledge. This is an epistemic harm, causing harm to the speaker and potential hearer. The shutting-down of dialogue reaffirms the hearer's belief that the speaker has no worthy testimony, and casts aside the speaker as a meaningful contributor to social knowledge.

Testimonial injustice appears to affect the most vulnerable members of a society, those who suffer from credibility deficit as a result of prejudice. Fricker states that testimonial injustice could be avoided if the hearer takes steps to revise her credibility assessments of the speaker, to accurately reflect the speaker's trustworthiness.⁶⁸ This idea is echoed in the objective of hopeful trust, which generally aims to increase the positive credibility of the speaker. This account relies on the speaker being trustworthy and reliable on her testimonial knowledge.

Hopeful trust relies on the premise that the hearer may be receptive enough to the speaker's testimony to revise her (previously prejudicial) beliefs. However, Frost-

⁶⁶ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 44.

⁶⁷ I refer to this two-step process as identity prejudice, defined in chapter one.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Arnold states that hearers often have defense mechanisms towards being told that a change in beliefs is necessary, because the hearer is required to change certain aspects of his/her sense of self-identity.⁶⁹ It is arguably easier for a hearer to retain prejudicial core beliefs, rather than accept *prima facie* from the speaker that he/she should change in order to fit the speaker's ideal vision. Furthermore, the hearer's prejudicial beliefs may be reinforced by other speakers who do not suffer from credibility deficit. Epistemic laziness or lack of motivation may cause hearers to reciprocate more towards speakers who share the same prejudicial beliefs (as opposed to seeking out speakers who challenge the hearer's prejudice).⁷⁰ This leads us to the second barrier.

Frost-Arnold's second concern about hopeful trust is termed *defensive ignorance*. Defensive ignorance occurs where certain hearers will resist psychological cognizance of his/her ingrained prejudice.⁷¹ Hopeful trust works on the basis of a trust-responsiveness mechanism between speaker and hearer, also referred to as reliance, or the speaker's expectation of reciprocation from the hearer.⁷² The speaker imposes a normative behavioral expectation where the hearer becomes motivated to be a less prejudicial person, resulting from the speaker's hopeful trust.

An example of defensive ignorance might occur when:

The speaker gives testimony on experiencing violence and harassment on the street, resulting from her Muslim identity and appearance. The hearer shows defensive ignorance in response to her testimony, and refuses to fulfil the speaker's hopeful trust that the hearer become prejudice cognizant.⁷³ In order for a

⁶⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 518, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁷⁰ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 518, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁷³ There is an implication that H is part of the dominant social group or culture that contributes in some way towards S's identity deficit as a Muslim woman.

hearer to let go of his/her testimonial bias against the speaker, s/he must realize that s/he is part of the majority group that contributes (even indirectly) to the maintenance of oppression against the Muslim culture. Part of this process includes getting the hearer to view herself, and the identity of her social group, in a negative light.⁷⁴

Frost-Arnold anticipates the fact that hearers have defense mechanisms towards being told s/he is ignorant, because it threatens the hearer's sense of self-identity. For example, an online hearer could easily find another speaker or source which contradicts the vulnerable speaker's view, reaffirming the notion that the hearer is not in the wrong. Resolving defensive ignorance is difficult when the hearer has assigned the speaker a credibility deficit, resulting from identity prejudice. In Frost-Arnold's above example, the speaker is asking the hearer to acknowledge that his/her social group has negatively contributed towards the speaker's existing credibility deficit.⁷⁵ There is an implication that the speaker has suffered from identity prejudice as a result of the hearer's privileged status. Even if the speaker has the best intentions to educate and motivate hearers to be less prejudicial, the hearer may feel alienated and show resentment towards the speaker for making her feel

"Uncomfortable, guilty... or for making the hearer (and his/her social group) seem unjust or unkind".⁷⁶

Despite the speaker's good intentions to lessen prejudice, the hearer may become further entrenched in prejudicial beliefs rather than respond to the speaker's hopeful trust. Frost-Arnold gives an example of a speaker taking pre-emptive action against defensive ignorance while engaging in hopeful trust. This excerpt is

⁷⁴ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 518, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

originally from Rachel McKinnon's blog, *Metamorpho-Sis: A Trans Girl's Blog on Philosophy, Feminism and Transitioning*.⁷⁷

“This post might make you feel bad, defensive or angry, and for that I’m sorry... [But] getting a transgender person’s name or pronouns wrong *really* hurts: it’s like an invalidation of his/her/hir identity. So I implore: a little effort goes a long way”.⁷⁸

The speaker is giving testimony about the harm she has encountered, as a result of being mis-gendered from other people refusing to use her preferred pronouns (she/her). Through giving this personal, risky testimony, the speaker is exposing vulnerability to her audience. Her exposition results from hopeful trust in her audience, to hear her testimony as she intends it to be heard. McKinnon, as a speaker, recognizes the controversial nature of her testimony, but she believes that her attempt to educate the hearer is worth the risk of making her potential audience susceptible to defensive ignorance.⁷⁹

Frost-Arnold states that this is a successful case of hopeful trust combating defensive ignorance, because McKinnon has asked her audience to realize that using the wrong gender pronouns can cause harm. She is relying on her audience to live up to her expectation of hopeful trust through privilege cognizance. The privilege cognizance aspect refers to hearers who were unaware of the personal harm caused to McKinnon's identity through mis-gendering. McKinnon attempts to motivate her audience to become less prejudiced, through educating unintentionally ignorant hearers.⁸⁰ This example shows McKinnon's rejection of identity prejudice, where she reaffirms her status and identity as a transgender woman.

⁷⁷ Rachel McKinnon, "Being On Autopilot", *Metamorpho-Sis: A Transgirl's Blog On Philosophy, Feminism And Transitioning*, 2012, <http://Metamorpho-sis.net/2012/06/5-being-on-autopilot/>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 524, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁸⁰ Note that this does not refer to hearers who engage in pernicious ignorance, because hopeful trust is aimed at receptive hearers.

Frost-Arnold takes this example as evidence that, despite a hearer's potential defensiveness to McKinnon's blog post, the hearer is capable of pushing past this initial reaction once receptive to the speaker's hopeful trust. McKinnon's post continues:

“And the good news? The more success you have, the more likely you'll continue to be successful, and the easier it will get. Thank you in advance”.⁸¹

McKinnon attempts to engage hearer(s) in a positive way, by thanking her audience in advance. This act of thanking intends to help the hearer push past her initial defensive reaction. This helps the hearer to respond to the motivational force of McKinnon's hopeful trust, helping the hearer to visualize who she could become; a non-prejudicial hearer.⁸² Frost-Arnold claims that McKinnon's pre-emptive action of thanking her audience for reciprocating

“mitigates the sting of the truths McKinnon tells her cisgender readers about their learned habits of carelessness, and this lowers the risk of defensive ignorance”.⁸³

Frost-Arnold's proposed solution to defensive ignorance is for the hearer to take positive action, by revising her internal beliefs to fit the speaker's idea of a less prejudiced person. This obligation for the hearer to become prejudice cognizant is sparked by the speaker's motivational power of hopeful trust. The role of hopeful trust in combating defensive ignorance focuses on increasing hearer accountability for meeting the speaker's behavioral expectation of reciprocation. The speaker is posed as vulnerable to defensive ignorance and testimonial injustice, because she

⁸¹ Rachel McKinnon, "Being On Autopilot", *Metamorpho-Sis: A Transgirl's Blog On Philosophy, Feminism And Transitioning*, 2012, <http://Metamorpho-sis.net/2012/06/5-being-on-autopilot/>.

⁸² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 525, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁸³ Ibid.

extends her hopeful trust to hearers without guarantee of reciprocation. While engaging in hopeful trust, the speaker must open herself up to analysis and potential criticism to elicit the desired prejudice cognizance from hearers. Frost-Arnold states that a speaker's role is often geared towards educating hearers. This involves the speaker cautioning hearers of implicit bias based on pre-existing prejudice, shown by McKinnon's testimony.⁸⁴

"Often, the speaker's goal is to alert [hearers] to the existence of the very stereotypes that could cause them not to take her seriously".⁸⁵

This reinforces Frost-Arnold's normative assumption that a hearer's expected role in hopeful trust is to overcome defensive ignorance.⁸⁶

Frost-Arnold's third concern about hopeful trust is termed, *absence of alternatives*. We have established that hopeful trust may fail in cases of testimonial injustice, and as a result of defensive ignorance. Frost-Arnold anticipates a third reason that hopeful trust may fail, where the speaker is unable to reach the hearer because

"The privileged and prejudiced may lack [role] models of alternative unprejudiced or privilege cognizant identities...without a positive anti-racist, feminist, anti-homophobic, class-conscious or anti-transphobic identity for which she can trade in her ignorance, the hearer's defense mechanisms may kick in. This presents a problem for our social media user, S, who aims to generate cognizance of privilege. S does not wish to simply preach to the choir; S wants to help the privileged ignorant see their privilege. But it is precisely the privilege ignorant who are least likely to already have a clear

⁸⁴ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 524, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 519.

⁸⁶ Defensive ignorance against the speaker also be referred to as inherent bias or prejudice which contributes to the speaker's credibility deficit. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

vision of an alternative, privilege cognizant identity. They are less likely to have role models of the privilege cognizant and those trying to unlearn their prejudice. And S herself cannot be such a role model for the hearer, since S belongs to the oppressed group”.⁸⁷

An absence of alternatives might occur when:

Tom gives testimony about his life experiences as an orthodox Jewish rabbi. His testimony is based on his experiences of discriminatory treatment from Christians as a result of his religious beliefs. Harry hears Tom’s testimony, but it does not have an impact on him because he is unable to relate it to any of his life experiences. Harry is a practicing Christian, but he has not experienced religious persecution, unlike Tom. When Harry hears that Tom is attributing blame to other Christians as a result of his experiences, Harry becomes angry and refuses to listen to Tom’s testimony (despite its veracity). Tom’s attempt at testimony fails, despite his hopeful trust in Harry to realize his privileges as someone who has escaped persecution because of identity prejudice.

The next day, Harry goes to a Christian sermon where the speaker, Betty, is a member of his congregation. Betty educates Harry about the historical persecution of Jewish rabbi by Christians, and Harry starts to believe Tom’s testimony. Harry’s increased hearer reciprocation results from Betty’s testimony. Betty acts as Harry’s role model, because he is able to see that a person who shares the same privileges has unlearned those privileges. Harry is inspired and wishes to unlearn his privileges as well. Therefore, Betty’s hopeful trust in Harry is successful.

This example demonstrates that Tom’s best efforts to reach Harry were unsuccessful because Harry was unable to empathize with Tom. However, once Harry heard testimony from Betty, he was able to understand the content of Tom’s

⁸⁷ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 519, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

testimony and become prejudice cognizant. Frost-Arnold states that hopeful trust can overcome absence of alternatives, by offering the hearer a “vision of a future version of the hearer, so that the hearer can act as a kind of role model to herself.”⁸⁸ She also states that social media communities offer the chance for a hearer to connect with vulnerable speakers outside of the hearer’s social group.⁸⁹ This may result in increased hearer susceptibility to testimony from an oppressed or vulnerable speaker, given the chance to communicate more directly online.⁹⁰ This imposes a normative expectation on the speaker to inspire the hearer to become prejudice and privilege cognizant, even in cases of testimonial failure (caused by identity prejudice from the hearer towards the speaker).⁹¹

In summary, Frost-Arnold has presented three concerns about hopeful trust. She has then responded to her concerns with proposed solutions. I have given exposition of her responses to these concerns, giving case examples to support and illustrate her points. Frost-Arnold believes that she has successfully defended her account against further concerns, proving that hopeful trust can combat socially situated ignorance.⁹² However, I argue that hopeful trust does not succeed in defending against any of the three concerns that Frost-Arnold has raised. The sentiment of hopeful trust is admirable, that a hearer and speaker should show respect and charity towards each other in acts of testimonial exchange. Yet, hopeful trust requires additional features and improvements to successfully operate in either face-to-face or online environments. This reasoning will be explained in the next section.

⁸⁸ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 525, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ This assumption is made on the assumption that within face-to-face testimony, it is more difficult to talk to the speaker directly given the limited time available.

⁹¹ Testimonial failure occurs when there is no reciprocation between hearer and speaker, where the hearer does not understand the speaker as a result of unclear communication, or the hearer does not recognize the speaker as a knower. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 528, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

My Objections to Hopeful Trust

The concept of hopeful trust is aspirational. It demonstrates the power of words, from the speaker to hearer. The speaker aims to motivate hearers by holding out an alternative, positive view of identity. A speaker's knowledge and decisions about her audience (and subsequently, the content of her testimony) are shaped by the hearer's perceived trustworthiness.⁹³ Hopeful trust requires additional features to operate successfully, which maximize charitability of the hearer towards the vulnerable speaker, while lessening the obligation on the speaker to educate prejudicial hearers.

I believe that hopeful trust makes the speaker more vulnerable by adding a normative obligation to perform acts of prejudice and privilege cognizance to unwilling hearers. I argue that hearers are given excessive requirements to restructure his/her internal beliefs, resulting from hopeful trust's heavy normative expectations on the speaker. Hopeful trust is context dependent in order to work effectively. Context dependence occurs in cases where hearers are already receptive to the content of the speaker's testimony (and thus more likely to engage in prejudice cognizance).⁹⁴ Finally, I believe that Frost-Arnold's paradigm example of the employee and her shopkeeper is reliant on a tacit assumption that the employee would have additional motivation to live up to the speaker's hopeful trust as a result of context. These objections to Frost-Arnold will be explained in further detail in this section.

⁹³ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

⁹⁴ I have created this definition of context dependence to refer specifically to testimonial occurrences between speaker and hearers. Other examples include cases where the trustor has an established relationship with the trustee. There are also situations where the speaker conveys knowledge on a topic that the hearer is already receptive to (i.e.: the hearer attends a seminar on marketing strategies for businesses, and willingly admits that she was ignorant on marketing strategies before the conference).

First Objection: *Frost-Arnold's paradigm example supporting hopeful trust is not successful because it is too context dependent, thereby undermining its general applicability.*

The key difference between hopeful trust and pre-existing trust is that hopeful trust is reliant on the assumption that people generally want to live up to the generalized trust of strangers. In Frost-Arnold's key example of the shopkeeper and the employee, she states that the shopkeeper should, at minimum, have an *absence of reason* to deny trusting her employee.⁹⁵ Intuitively, it does not follow that a speaker should engage in hopeful trust without due reason. Frost-Arnold states that hopeful trust exists even in situations where there is no clear reason to extend trust. She argues that the very act of trusting is therapeutic for the speaker, and therefore rational according to her definition of trust. I do not believe that an action is necessarily rational due to its therapeutic potential. Consider a situation where I could choose to spend a large amount of money on a therapeutic massage, but the consequence of this choice is: I cannot afford my monthly rent payment. Therefore, it would be irrational for me to purchase an expensive massage based solely on its therapeutic potential. There are other considerations that must be taken into account, which I explore in this section.

Frost-Arnold's primary case example does not clearly show the benefit of engaging in hopeful trust. The shopkeeper's trust may be therapeutic in some sense, but *the final outcome is not dependent on hopeful trust*. Frost-Arnold assumes that the shopkeeper will engage in hopeful trust with an absence of reasons not to trust the employee. Hopeful trust requires that the shopkeeper give the benefit of the doubt to her employee, at risk to herself. There is no requirement for risk-management in this example, where the shopkeeper weighs up what might be at stake (the contents of her store, effectively her livelihood) in exchange for a small return (having her hopeful trust in her employee satisfied). If we were to take an

⁹⁵ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 522, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

abstracted notion of hopeful trust as positive reinforcement, this could work over a period of time where the shopkeeper built up a relationship with her employee. However, this is not the stated purpose of hopeful trust, which intends to encourage privilege cognizance.

Frost-Arnold appeals to the shopkeeper's experience, and her relationship with her employee. Trust is often built on the length of a relationship, which should be accounted for in hopeful trust. But notice how Frost-Arnold is tacitly relying on pre-existing trust in her example of the shopkeeper and her employee. The shopkeeper might have the best of intentions to trust in her employee, but this does not guarantee the success of hopeful trust. It seems that a pre-existing trust is necessary in order for the shopkeeper to take the step of leaving her livelihood to the care of her employee.

It is probable that the employee made mistakes due to his/her inexperience, but s/he could have learned from those mistakes and lived up to the shopkeeper's hopeful trust, without her boss's expectations being the primary driving force. I do not dispute that the shopkeeper's expectations may affect the employee in some way, but s/he could simply not care about the shopkeeper's expectations. The employee might, for example, be acting from fear of recrimination or future punishment. However, it is reasonable to assume the shopkeeper's expectations would have more effect on the employee over time, if she had a good relationship with her employee.

In response, Frost-Arnold states that hopeful trust may be stronger in thick relationships. She defends her account by stating that in an online context where there are no pre-existing relationships, there is still the possibility of the hearer living up to the speaker's motivations. Her reasons are that

- 1) "A rational trustor is basing her trust on evidence about what people in general are capable of doing. Thus her vision, as long as it does

not appear to be wildly implausible, does appear to the online user as having some grounding - so it appears to the trustee as a vision they could possibly live up to.

2) There can be some motivation to live up to the generalized trust of strangers. When others make themselves vulnerable to us by trusting us, many of us feel loathe (to some degree) to let them down. So while the hopeful trust mechanism may be stronger in thick relationships, I do not think it is wholly absent in thinner ones".⁹⁶

Notice that the rationality of hopeful trust is dependent on the strength of the relationship between the speaker and hearer. However, even in this example, one must suppress rational thought in order to have hopeful trust. The shopkeeper must suppress her rational instinct not to trust her employee (based on evidence of the employee's past actions), and hold out hope that s/he will overcome his/her past mistakes. This normative expectation of the employee is based on a generalized assumption that s/he will fulfil the shopkeeper's hopeful trust, and become trustworthy.

When criminals are sent to jail, they are convicted based on their past actions. One does not use hopeful trust to justify letting a convicted pedophile, once released, go to a children's playground, on the strength that the parole officer had hopeful trust that the pedophile would be motivated by his officer's trust to become a law-abiding citizen. This is an extreme example, but it demonstrates the existence of other factors that influence the employee's actions. This paradigm example does not prove that hopeful trust can occur between two strangers without a pre-existing trust, as Frost-Arnold claims.

Second Objection: *Hopeful trust imposes an excessive burden on the speaker to reduce ignorance and increase privilege and prejudice cognizance among hearers*

⁹⁶ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 527, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

(while the speaker suffers from a credibility deficit). This increases the vulnerability of the marginalized speaker.

Frost-Arnold claims that socially constructed ignorance is best combated through improving and validating the hearer's knowledge.⁹⁷ In comparison, I believe that the oppressed speaker should not be expected to educate her oppressors. It is a matter of choice, whether the speaker is comfortable in giving testimony of such a risky, personal nature. To give an example of speaker vulnerability, Sally might give testimony concerning her sexual assault. She chooses to give testimony in a group counselling session, where she feels safe as an epistemic agent to give knowledge. Her reasoning is that she is confident that she will not be assigned a credibility deficit based on *prima facie* assumptions. Her comfort within that community allows her to give testimony without feeling threatened or undermined as an epistemic knower. Sally is encouraged by her experience giving testimony within a supportive community, and she chooses to start a personal blog based on supporting other victims of sexual assault.

One day her blog gathers attention within another community which assigns Sally an identity prejudice on the basis that her testimony is false, made up for attention and/or commercial gain. Sally is left with two choices: attempt to educate the hearers who have assigned her a credibility deficit, or close her blog down (resulting in what Dotson terms *self-suppression of testimony* from the speaker). Sally chooses to respond to the hearers who have assigned her negative credibility, but they do not respond in the way she had hoped. As a result, she closes her blog down. Sally's choice was made on the basis of her mental fortitude and hope that hearers would reciprocate her hopeful trust and become less prejudiced towards victims of sexual assault. However, Sally should not suffer an obligation to convince prejudicial hearers that she is not a liar or opportunist. Frost-Arnold proposes that the speaker (Sally) combat ignorant hearers by educating her

⁹⁷ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

oppressors. On the contrary, I believe that the speaker should not suffer an obligation to reason with prejudiced hearers on the basis that this furthers the vulnerability of the speaker.⁹⁸

In Fricker's definition of testimonial injustice, she does not account for the underlying cause of identity prejudice that is assigned to the speaker by the hearer. A credibility deficit could result from identity prejudice, which implies hearers would be unwilling to make a revised credibility assessment. Here, hopeful trust is introduced as a mechanism where the speaker convinces the hearer to revise her credibility assessment after giving testimony. However, this imposes an obligation on the speaker to convince the hearer that she deserves to be listened to. This detracts from the content of the speaker's testimony, making an additional requirement that a speaker give testimony for the sake of prejudicial hearers, rather than focus on appealing to receptive hearers in her audience.

A speaker might set out with the best intention of hopeful trust in her hearers, but some hearers choose not to receive her testimony in good faith; assigning her a credibility deficit based on identity prejudice. Hearer reciprocation requires some charitability from the hearer, to acknowledge the speaker in the way she would like to be heard. It may be desirable for the speaker to attempt to convince unreceptive hearers to accept the veracity of her testimony (taking on a challenge). Yet, requiring the speaker to educate the willfully ignorant or prejudiced requires that the speaker set out with the notion that some prejudicial hearers do not believe her testimony, regardless of its potential value. This is a heavy burden to require from a vulnerable speaker, especially when she is attempting to establish herself as an epistemic knower.

⁹⁸ This obligation also wrongfully conveys that the speaker (and her potential responses to hearer ignorance) may be representative of other vulnerable speakers with similar marginalized identities or experiences. In this case, Sally's testimony is taken to represent that of all sexual assault victims, painting her as a figurehead of that marginalized social group.

Frost-Arnold focuses on motivational hope, which is used by the speaker to motivate the hearer to become a better, or at minimum, a less biased person. Frost-Arnold believes that the speaker makes herself vulnerable to hearers, but

“In a way that actively holds out a vision to them...what they can be or do”.⁹⁹

This implies that the speaker is the victim of epistemic injustice, because the speaker is not able to communicate effectively due to credibility deficit. The speaker is limited in her capacity to reach an unreceptive audience, because of the problem of the absence of alternative speakers with positive credibility. By instigating hopeful trust as the primary means to reach hearers, this places an unfair burden on the speaker to educate and motivate hearers.

When Frost-Arnold asks,

“If the speaker belongs to the oppressed group, how she can help the hearer to see his/her prejudice?” she assumes that the speaker has the capacity to educate a prejudiced hearer and motivate him/her to be less prejudicial. However, just because the speaker has the *capacity* to educate prejudicial hearers, does not mean that she *should* suffer the obligation to educate prejudicial hearers.

Third Objection: *Hopeful trust is not successful against defensive ignorance, because it imposes an unrealistic expectation on the hearer to revise her internal beliefs to become consistent with the speaker’s motivational expectations.*¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it does not allow for an open dialogue where the speaker and hearer might reach a respectful disagreement.

A third problem with Frost-Arnold’s account is that she has not adequately explained the process behind using hopeful trust to counter defensive ignorance. Defensive ignorance is difficult to combat for the hearer, because it requires the

⁹⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 520, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

¹⁰⁰ This includes the expectation that S respond to negative credibility assessments from H with motivational hope, which I have explained as an excessive requirement.

hearer to *align her fundamental moral beliefs with those of the speaker*. Hopeful trust requires that the speaker not only has an obligation to educate hearers, but also to initiate a new belief system for the hearer, in line with what the speaker believes is right. This defeats the purpose of an open dialogue, where the speaker and hearer reciprocate and learn from each other.

Hopeful trust is based on the speaker's desire to be heard as he/she would like to be heard. Frost-Arnold's analysis of this example assumes that the hearer would find it difficult or unusual to accept a transgendered person's testimony. She emphasizes McKinnon's act of thanking the audience as a means of combating defensive ignorance. Frost-Arnold seems to be making an inference that hopeful trust requires more than a normative expectation of the hearer to listen. However, the amount of effort required from the hearer to overcome initial prejudice towards the speaker depends on the hearer's existing beliefs.

For example, it would not be an excessive demand for McKinnon to ask an avid LGBT rights supporter to reciprocate her hopeful trust. This is because the LGBT supporter would already be susceptible to the belief that transgendered people deserve to be called by whichever pronoun with which they identify. Yet, if McKinnon directed her testimony towards a hearer who identified as an orthodox Catholic priest, her requirement that the hearer extend meaningful reciprocation might be excessive. This would be due to the hearer having to overcome his pre-existing internal belief that transgendered people do not exist. The hearer is expected to reduce his/her prejudice through self-awareness. This is a difficult task to accomplish, even if the hearer is willing to engage in a self-reflective process.

Furthermore, it is possible for a hearer to understand the speaker's testimony without necessarily meeting the speaker's expectations. A hearer may disagree with a speaker's testimony without changing his/her internal beliefs. In summary, I believe that Frost-Arnold's response to defensive ignorance fails because it places

an unnecessary burden on the hearer to align her internal beliefs with the speaker, and it does not allow for disagreement between the hearer and speaker.

Fourth Objection: *Frost-Arnold's proposed solution to the absence of alternatives is based on the idea that speakers and hearers only ever belong to a single identity, which picks at a single set of privileges. However, this is not the case for anyone with an intersectional identity. Epistemic diversity of speakers instead should be encouraged to promote speaker-hearer reciprocation.*¹⁰¹

The absence of alternatives states that a hearer may be unable to accept testimony from a speaker who has a different identity or credibility to the hearer. This is caused by a lack of understanding from the hearer towards the speaker, where the hearer requires a role model with similar privileges to show how s/he became prejudice cognizant, before the hearer can realize his/her prejudices.

Frost-Arnold offers a solution to absence of alternatives: that a hearer should instead receive testimony from a member of his/her own social group. She believes that hearing testimony from a member of one's social group may be more effective than hearing testimony from a vulnerable speaker with dissimilar experiences.

I believe that Frost-Arnold's solution to absence of alternatives is counter-intuitive to hopeful trust, which preaches acceptance and diversity as epistemic benefits to testimony. If the hearer refuses to accept testimony from the speaker on the basis of identity prejudice, this furthers discrimination against the vulnerable speaker. It is unrealistic to assume that a hearer's identity prejudice against the speaker might be easily changed by hearing testimony from another speaker, regardless of any similarity in privilege. It is also possible for a hearer to look up to a speaker for being different, or encountering unimaginable hardship. Testimony is a tool of

¹⁰¹ Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

communication, where the speaker often gives her audience a glimpse into uncharted territories. Some hearers seek to have certain boundaries tested, becoming more receptive to challenging ideas or concepts.

Furthermore, Frost-Arnold's account does not take into account speakers or hearers with intersectional identities. People have multifaceted identities whose sources of privilege are hard to identify, thereby making them hard to unlearn. The absence of alternatives is based on the idea that speakers and hearers only ever belong to a single identity, which picks at a single set of privileges. However, this is not the case for anyone with an intersectional identity.

Kristie Dotson suggests a preferable solution to the absence of alternatives. Her proposed solution is to give epistemic agency to knowers, which she defines as

“The ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within given community of knowers to participate in knowledge production, and if required, the *revision* of those same resources”.¹⁰²

Dotson's solution brings more speakers into the spotlight, rather than excluding the speaker further because of her marginalized social position. Dotson claims that revision of shared social resources is necessary in order to bring about wider social changes.¹⁰³ This necessitates the inclusion of more speakers to achieve epistemic agency. By revising common stereotypes or assumptions which contribute to marginalization of speakers, we are able to include knowers in the circle of epistemic agency. Increasing diversity aims to increase acceptance and likelihood of reciprocation between hearer and speaker.

In order for our knowledge to grow, it is important to recognize when pre-existing beliefs held by the dominant majority should be challenged. It is also important that

¹⁰² Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 115-138.

the viewpoints of stigmatized groups be included in these shared epistemic resources. This involves recognizing that we occasionally need friction, in order to test the resilience of our social imagination.¹⁰⁴

Summary of Objections

In summary, I have presented four key objections to Frost-Arnold's account,

- 1) Frost-Arnold's paradigm example supporting hopeful trust is not successful because of context dependence, thereby undermining its general applicability.¹⁰⁵
- 2) Hopeful trust imposes an excessive burden on the speaker to reduce ignorance and increase privilege and prejudice cognizance among hearers (while S suffers from a credibility deficit). This increases the vulnerability of the marginalized speaker.
- 3) Hopeful trust is not successful against defensive ignorance, because it imposes an unrealistic expectation on the hearer to revise her internal beliefs to become consistent with the speaker's motivational expectations. Furthermore, it does not allow for an open dialogue where the speaker and hearer might reach a respectful disagreement.
- 4) Frost-Arnold's proposed solution to the absence of alternatives is based on the idea that speakers and hearers only ever belong to a single identity, which picks at a single set of privileges. This is not the case for anyone with an intersectional identity. Epistemic diversity of speakers instead should be encouraged to promote speaker-hearer reciprocation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

¹⁰⁵ My definition of context dependence is first given on page 42, occurring in cases where: hearers are already receptive to the content of the speaker's testimony (and thus more likely to engage in prejudice cognizance).

¹⁰⁶ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

I have examined key reasons for testimonial failure in traditional accounts of face-to-face testimony. This led me to Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust, which attempts to resolve epistemic injustices and socially constructed ignorance. I have found that hopeful trust, in its current state, does not provide a solution to testimonial failures in cases of face-to-face testimony.

However, epistemic harms are enacted differently in online environments. This change in environments begs the question of how Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust might also change to address epistemic harms unique to the online world. In chapter two, I have discussed Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust without referring to the different methods used to spread information through online testimony. Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust should be modified to take the differences of online harm into consideration. My next chapter takes a closer look at how hearers receive online testimony differently from face-to-face testimony, and what this implies for Frost-Arnold.

My primary objective in chapter three is to examine the unique types of epistemic harms encountered by online testimony. I then introduce reasonable expectations for the way online testimony is conducted. Finally, I propose a new framework to identify testimonial failure online. My list of features distinguishing online testimony from face-to-face testimony will be explained in further detail, to provide a realistic context for online testimony.

Chapter Three: An account of differences

The primary goal of this chapter is to introduce and explain differences between online and face-to-face testimony. I first define what successful online testimony ought to look like, by creating a paradigm example for successful testimony in an online environment. I then explore key differences between face-to-face and online

testimony. This undergirds my final discussion, where I discuss the implications of these differences for hopeful trust in an online environment.

What is successful online testimony?

According to Frost-Arnold, the success of a speaker's testimony is dependent on the level of positive reciprocation from the majority of hearers.¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸ Let us deconstruct how reasonable normative expectations between hearer and speaker ensures successful reciprocation in her view.¹⁰⁹ She claims that a speaker must have trust in her audience, and that her testimony will be heard with an open mind. This is an extended version of her requirement that the speaker adopts an attitude of hopeful trust toward a single hearer.

She gives the following example:

A young transgendered male, Mike, makes a post about his gender transition online. He posts a long, heartfelt testimonial account of the struggles he has encountered during his transition, listing the obstacles that he has faced. At first, the reaction to his testimony is broadly negative. The majority of comments consist of trolls seeking attention, or to diminish the meaningful implications of this testimony from someone who is considered 'outside the norm'. However, the post turns viral as a result of this negativity and hate-speech from commenters. The wider audience who sees this post has an overwhelmingly positive reaction, appreciating the honesty of Mike's testimony. Mike has made himself vulnerable to

¹⁰⁷ From now on, I will refer to an audience, which might be constituted by an individual, or many individuals, rather than a singular hearer, because online testimony allows for both kinds of interactions (in contrast to the singular interactions in face-to-face testimony).

¹⁰⁸ I refer to Kristie Dotson's definition of reciprocation as imposing two obligations between speaker and hearer: the obligation on the speaker to successfully confer understanding among hearers, and the obligation on the hearer to take the speaker's words as they are meant to be taken. Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138, doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

¹⁰⁹ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

his audience, and his audience was able to appreciate his vulnerability and bravery in giving controversial testimony. The audience reciprocates and 'hears' Mike's testimony, making it a successful linguistic exchange.

This example shows that despite an initial negative reaction based on credibility deficit, it is possible to receive positive hearer reciprocation from the majority. There may be delayed hearer reciprocation due to the volume of potential hearers online. However, the normative expectation of Mike's hopeful trust has a successful outcome here. Mike believed in his audience, and trusted that they would be able to overcome potential prejudice in order to 'hear' his testimony. There is reciprocation from the audience towards Mike, in response to his vulnerability as a speaker.

Other hearers who shared the same values with Mike were able to access his testimony and show reciprocation, despite his initial rejection as a knower. This example highlights an interesting phenomenon possible in online testimony: receptive hearers are able to show appreciation for the vulnerable speaker in a different way from face-to-face hearers. For example, it is easier for the speaker to reach out to hearers who subscribe to similar beliefs, encouraging reciprocation. This could lead to the formation of an epistemic community of shared knowledge between speaker and hearers. The next section will identify which features of online testimony contribute to increased reciprocation and other differences between face-to-face and online testimony.

What are the differences between online and face-to-face testimony?

The following differences explain the importance of accounting for distinct methods of testimony and causes of testimonial failure unique to the online environment.

The first main difference is about a speaker's ability to *build control* over her audience. She is able to shape her content to appeal to a certain target demographic online, and 'build an audience'. This change reflects a difference in the nature of the speaker's testimony. By building an audience, she increases the likelihood of hearer reciprocation, as her audience becomes more likely to contain hearers who subscribe because they agree with or become susceptible to the speaker's beliefs.¹¹⁰ In face-to-face interactions, hearer reciprocation is always dependent on a single individual, and that reciprocation is fixed and unchanging.¹¹¹ In contrast, online interactions require building in flexibility around the speaker's expectations of audience reception. This flexibility is reflective of the different kinds of platforms a speaker could use in her search for a target audience, resulting in different credibility assessments by different audiences.¹¹²

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Building control over one's audience is indicative of two further subsets of differences, resulting from the speaker's increased ability to build control over her audience. The first subset is the *change in potential scope* for a speaker's testimony to be heard. Online testimony is not limited to a particular time or space, unlike face-to-face testimony. In face-to-face testimony, the speaker is required to invest a quantifiable amount of time and money meeting an audience offline. We assume that in face-to-face testimony, a speaker gathers an audience through the veracity of her testimony, and the belief that the speaker reliably knows that-P.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ This is dependent on the platform she uses and whether she has an existing credibility on that platform.

¹¹¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹¹² The implications of this difference are discussed later in this section, after further exposition is given for resulting subsets of differences in type and scope of testimony.

¹¹³ Platforms refer to "web-based applications that run independently of a computer's actual operating software". "What Is Web As A Platform? Webopedia Definition", *Webopedia.Com*, 2018, https://www.webopedia.com/TERM/W/web_as_a_platform.html.

¹¹⁴ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The implication of this difference for testimony online is that online communities may continue to grow and add members for the purpose of sharing knowledge and contributing to or challenging pre-existing epistemic concepts. This allows for a further refinement of ideas from a diverse range of hearers. Hearers and speakers also have the ability to have an ongoing conversation through a forum or platform, with more time for learning. This may add positive value to the speaker's original testimony, because she has the option to refine and develop her testimony in response to hearers, without the added pressure of a time limit.

The second difference resulting from a speaker's increased control over her audience is that there is a *difference in type or kind of testimony*. A speaker is able to reach out to hearers with shared values more easily using an online platform, because of the sheer number of participatory agents online. She is able to change the type of her testimony to meet hearer expectations, or to appeal to a wider group of hearers. Therefore, once a speaker has built an audience of hearers, she creates a community who subscribe to similar beliefs.¹¹⁵ For example, the #MeToo movement was started by a speaker who wished to speak out online about sexual harassment, quickly gaining a global community of supporters.¹¹⁶

Speakers online have the capacity to appeal to certain demographics, often attracting hearers who choose to become receptive to a creator's testimony.¹¹⁷ The speaker therefore adjusts her expectation of hearer reciprocation based on her expectations of audience reception (this is dependent on the platform she uses and whether she has an existing credibility on that platform). A speaker is more likely to have a successful testimonial exchange if her audience takes an open-minded approach to the content of her testimony, creating a positive effect: the vulnerable speaker finds common ground with her audience. This allows for a

¹¹⁵ Frost-Arnold, Karen. "Trustworthiness And Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls Of Internet Accountability". *Episteme* 11, no. 01 (2014): 63-81. doi:10.1017/epi.2013.43.

¹¹⁶ Emily Shugerman, "All You Need To Know About The Me Too Campaign And How It Started", *The Independent*, 2018, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/me-too-facebook-hashtag-why-when-meaning-sexual-harassment-rape-stories-explained-a8005936.html>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

higher level of reciprocation between hearer and speaker. The burden of proof on the speaker and her responsibility to educate hearers under hopeful trust would become less of an obstacle if the speaker is comfortable that her audience is willing to participate in her knowledge transmission.

However, just as a speaker is more likely to attract empathetic hearers, it is also possible for the speaker to attract hearers who disagree with the speaker's testimony, and seek to challenge her testimony because they do not share her beliefs or values. For example, testimony on promoting social justice draws on similar themes of tolerance and diversity, no matter who the speaker is. The speaker is able to appeal to hearers who seek out similar kinds of testimony on social justice, because they share similar beliefs. This could also be classed as an implication of face-to-face testimony, however, the ease and speed of access to testimony online allows the hearer to search for content she finds controversial or wrong without significant investment of time or resources, unlike face-to-face testimony.

Furthermore, the hearer is able to contribute her opinion online (regardless of bias) without first engaging in reciprocation with the speaker.¹¹⁸ In face-to-face testimony, there is an expectation that the speaker will give her testimony first, before engaging with the hearer. There is no such expectation of give-and-take online, and testimony can often become muddled or confused as a result of the uninformed or perniciously ignorant hearer.¹¹⁹ For example, a hearer might search for a political party with policies that she disagrees with. It does not take the hearer long to find the group's Facebook page, where she posts an unfavourable review of the group's policies as a result of her conflicting beliefs (which are reflective of uninformed yet popular opinion towards the group). The hearer's pernicious bias thus has the power to detract from the group's overall perceived online credibility.

¹¹⁸ Jesse Singal, "This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like". *Daily Intelligencer*, 2018. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracialism-article-controversy.html>.

¹¹⁹ Pernicious ignorance occurs where the hearer is aware of his/her own biases, yet chooses not to overcome them. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices Of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.

The next main difference is that credibility assessments are formed differently online: *sometimes a speaker's credibility online is affected by considerations that should be or are not connected to knowledge creation or transmission.*¹²⁰ For example, a forum is devoted to the acceptance and promotion of LGBT rights, where a speaker's testimony on protecting transgender people from domestic violence is more likely to receive positive reciprocation because of her audience's shared beliefs. This means that it is possible for a false credibility to be formed due to the bias of the audience.

I outline the following variables to distinguish how a speaker might be assigned a false credibility based on non-epistemic features. The variables I discuss include: speaker popularity, profit-induced bias towards the speaker by third-party algorithms,¹²¹ and trolling.

The first variable determining credibility assessment online is the *popularity of the speaker*. The value of a speaker's testimony is decided based on the majority reaction of hearers who receive her testimony.¹²² If a popular speaker attains a mass following, the likelihood of positive hearer reciprocation from the majority of hearers who listen to her testimony increases. This could have positive implications for speakers who have genuine intentions to spread knowledge. However, a negative implication of this difference is that the speaker may choose to attain popularity faster by publishing content that appeals to the maximum number of hearers, regardless of its truth content. Once a creator has attained a

¹²⁰ This concept is related to Fricker's idea that sometimes credibility is related to prejudice in face-to-face testimony. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹²¹ Financial profit is relevant given the likelihood of increased visibility of testimony due to information-sorting algorithms and/or clickbait; which may present testimony to the hearer in such a way that the hearer's opinion of the speaker is subconsciously influenced by the bias inherent in clickbait titles. This point will be explained later in the section. Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It", *Slate.Com*, 2018. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

¹²² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Trustworthiness And Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls Of Internet Accountability". *Episteme* 11, no. 01 (2014): 63-81. doi:10.1017/epi.2013.43.

mass following, she could be attributed a credibility excess or deficit by her followers.

In contrast, face-to-face credibility is largely fixed and often based on titles, physical features of the speaker, or stereotyping.¹²³ For example, a speaker's academic work is assigned a value based on her qualifications and epistemic contribution to existing literature. However, in online environments, speaker credibility can be affected by different, non-epistemic features such as uninformed bias from the hearer. This has negative implications for the formation of unjustified online credibility assessments, which will be discussed later in this section.

An example of an unreliable online credibility assessment would be:

Sarah is a schoolteacher who asks her class to write a performance review of her lessons. Her review is based on her daily interactions with the class. Most of the reviews are good, but a few are bad. The few bad reviews are from students who do not understand Sarah's lessons. Sarah's credibility is based on her direct actions, and her testimony as a teacher is addresses a specific audience for a specific purpose (to teach). Sarah has been given a negative credibility by a minority of students who were disappointed by her teaching. It is now Sarah's obligation to address the concerns of the minority of students to become a better teacher.

To extend this example to digital credibility assessment, Sarah regularly posts testimony on her personal blog. Sarah learns how to appeal to a certain group of hearers through her writing. Sarah has built a strong credibility excess through her digital community by posting regularly and engaging with her readers consistently. Sarah's main motivation is not knowledge transmission, but to grow an audience by writing appealing testimony. As a result, Sarah is assigned a positive online

¹²³ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

credibility, created by her audience. The majority of her audience provides her with an ongoing positive credibility despite her refusal to take constructive criticism from other hearers (the minority audience) on board. It does not matter whether Sarah's testimony contributes knowledge; what is important is that she has a strong credibility due to her followers attributing her with a credibility excess. Sarah is then able to use her excess credibility to commit epistemic laziness by ignoring constructive criticism of her testimony. She chooses not to reciprocate the hearer's hopeful trust that she would engage with his/her feedback.

This example shows that hearer reciprocation occurs differently online, depending on the speaker's perceived credibility. There is also less of an obligation for the speaker to respond to a negative minority, because they do not affect her online credibility excess. In contrast, the face-to-face situation required Sarah to revise her lessons as a result of the constructive criticism she received. Online, Sarah has successfully built rapport with the majority of her digital community, gaining a credibility excess. Sarah is able to gain a positive credibility as a credible epistemic knower, despite her lack of intention to transmit knowledge. Her credibility is assigned by the majority of her followers, and when a hearer attempts to raise challenging points which disagree with her content, Sarah chooses to ignore the hearer because it does not affect her credibility excess.

Sarah has effectively used her digital platform to present a more likeable image of herself to her online audience, increasing overall hearer reciprocation to her testimony. Therefore, her digital credibility assessment is far more positive than her face-to-face credibility assessment.

This difference in credibility assignation is also due to the two different audiences of hearers which receive her testimony in an online environment, and in a face-to-face environment. The success of online testimony is often context dependent: the reception of a speaker's testimony is dependent on whether a hearer's pre-existing beliefs align with her beliefs. This alignment may also be attributed to the

speaker's credibility excess. The speaker is aware of this and may shape her testimony accordingly to appeal to the maximum amount of hearers, growing her audience.

When a speaker is able to manipulate her testimony to gain popularity, there is no obligation for her to share knowledge. Despite this, she is able to gain a credibility excess, which has negative implications for testimony in the context of online credibility. The value assigned to the speaker's testimony (and resulting credibility) is dependent on the audience which receives it.¹²⁴ The goal of testimony is an open line of communication, which Frost-Arnold argues is dependent on the speaker in her capacity as a giver of testimony.¹²⁵ However, testimony may no longer be about knowledge transmission online; it is used for a variety of other purposes. Testimony as we understand it is a form of communication between a speaker and hearer, where the speaker intends to share her unique understanding or position on her subject of expertise. We understand that testimony is a transaction of knowledge, where the hearer can choose whether to subscribe to the speaker's same beliefs (based on the effectiveness of her testimony), or not. In face-to-face testimony, a hearer makes the conscious choice to attend a speaker's testimony, whereas online, a hearer can simply peruse the internet searching for testimony.

Online, testimony is presented to the hearer through a variety of interfaces. These interfaces often use algorithms to pre-select information to show the hearer. The algorithm does not have a clear intention to transmit knowledge, because it does not care if the hearer truly understands the content: the algorithm functions on a profit-driven motive to get the hearer to click on content that she perceives as testimony, regardless of its truth value.¹²⁶ This is significant for hopeful trust

¹²⁴ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁵ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

¹²⁶ Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It", *Slate.Com*, 2018,

because the speaker could be an algorithm instead of a person. The algorithm does not extend hopeful trust that the hearer will reach prejudice cognizance: it simply wants the hearer to spend more time on the website, driving up revenue from its displayed ads. The next variable is therefore based on *profit-induced bias towards the speaker by algorithms*, and the subsequent impact for the formation of online credibility assessments.

Face-to-face testimony requires that a hearer actively seeks to gain knowledge from the speaker.¹²⁷ In online communities, time is of specific value, measured in a directly profit-seeking capacity by algorithms.¹²⁸ Facebook's algorithm takes information as an input from users and makes changes based on the time an individual takes to view an article on the platform.¹²⁹ The shorter the viewing time, the less meaningful the algorithm interprets the content to be. Algorithms try to predict which information would appeal or provoke a particular user to spend more time on the site.¹³⁰ It is often assumed that websites are objective sources of information.¹³¹ However, social media algorithms operate based on subjective inputs, which means that the content a user sees is not decided upon in a neutral or objective manner by the site.¹³² The source of information *is not a speaker* intending to spread knowledge; *but a website* which uses an algorithm to suggest content to hearers based on his/her viewing history of similar articles.

A user who holds certain beliefs is shown content which reaffirms her beliefs, even if wrongly held, because she is more likely to spend time looking at the information source. An algorithm prioritizes posts with the most comments, likes, or user

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

¹²⁷ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁸ Tobias Rose-Stockwell, "This Is How Your Fear And Outrage Are Being Sold For Profit", *Quartz*, 2018, <https://qz.com/1039910/how-facebooks-news-feed-algorithm-sells-our-fear-and-outrage-for-profit/>.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It", *Slate.Com*, 2018, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

reactions.¹³³ This results in added visibility and popularity for the post, and by extension, the original speaker/content poster. However, this does not mean that the most popular testimony is the most valuable. It may simply be the most entertaining or controversial, depending on how the hearers using the site view the content.

For example, a white supremacist who spends more time reading articles which are pro-KKK is likely to be suggested more similar content because the algorithm dictates that longer viewing time equals added meaningful value to the user. The algorithm does not have morals, and it does not seek to challenge the user's internal beliefs. Its goal is to maximise profits by maximising the amount of time a user spends on the site.¹³⁴ Online testimonial utterances are also evaluated according to its spread (influenced by the popularity of the speaker).¹³⁵ The spread of testimony is faster than face-to-face testimony, and misinformation can spread just as quickly. This poses a threat to the vulnerable speaker's credibility.

An algorithm might influence a hearer's perception of a speaker by causing her indirectly to form a false credibility assessment. Unreliable sources (i.e.: news tabloid sites) might capitalise on the negative publicity and public scrutiny surrounding the speaker's credibility deficit. This has powerful implications for epistemic accountability, because the hearer consistently encounters biased or misinformed testimony online *at no fault of the vulnerable speaker*. It becomes difficult to establish the effectiveness of online testimony, because the hearer is unable to distinguish what is real or false due to unreliable or misleading sources of information.¹³⁶ This presents a dilemma for accounts of testimony, because we can no longer distinguish the truth content of a speaker's testimony, and therefore

¹³³ Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It", *Slate.Com*, 2018, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Tobias Rose-Stockwell, "This Is How Your Fear And Outrage Are Being Sold For Profit", *Quartz*, 2018, <https://qz.com/1039910/how-facebooks-news-feed-algorithm-sells-our-fear-and-outrage-for-profit/>.

become reliant on sources with assumed credibility. In face-to-face accounts of testimony, there has never been a situation where mere information could be confused with testimony. In order to have a successful account of testimony, we must recognise that online testimony must include a way to distinguish between, or recognize differences between, genuine online testimony and mere information.

It is also harder to assign accurate credibility to online sources, because there is no single attributable speaker to hold accountable as an epistemic agent. Another negative implication from this dilemma is that credibility assessments are often falsely attributed, even in cases where there is an identifiable speaker with the intention to transmit knowledge.

An example of a long-lasting false credibility assessment occurred in 2017, concerning author Rebecca Tuvel.¹³⁷ Tuvel wrote an article: *In Defense of Transracialism*, for the feminist journal, *Hypatia*. Tuvel suggests that

"Generally, we treat people wrongly when we block them from assuming the personal identity they wish to assume".¹³⁸

In the article, Tuvel compared the situation of Caitlyn Jenner, a transgender woman, to that of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who identifies as black. Tuvel argued that

"Since we should accept transgender individuals' decisions to change sexes, we should also accept transracial individuals' decisions to change races".¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Jesse Singal, "This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like", *Daily Intelligencer*, 2018, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracialism-article-controversy.html>.

¹³⁸ Rebecca Tuvel, "In Defense Of Transracialism", *Hypatia* 32, no. 2 (2017): 263-278, doi:10.1111/hypa.12327.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

The majority reaction to Tuvel's article was immediate outrage, from all corners of the internet. Tuvel's intention in writing the article was to contribute knowledge and challenge existing cultural norms, as an epistemic knower. However, Tuvel quickly became the source of

“[A] massive internet witch-hunt, abetted in part by *Hypatia*'s refusal to stand up for her. The journal has already apologized for the article, despite the fact that it was approved through its normal editorial process, and Tuvel's peers are busily wrecking her reputation by sharing all sorts of false claims about the article that don't bear the scrutiny of even a single close read”.¹⁴⁰

Tuvel encountered harsh criticism from other academics, and from outside sources in social media, urging *Hypatia* to retract the article due to its offensive nature.¹⁴¹ The negative publicity elicited by Tuvel's article has resulted in her academic isolation and silencing as a speaker. This example illustrates an online act of epistemic silencing and pernicious credibility damage towards Tuvel. Tuvel was undermined in her capacity as a knower online, almost instantly after publishing her work in an accredited journal.

Part of the problem of online testimony is that a speaker's reputation can be damaged by an audience who are ignorant of the original source of testimony. Rejection of Tuvel's testimony became a trend, as popular users with credibility excess disclaimed her work, causing a chain reaction among their followers to do the same. This chain reaction is less likely to occur in face-to-face testimony, because there are clearer limitations on false credibility assessments. The hearer must receive or seek the original source of testimony before making a credibility judgement.

¹⁴⁰ Jesse Singal, "This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like", *Daily Intelligencer*, 2018, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracism-article-controversy.html>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Tuvel's experience is significant because it reminds us that highly publicized attacks on a speaker's online credibility are more often about attracting the most views; not about giving fair criticism to the speaker or engaging with her ideas in respectful disagreement. This constitutes a flaw in online testimony where well-researched content is not shared as often; because attention-grabbing headlines based on scandal attract more clicks or hearers.¹⁴² This contributes to the pernicious spreading of misinformation online. The scandal of Tuvel's publication and the resulting apologetic behaviour from an associate editor of *Hypatia* furthered Tuvel's credibility deficit. This harm is characteristic of online testimony, as the majority of public reaction to Tuvel's article was based on opinion and not academic or constructive criticism.¹⁴³ It is becoming harder to distinguish between mere information and testimony, because there are unreliable agents with false credibility who outwardly appear to contribute to shared knowledge.

In face-to-face testimony, an agent utters the testimony and is the source of testimony: testimony is finite, limited, temporal, and caused by the hearer (who asks a question to which the speaker responds). In contrast, algorithms can generate a feed, and this is the source of much online testimony.¹⁴⁴ Algorithms do not promote epistemic diversity unless the user actively takes steps to expand her beliefs in her spare time.¹⁴⁵ Algorithms *are not* finite, limited, temporally bound or caused by the hearer (at least, not in the same way), which creates a dilemma about whether we should reconsider what testimony is in online spaces. Algorithms act as a filter between the hearer and the speaker or giver of testimony, and they can skew a hearer toward undue bias before she even accesses the

¹⁴² Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It". *Slate.Com*, 2018. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

¹⁴³ Jesse Singal, "This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like". *Daily Intelligencer*, 2018. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracialism-article-controversy.html>.

¹⁴⁴ A 'feed' is a constant stream of information a user receives, determined by an algorithm. Algorithms collect data on each user, in exchange for the user's necessary input and activity on the site. Tobias Rose-Stockwell, "This Is How Your Fear And Outrage Are Being Sold For Profit", *Quartz*, 2018, <https://qz.com/1039910/how-facebooks-news-feed-algorithm-sells-our-fear-and-outrage-for-profit/>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

testimony.¹⁴⁶ Unpeeling layers of truth is required in some cases to make a true credibility assessment. However, imposing an obligation on the hearer to always distinguish between true and false testimony before engaging in reciprocation is an excessive requirement, given the spreadability and permanence of information online (regardless of truth content).

This dilemma is significant to the reception of hopeful trust because the hearer's receptivity to the speaker's content is influenced by an algorithm in many cases. The presence of an algorithm changes how testimony is conducted and received. For example, a hearer could read about a speaker's testimony through a third-party site, which an algorithm displayed on her feed as clickbait. The hearer's opinion on the speaker could be subconsciously influenced before she clicks on the article, perhaps because the clickbait title portrays a sympathetic image of the speaker. Therefore, the hearer might be predisposed to give the speaker the benefit of the doubt, contributing to a credibility excess.

The spread of misinformation through clickbait also presents a serious epistemic threat to the speaker, contributing to the formation of false credibility assessments. This could contribute to pernicious ignorance, where the hearer assigns identity prejudice as a result of second or third-hand information from other, unreliable sources. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish the true motivation of these sources, because information and testimony can become mixed with advertising purposes to drive revenue. We must account for this variable because of its potential impact on both the unsuspecting hearer and the vulnerable speaker.

The third variable I focus on in determining online credibility is: *the different nature of epistemic harm to the vulnerable speaker, which I refer to as 'trolling'*. The troll's aim is to distract hearers and gain negative attention; detracting from the speaker's

¹⁴⁶ Jesse Singal, "This Is What A Modern-Day Witch Hunt Looks Like". *Daily Intelligencer*, 2018. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/05/transracialism-article-controversy.html>.

testimony. I use trolling as an umbrella term for agents who intend to undermine the vulnerable speaker. The troll's goal is not knowledge or truth-oriented.

Online trolling is significant because of the unique means through which it expresses epistemic harm towards the vulnerable speaker(s). Howard Fosdick states that

“Trolls divert online discussions into non-productive, off-topic venues. They pose as part of a community only to disrupt it. Trolling is anti-social behaviour... intending to cause disruption, and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement”.¹⁴⁷

Trolls function to provoke, often engaging in pernicious ignorance for the controversy she causes. Typically, the type of trolling content that gets the most attention is of a xenophobic and prejudicial nature, because it raises the most controversy. We are unable to understand the troll's exact motive for subscribing to or spreading pernicious ignorance.¹⁴⁸ I focus on the negative implications of the troll's actions, in both drawing attention away from the speaker, and indirectly undermining her epistemic agency by distracting hearers. This adds a new complication to online testimony, for which I propose a solution in my next section.

Trolls commit epistemic harm to multiple speakers by commenting, sharing and posting content that distracts hearers from the content of the speaker's testimony. Attention from other hearers functions as a type of online commodity to the troll: the more views or responses, the bigger the troll's profile. Trolling creates epistemic harm by intentionally seeking to detract from the quality and content of a speaker's testimony: negatively impacting her discourse. Trolls reduce the scope

¹⁴⁷ Howard Fosdick, "Why People Troll And How To Stop Them". *Osnews.Com*, 2012. http://www.osnews.com/story/25540/Why_People_Troll_and_How_to_Stop_Them.

¹⁴⁸ Howard Fosdick lists a few possibilities of payoff for the troll, including: attention and recognition, emotional release of venting, power to disrupt, vandalism, thrill of breaking social conventions, sabotage, or immaturity. *Ibid*.

of epistemic debate by assigning credibility deficit to the speaker, stripping away her authority as a knower.

Online discourse generates, to a greater extent than in-person dialogue, perverse incentives for trolls, or the perniciously ignorant, to garner followers or connect with like-minded hearers at the expense of the authentic speaker. This is partly due to online capacity for greater degrees of anonymity, where a user can hide behind an avatar or screen name. Credibility of content and 'knowledge' become associated with popularity, or number of followers, instead of authentic dialogue.

Face-to-face credibility assessments do not present the same level of epistemic threat to a speaker through false credibility assessment, as they are often temporary and limited: the audience's assessment is limited to one instance of testimony over a limited period of time. In comparison, a false online credibility assessment can become long-lasting online, even permanent in some cases, with potential to spread across broader communities (although the assessment is still limited to the individual).

An example of trolling may occur when:

Gordon uses his online gaming character to send cruel messages to other players anonymously. He plays a MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) which gives users a chance to engage with millions of other players around the world in an online fantasy realm. Gordon started out being cautious with his behaviour around other players because of the strict terms of agreement he agreed to before he was allowed access to the game. However, he found harassing other members to be more fun than playing the game according to the rules. He was successful in chasing four other users from the game, before he was reported to a moderator and banned from the game.

In reaction, Gordon started to claim online to his Twitter followers that he was banned from the game unfairly. He spread a pernicious rumour that the moderators were unjust and called for his followers to boycott the game as a result of his unfair treatment. His posts via his Twitter account were seen by a tabloid news website, which published an article about Gordon: *Top Ten Reasons Why You Should Not Play This Game*. The article was picked up by several other websites because of the controversy it was causing, not because the tabloid website was seen as reputable. The game creator's credibility suffered as a result, despite the creator's attempt to give testimony in response, disputing Gordon's claims.

In this example, Gordon spreads false information which contributes to a false credibility assignment to the game's creators. This again leads us to the question of how to separate testimonial accounts from information dissemination online. Even though Gordon's rumours might appear to be a form of testimony (where the speaker reliably conveys that-P to the hearer in a way she can easily understand),¹⁴⁹ he is not giving reliable testimony that-P. Gordon's choice to intentionally misinform hearers leads to hearer prejudice against the game's creators, leading to a false credibility assessment.

There is no clearly identifiable speaker in this case, which also occurs in cases where third-party algorithms present testimony to the hearer. This example defies our previous notions of testimonial failure as occurring after a speaker gives testimony. Gordon did not engage in meaningful testimony or knowledge transmission; we are unsure if his testimony was validated by outside sources; and he was not assigned a credibility excess by reliable sources.¹⁵⁰ Gordon's credibility is not based on actual merits, only his popularity as a speaker. In this example, speaker credibility is not assigned in a consistent or reliable manner. This seems

¹⁴⁹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁵⁰ The game's creator was silenced before having the chance to speak; but perhaps s/he might function as the speaker in this example, because s/he attempted to give truthful testimony in response to Gordon's rumours.

to be true even if the majority of hearers assign the same credibility to a speaker, because the credibility assessment is based on misinformation and unreliable sources.

In a face-to-face act of testimony, it is also possible for false knowledge to spread as a result of the speaker. For example, a lecturer could say something false to his students by accident, and the students write down the false information in a final exam, scoring a lower mark as a result of the lecturer's initial error. However, the context differs from Gordon's case because the students have good reason to believe that the lecturer is a reliable source of knowledge, whereas Gordon has only been assigned positive credibility from his Twitter followers and subsequent unreliable news sources who did not check their facts. We can safely assume that the lecturer does not have the intention to mislead his/her students; with an overarching goal to share knowledge. In Gordon's case, we can reliably infer that he is a troll because of his intention to mislead and/or undermine knowledge transmission by his actions. Furthermore, Gordon does not have a specific targeted audience in mind when spreading misinformation, whereas in an offline environment, the speaker must have a targeted audience, such as with the lecturer and his/her students.

The main threats posed by a troll therefore consist of: detracting attention and/or value from a speaker's testimony, convincing hearers to assign a speaker a false credibility deficit, and actively spreading pernicious ignorance by choice. Trolls may contribute to a credibility deficit against a speaker for the purpose of amusement. Her motivation might be malicious, or for non-truth related reasons, but this is unclear to everyone except the troll. This is a different type of epistemic harm from what I have previously discussed. A troll does not fit the traditional view of a hearer, because she does not actively participate in hearer reciprocation, or fulfil the speaker's hopeful trust to become prejudice-cognizant. The troll may listen in some sense to the speaker's testimony, but she chooses to remain perniciously ignorant. This means that the troll could 'hear' the speaker, but she does not take

the testimony seriously, committing epistemic laziness and contributing to identity prejudice against the speaker. The speaker is further made vulnerable as the troll acts out against her testimony, in his/her attempt at distracting other hearers from paying attention.

To summarize, we have seen the differences between online and face-to-face testimony. Our original goal was to consider whether face-to-face accounts of testimony could be extended to account for online testimonial injustices. I have now established that the reasons for failed testimony online are attributable to its differences in type, scope and how credibility assessments are made in online and offline environments. Furthermore, a single utterance can be understood or heard by different online communities in different ways. Therefore, a speaker can have increased control over the content and reception of her testimony online, when she takes these variables into account. Traditionally, in face-to-face testimony, the goal of testimony was to transmit and/or gain knowledge, but my account has highlighted that communicative acts of testimony online have very different goals. These goals can be positive: to share, to bring together, to identify commonalities between speaker and hearers.

However, there are conflicting goals introduced by third-party or unreliable sources (including profit-seeking algorithms) that introduce new variables which can affect the original goal of testimony to seek or transmit knowledge. Testimony is also evaluated differently, according to its spread and popularity. Information transmitted via online testimony is no longer measured simply by truth and falsity, causing an exchange of information between speaker and hearer without the goal of transmitting knowledge. This complicates our understanding of testimony as a communicative act of knowledge transmission.

This account of differences has raised some negative implications in light of successful testimonial exchanges online, including the concerns that non-epistemic features often form a speaker's credibility online, and that the speaker is

able to use her popularity to gain hearer reciprocation. This suggests that there are testimonial injustices that result exclusively in the online context. I offer a modified version of hopeful trust to address these concerns in the next section.

So far, I have introduced differences exclusive to online testimony that are unable to be accounted for in face-to-face testimonial accounts. In the next section, I provide solutions for the obstacles to successful online testimony that have arisen from my account of differences of online testimony. Finally, I propose a modified version of hopeful trust, which addresses the distinct nature of testimony in the online environment.

What are the implications of these differences on hopeful trust, and how can we resolve them?

I have established that Frost-Arnold does not respond sufficiently to the concerns she has raised about hopeful trust in offline contexts. Moreover, as her account is currently framed, it cannot accommodate certain features that are exclusive to the online environment. Objections aside, Frost-Arnold has started an important conversation about what happens when we shift from face-to-face, traditional accounts of testimony to a new epistemic realm: online testimony. Given the importance of continuing this conversation, I offer modifications to her account on her behalf, which take into consideration the specific features of testimony that are unique to the online environment.

The first difference I raised on the speaker's ability to build control over her audience resulted in two subsets of differences for online testimony: a change in potential scope for a speaker's testimony to be heard, and a difference in kind of testimony, where a speaker can reach out to hearers with shared values more easily through an online platform.

We have established that the receptiveness of the hearer to the speaker's testimony makes a significant difference to the level of reciprocation between the speaker and hearer. The speaker's overall credibility may increase as a result of hearer reciprocation from other hearers. In online testimony, there is more potential for hearers to flock towards speakers who share the same beliefs. The hearer may also be familiar with or subscribe to certain concepts endorsed by the speaker, which allows for a higher likelihood of hopeful trust between speaker and hearer. Therefore, context dependence may have some advantages in enacting hopeful trust online, because it is easier for a speaker to reach out to receptive hearers over a period of time. The accessibility of online testimony means that a speaker's testimony can be heard for a prolonged period of time, unrestricted by geographical location.

The concern, however, is that the speaker is able to target more receptive hearers by pandering to certain demographics, regardless of her beliefs. A speaker might intend to spread hopeful trust at first, but lose sight of her initial intention to raise hearer prejudice-cognizance in the pursuit of fame and attention. Furthermore, the nature of the online environment enables other sources of information/people to co-opt the speaker's testimony, sometimes unwittingly, in order to spread testimony faster as a new source of information. Even if the intentions of the original speaker were to spread hopeful trust, it is not the case that the information is subsequently spread with those same intentions later on.

In response to this concern, it is unrealistic to expect a speaker not to promote her testimony to appeal to more hearers. Speaker popularity usually results from a positive credibility, empowering the speaker to reach out to more hearers.¹⁵¹ This increases the likelihood of testimony reaching other vulnerable hearers who may wish to speak and appreciate seeing representation of other viewpoints similar to

¹⁵¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

her own. The accessibility of online platforms may inspire vulnerable hearers to reciprocate the original speaker's hopeful trust, and start to contribute shared knowledge to other hearers. This would increase epistemic diversity of shared resources online, with the potential to create online communities of hearers and speakers who want to reciprocate and share knowledge on certain areas of testimony.¹⁵²

There is also a difference in how the speaker's credibility is formed. This means that context dependence could lead to a scenario where a speaker's testimony is falsely represented or unfairly criticised by a speaker or unreliable source with a credibility excess. I believe that hopeful trust should provide for this additional vulnerability to the speaker online, by not requiring the speaker to respond to unfair criticisms from a hearer who has not engaged in reciprocation (i.e.: she has not 'listened to' the speaker's testimony). I make a distinction from Frost-Arnold's account here, which imposes an obligation on the speaker to educate the perniciously ignorant. This does not mean that a hearer should not disagree with a speaker, or that a speaker should engage in epistemic laziness by ignoring constructive criticism. This requirement is intended to protect the speaker, while requiring that the hearer's criticism contain some constructive element; to encourage further dialogue and knowledge between agents.

I introduce this modification to hopeful trust because of the increased capacity of the hearer to assign false credibility to the speaker, which permanently damages the speaker's reputability as a knower. The formation of false credibility assessments are sometimes encouraged by other hearers or trolls who perpetuate pernicious ignorance, illustrated in the Rebecca Tuvel case.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

¹⁵³ This includes scenarios where a false credibility is assigned by hearers or by another perniciously ignorant speaker with a credibility excess. Karen Frost-Arnold, "Trustworthiness And Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls Of Internet Accountability". *Episteme* 11, no. 01 (2014): 63-81. doi:10.1017/epi.2013.43.

This difference in epistemic harm through false credibility assignment focuses on the additional threat to the speaker, as a result of misleading information via unreliable sources such as third-party algorithms. These unreliable sources capitalise on the negative publicity accredited to a speaker's testimony. Capital is acquired through attracting more viewers by any means necessary; including publishing articles which repeat denigrating content about a speaker.

In response, I submit that it is possible for a speaker to combat false credibility assessments and increased epistemic harm by carefully choosing her audience. This idea is originally introduced by Frost-Arnold in an attempt to protect the additional vulnerability imposed on the speaker online.¹⁵⁴ Hearer reactions to testimony will vary significantly depending on the forum. If a speaker chooses to post testimony on her personal social media account, she is more likely to gain hearer reception from her existing credibility in comparison to posting on a forum with no established credibility, leaving her vulnerable to identity prejudice. It could be argued that if we accept hopeful trust's requirement that a speaker knows her audience, this would be too difficult to enforce because of the spreadability of testimony online.

All we can say in response to this is that the hearer's likelihood of reciprocation is dependent on the individual, and the speaker must not expect too much of her audience. It is true that the speaker will likely not realise or know who her testimony is heard by. However, the definition of hearing has changed due to the online environment, and the nature of information is less trustworthy when accessed through second and third-hand sources. Hearers who seek true knowledge have the ability to search for it themselves, in order to find the speaker's original testimony (and other, similar testimony). I propose a modification to hopeful trust in that the hearer should take some further action to reach prejudice-cognizance on some level. The hearer's role is to remain open-

¹⁵⁴ Karen Frost-Arnold, "Trustworthiness And Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls Of Internet Accountability". *Episteme* 11, no. 01 (2014): 63-81. doi:10.1017/epi.2013.43.

mind to new testimony, with the ultimate goal of achieving a higher level of prejudice cognizance under her own efforts to seek knowledge. It should not be the speaker's responsibility to provide prejudice-cognizance to the perniciously ignorant.

If the vulnerable speaker is the victim of identity prejudice or testimonial injustice, she might take action by gathering support through appealing to hearers who hold similar beliefs online. Furthermore, it is easier for a speaker to find or form diverse online epistemic communities with the goal of knowledge transmission online. This is due to ease of access to online resources compared to face-to-face testimony, where the hearer must actively elicit information from the physical speaker within a certain time/space (as opposed to using a search function, commenting or typing a question via email).

Whether a hearer becomes less prejudicial, or more aware of his privileges does not rest on the accountability of the speaker (or the perceived effectiveness of her testimony according to hopeful trust). The speaker may retain her faith in hopeful trust, however; that at least some hearers will view her testimony charitably with good faith, even if the hearer disagrees with the speaker's content. In addition, the speaker can continue her conversation with the hearer, and defend herself against pernicious ignorance. She may be able to limit pernicious ignorance by limiting her audience, but this proposition is not satisfactory for increasing prejudice awareness. Therefore, hopeful trust should include the notion that a speaker is not fully helpless to respond to unfair criticism, and she may be further encouraged to defend her account with the support of her online community of receptive hearers.

Another difference I introduce concerns the hearer's receptivity to the speaker's content as being influenced by a profit-seeking algorithm in many cases. This is a problem because the hearer is a) subjected to inherent bias against a speaker before reading his/her testimony, and b) algorithms do not promote epistemic diversity, because they are engineered for profit; to maximise the amount of time a

user spends on the site. It is also important that hopeful trust account for biased sources or unreliable sources of testimony online, even if the hearer is aware of the algorithms on sites which select sources to show her.

In response, I believe that if a hearer chooses not to pursue knowledge of her own accord, it should not directly affect a vulnerable speaker unless the hearer engages in active pernicious ignorance (as a result of entrenched prejudicial beliefs). If a hearer encounters new information and chooses to extend hopeful trust towards the speaker's testimony, she benefits from a new source of epistemic diversity.

We have established that the information fed to a hearer through algorithms is not objectively selected. The original speaker's words may be confused through the filter of a third party, or her original intention to transmit knowledge may be lost through the filter of an algorithm. Hearers must choose to be open to new information, or risk epistemic stagnation. This is not an exact requirement of hearers, but a solution to the risk posed by third party algorithms. Furthermore, I propose a modification to hopeful trust's requirement that hearers adapt his/her internal beliefs to achieve prejudice-cognizance in line with the speaker's idealised vision of non-prejudice.¹⁵⁵ Instead, there should be room for respectful disagreement on the basis that reciprocation occurs between hearer and speaker. This may lead to prejudice-cognizance for individual agents, dependent on the hearer's motivation to gain knowledge and decrease prejudicial ignorance.

The last difference I discuss is based on epistemic harm and trolling. The spreadability of pernicious misinformation can present a long-lasting threat to a vulnerable speaker's credibility and/or identity. For this reason, speakers might choose to remain anonymous or post testimony under a pseudonym rather than

¹⁵⁵ Reciprocation occurs where the speaker gives reliable, clear testimony on her belief that-P, and the hearer hears her as she intends to be heard. Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression". *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-138. doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

reveal his/her real-life identity.¹⁵⁶ There is some advantage in being anonymous because it allows the speaker to give valuable testimony without feeling threatened. However, the threat of an identity reveal becomes more significant as she becomes more famous or notable online.

The potential for harm to the speaker's credibility is therefore greater online, because misinformation or ridicule is longer-lasting, spread faster, and constitutes a stain on the speaker's identity. Face-to-face testimony is typically committed by a speaker with clear credibility assignment, however, any speaker is able to participate in giving online testimony. This can have epistemic benefit, such as encouraging a more diverse range of hearers to contribute knowledge to shared resources. It also creates new methods for hearers to engage in pernicious ignorance or identity prejudice against the speaker (i.e.: the increased likelihood of trolling and anonymous hate).

In response, I claim that hopeful trust should offer a solution to trolling. I suggest that the two most effective options are a) do not "feed" the trolls by giving them attention and/or b) reducing hopeful trust's burden on the speaker to extend hopeful trust to all hearers (even those lacking receptivity).¹⁵⁷ These two solutions are dependent on whether the speaker is perniciously assigned a false credibility by trolls, requiring a response from hopeful trust. It may be difficult for the speaker to separate trolls from those engaging in pernicious ignorance, which is why I suggest that the speaker be released from the expectation that she respond to hearers who refuse to reciprocate her hopeful trust.

Furthermore, by refusing to give trolls attention, the speaker reduces the impact that they might have on her testimony. I argue that it should be left to the speaker's discretion whether or not to respond to a troll, because trolls do not actively

¹⁵⁶ This is first proposed by Frost-Arnold as a means to protect the vulnerable speaker, however, my proposed modification is based on my discussion of the difference of epistemic harm online (not her work on hopeful trust). Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, And The Epistemology Of Prejudice", *Social Epistemology* 30, no. 5-6 (2016): 513-531, doi:10.1080/02691728.2016.1213326.

¹⁵⁷ This burden has been introduced and explained in detail in chapter two.

engage in knowledge transmission. Therefore, I believe that it is not important whether or not a speaker responds to a troll, because the troll intentionally does not engage in a meaningful way with her testimony (except to introduce controversy and strife).

I have carved out differences between face-to-face and online testimony in this chapter. I believe that these differences raise important obstacles for hopeful trust. I have strengthened hopeful trust and introduced solutions to my raised concerns based on my account of online testimonial failures, and resulting modified version of hopeful trust. This modified version lessens the burden on the speaker to motivate prejudicial hearers by inducing prejudice-cognizance. Instead, a speaker may aim to enlighten and inspire hearers to become less prejudicial, but this is not the sole obligation of the speaker. Hopeful trust should require that online testimony involve a successful transmission of knowledge between agents, with an ideal case involving reciprocation between the hearer and the speaker. This version allows for disagreement and variation of epistemic beliefs between speaker and hearer, with the overall goal of knowledge transmission.

Conclusion

In summary, I have provided an account of online testimonial injustices faced within the context of online testimony. I have achieved the objective of my thesis: to provide a diagnosis of epistemic issues unique to online environments, with the aim to hold agents accountable for acts of epistemic harm, such as the pernicious spread of misinformation or controversy which detracts from a speaker's credibility.¹⁵⁸ I examined cases of face-to-face epistemic injustice, which resulted from failures of knowledge transmission. Exploring the nature of these reasons allowed me to develop my own novel position about online testimonial injustice. My

¹⁵⁸ I submit these accountability mechanisms through my proposed modifications to hopeful trust in chapter three, in the section: *What are the implications of these differences on hopeful trust, and how can we resolve them?*

account demonstrates that the structure of, and access to, information online differs from face-to-face interactions.¹⁵⁹

I have raised several issues with the functionality and principles of hopeful trust in order to provide an account on online testimonial injustice. These issues were: that hopeful trust's paradigm example is heavily context dependent, that it imposes unrealistic and excessive expectations on both hearer and speaker, and that its' proposed solution to the absence of alternatives does not promote epistemic diversity and thereby limits speaker-hearer reciprocation.

I acknowledge that Frost-Arnold has started an important conversation about what happens when we shift from face-to-face, traditional accounts of testimony to a new epistemic realm, viz., online testimony. Given the importance of continuing this conversation, I offer modifications to her account of hopeful trust on her behalf, which take into consideration the specific features of testimony that are unique to the online environment.

My modified framework for Frost-Arnold's account of hopeful trust identifies the different nature and scope of online testimony, while providing accountability mechanisms to increase the likelihood of hopeful trust online. For example, hearers must choose to be open to new information, or risk epistemic stagnation. This protects the vulnerable speaker against the excessive expectation that she motivate perniciously ignorant hearers to become prejudice-cognizant, even if she suffers from a credibility deficit.

I have introduced key features of online testimony, and explained the significance of distinguishing online testimony as a space for shared knowledge. My thesis contributes to the existing literature on philosophical acts of testimony by

¹⁵⁹ For example, the presence of algorithms select forms of testimony to show a hearer through her 'feed', which greatly differs from face-to-face testimony. Will Oremus, "Who Really Controls What You See In Your Facebook Feed—And Why They Keep Changing It", *Slate.Com*, 2018, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html.

comparing causes of testimonial failure in face-to-face and online environments. In addition, my thesis is significant to the field of testimony because it introduces new epistemic reasons for testimonial failure, and how to address them by accounting for online differences.

I raise a new dilemma for testimonial literature: in online testimony, truth is secondary and competes with other communicative goals, therefore, should it still be qualified as testimony? Perhaps philosophically, much online content shouldn't qualify as testimony, since knowledge is not its primary goal. However, many people still take much information spread by online testimony as a knowledge source, and this is the problem.

Information transmitted via online testimony is no longer measured simply by truth or falsity. This is a novel claim, because there has never before been a situation where mere information could be presented as, or confused with, genuine testimony. In addition to being able to have an account that can make sense of online testimony, then, a successful account of testimony must also include a way of helping people distinguish between, or recognize differences between, testimony and mere information. In face-to-face testimony, there is an identifiable, credible speaker with an intention to transmit knowledge. In online testimony, the speaker or source of information is often difficult to identify, decreasing the likelihood of an accurate credibility assessment. There is also increased risk of misinformation presented as testimony, negatively impacting the hearer's ability to form a reliable credibility assessment of the information source.

There might be a disparity between listeners and hearers (and information vs advertising) as a result of the blurred line between truthful testimony and information posing as testimony; the truth of which cannot be verified easily by the hearer. The problem of distinguishing the veracity of a claim results partly from the lack of a clearly established speaker. Hearers risk assigning a false credibility to the speaker based on biased or misleading second-hand information. This

dilemma demonstrates that the individual roles of the hearer and speaker change online, because there are different variables that should be accounted for, such as in the formation of the speaker's credibility. The notion of credibility in face-to-face assessments is based on the esteemed trustworthiness of the speaker (e.g.: academic titles and past reception of academic work), and what the hearer may gain from the speaker's testimony that-P.¹⁶⁰ Our understanding of credibility changes once applied to the online environment, because the formation of testimony as we know it changes.

Some hearers who assign online credibility deficits for non-epistemic reasons do not participate in testimony as we understand it in the literature: as a reciprocal act of knowledge transmission between hearer and speaker, without the influence of undue bias. However, we cannot rule out these interactions between a user and her interface unless we agree on a more specific definition of testimonial interaction which provides for more than just acknowledgement of knowledge transmission, and the belief that the speaker reliably knows/conveys her belief that-P. This is important because many people get their information in a way that could be classified as testimony, but it does not fit the existing definition of testimony as *a knowledge transmission between speaker and hearer*.

Prejudicial ignorance also has different implications online, because the hearer might not be aware of her own biases. A speaker's attempt at knowledge transmission may become blocked because of an interfering third party between the speaker and her audience. A user scrolling through her feed could be shown content based on an algorithm's predictions. The algorithm shows content which intentionally appeals or provokes the user into clicking on the link, leading her to a webpage where she accesses knowledge or testimony. However, the testimony may be presented in a way that prioritises entertainment value over truth-content. This could lead to false credibility assessments of the original source or speaker,

¹⁶⁰ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

because the algorithm's (and corresponding website) only intention is to maximise profit through longer viewing times. There is no guarantee that the algorithm's intention to spread epistemic diversity or promote knowledge transmission, unlike in face-to-face testimony. In this way, even if a speaker does intend to transmit knowledge, she is prevented from hearer reciprocation.

The novel claims made by my thesis have interesting implications for the traditional definition of testimony as an act of knowledge-transmission; limited between a singular speaker and hearer.¹⁶¹ A website might function as a speaker because it spreads information, which the hearer reads and understands as new knowledge. However, if the information cannot be verified, or it does not have the intention to transmit accurate knowledge, epistemic harm is committed against the hearer. This change in the individual roles of hearer and speaker is a dilemma which my account has raised. I cannot answer this dilemma, because there is no definitive solution to ensuring the veracity of testimony online, nor a solution which cross-references the speaker's credibility before she is allowed to give testimony.

My account has shown that there is a need to identify whether a claim is knowledge-based, with a clear intention from the speaker to educate in her own right, or whether a claim is made merely to spread information to the maximum amount of people. There are positive benefits from the different nature and scope of testimony online, however, there is also greater potential for pernicious spread of misinformation and false credibility assessments. The modifications I propose to hopeful trust focus on protecting the vulnerable speaker, and providing accountability mechanisms for the hearer, in line with the traditional understanding of testimony as a reciprocal transmission of knowledge. Online, the speaker's credibility, scope and type of testimony are all changeable. These differences have exciting implications: we must reconsider what we think we know about testimony.

¹⁶¹ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power And The Ethics Of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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