

Argumentative and Epistemic Oppression: A Black Feminist Analysis
Towards Argumentative Justice

By

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To my ancestors who were forced upon this land
and
Black African American Language speakers who continue to survive on it

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Introduction¹

“If ya’ll actually believe that using ‘standard English’ will dismantle white supremacy, then you are not paying attention! If we, as teachers, truly believe that code-switching will dismantle white supremacy, we have a problem. If we honestly believe code-switching will save Black people’s lives, then we really ain’t paying attention to what’s happening in the world. Eric Garner was choked to death by a police officer while saying ‘I cannot breathe.’ Wouldn’t you consider ‘I cannot breathe’ ‘standard English’ syntax?” – Baker-Bell 2020, 5

“The underlying tone of resistance in the language may explain why African American linguistic innovations are so often dismissed as slang” – Smitherman 2000, 3

This dissertation is an assemblage of articles regarding the argumentative norms within Black African American Women’s Speech Communities (BAAWSC). While each of these chapters can stand alone, combined I press on various issues regarding the stakes and stigmas of Black women utilizing African American Language (AAL) within argumentation. Some of the issues I identify are applicable to Black men, but due to the ‘double jeopardy’² Black women face and frankly because I am a Black woman who loves other Black women/femmes/girls, I am bringing our experiences, concerns, and stories to the forefront. Throughout these chapters, I press on dominant feminist argumentation theories and models which would depict BAAWSC’s practices as hostile and adversarial. Each chapter serves as an expansion upon the last. Most of the literature regarding argumentation theory, specifically conceptions of politeness and non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models, theorize arguments, adversariality, and politeness norms from a whitewashed vantage point. Meaning the theorizing stems from a Western conception of argumentation and logical fallacies. What I aim to show, specifically with non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models, is that the literature’s conception of productive, liberating, virtuous, and ‘good’ argumentative models would render BAAWSC’s arguments as unproductive, riddled with vices, and hostile. While the aim of non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models is to express the virtues of more ‘feminine’ argumentative styles and largely to end argumentative oppression against women, the body of work barely mentions the intersections between race with gender or sex.

The matter and subsequently the consequences are not just issues of diversity and inclusion. That is, if we expand our observations regarding adversariality within argumentation and adjust our contexts to include African American Language, then the oppression experienced by Black women during non-home argumentative styles will dissipate. I take the issue to be a problem of ‘why we argue.’ In the following chapters, I put forth the case that one of the reasons argue is/was for basic survival. The development of argumentative African American Language styles and norms vastly differ from other immigrant experiences, since “Black Americans are the only racial/ethnic group in the United States in which the first generation did not speak its native tongue” (Smitherman 2000, 19). Smitherman argues that our shared history as descendants of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade gave rise to Black Language as it “comes out of the experience of U.S. slave descendants.

¹ I aim not only to set forth my arguments, but throughout the paper I occasionally engage in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or African American Language (AAL). I do this for two reasons: 1- to challenge the conception of ‘presentable’ arguments and 2- because I wanna and I shouldn’t have to justify myself to nobody. And yes, I do know White Mainstream English subject/verb agreement and the Western logical conception of double negation.

² Coined by Frances Beal (1995), double jeopardy refers to the constraints Black women experience given racism and sexism. Black women bear the “burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin” as well as experiencing “the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men” (Beal 1995, 146). The oppression Black women experience – at a minimum – hits on their identity as a woman and as Black.

These shared experiences have resulted in common language practices in the Black community. The roots of African American speech lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, that was created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the domain master [white] class” (2006, 3). This basic fight to a right to live has heavily shaped the ways in which African Americans, especially Black women and femmes engage in argumentation.

I am not the first person to theorize on the communicative or argumentative practices of Black women, or Black descendants of the Trans-Atlantic African slave trade. African American Language (AAL), Ebonics, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or Black Language is almost unanimously accepted as a language amongst linguistics (Baker-Bell 2020; Ramirez et. al 2005; Baugh 2000, 1997, 1983, 1969; Smitherman 2015, 2000; Williams 1975; Dalby 1969; Dillard 1972; Kochman 1981, 1972; Rickford 1999; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Spears 1998; Turner 1949; Woodson 1933). I will not rehash this debate other than to point out that there are proper and improper ways to speak AAL since there are identifiable grammatical rules, a few of which I cover within this introduction. One can err. The overarching question that interests me is if AAL is properly recognized as a language, why are some of its key features seen as hostile or irrational when utilized in argumentative engagements within white settings? Or as Smitherman (2020) asks: “If African American Language (AAL) is systematic, rule-governed, and functional, as the voluminous research over several decades has established, then why is it continuing to be stigmatized and disrespected, even within the Black Language-speaking community itself?” (xv). There are grammatical rules and argumentative norms within AAL.

Some of these grammatical and phonetic traits stem from residual language use from Africa. “Niger-Congo speakers learning English three hundred years ago would have been likely to simplify English consonant clusters because of their African language patterns, just as Africans learning English today do” (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 150). Phonetically wise, a few rules within AAL include deletion of word-final clusters (looked [luk], kept [kep], or west [wes]) (Baker-Bell 2020; Green 2002; Young et. al 2014), ‘th’ variations (death [def], tooth, [toof], that [dat], or they [dey]) (Green 2002; Baugh 2015), diphthong variations (my [ma]) (Young et. al 2014), and strong initial stress on words with two syllables (police [POLice] or July [JUly]) (Smitherman 2000; Green 2002; Young et. al 2014). A few syntax rules include the usage of habitual ‘be’ (Erbody be like dat), regularized agreement – absence of present tense third person singular -s (She don’t like dem), copular deletion or zero copula (She a professor), and double/multiple negation (I ain’t never seen nothing like dat) (Baugh 1999; Rickford 1999; Baker-Bell 2020; Smitherman 2015, 2006; 2000; Green 2002). While some of these aspects can be traced to Niger-Congo speakers, other aspects are theorized to have derived from African enslavement. bell hooks states:

In the mouths of Black Africans in the so-called ‘New World,’ English was altered, transformed and became a different speech. Enslaved Black people took broken bits of English and made of them a counter-language. They put together their words in such a way that the colonizer had to rethink the meaning of the English Language. Though it has become common in contemporary culture to talk about the messages of resistance that emerged in the music created by [enslaved Africans], particularly spirituals, less is said about the grammatical structure of sentences in these songs. Often, the English used in the song reflected the broken, ruptured word of the slave (1994, 170).

The broken syntax was out of a need to create new unintelligible words to white onlookers, but also as an attempt to speed up communication. Body language was also utilized to communicate more secretly and efficiently (Morgan 2002; Green 2014; Troutman 2001, 2006).

Because there are rules within this language game, AAL is not merely Dominant American English (DAE) slang or an improper deployment of DAE. Dominant American English (DAE) at times has been referred to as Standard American English (SAE). D. Paris (2009) developed the term DAE to highlight the oppressive nature and function of SAE. Rather than ‘standard,’ ‘dominant’ points to the power dynamic at play

between what is and is not even considered to be standard American English practices. However, April Baker-Bell (2020) argues that the term dominant is insufficient in conveying the power dynamics, so she opts for the term White Mainstream English (WME). Linking racial power dynamics to language more explicitly shows how “people’s language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences” (Baker-Bell 2020, 2). While I have used the terms SAE and DAE in the past, I am in agreeance with Baker-Bell that if the project is to bring anti-Black oppression to the forefront within language, and for my specific purpose’s argumentation, then the terminology of dominant/standard English practices should also incorporate racial categorization.³ As Carmen Kynard states:

WME means something different from standardized English. Many white people think they are speaking standard English when they simply are not; they are just normative so the moniker of standard follows them from the flow of white privilege (quoted in Baker-Bell 2020, 3)

Because one of my aims is to highlight the seepage of white privilege into argumentative practices, rather than using the terms SAE or DAE, here I refer to these practices as White Mainstream English (WME). NAFAMs, I believe, operate from a WME argumentative framework of adversariality.

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to make a stance on the nature of adversariality within argumentation. That is a project for another time. What is within the scope of this project is to examine the ways in which non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentational models frame their primary objective as liberatory for all women, yet several of their qualifications for congenial argumentation stem from whitewashed notions of feminine argumentation. It is not merely the ‘dos and don’ts’ that I am objecting to in regard to non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentational models, as that could simply be remedied via a change of what is and is not considered hostile. Using expletives when referring to someone or interjecting when another person is speaking could be construed as affiliative in the right social context. But I believe this would be a flippant and insufficient alteration to the non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation model. At the root of my issue is methodology and the lack of acknowledgement concerning the genealogy of BAAWSC’s argumentative practices. The practices and our tactics on this continent stem from our ancestor’s enslavement on this new land. The ways we argue, express dissent, and even show assent was born from a need of survival. These are argumentative tactics that we developed in an attempt to engage in arguments where white onlookers could not readily decipher the conversation and arguments that were happening right in front of their faces (Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1991, 2004, 2000, 2015; Baugh 2000, 2013, 1983; Baldwin 1979; hooks 1994; Morgan 2002; Wiley 1992; Makoni et. al 2003; Alim and Smitherman 2012).

I do not believe that non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models can account for this development nor our subversive practices. At the very heart of NAFAM is a stance on oppositional frameworks. BAAWSC’s argumentative practices is itself oppositional. It must be. Oppositionality was and still is integral to our survival (Collins 2016; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Baugh 1999, 2015). Moreover, it is fundamental to our thriving as Black women in an oppressive system that seeks to destroy us. If NAFAM wants to truly liberate all women, more specifically if their models aim to include Black women, then the models must change this fundamental aspect of their theory. Without such a change, then NAFAM cannot speak to our argumentative practices. Nor will NAFAM be able to provide the argumentative justice in which the entire project attempts to deliver. In other words, it won’t deliver what it’s suppose to gave.

³ This is not to say non-whites do not also utilize White Mainstream English (WME), because they do. Throughout much of this project, I engage in WME; however, at times I will slip into some AAL practices. To offhandedly use Marshall McLuhan’s (1964, 9) quote “The medium is the message” – it don’t sit right with me to do a project on the oppressive nature of WME’s argumentative practices and critiquing non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models within the practices themselves. In an act of resistances (and to practice what I preach), this project is an engagement in code-meshing. More will be said on code-switching and code-meshing in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

This dissertation will proceed as follows. Within Chapter 1,⁴ I critically examine non-adversarial feminist argumentation models specifically within the scope of politeness norms and cultural communicative practices. Asserting women typically have a particular mode of arguing which is often seen as ‘weak’ or docile within male dominated fields, the model argues that the feminine mode of arguing is actually more affiliative and community orientated, which should become the standard within argumentation as opposed to the Adversary Method. I argue that the non-adversarial feminist argumentation model (NAFAM) primarily focuses on one demographic of women’s communicative styles – white women. Taking an intersectional approach, I examine practices within African American women’s speech communities to illustrate the ways in which the virtues and vices purported by the NAFAM fails to capture other ways of productive argumentation.

Within Chapter 2,⁵ I move to show what is at stake if NAFAMs along with WME norms of politeness continue to dominant argumentative norms. Despite non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models heavily critiquing rude, hostile, uncooperative argumentative practices, I argue that these models slip easily into instances of ‘white talk’ when white individuals are engaged with BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) on matters concerning racial injustices. While these models address overt aggression, a more nuanced modification is needed for the models to handle cases of white passive aggressive argumentative tactics (‘white talk’). Moreover, I also argue that given the language and argumentative ideology within academia, ‘white talk’ cannot be addressed by BIPOC without ‘argumentative smothering.’ Building heavily from Kristie Dotson’s conception of ‘testimonial smothering,’ I argue argumentative smothering occurs when an interlocutor heavily modifies their argumentative practices due to an oppressive environment in an attempt to situate their argument in such a way that it will be receptive and ‘acceptable’ to the other interlocutor and/or audience.

Within Chapter 3,⁶ I continue a critical engagement with norms of politeness. This chapter complicates two primary norms within argumentation theory: 1- engaging with one’s interlocutors in a ‘pleasant’ tone and 2- speaking directly to one’s target audience/interlocutor. Moreover, I urge argumentation theorists to explore various cultures’ argumentative norms and practices when attempting to formulate more universal theories regarding argumentation. Ultimately, I aim to show that the two previously mentioned norms within argumentation obscures and misrepresents many argumentative practices within AAL, specifically the art of signifying. While other argumentative aspects within AAL do play distinct roles within the argument, I take signifying to be a practice that is serving a very unique purpose that adds to the argument at hand rather than being merely a signal for in group affiliation.

Within my final chapter, take a small step away from argumentation theory and I focus more on embodiment within BAAWSC practices. I seek to bring the body into our conceptions of testimony and examine the ways in which, as a mode of ‘speaking,’ the Black female body is oppressed and can experience a new mode of testimonial injustice. Such an examination will be more able to account for the various ways in which testimonial smothering occurs. I argue for the possibility that bodies can articulate and give testimony, which can foreclose assertions that hermeneutical lacunas utterly prevent an individual from expressing something which does not yet have terminology. There can be a ‘this’ or a ‘that’ which has no name but can still be articulated by the body.

I conclude with a few notions of moving forward, since this dissertation is merely diagnostic as opposed to prescriptive. Due to the formatting (i.e. – each chapter is a stand-alone article), at the end of each chapter I do have some prescriptive suggestions. But it is not the aim of this project to provide more prescriptive content than what is already given.

⁴ A version of Chapter one has previously been published in *Symposion*, 2018, vol. 5, issue 2: 197-211.

⁵ An altered version of Chapter 2 is forthcoming in *TOPOI*.

⁶ A version of Chapter 3 has been published in *Informal Logic*, 2021, 41(1): 17- 39.

Chapter 1⁷

The advent of the 45th United States Presidential administration reignited a wave of literature and debate pertaining to civility within argumentation theory⁸. Displays of aggression, adversariality, and impoliteness are often construed as impediments to ‘*genuine*’ debate and argumentation (Hundleby 2013; Hundleby 2010; Rooney 2012; Rooney 2009; Cohen 2002; Govier 1999). Moreover, such impediments can facilitate an environment where various forms of argumentative injustice can take root (Bondy 2010; Kotzee 2010; Linker 2014). While not everyone who condemns aggressive, adversarial, or impolite argumentative tactics fall under the heading of feminist, much of the critique of such tactics have come from feminist argumentation theorists. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the various modes of feminist argumentation theory with an eye towards an intersectional analysis. What interests me is the notion within the literature that women are inclined to partake in arguments in a more nurturing, affiliative, and community-oriented way than their male counterparts. Advocating towards a more communal and less adversarial method of argumentation, the literature posits, will alleviate some of the gender oppression that women face when engaging in arguments. I believe their argument and aim toes the line of gender essentialist and is whitewashed. I argue the non-adversarial/minimalist adversarial feminist model of argumentation is not suited to accomplish the aims (gender liberation within the scope of argumentation) that it seeks out to solve – neither theoretically nor practically.

To adequately illustrate the ways in which non-adversarial feminist models of argumentation fail to address the concerns that it purports to remedy, I first provide an exegesis of the literature. From here, I briefly touch upon the nature of debate and argumentation, because I believe that what the non-adversarial feminist argumentation model (NAFAM)⁹ is proposing is something different from debate and/or argumentation. That is to say, what NAFAM hopes to see occurring within arguments and debates, is not actually arguments nor debates. Within the next section of this chapter, I temporarily suspend my previous concern and theoretically concede that what NAFAM advocates can be a model of argumentation and debate. I argue that even if the model is a form of debate and argumentation, it still is ill-equipped to deal with the issues that it hopes to address (namely sexism and gender oppression). One of the ways NAFAM theories attempt to curtail oppressive institutions is to jettison metaphors of adversariality – primarily analogies to sports and war. The theorists have proposed cooperative metaphors such as barn-raising, cross-pollination, and dancing. However, in order to partake within a ‘barn raising’ activity, members of the debate must be able to trust and understand one another, along with having the same blueprint (i.e., goal). All three are necessary conditions to adequately engage within the argumentative project that NAFAM hopes will remedy the state of oppressed individuals.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the precarious relationship between Black women and white women¹⁰ to illustrate the saliency of trust, understanding, and goal orientation within argumentation. Specifically, I focus on the ways in which the gendered language community of women within the NAFAM literature has been

⁷ Adapted with permission from *Symposion*, 2018, vol. 5, issue 2: 197-211.

⁸ TOPOI, Informal Logic, Argumentation, and Argumentation Theory all have had at least one special issue since Trump’s inauguration on argumentative adversariality.

⁹ Pronounced NAH-fam

¹⁰ I capitalize Black and use the descriptor ‘white’ in lower-case. I do this for 2 reasons: 1 – Black is a racial designation which gained traction in the 1960’s to replace the term ‘Negro.’ Negro has been capitalized since the 1930s, while unless occurring at the beginning of a sentence, the term ‘white’ does not have such a history (Smitherman 2000). 2 – Black not only serves as a racial designation, but when referring to descendants of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Black also serves as an ethnic group. Because of the deliberate ethnic mixing and condemnation of lineage tracing, it is extremely difficult to track ethnic heritage other than to utilize what we have, which is Black. “This [lineage tracing] has not been the case for Europeans in the United States, who typically have labeled themselves German, Italian, English, Irish, Polish, etc., according to their European ethnicity” (Smitherman 2000, 39). Some critics of grammatic practice may find it dehumanizing to use ‘white’ in lower-case but capitalize Black. But if the very definition of humanity has been conceptualized through the racial category of white, then it becomes logically impossible to dehumanize whiteness. To such critics, I direct you to Douglas (2018), Warren (2017), and Spillars (2003).

structured with white women's language practices and I contrast this with the practices within Black African American women's speech communities (BAAWSC). Ultimately within this chapter, I argue that what is asserted as inherently feminine or gendered as women's communicative and argumentative practices are not universal. While NAFAM does acknowledge 'not all women' engage in the same argumentative practices, I argue what the literature purports as a common mode of argumentative style is not as common as they think – specifically, it may only be common for white women. If we (Black women 'we') adopt a NAFAM, then BAAWSC practices will theoretically and in practice be perceived as hostile and combative. The logical conclusion regarding our practices under NAFAM is that BAAWSC practices should be jettisoned. I adamantly reject this.

I conclude the chapter with a few possible ways the NAFAM can adapt to best address the concerns I raise, although, ultimately and especially given the political debate climate, while NAFAM may be modified to handle debates and arguments even amongst those who share a proximity of viewpoints, the model cannot handle deeper debates and disagreements. Moreover, due to the inherent oppositionality found within BAAWSC practices, derived from AAL (African American Language), any flat-footed stance against adversariality cannot accommodate neither our language nor our argumentative norms. And certainly cannot address the issues concerning our oppression.

I

“I’m such a fucking lady”
-Rihanna, *Wait Your Turn*

In “Language and Woman’s Place,” Robin Lakoff argues that there is a deep connection between women’s oppression and the language (White Mainstream English – WME) that we use – “Language uses us as much as we use language” (1973, 45). Within WME, a woman should engage within the passive voice, rather than the active voice and be deferential to their audience – i.e. “John is here?” versus “John is here, isn’t he?” (Lakoff 1973, 54). Polite conversational behavior for women involves no swearing, rough talk, interruptions, loud volumes, assertiveness, or simultaneous speech. Most of these features make up what Janice Moulton deems to be “The Adversary Method” within Philosophy. Moulton states

Under the Adversary Paradigm, it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest or most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it. (Moulton 1983, 153)

While this modus operandi may seem ideal to create, foster, and strengthen objective stances and systems of thought, Moulton believes that such a method severely limits the scope of philosophical projects and inquiry. Deductive reasoning becomes the reasoning of choice and problems/questions are constructed between opponents. Refutation is the name of the game – “the philosophic enterprise [sic] is seen as an unimpassioned debate between *adversaries* who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views (Moulton 1983, 153, emphasis in original). ‘The Adversary Method,’ according to Moulton, thrives on oppositional tactics and the strongest opposition is the stance that survives. Such a model has no interest in investigating philosophical problems for their own sake nor do we evaluate theories for their plausibility – what our assessment boils down to is whether a philosophical stance can be defended against a particular opponent. This, Moulton argues, creates and facilitates not only bad reasoning, but bad reasoning *and* argumentative practices. Because we construct strong oppositional stances as markers of success and our interlocutors as opponents, argumentation under this method fosters aggression, which is a

characteristic that presents a double bind for women.¹¹ For Moulton, what ‘The Adversary Method’ lacks are gendered analyses of argumentation.

The Adversary Method within philosophy is assumed to be the neutral state of argumentation. While Moulton specifically critiques philosophical argumentation – specifically argumentation amongst ‘professional’ philosophers, feminist argumentation theorists have expanded her views to encompass argumentation in general. The adversarial method occurs in women’s day-to-day life and the issue of gendered argumentation occurring within philosophy crept into other domains, especially considering the ways in which critical thinking and general/introductory logic courses approach the teaching of argumentation.¹² What should be the goal and good practices is not neutral at all but is more male orientated. It is men who are more inclined to be “confrontational, dominant” (Ayim 1991), “judgmental” (Rooney 2010), “aggressive” (Moulton 1983; Hundleby 2013), “hostile” (Rooney 2010), “penetrating,” able to “thrust,” partake in a “battle of wits,” or “cut an opponent’s argument to pieces” (Ayim 1988), or be “war-like” (Cohen 2004). Women are often more “affiliative, nurturant, cooperative” (Ayim 1991), “indirect, empathetic,” “tied to relationships and respect for the other,” (Orr 1989), or “cooperative or contextual” (Rooney 2010). Burrow states that outside of academia “Men can take turns insulting and swearing at each other and evidence verbal sparring that is friendly, not quarrelsome” (Burrow 2010, 247). In contrast, women are more cooperative and “feminine politeness strategies aim at cooperation through connection and involvement, reflecting values of intimacy, connection, inclusion, and problem sharing” (Burrow 2010, 247). Such politeness strategies, according to NAFAM theorists, are observed within philosophical discourse as well as non-philosophical arguments.

Women are more communal and group oriented, while men are more individualist. Ayim goes as far as to say that within argumentation men are focused on domination. While “women are concerned with affiliation in their use of language and men are concerned with control” (Ayim 1991, 82). These practices that are often attributed to men have aided in the oppression of women and any indication of hostility or what is construed as rude behavior should not be tolerated within any circumstance (Govier 1999; Miller 1995).¹³ Rude behavior for some NAFAMs merely is a product of the oppositional assumptions within argumentation (although Govier differs on this point).¹⁴ It is not only the language and lack of polite behavior within argumentation that is problematic, but the very way in which we conceptualize argumentation that is at issue. Ayim states:

I believe it is time to stop focusing our attention exclusively on proving arguments that run counter to our own as wrong. We need to turn to the more integrating tasks of asking how these arguments mesh with other different experience sets, different belief systems, different value codes, and even different reasoning styles (Ayim 1988, 189).¹⁵

Arguments should, for Ayim, serve more purposes than merely proving another side’s inadequacy or exposing their errors. NAFAM advocates for other aims besides defeating contrasting stances.

Ultimately, impolite adversarial methods should be avoided within argumentation (Hundleby 2013; Hundleby 2010; Rooney 2012; Rooney 2010;

¹¹ Moulton does not advocate for women to take on more aggressive practices, rather she questions the causality between success and those who display aggression stating, “it is a mistake to suppose that an aggressive person is more likely to be energetic, effective, competent, powerful or successful and also a mistake to suppose that an energetic, effective, etc. person is therefore aggressive” (Moulton 1983, 150).

¹² For a critical feminist examination of common introductory logic textbooks, see Hundleby (2010).

¹³ More will be said on this in the following section.

¹⁴ Govier argues that at a minimum, arguments must be adversarial in virtue of there being an argument for p and ~p. Section II, as well as Chapter 2, expands upon Govier’s argument.

¹⁵ Ayim’s vision, I believe, is something more than the standard habit of ‘presenting both sides’ of the issue, as it is often the case that there are more than two angles to an issue or argument. For more on this, see Govier (1999), Collins (1998), and Collins (2000).

Rooney 2009; Cohen 2002; Govier 1999; Ayim 1988; Burrow 2010; Moulton 1983). Ayim does not completely jettison the ‘combative’ model of argumentation, as she acknowledges that confrontation has a role to play in getting rid of the combative model towards a more nurturant paradigm. The confrontational paradigm does not in itself have inherent value, rather it is necessary to address confrontational modes of thinking within a pre-established combative system with tactics that the system will recognize and not immediately destroy. Ayim states “I do not want to turn our classrooms into nurseries and graduate suckling babies, for these could not survive in the world” (Ayim 1991, 80). So, the preservation of any combative or confrontational modes of argumentation is merely strategic and pragmatic.¹⁶

Nevertheless, communicative styles that are considered “rude” and “brusque language” are not conducive to any of Ayim’s nurturant goals, along with the practice of interruption, because “while persistent interruption undermines affiliative behaviour [sic], it goes hand in hand with the maintenance of power and control as well as linguistic confrontation” (Ayim 1991, 83). The practice of interruption violates the politeness established within ‘turn-taking’ practices in “*our* ordinary language” (Ayim 1991, 83, emphasis my own). Here I want to flag the notion of a universal community of shared language practices.¹⁷ A rule (i.e. – brusque or rude language is unacceptable) is observed within their (Ayim’s and other NAFAM theorists) argumentative exchanges, which then is taken up to be universal. One of the major faults within the NAFAMs I find is the assumption that what is ‘rude, brusque, or ordinary practices’ are indexed to particular communities. That is not to say that there have been zero acknowledgements or nods to the various ways in which women can and do converse or argue. Several scholars have made obligatory footnotes or addendums remarking that ‘not all women partake in the same argumentative tactics’ or moreover ‘one must take an intersectional approach to formulating new argumentative models,’ but I have yet to see them produce any serious and in-depth work on the subject nor any work regarding possible counterexamples to their models. I expand upon this more within the remaining sections and chapters, as I hope my work begins to remedy this problem.¹⁸

II

“Get your swagger right ”
-RichGirl, “Swagger Right” (2010)

The consensus within the NAFAMs is that framing arguments as taking up oppositional positions gives rise to arguers asserting their viewpoints at all costs, often in a war-like combative style because the end goal is to ‘defeat’ the opposing side so that one’s own viewpoint can prevail. Because ‘war is hell,’ participants engage in rude practices, such as interruption, brusque language, offensive tones, and dismissive gestures (Cohen 2004). Women tend not to communicate via this style (#notallwomen), which disadvantages women because

¹⁶ Aikin (2020) aptly points out “that tamed adversariality is still adversariality” (3). He questions the reasoning for non-adversarialists arguments. Is it to cross-pollinate with adversarialists? Is it to barn raise with the adversarialists? Or is it to win the debate?

¹⁷ Although it is interesting to note that Ayim does acknowledge that men and women operate within different language paradigms, so in some sense she recognizes that there are different language communities with differing sets of norms. Ultimately, her argument is that the dominating male model is inherently destructive and confrontational, while the feminine model is supportive and affiliative.

¹⁸ I want to be very clear that I am not claiming that somehow my work is utterly groundbreaking, entirely original, or has never been thought within the history of peoples. Because it has been said and thought. Just not in direct dialogue with the NAFAMs and published in journals or other ‘appropriate’ academic settings. As Kristie Dotson testifies “There are no ‘original’ ideas that are not also erasures of past lives or current ideas. No ‘new’ ideas waiting to be ‘discovered,’ just as there wasn’t any ‘new’ land for Christopher Columbus to ‘discover” (2016, 47). I’m not bout to disrespect my ancestors and theoretical aunties like that. They gave too much for me to ignore their work, both inside and outside of the academy. Now, what I do have is training within US settler-colonial philosophical academia and space has been made available for me (because of them) to offer up these critiques within a ‘bonafide’ academic setting. So imma use dis space up.

the more masculine argumentation style is what garners praise since harsher styles is what it takes to ‘win’ arguments. Getting rid of the metaphor of arguments as war, along with the practice of viewing interlocuters as opponents will, according to NAFAMs, get rid of hostility within argumentation. However, there are differences to the extent that adversariality should be avoided within argumentation. While theorists such as Rooney aim to avoid adversariality at all costs, Ayim sees the method as being capable of being subverted to thwart itself, and Govier sees the necessity of a ‘minimal’ amount of adversariality to maintain that arguments are indeed arguments. Within this section, I briefly outline Govier’s stance ultimately agreeing that in order to uphold the practice of argumentation, adversariality, in some sense, is necessary. In chapter 2, I expand more on Govier’s stance regarding adversariality, but for now, just a short overview is sufficient.

Govier distinguishes between “ancillary adversariality” and “minimal adversariality” – the former pertaining to “name-calling... animosity, hostility, failure to listen and attend carefully, misrepresentation” (Govier 1999, 245).

While these negative argumentative practices are distinct from minimal adversariality, they often accompany minimal adversariality which makes one tempted to elide the two. Minimal adversariality is just the nature of controversy, which “is a healthy thing in many contexts” (Govier 1999, 51). In its most simplistic form, during an argument one has the stance ‘p,’ while another ‘~p.’ This is minimal adversariality, which can be productive and valuable. Controversy is beneficial in several ways: 1- it can cause us to partake in the activity of giving reasons for our beliefs, 2- we are prompted to hear beliefs that differ from our own, 3- counterpoints to our arguments can help to strengthen our viewpoint or dismiss an argument if its conclusion proves no longer viable, and 4- it provides us with a civil opportunity to non-coercively persuade others. For Govier, “argument is not *necessarily* confrontational” and when adversariality happens to exist in the nature of arguments, it “can be kept to a logical, and polite, *minimum*” (Govier 1999, 55, emphasis in original). But some level of adversariality is necessary, otherwise it seems that what is occurring is no longer arguments. Aikin states “If an argument were not adversarial, then dissent could not be argumentational” (Aikin 2011, 266). The non-Govier NAFAMs dissent from the adversarial model completely – it offers reasons against it, not a reciprocal reading of it, nor a growing with or adaption of the thought (recall: many theorists of the NAFAM want to completely do away with the adversarial model as it is inherently problematic). There is not barn raising, or cross-pollination or hybridization with the adversarial model either. There is *objection*, *refutation*, and *dissent*. The NAFAM is *opposed* to the adversarial model.

It is unclear to me exactly how one is to strongly oppose a stance, engage in argumentation, and not be adversarial. Many of the NAFAMs recommend replacing adversarial argumentation with what no longer appears to me as argumentation. Also, as Aikin aptly points out, some narrative should address when it is the appropriate time to use stronger adversarial tactics within arguments. Aikin asserts that there are some situations where “it would be inappropriate to be *minimally* adversarial” (Aikin 2011, 267, emphasis in original). An example of a simpler case might be a dissenting argument against putting onions in the soup if someone consuming it is highly allergic to onions. I would hope that those purporting a NAFAM would not be so eagerly willing to engage in brainstorming, barn raising, hybridization, or cross-pollination with those who actively distort the truth or who fuel hateful or oppressive rhetoric. And it seems that many of these theorists would not want individuals who are highly disadvantaged or oppressed within society to ‘go up against’ oppressive rhetoric with little to no adversarial argumentative tools.

III

“Begin with the heart, our sisters is a living art.”
- KRS One *Womanology*

Within the previous section, I questioned to what extent the non-adversariality Feminist Argumentation model is still argumentation. The majority of NAFAMs aim for non-adversariality within all forms of argumentation, sans Govier who sees argumentation has having some form of minimal adversariality, but still nonetheless seeks to remedy all ancillary adversarial practices with conceptions of politeness. I now turn to examining BAAWSC (African American Women Speech Communities) to highlight the ways in which a NAFAM that is strictly non-adversarial is problematic and forces Black communities to engage in oppressive practices such as codeswitching. But even Govier’s suggestion of instilling a sense of ‘politeness’ when engaging in arguments is still the same fruit off the oppressive tree. Ayim’s, Govier’s, and other NAFAMs aim to liberate women from argumentative oppression, yet what I am arguing is they are perpetuating Black women’s oppression. I suspend the discussion as to whether the suggestions from strict non-adversarial feminist argumentation models are still argumentation and will grant that it is, because I aim to still show that such a model is nevertheless untenable for *all* women.

As a precautionary note, while I am focusing on BAAWSCs, that is not to assert that all Black women always engage in all or some of these language practices. US Ebonics, or AAL, does vary from region to region, albeit the basic grammatical and argumentative practices do remain the same. Every Black woman has her own unique experience that differs, sometimes quite vastly, from another Black woman’s. Black women are not a monolithic community. Patricia Hill Collins states:

Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion. The existence of core themes does not mean that African-American women respond to these themes in the same way. Differences among individual Black women produce different patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes (2009, 30).

While our experiences differ as well as our interpretations and responses to individualized experiences, the trends still can be categorized as misogynoir. Kristie Dotson (2013) asserts that the individualized jeopardization of being a Black woman within white dominant culture speaks to this shared, yet individualized experience that each Black woman faces. It has come to my attention that a possible version of my critique against the NAFAM folks who only note on the side that there are outliers to their generalizations¹⁹ could be made against me here. Since I am making a caveat that not all Black women always partake in these exact linguistic and argumentative practices, then my addendum could be run parallel to what NAFAM is suggesting. That by suggesting that intersectional approaches be used, they (NAFAM) are acknowledging the outliers (Black women). However, I do not find this critique to be well-founded nor apt.

First, I have doubts as to whether NAFAMs calls for ‘intersectional approaches’ are indeed genuine or just lip service towards the trend to be ‘concerned’ with matters of diversity and inclusion within academia.²⁰ Second, by positing Black women and our argumentative practices as outliers, whiteness becomes centralized and standardized. “African-American women’s status as outsiders becomes the point from which other groups define their normality” (Collins 2000, 77). My project is to directly destabilize and complicate white and dominant Western argumentative practices as the norm. Third, if you have not seen a Black women use AAL and you’re white, I am willing to bet that it’s probably the setting y’all are in and she is code-switching. Even if a Black woman were to be raised in a completely WME setting by white people, they even still use some elements of AAL due to the consistent co-opting of out (AAL0 linguistic practices. As Geneva Smitherman

¹⁹ Page 11 of this document.

²⁰ For more on how these lip service moves should be construed as a microaggression, see Henning 2020).

(2000) notes, the amount of crossover from AAL to WME is staggering and deceives the majority of WME practitioners. Smitherman states “The absorption of African American Language into European American culture masks its true origin and reason for being cause the ‘nigga metaphor’ is born from a culture of struggle” (2000, 31). Our practices are not taught in an overwhelming majority of English Language Arts courses. The language is incessantly being demonized or flat out rejected even as a distinct language within mainstream society. Basically, as Ralph Wiley states the perception is that “Black people have no [cultural language] because most of it is out on loan to white people. With no interest” (1992, 26).

In virtue of being Black women/femmes, we *do* share certain ‘elements of community,’ ‘core themes’ (Collins 2009), ‘jeopardization’ (Dotson 2013) in a way that is distinct from being just women such as “shared history of enslavement, Jim Crowism, segregation, and ‘race’-ism; investment in ties that bind, including knowledge and value systems; historical connection to Africanized language forms; self-identity” (Troutman 2010, 92). From these community elements, which also includes language and argumentative norms along with styles, we can ascertain characteristics to BAAWSC practices. As stated in the introduction, what I am not referring to is slang. While Black slang is a component of our communicative practices, “all Black Language is not Black slang” (Smitherman 2000, 2). Black Slang is ever evolving and varies from South Central to the DMV. African American Language’s roots of enslavement shaped it to be a coded language and secretively argumentative style, which heavily relies upon the body and tone. Some linguistic practices within BAAWSC include lewd or indecorous language, signifying²¹, culturally toned diminutives (i.e., gurl/gurl²², sista/h, child/chile, honey, bitch²³), simultaneous speech, and talking with attitude (TWA), while nonlinguistic practices include side-eye, cut-eye, various hand gestures, ‘edge,’ and suck-teeth. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but is to serve as a reference point as to the sorts of practices that are common within BAAWSCs. These practices are at times meant to emphasize the content of speech, replace words directly, highlight various affective states, and can be seen as acts of resistance. The context will determine the content.²⁴

However, stereotypes and media representations of BAAWSC practices often render us as sassy, dismissive, copping an attitude, ghetto, or straight up hood rats with no knowledge (Collins 2009, 2005, 1998) (Wollcott 2001) (McKenzie 2014) (Getz 2017) (Flory 2008). Mainstream media representations of Black women speaking African American Language and enacting our norms and style of argumentation are often to depict harmful tropes such as the mammy, matriarch, welfare queen, sassy Black woman, or ‘hot mamma’/jezebel. These latter stereotypes render us as poor interlocutors riddled with argumentative vices. The sassiness is conveyed through the utilization of AAL and the welfare queen as well as the as the jezebel are depicted by the language they use. AAL commonly is associated with the ill-educated, ghetto/hood,

²¹ Signifying is a verbal game/exercise of indirection, sometimes called sounding or snapping. See Morgan (2002), Smitherman (2015) (2000), and Baker-Bell (2020). I expand more on the practice in Chapter 3.

²² Early in my career, this specific term caused me a great deal of grief when I once referred to a white conference presenter as ‘gurl,’ only to be charged with belittling and demeaning the speaker because I did not call her a woman. I don’t forget where I am anymore.

²³ Typically, these culturally toned diminutives express solidarity, even though within white

U.S. and European contexts several of these words have been “rejected... as a result of inequitable and degrading treatment,” but tone is incredibly important here along with other nonlinguistic communicators (Troutman 2001, 217). See xander bird “How to say B*tch in many ways” for an example of the role that tone, inflection, and facial expression plays within AAL.

²⁴ In an effort not to air too much dirty laundry or giving away ‘trade secrets,’ I hesitate to give a plethora of clear concrete examples of the various ways bringing wreck, talking the talk, talking with attitude, or other AAWSC practices can be delineated from being practices of resistance, tough love or ‘calling-in,’ play, or just wild’n. I am not intentionally keeping people in the dark for the hell of it or because I am unable to defend my stance; rather, this is to keep AAL and AAWSC practices as oppositional and to protect some of them from exposure as acts of resistance. For example, the term “Becky’ has now entered MWE to mean something akin to a stereotypical white girl. When I was an undergraduate (before Becky in MWE was a common term), if there was another Black woman in the class and a white woman said something Becky-ish, I would raise my hand and respond with something like ‘I’d like to respond to Becky’s remarks on ...’ My statements were for two audiences: 1 – the other Black woman in the class and 2 – everybody else. Calling the woman ‘Becky’ despite being her actual name was for the sistah and the rest was for everyone. So, what I will say is that we within the community of practices know the apropos contexts, rules, etc.

unprofessional, unkempt, or ain't shit. The sistah in a movie or show more often than not speaks AAL. It's seen as a street language that is not considered proper 'English,' despite being recognized as a language by linguists (even white ones) since as early as the 1930's.²⁵ What I am bringing to the forefront is the direct tie between these stereotypes or 'controlling images' of Black women and the degradation of AAL. Utilization (or an attempt at it)²⁶ of AAL to depict these stereotypes is one of the signals in which the stereotype is in play. The language and argumentative styles rise and fall with these images. How else is the sassy Black friend depicted/signaled if not by her language (both verbal and body) and argumentative style?

This image of the sassy angry Black women is what Collins refers to as a "controlling image" which are depictions of Black women "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 2005, 69). Such images are not meant to serve as representations of reality; rather, they are a façade designed to render displays of the hood rats/ghetto chicks/welfare queens as not only normal and expected, but as exculpations and justifications for their plight. The deployment of these controlling images helps to justify and maintain Black women's oppression within dominant society. Many linguistic practices within the BAAWSC are perceived as unprofessional, ill-educated, and hostile (Collins 2009; Troutman 2010; Koonce 2012; Fordham 1993). The issue with the controlling images depictions of us as overly sassy, hostile, and the angry Black woman is not that we never express those emotions or enact these traits. I know for sure I do at times. What is problematic is 1 – the flat-footed one-dimensional depiction of us, which 2 – gets used to justify and maintain our oppression. The controlling images makes a case that based upon these depictions, dominant white society can undercut our knowledge and our confidence as knowers. The images are purported evidence of an irrationality and unsuitability to be virtuous interlocutors.²⁷ However, within our community, these practices do not usually carry the negative connotation that they hold within white dominant culture.

Within Troutman's study on politeness within BAAWSC, she conducted a survey on what talking with attitude (TWA), one particular practice within our language community, meant for a variety of Black women. Below are a few of the participants responses:

- Oh, it's like they use a certain tone in their words.
 - It's not so much the words but it's the tone and the structure of the words to get the point across... you know what I mean?
 - Inflection in voice; sass, talking back but it's not disrespectful
 - It's which words are used to accent
 - I think on the outside looking in for people who are not [B]lack women they may think that its attitude but among black women we just see it as a way of communicating; all in all I don't think it is really an attitude it is just how we express ourselves.
 - I guess we have always TWA. It's also walking with an attitude, being with an attitude. It's not unique to language.
- (Troutman 2010, 99-100).

Not all answers considered TWA as merely 'just the way we talk or express ourselves;' some of Troutman's participants explicitly contributed positive attributes to TWA. They saw it as a sign of confidence, knowledge, authority, and even as a means of resistance. Usually, it is deemed as impolite if it is incorrectly deployed, done with strangers outside of the community, or excessive for no reason. Several of the participants were aware of the general stereotype of Black women who TWA – "Someone who doesn't know me may think it's negative...

²⁵ For more on the history of AAVE, Ebonics, Negro language, AAL, or Black language, see Baker-Bell (2020), Ramirez et. al (2005), Baugh (2000) (1997) (1983) (1969), Smitherman (2015) (2000), Williams (1975), Dalby (1969), Dillard (1972), Kockman (1981) (1972), Rickford (1999), Spears (1998), Turner (1949), Woodson (1933).

²⁶ The book *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett is a critically acclaimed example of an attempt at AAL gone wrong.

²⁷ I say more on this in Chapter 4.

we are highly publicized of having an attitude; it's just an over-generalized stereotype" (Troutman 2010, 101). The notion of an over generalized harmful stereotype is evidence of the impact the utilization of controlling images can have on Black women. One respondent stated that it was inappropriate within the workplace or another professional setting "where the majority of [her] colleagues were not Black women," not because TWA is inherently a negative thing to do, but because it would play into the stereotypes that already plague us and would hurt her/our professional standing within the workplace.²⁸ It is not the practice itself that she is reluctant of, it is the high probability that the practice will be misunderstood, and she will suffer negative consequences. So, she engages in code-switching when the predominant audience is white. Young argues that coerced engagement of code-switching is oppressive to many Black people, especially Black women, and it does not "match the achievements in diversity" (Young 2009, 64).

My concern regarding NAFAMs is that these controlling images which often portray Black women as sassy, angry, and hostile in conjunction with our misunderstood linguistic practices, if enacted within an argument, will be interpreted as engaging within The Adversary Method or participating in ancillary adversariality. Within the next section, I expand upon my reservations of NAFAMs.

IV

"It's funny how money change a situation/Miscommunication lead to complication/My emancipation don't fit
your equation"
- Lauryn Hill *Lost Ones*

Now that I have provided a sketch of what some of our practices are within the BAAWSC, within this section I juxtapose our practices with the critique of the adversarial mode of argumentation offered by the NAFAM. I argue that many (if not all) of the practices criticized and deemed impolite within NAFAM, appear in some fashion within BAAWSCs. For example, interruption, for Ayim, is an exercise of power and domination, rather than just a mode of expression. When you interrupt another person's speech, you are attempting to shut them down and shut them up. The assumption, according to Ayim, is that what the other person has to say is not worthy to be heard and your (the interrupter) viewpoint has more saliency and should interject. Not only is interruption within an argument a sign of disrespect, Ayim asserts that if everyone responds similarly while conversing, "then we would be hard-pressed indeed to keep a conversation going" (Ayim 1991, 84). Laying all my cards on the table, I wonder a bit if Ayim has ever seen/heard a group of Black women conversing while engaging in TWA or other practices of ours, because we typically are very skilled at keeping the conversation going despite the interruptions. Nor does the conversation have an overly hostile tone to us, since engaging in some of these practices is one way to show solidarity, affection, and equality.

One person's harmful argumentative practices are another's form of 'tough-love,' assertiveness, or act of resistance. Ayim's description of one male centric confrontational domination tactic is "[o]ne cuts them off, interrupts them, puts them in their place" (Ayim 1991, 84). Rooney strongly associates "hostility and combativeness in argumentation, with an aggressive atmosphere that can include name-calling, put-downs, or quips such as 'that's a ridiculous argument!'" (Rooney 2010, 209). However, both of these descriptions also fit into what Pough describes as an BAAWSC practice of "bringing wreck,"²⁹ specifically "talking back, going off, turning it out, having a niggerbitchfit, or being a diva" (Pough 2004, 78). BAAWSC linguistic practices, as previously stated, can be used as a way of calling-in, 'gettin your peoples,' putting someone in their place, or

²⁸ I delve into the issue of the workplace more in Chapter 2.

²⁹ 'Bringing wreck' roughly means to utterly destroy something. When you 'bring it' you respond "to a challenge to a person's leadership, situation, position on an issues, or to a threat to do bodily harm; indicates that one is up to the challenge" (Smitherman 2000, 80). 'Wreck' can mean to destroy, go hard, just do something so right it's decimated.

talking that talk. A “put-down” or “quip,” as Rooney refers to it, is not always meant to shut someone up or shut them down within AAL. It is not necessarily a tactic that is meant to halt argumentation. Moreover, some of these features are constitutive of the arguments. They are what makes the argument work. Bringing wreck and other BAAWSC practices are not inherently domineering nor antithetical to an affiliative project.

Rather than being opposed to an affiliative project or practice, I argue that some of our practices should be viewed as affiliative and cooperative. Dialoging in this way is incredibly important to our assessment of knowledge claims. Collins harkens our practices today with African based oral traditions, such as the call-and-response model. This model is “[c]omposed of spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker’s statements, or ‘calls,’ are punctuated by expressions, or ‘responses,’ from the listener” (Collins 2000, 280). For example, a Black woman might be arguing with a friend about x, and while making her points the friend can ‘interrupt’ the speaker with expressions such as ‘uhm,’ ‘uh-huh,’ ‘I hear you,’ ‘girl,’ ‘bitch,’ or a plethora of other responses. This interruption is not an interruption to shut the speaker down/up. The interruption can function as affirmation that the listener is indeed listening. Another example of the call/response model is within the Black Church, specifically lining-out. Lining-out refers to the leader of the church calling out lines or verses and the congregation responds accordingly. “The lining-out style of singing also reflects the antiphonal nature of African work songs and the Black interactive style of communicating” (Smitherman 2000, 20). Being entirely silent while a speaker is speaking within many BAAWSC practices actually has the opposite effect as what the NAFAM purports. Within the Black Church, if a congregation is being too quiet, it is not uncommon for a preacher to use signification to get folks to actively participate.³⁰ Collins states “to refuse to join in, *especially if one really disagrees* with what has been said, is seen as ‘cheating’” (Collins 2010, 280, emphasis my own). To not partake in this call-and-response model is seen as not partaking in the dialogue or not listening – and for us, that’s just rude.

As one can see, many of the practices within the BAAWSC are highly contextualized and situational.³¹ While such practices within BAAWSC may appear to be dismissive of an interlocutor’s remarks or arguments, “when you talk with an attitude, you have to know what you are talking about” (Troutman 2010, 99). In other words, to adequately execute TWA, TTT, or bringing wreck, one must not only have command of the subject matter at hand, but they also have to exhibit a mastery of a multitude of linguistic and non-linguistic communicative practices. Enacting any one of these practices “represents one of the highest levels of linguistic dexterity,” because it encompasses multiple communicative practices simultaneously (Troutman 2001, 2006, and 2010). Similar to the call-and-response model, TWA, TTT, or bringing wreck can be a sign that the listener is actually listening to what is being said. These practices require not only an understanding of what the dialogue or argument is about, but also what has been said thus far, and an ability to play off of these points using linguistic and non-linguistic practices. One must be able to play with the language, recapitulate the concepts, and articulate these with just the right emphasis on certain words with well-timed and appropriate bodily/ facial expressions. According to one of Troutman’s respondents, “We have to respect each other’s conversations before speaking. It’s the way you say something, not what you say” (Troutman 2010, 101). The way one says something is not just that there is tone, sass, or a rough edge to the voice – the way you say something also has to fit the context.

³⁰ Statements I have personally heard include ‘Imma say it again cuz y’all ain’ hearin me’ or my personal favorite ‘Dem walls are gettin saved today.’

³¹ When asked if TWA was polite or impolite within Troutman’s study, there was almost unanimous agreement that “You have to use contextual cues to know if it’s positive or negative” (2010, 101). One respondent indicated that the relationship between the speaker and ‘target’ is also important. “[I]f I see [B]lack women acting that way no I would not view it as negative because I’m used to it, it’s the norm for me... but if I seem them using that same attitude with strangers *for no reason*, then I’ll be like yea that’s a little excessive... you just have to know when and when not to use the attitude and how far” (Troutman 2010, 101 emphasis my own).

Engaging in TWA, TTT, or bringing wreck also is a way in which an individual can assert themselves, particularly when these acts are being done with an interlocuter where there is a power differential. The act of TWA, for hooks, is “speaking as an equal to an authority figure... daring to disagree” (hooks 1989, 5). In this way, utilizing some of the practices within the BAAWSC can be an act of resistance. “It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back,’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice” (hooks 1989, 9). To liberate women’s voices appears to be what many NAFAMs are after, but hooks’ (and Pough’s) notion of talking back as a form of liberation appears to be contrary to the means of liberation asserted by the NAFAM. While the emancipation of women’s voices is the goal for both the NAFAM and Black feminists/womanists, our means of getting there are incredibly different. And I have to wonder, exactly who the NAFAM seeks to liberate.

V

“If I see you and I don’t speak/ That means I don’t fuck with you”
-Cardi B *Bodak Yellow*

I have made the case that many of the practices within the BAAWSC do not fit the practices encouraged by the NAFAM; moreover, several of our practices seem to be precisely what the NAFAM is opposing. However, with a few modifications I believe a case could be made that the NAFAM could be adapted to accommodate BAAWSC practices, especially considering that whether BAAWSC practices are impolite or polite depends a great deal on context. Most of the time our practices are not aggressive, born out of an attempt to shut another person up, or ignorant of our interlocuter’s stance. That is to say that what is happening within our language community is not necessarily the vices that are being critiqued by the NAFAM. One way to make the NAFAM more acquiescent to BAAWSC is to adequately enlighten other interlocuters to the practices of BAAWSC. Education regarding the various cultural practices of politeness has, at first glance, the potential to not render BAAWSC as hostile when our speech practices are enacted (by us) within arguments or debates. Many of our linguistic practices could be seen as nutritive, coalescent, or polite.³² But such modifications I find to be insufficient. Several of our ideological commitments, which I believe are reflected within our linguistic practices, are too confrontational for the NAFAM.

It is not just the means by which adversariality is articulated that the NAFAM of argumentation rejects – it is also the practice of opposing viewpoints and approaching arguments as though the interlocuters are in opposition with one another. An oppositional stance is deemed to perpetuate the adversarial method, which then brings about rude, brusque, and dismissive argumentative practices. Differences in opinion and argumentative disagreements are acceptable, and will occur, but these can be resolved if we approach the argument from a more communal and understanding perspective. We should argue alongside our interlocuters, rather than against them (Cohen 2004). Similarly, Rooney interrogates the move between practices of “difference and disagreement to opposition and adversariality,” in hopes of diminishing the latter, because it “construes the epistemic role of good argument as a significant tool of rational persuasion in the acquisition and communication of truths or likely truths” (Rooney 2010, 211). To be adversarial – to be oppositional – is to impede the goals of argumentation and weakens its strength as a tool. Rooney states “By ‘oppositional reasoning’ I mean reasoning and arguing that is largely structured in terms of opponents and opposing positions, attacks and defenses, winners and losers” (Rooney 2010, 209 fn 6). Such an embattled sense of reasoning is in “conflict with the standard philosophical norms of good reasoning and argumentation” (Rooney 2010, 211). Arguments should not be battle grounds. They should be “diplomatic negotiations,” “metamorphosis,”

³² For example, the co-opting of culturally toned diminutives such as ‘girl’ and ‘bitch,’ by gay white men can be seen as a sign of solidarity and friendship. For a critique of this phenomena, see E. Patrick Johnson (2003) and Mannie (2014).

“brainstorming,” or “barnraising [sic]” (Cohen 2004). But are there really no viewpoints or arguments that warrant an oppositional stance? Does the NAFAM sincerely intend to ‘brainstorm’ or ‘raise barns’ with those who seek to advance not only oppressive arguments, but oppressive practices?

As I stated within Section I, Ayim (1991) sees utility in the adversarial model, mainly that of combatting the adversariality of the world – be it racism, sexism, ableism, etc. Once these oppressive forces are gone, as communicators we should depart from an adversarial style and turn to a more nutritive mode of argumentation. Govier argues that argumentation at a minimum is adversarial, that is simply its nature, but that does not give us reason to be hostile or rude to those who differ with us. Govier states that “When argument is understood in an *oppositional* way, difference in opinion or belief is construed as disagreement, and disagreement is regarded as conflict; conflict leads to contest between opponents; and contest to battle – real or metaphoric” (Govier 1999, 54, emphasis in original). Argument can merely be a forum in which interlocutors articulate their differences. Difference, according to Govier, does not necessitate disagreements. While I agree that having differences does not demand that disagreements occur, I reject the notion that opposition is inherently bad.

Before delving into the discussion in favor of certain cases of oppositional stances, specifically Black feminism, I want to make it explicit that just because a Black woman engages in BAAWSC practices does not mean that they are a Black feminist. Black feminism is not synonymous with BAAWSC; however, many Black women whether they label themselves as Black feminists, tend to adhere to several of its central tenets. Collins states that this is because “as members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women’s group empowerment... helps U.S. Black women survive in, cope with, and resist our differential treatment” (Collins 2009, 33-35). In order to survive the U.S. terrain, we must remain oppositional to it. “For Black feminist thought, oppositionality represents less an achieved state of being than a state of becoming” (Collins 1998, 89). Black feminist thought challenges the status quo – that is the reason for its being (Collins 2016). Moreover, AAL as a language was specifically developed *to be* oppositional. Enslaved Africans were forced to use English as an attempt to quell resistance and rebellions. However, a new language utilizing English language vocabulary was created. AAL is “a coded language that allowed them [enslaved Africans] to talk about Black business publicly and even to talk about ole massa himself right in front of his face” (Smitherman 2000, 26). Not only was AAL a way to communicate in a secretive fashion, but it also was a way to solidify a Black identity. John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford (2000) state that because “Spoken Soul [AAL] often marks the *oppositional* identity of [B]lacks vis-à-vis whites and ‘mainstream culture’ is undoubtedly part of the reason for its vibrant existence to this day” (139, emphasis my own). The practices within BAAWSC, given our history within the United States, is in direct opposition to the very practices of white American communication. White dominant argumentative practices. To actively and consciously partake in many of these linguistic practices is to stand opposed to the US settler-colonial systems of oppression.

All-in-all, I sympathize with the NAFAM project. Arguments do not need to always be hostile, and sometimes using specific words, bodily gestures, or facial expressions are not warranted. But warrant for adversariality is the missing element within the NAFAM, because under this model no situation warrants any hostility. I believe certain situations warrant particular argumentative styles and that includes what is perceived to be (and what flat out is in some cases) adversarial methods of argumentation. The claim that all modes of hostility are oppressive to women ignores the communicative and argumentative styles of several different groups of women, particularly Black women. Modalities of argumentation that were created to stand against systems of oppression. If the NAFAMs remain adamant on maintaining a universal conception of politeness within argumentation, I wonder which women their work serves?

Chapter 2

“Leap on this, so I can bust your lip
Because the lord made man, but man made speech
And speech is only talk, and talk is cheap”
-Stetsasonic *Don't let your mouth write a check that your ass can't cash*

“Got the tone to ya head yo life flashing right front your eyes”
-Project Pat feat. Frayser Boy *Mouth Write A check*

At the onset of summer 2020, the United States' news media and social media affixed themselves to the racial disparities and police brutality that plague the country. Protests, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience have erupted not only domestically, but globally.³³ Some predict that a 'racial' war is approaching, while others hope the civility of words will prevail over the violence and riots. Calls for papers are cropping up for both journal articles and virtual conferences in hopes to engage in polite/civil racial discourse. The time of racial reckoning seems to be upon our doorsteps; however, I believe that it is pertinent to take a meta step to scrutinize the ways in which our discourse and arguments regarding anti-Black racism are examined. Anti-Black police brutality is important to discuss, but anti-Black racism does not begin with nor end with police brutality. We need to also take steps to critique the ways anti-Blackness has seeped within academia, specifically via linguistic and argumentative racism. This paper is a small step towards examining argumentative racial injustice.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully flesh out anti-Blackness within the academy, my hope is that this will serve as 'food for thought' in the conversations that are yet to come. Here I focus on one set of literature (non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models) which calls for argumentative civility. Ultimately, I argue, that this set of literature has the high probability of leading to white passive aggressive argumentative moves ('white talk') and that the conceptions of adversariality within these models are ill equipped to handle such passive aggressive behavior. The consensus within the non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation model is that framing arguments as taking up oppositional positions facilitates 'warlike' practices, because the end goal is to 'defeat' the opposing side so that one's own viewpoint can prevail. Because 'war is hell,' participants engage in rude practices, such as interruption, brusque language, offensive tones, and dismissive gestures (Cohen 2004). The model asserts that women tend not to naturally communicate in this fashion – they are more “affiliative, nurturant, cooperative” (Ayim 1991), "indirect, empathetic," "tied to relationships and respect for the other," (Orr 1989), or "cooperative or contextual" (Rooney 2010). Not only is this a whitewashed depiction of women as arguers as I argued in Chapter 1, but, as this chapter argues such a critique of argumentative aggression and calls for civility creates instances of passive aggressive behaviors towards BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) rather than overt aggression. Due to systemic anti-Black racism involving distorted perceptions of BIPOC, tone-policing, along with code-switching in academic settings, white passive aggressive argumentative moves are nearly impossible to engage with without being caught in an argumentative double bind. The BIPOC interlocutor can either stand down, which inadvertently consigns the white interlocutor, or they can reassert themselves, which must be within the academic fashion of settling an argument (as opposed to engaging in the 'street' way of settling arguments). The academic fashion involves code-switching and being overly mindful of controlled images. Building from Dotson's conceptual tool, testimonial smothering (2011), I refer to this type of predicament faced by BIPOC within the academy as

³³ See Kirby (2020) and Liubchenkova (2020) for moving photographs of Black Lives Matter protests from around the world.

‘argumentative smothering.’ Argumentative smothering occurs when an interlocutor heavily modifies their argumentative practices due to an oppressive environment attempting to situate their argument in a way that will be receptive and ‘acceptable’ to the other interlocutor and/or audience. We all modify our arguments to appropriate audiences. Doing otherwise would be unwise and has the potential to make our arguments inaccessible to various groups. What distinguishes argumentative smothering from merely modifying one’s argument to fit a specific venue is the additional factor of oppression. Argumentative smothering must contain the component of oppressive environments as the catalyst for the argumentative tactic’s revision.

Argumentative smothering can occur for various oppressed and marginalized peoples; however, here I focus on Black African Americans and our argumentative practices. Our norms and linguistic mores are different than the white-Anglo academic model. Arguments within Ebonics, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), African American Language (AAL), or dem streets involve more than just the discursive exchange of ideas, formalized argumentation, or even just words. At times during the engagement of these practices, one can find themselves catching hands. While I am not advocating for settling arguments via fists, what I am arguing is that many passive aggressive forms of ‘white talk’ have been articulated to me that wouldn’t have been said otherwise if the interlocutor knew we could step out back. A common phrase within African American speech communities is “don’t let your mouth write checks your ass can’t cash.”

Through a case example coupled with an examination of Black African American argumentation styles, this chapter shows that many non-adversarial feminist argumentation models create a new form of aggressive behavior when utilized by white individuals, especially white women. Abandoning the adversarial model has the high potential of creating passive aggressive argumentative practices with white interlocutors, specifically ‘white talk.’ Bailey (2015) outlines ‘white talk’ as a “‘boomerang discourse’: I talk to you but come right back to myself...in addition to its responsibility-evasive function, white talk also serves to construct the speaker as an imagined non-racist self” (41-42). It is a phenomenon known within the white ignorance literature (Mills 1997, 2007, 2015, 2018) that allows white allies to segment themselves off from a systemic white framework, without the ally having to acknowledge their own complicity within said framework. These argumentative moves are difficult to locate because prima facie no wrongdoing has occurred - after all the white speaker has aligned herself with an anti-racist agenda (McIntyre 1997). I want to be clear that the phenomena that I am identifying as argumentative smothering is not something that is typically done by overt white racists, as I imagine many would not even participate in arguments with me, since imma woman of African descent. In my experience, argumentative smothering typically occurs when engaging in arguments/disagreements with white allies.

This chapter proceeds in the following manner: first I examine Black African American styles of argumentation. Often, such an argumentative style is deemed to be unacceptable within an academic setting, which causes the majority of African Americans to engage in code-switching. While code-switching is a necessary practice within academia, it is nevertheless an oppressive one given the power dynamics between BIPOC academics and white academics. This theoretical work will lay the foundation for what I deem to be argumentative smothering – the modification of one’s arguments due to an oppressive environment. From here, I give an account of the non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation model which situates my claims that such a model easily allows for passive aggressive behavior. Juxtaposing a case example with the non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation model illuminates the high probability of the theory to turn into ‘white talk,’ which is counterproductive towards the aims of the feminist argumentation models. The weaker conception of ‘white talk’ situates the phenomena as a passive aggressive behavior; however, stronger conceptions posit the action as overtly aggressive (specifically that it involves an intentional deployment of white fragility). Regardless of the degrees of passivity, all notions of ‘white talk’ see the argumentative tactic as aggressive, and so antithetical to the project outlined within non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models. If non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models continue to advocate for minimal or no adversariality without attending to the backdrop of systemic racism, it will continue to be another mode of argumentative

injustice and contribute to the oppression of BIPOC women. In lieu of a formal conclusion, I end the chapter with some steps to help mitigate argumentative smothering within academia.

I

Due to space limitations, within this section I briefly go over some key components argumentative styles found in AAL. It is important to note that AAL is not merely the deployment of slang or hip words or entirely focused on vocabulary nor phonology. Ebonics – also known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English, African American Language (AAL), Black Vernacular English, or Black English Vernacular³⁴ incorporates English words, but retained syntactic features found within Niger-Congo languages and follows distinct linguistic rules including but not limited to: negative concord, deletions of verb copulas, habitual aspect markers, semantic bleaching, and ‘it’ for the dummy explicative ‘there’ (Smitherman 2015). Ebonics is a composite between the words ‘ebony’ and ‘phonics,’ and pertains to the linguistic practices found in West African, Caribbean, and United States African slave descendants. AAL encompasses both verbal and non-verbal linguistic practices. These rules are regulated and maintained. There is a proper and improper way of speaking Ebonics³⁵, or AAL, so it is not merely ‘in vogue’ bad English or slang. Pullum offers a detailed definition of slang:

“We call an expression slang when it represents a vivid, colloquial word or phrase associated with some subculture and not yet incorporated as part of the mainstream language. No subculture’s slang could constitute a separate language. The mistake is like confusing a sprinkle of hot sauce with a dinner. Slang is by definition parasitic on some larger and more encompassing host language” (1999, 40).

Slang is bereft of grammatical structure and typically is already words within the mainstream language. What is distinct with slang is that word meaning has been altered. Word meaning alteration is not what is happening within AAL. There are grammatical features and proper and improper ways to speak it. When someone is speaking AAL, defectives in the grammar can occur. When errors occur that is what constitutes a defective speaker as well as “when one’s skills register lower than one’s peers” (Kirk-Duggan, 141). Since AAL does contain rules and social practices that enforce proper deployment, speaking Ebonics should not be construed as a deficiency in argumentative nor linguistic skill. One must be quite adept at tracking linguistic and non-linguistic social cues in order to actively participate in several of the speech community practices.

There are several elements to AAL argumentation that distinguishes it from White Mainstream English (WME) argumentative styles, but I limit my analysis to three: cooperative/collaborative speech, signifying, and latching. Cooperative or collaborative speech refers to flow of a discursive exchange where the interlocutors’ statements are flowing into one another almost as though they are finishing one another’s sentences.³⁶ It may seem as though the participants are interrupting each other, but non-verbal cues are essential to ensure the ‘right’ speaking order. Troutman describes the practice as a “pattern of speaking [which] shows that the speakers are working together cooperatively” (2001, 215). Sometimes this pattern is prompted by one individual asking for more information after a pause or a certain facial expression. This style of ‘call and

³⁴ The debate as to whether Ebonics constitutes a language within linguistic departments has done been had, but philosophy and argumentation theory have yet to catch up. If someone is still unconvinced that it is indeed a language, I can remain theoretically neutral on this matter as the outcome of this old debate does not bear on whether the argumentative smothering occurs. The point is that these argumentative practices do happen, and such practices do not rely on Ebonics being a language, dialectic, or something else entirely so please don’t get caught up in the question. What is important for my purpose; however, is the understanding that Ebonics is not merely ‘bad’ American English. For proof that Ebonics, AAVE, AAL is a language, see Baker-Bell (2020), Ramirez et. al (2005), Baugh (2000), Smitherman (2015) (2000), and Williams (1975).

³⁵ For native speakers, it is usually comical and frustrating to hear non-native speakers often attempt to use the invariant ‘be.’ For more on grammatical rules regarding ‘be’ see Green (2002) and Young et. al (2014).

³⁶ This is distinct from feminist argumentation models conception of cooperative or collaborative argumentative practices.

response' is residual from the Niger-Congo languages of the African slaves who were forced to this continent and held with Africans from other tribes to make discourse more difficult. The melding of linguistic/argumentative responses was a tactic for Africans to "bind together, melding diverse African ethnic groups into one community" in the face of enslavement (Smitherman 2006, 3). Not only was this a way for African slaves to partake in a reclamation of their ancestral history, but it also facilitated open communication in front of white slave masters. Cooperative/collaborative speech practices are signals that an interlocutor and I are on the same page (i.e. – we are in agreeance on certain premises) and gestures/sounds/tones can be used to signal disagreement without having to overtly state we have diverging views.

Signifying or signification³⁷ is a specific type of speech act within AAL that utilizes exaggeration, irony, and indirection to partake in coded messages, riddled with insults, during discourse (Morgan, 2002). Similar to the WME practice of back-handed compliments, signifying is usually meant to be fun, but is also very serious business. It contains burns but most of the time is done so out of love and affection. Signifying is usually an act done with those whom we have a bond, which is due to the communicative and affiliative nature of the discourse. The practice relies heavily upon "double meaning and irony" and utilizes humor to provide serious critique (Smitherman 2006, 43). The signification hides the critique in a 'playful' manner. Smitherman states that "a common strategy is to first boldly state your critique and then retreat to the familiar Black expression: 'I was jes playin'" (2006, 69). Rhetorical critical questions are another mode in which signification can occur. Mild insults are used, not only in a joking manner, but with serious intent to articulate disagreement or dissent. However, it is important to note that while signification can be used affectionately, it can also be used critically and without play, yet still with the tone of joking. Two examples of more critical forms of signification would be the phrase 'head nigga in charge' (HNIC) and my abbreviation and pronunciation of non/minimal adversarial feminist argumentation models (NAFAM). With HNIC, on one hand when you refer to someone as an HNIC you are giving them accolades for being the person in charge; however, on the other hand you are criticizing them for workin for tha man. The head nigga was usually a house African slave who was massa's right hand negro. While you are in charge, you ain't workin for your peoples. I abbreviated NAFAM this way to be a quip of sorts, but with a very serious message to double check what they are doing. It is playful, but also very much not. And some of these theorists I most definitely do not consider to be my sisters or family.

A less affiliative and more assertive practice is latching – "a turn-taking mechanism which occurs at the end of a conversational partner's speaking turn, avoiding an interruption or overlapping of a conversational partner's speech" (Troutman 2001, 219). Effectively an interlocutor 'latches' on to the previously given statement/premise. This is distinguishable from cooperative/collaborative speech in the sense that one can conceive of latching as 'forcing' or 'asserting' the turn, as opposed to cooperative/collaborative speech being encouraged to receive the turn. Tone and body language also play a role in distinguishing these two features. Probably the most accessible comparison to non-native speakers would be the speed, tone, and body language someone might have if they are giving a clapback. Another distinction between latching and cooperative or collaborative discourse is that the employment of latching is not only meant for the conversational partner, but it is also a way to save face to the audience/onlookers (Morgan 2002). Latching serves the purpose of letting your conversational partner know you're not to be fucked with and it also lets onlookers know you're not the one.

It would be deemed uncouth to use expletives during a seminar, conference presentation, or job interview. And it would be considered ill-mannered to go in on somebody during a conference Q&A only at the end to say 'jes playin.' Which is why many of us who speak AAL usually choose to engage in code-switching. Code-switching is often defined as the "use of more than one language or language variety concurrently in conversation" (Young 2009, 49). But there are some arguments and sentiments that cannot be fully captured when one is not using their native tongue. As Yancy eloquently states, "Some forms of knowledge become

³⁷ Also referred to as 'sounding' or 'snapping.'

substantially truncated and distorted, indeed, erased, if not expressed through the familiar linguistic media of those who have possession of such knowledge” (275). In addition to some knowledge becoming squashed, it is also very burdensome to consistently code-switch when direct translations even can occur, which leads me to argumentative smothering.

II

My conception of argumentative smothering is an expansion upon Kristie Dotson’s conception of testimonial smothering, where an individual “truncates” their testimony due to epistemic and social conditions for their testimony to be taken up with charity and competence (2011). There are three conditions for a case to be deemed testimonial smothering: “1) the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky; 2) the audience must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony of the speaker; and 3) testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance” (2011, 244). A case of testimonial smothering would not be adjusting or truncating one’s testimony to explain a global pandemic to a 5-year-old. In such a case, condition 2 is met, but the testimonial adjustments do not meet conditions 1 or 3. It does not seem particularly risky or unsafe to tell a kindergartner about global warming. And I wouldn’t attribute pernicious ignorance to a 5-year-old. Similarly, adjusting one’s testimony to tell a friend that his attire is ill-fitting also does not meet the conditions for testimonial smothering, even though condition 1 may very well be met. The key aspect is pernicious ignorance – that the lack of competency of testimonial uptake is due to an individually being “reliably ignorant”³⁸ which harms another. Regarding testimonial smothering, Dotson writes that “a linguistic exchange that might prompt testimonial smothering concerns situations where ‘unsafe’ testimony, which is testimony that an audience can easily fail to find fully intelligible, runs the risk of leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm” (2011, 244). The emphasis of harm is not epistemically attached to the incapable receiver qua formulating false beliefs. To be clear, the harm is not that the receiver holds false beliefs, it is what the incapable receiver will do with the misunderstood testimony and their false beliefs that is of concern.

Analogous to testimonial smothering is argumentative smothering – the reconstruction of one’s arguments and argumentative form in an attempt for uptake from an interlocutor/audience. Modifying Dotson’s circumstances of testimonial smothering, I argue that argumentative smothering occurs when 1- the argument itself bears high personal costs to the individual who is modifying their argument; 2- the other interlocutors are incompetent to the argumentative style that is being jettisoned/modified; and 3- the argumentative incompetence stems from pernicious ignorance. African American Women’s speech practices would be considered entirely adversarial and largely antithetical to the project that non-adversarial feminist argumentation theorist seek. But this is largely due to the presupposition posited by these theories that adversariality is born out of hostility towards the interlocutor. Adversariality within African American women’s speech communities is an act of love either through ‘tough love’ or an engagement with playful linguistic/argumentative acts. Here condition 2 is met, because within academia often, interlocutors will be incompetent to an AAL argumentative style.

High-risk factor to engage in a specific argumentative style can apply to everyone; however, I am focusing my arguments on Black academics and their code-switching. The mastery of WME can be truly transformative within Black African American lives. Code-switching, for linguistics, encompasses “any type of [linguistic] alteration, but is most likely to refer to metaphorical code-switching or interasentential code-switching” (Young et. al. 2014, 31). Metaphorical code-switching is the utilization of “two languages in the same context,” such as this chapter/dissertation (ibid). While intrasentential code-switching involves the switching of languages within a single sentence. For example, “She be researchin, so I imagine she will get

³⁸ Dotson defines reliable ignorance as “consistent or follows from a predictable epistemic gap in cognitive resources” (2011, 238).

early tenure.” The latter part of the sentence (behind the comma) is in WME, while the first half is in AAL. The type of code-switching I have in mind are instances of situational code-switching, which are cases “where one language is used in one context and another language is used in another context” (ibid). I often do not speak the same way I do at home as I do in a conference room with white people. If I am in an academic space where the participants are largely Black, then I will take on the linguistics and argumentative practices of my home world. This is not an uncommon phenomenon for Black individuals within professional settings, because to advance our careers, we have learned to ‘sound white.’ For an excellent example of code-switching in a professional setting, I direct my readers to a YouTube video entitled ‘Bug in Mouth Brings Out the Street in Reporter.’³⁹ Within the video, a Black male reporter, Isiah Carey, stands outside of a high school. Beginning his segment, he states in WME “What really happened on that Thursday here at Augusta High School that led to Chris Woods death...” when suddenly a bug flies into his mouth and he switches to AAL. “Wat dey fuck is dat? Shit!” Phonetically ‘th’ sounds are altered and diphthongs are dropped. He pronounces ‘my mouth’ as ‘ma mouf.’ Norms of professionalization are dropped, and expletives are used. Not only does his ‘professional’ demeanor change, but the intonations change as well. During the ‘professional’ presentation, WME rules and intonations were utilized. Once that is dropped, he goes into AAL without skipping a beat.

Switching to White Mainstream English has allowed Black individuals to experience upward career mobility, so it can be viewed as a fiscally beneficial practice. However, it is a linguistic and argumentative practice that is coerced and oppressive (Young 2009). It is a practice that offers ‘burdensome benefits’ (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). The burden lies in having to repress the celebratory nature of AAL and honor the history of the practice and our roots. Kirk-Duggan (1997) argues that to repress AAL is a denial of one’s self – one’s very being. People who are opposed to the practice neglect “to recognize the extent to which Ebonics is celebratory of African American life. They failed to acknowledge its distinctive fluidity, the way in which its speakers use intonational, stylistic, and often indirect methods in order to make a point” (Kirk-Duggan, 150). Canagarajah (2006) asserts that the code-switching approach hinders linguistically marginalized students’ ability to develop critical linguistic skill sets, because it reproduces oppressive monolingual practices and ideologies. The practice reinforces a linguistic hierarchy, rather than supporting argumentative pluralism. Baker-Bell (2011) likens such linguistic and argumentative oppression to reinstating the ‘separate, but equal’ mentality. One does not have to look long into the history of the United States of American to see that separate is not equivalent to equal. Maintaining ‘home’ linguistic and argumentative practices does structure who we are and how we identify, because “[l]anguage uses us as much as we use language” (Lakoff, 54). On a personal note, it does sadden me to have to alter so much of the natural way in which I communicate and argue to be construed as competent within my field. However, if I did not write, talk, or argue within the norms of my discipline (white Western dominant English), then I would be written off as unintelligent and unworthy to pursue a career in academic philosophy.

Due to these conditions, one of the requirements of argumentative smothering is a high personal cost to the arguer. To utilize AAL within an academic setting is deemed to be incompetent and ignorant. Your arguments will more than likely not be taken seriously, at best. At worst, you will be judged, and other Black academics will be judged to be incompetent and not suitable for academic work. Not being deemed intelligent enough to do academic work along coupled with not being legible comes with high personal costs within the academy. It makes it extremely difficult to find work at a college or university if you’re unable to publish (or the work you do manage to get published is deemed to be lacking in quality and academic rigor). These negative stereotypes regarding AAL is due to pernicious ignorance. It is not uncommon for practitioners of AAL to be perceived as lacking (dominant/white) English competency. Coupled with controlling images of

³⁹ <https://youtu.be/MP8USm7sABI> One of the top comments hits the nail on the head quoting Dave Chappelle – “Every Black American is bilingual. All of them. We speak street vernacular and we speak ‘job interview.’”

Black bodies, engaging in arguments with white interlocutors invoking white talk is a difficult task. It becomes a job ripe for argumentative injustices.

Bondy construes argumentative injustice as “cases where an arguer’s social identity brings listeners to place too much or little credibility in an argument” (2010, 265). The conceptual layout Bondy provides is a universal, or catch-all, type of analysis. While I find Bondy’s work useful, my aim is to focus specifically on racial matters, especially anti-Black injustice within argumentation.⁴⁰ Bondy asserts that argumentative injustice is harmful in three primary ways: 1- “it undermines the rationality of the endeavour,” 2- “it can distort an arguer’s status in the community of arguers,” and 3- “if repeated enough, credibility deficits can damage the ability of the person to whom the prejudice attaches to engage productively in arguments” (266). It is unclear to me how Bondy is defining ‘productivity’ within arguments, which I can potentially see as a problem of the conceptual tool. Nevertheless, the model of argumentative injustice is useful to help illustrate the importance of accurate dissemination of our argumentative practices in conjunction with greater diversity within the academia’s argumentative theories. Bondy largely focuses on whether interlocutors of a particular social positioning will even be seen as arguers due to varying degrees of argumentative credibility. My argument is distinct from Bondy’s insofar as I am not only interested in whether there is a credibility surplus or a deficit. Argumentative smothering deals with argumentative styles that are incomprehensible or has the high probability of being misunderstood within certain audience contexts. Moreover, I give an account of the racialized dynamics at play that would render me giving arguments in AAL style with a credibility deficit inside academia’s ivory tower. The issue I see is problem of intelligibility and misinterpretation, which leads to a credibility deficit. Hundleby asserts that “Oppression shapes the people in those institutions and influences their argumentation practices, and the reception of their arguments” (2013, 256). It is undeniable that academia is an oppressive institution to Black individuals, especially women. Being in such an oppressive environment alters the ways in which we argue. The need to formulate our argumentative styles is also compounded when we consider historical representations of Black women as previously mentioned in Chapter 1.

The misconceptions pertaining to another’s social identity are due to employing false stereotypes, such as Black women are angry or hostile. False stereotypes such as these regarding Black women are often promoted and perpetuated within mainstream American media, which Collins denotes as “controlling images” (2009). These false stereotypes skew reality and attempt to render the falsity as natural and factual, to justify Black women’s oppression. There is a history of controlling the images and material bodies of Black women and girls. Patricia Hill Collins argues that this regulation of black female bodies stems from the enslavement of black-Africans as not only justification for enslaving them, but as exculpations in utilizing their bodies and fertility for economic purposes (2009, 86). Not only are black female bodies regulated for economic purposes, but they are also used to delegitimize the epistemic framework and stance of Black women (2009, 272). Black women who behave a particular way that is not in line with the white dominant knowledge validation process are dismissed as knowers, members of society, and some would argue human (Collins 1998). Images and false external narratives depicting us as ‘hot-head,’ ‘hard-headed,’ ‘rude,’ or ‘disrespectful’ gives way to argumentative injustices, specifically credibility deficits. When we enact certain argumentative practices, such as signification or latching, we are no longer interpreted as giving arguments, rather we are reduced to these controlling images. So instead of being viewed as a reason giver, an arguer, a dissenter, we are just another rude, disrespectful, uneducated Black woman/girl. There are a few models within argumentation theory that take up a gendered analysis concerning women’s argumentative practices. Within the next section I explore a few of the feminist non/minimal-adversarial argumentation programs.

⁴⁰ Within the 2010 article, there is zero mention of racial identity, let alone an analysis of misogynoir.

III

Feminist argumentation models typically come in two variants which depend upon the degree of acceptable adversariality: minimal adversariality and non-adversarial. Within this section, I address the first variation and then move to the stronger feminist argumentation model which denounces any types of adversarial elements within arguments. After the exegetical work, I present a case where there is minimal to no adversarial tactics at play, according to the feminist argumentation frameworks; however, within the next section I demonstrate how the case does have passive aggressive elements, specifically highlighting the ‘white talk’ that occurred. My argument is not to directly argue against these feminist models, but I aim to show that they are currently insufficient in their account of adversariality.

Govier (1999) maintains that in order to even engage in an argument, a certain element of adversariality is necessary. Adversariality is inherent to argumentation. Without some minimal level of adversariality, arguments cannot be construed as arguments. We cannot engage in arguments that do not have some baseline element of adversariality because arguments, according to Govier, at their core are about changing beliefs. If we are attempting to change or shift another’s belief, then we are in a disagreement to said belief. Dialectically, if I am in an argument regarding my belief p , my interlocutor holds the logical position of $\sim p$. My aim in arguing with them is to dissuade them from the position $\sim p$ to p .⁴¹ Such an argument at its very core is minimally adversarial.

What Govier takes issue with is how this minimal adversariality comes into practice. Even if dialectically argumentation is adversarial, Govier’s view is that the pragmatics of this tends to turn into “ancillary adversariality.” Ancillary adversariality includes actions such as “lack of respect, rudeness, lack of empathy, name-calling, animosity, hostility, failure to listen and attend carefully, misinterpretation, inefficiency, dogmatism, intolerance, irritability, quarrelsomeness, and so forth” (Govier 1999, 245). It is this level of adversariality that is damaging and should be unacceptable within argumentation. While arguments inherently involve a certain level of adversariality, there does not need to be these other components that not only derail the argument at hand, but harm the interlocutor to whom the ancillary actions are directed towards. One way to avoid these ancillary tendencies is to distinguish between arguing against a claim versus arguing against a person. “We can argue *for* a claim without arguing *against* a person – even in contexts where we are addressing our arguments to other persons with whom we deeply disagree” (Govier 1999, 64 emphasis in original). When we engage in arguments, our interlocutor’s humanity must remain at the forefront of our minds and we must see them as unique people with epistemic positionality. Because “words have associations, semantic links, and emotive overtones” framing arguments in terms of ‘opponents’ or as ‘oppositional’ carries semantic baggage which leads to ancillary adversariality (ibid, 255 fn. 8).⁴² Staging arguments in terms of opponents frames the interlocutor as someone who is a “threat” to my belief p . My opponent is not longer viewed as someone who is trustworthy, a friend, nor someone I can “seek to cooperate with” (Ibid, 246). If we can jettison oppositional language regarding argumentation, then we are better able to view arguments as affiliative acts and reach agreements that do not involve ancillary adversariality. Govier maintains that we can argue in non-confrontational ways “with due respect for those whom we are addressing, and consideration for their beliefs

⁴¹ Govier does not conceive every disagreement as merely having two sides. Addressing questions through argumentation is much more complex and argumentation should reflect the complexity of issues at hand. Merely presenting the majority of disagreements within a two-sided model leads the arguer, according to Govier, to “speak or write very prejudicially – using distorted facts, loaded language, false statements, questionable hypotheses, inappropriate authorities, fallacious arguments, tendentious rhetorical questions, and much else” (1988, 47). But dialectically and logically, at the heart of a disagreement we can formulate argumentation as a p vs $\sim p$ model.

⁴² For more on argumentation and dominating metaphors see Ayim (1988) and Cohen (2004).

and values” (1999, 55).⁴³ Again, there is the emphasis that not only are arguments formed in a vacuum, but when we engage in arguments we are arguing with people and our responses should be aimed at the arguments themselves rather than the individuals espousing them.⁴⁴

The non-adversarial feminist argumentation model variant agrees with Govier’s assessment regarding the negative impacts of ancillary adversariality; however, this strain disagrees with the notion of argumentation as necessitating any level of adversariality. Within this subset feminist model, arguments do not need any element or conception of adversariality in order to be arguments. By allowing adversariality into the conceptual framework of argumentation, ancillary adversariality will also creep into argumentation. Put another way, if we define argumentation with the necessary component of minimal adversariality, then more explicit/ancillary adversarial features will inherently follow. This is due to the very concepts we use regarding arguments as carrying emotional weight, which is similar to the line of reasoning previously seen by Govier. Rooney (2010) critiques Govier’s articulation of this issue stating “Yet even talking about conflicting or opposing beliefs is already something of a misnomer when we have perfectly fine epistemic or logical terms such as ‘contradictory’ or ‘inconsistent’ which more precisely describe what the ‘conflict’ is” (222). So Govier’s deep adversariality model of p versus $\sim p$, need not be described using oppositional language – describing the disagreement as ‘contradictory’ or ‘inconsistent’ would suffice.

Moreover, merely attending to polite argumentative practices is not enough. Critiquing Govier’s Deep Adversariality model, Hundleby (2013) argues that politeness cannot adequately interject against the tendencies towards adversariality, that it merely “institutionalizes rather than moderates certain aggressive tendencies” (242). In addition to this claim, Hundleby also takes issue with the dynamics of Govier’s minimal adversariality within arguments. The reasoning from “I think X is correct” to “I think that non-X is not correct” (Govier 1999, 244) demands a “cognitive self-awareness that has little psychological plausibility” (252). I see Hundleby’s objections to Govier as twofold: 1- politeness can only carry us so far, so there will still be ancillary slippage, and 2- it’s not practical to construct our arguments in everyday reality towards a propositional reframing of p or $\sim p$. In regard to 2, this reframing may very well be logical, but seems to be “beyond our finite cognitive capacities” (Hundleby 2013, 253). Concerning 1, politeness does not mitigate an antagonistic approach to arguments. Rather than thinking in terms of p is correct and $\sim p$ is incorrect but being polite about it, Hundleby calls for an openness to more than contradictions or wrongness. We can hold multiple beliefs as true. The example given is “I think it’s cold outside and you think it’s beautiful out” (Ibid). Both statements can be true, which would not be situating the beliefs as contradictions or inconsistent.

Neither Hundleby (2013, 2010) nor Rooney (2012, 2010) argue for the stronger stance that adversarial argumentation automatically gives way to oppression or forms of argumentative injustices; however, Ayim (1988, 1991) does take such a stance. Ayim argues that the adversary method is inherently “confrontation[al],” “dominant,” and “aggressive,” while a feminist non-adversarial argumentation model encourages practices which are “affiliative,” “nurturant,” and “cooperative” (1991, 82). I believe a large reason for Ayim’s assertion stems from her notions regarding gendered language norms. For example, “Women are concerned with affiliation in their use of language and men are concerned with control” (Ayim 1991, 82). Since men have constructed the adversarial method of argumentation, the very act is one that is domineering and largely geared towards the oppression of women. Ayim goes on to state:

“There is a real sense in which women and men speak different languages or operate within totally different paradigms. The functional nature of women’s language is defined by its success in achieving

⁴³ I want to flag this notion of prima facie granting respect to an individual and consideration for their beliefs. In the sections to follow, I argue that not only is this call for charity harmful to BIPOC as individuals, but it also reinforces systemic racism.

⁴⁴ For more on the notion that critical thinking and arguments do not occur from a ‘bird’s eye viewpoint’ see Warren (1988).

affiliative behavior, whereas the functional nature of men's language is defined by its success in achieving confrontational exchanges and mastery" (1991, 83).

By conceiving of women and men as having different natural tendencies and approaches towards argumentation, it is easy to see why Ayim holds the stronger view that any type of adversariality within argumentation is at best domineering and at worst systematically oppressive. The only exception to using the adversarial method, for Ayim, is in attempts to thwart oppressive patriarchal structures of society (1991, 80).

Regardless of the degrees of acceptable adversariality, the non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation debate does discourage "the antagonistic, coercive, or militaristic aspects of argumentation" (Rooney 2010, 220). Any "rude, brusque language," "persistent interruption," (Ayim 1991, 83), "name-calling, animosity, hostility, failure to listen and attend carefully, misinterpretation, inefficiency" (Govier 1999, 245), or "aggression" (Hundleby 2013) cannot foster cooperation, nor can it encourage interlocutors towards an affiliative goal. The model is largely directly towards norms of politeness; however, these norms are very gendered and whitewashed. I have argued that the model focuses on the communicative practices of white women, which are different than those of Black speech communities (as shown in Chapter 1). If the model wants to accommodate a fully realized gendered liberatory argumentative practice, it must incorporate or attend to other women's communicative practices. My question from Chapter 1 remains: "If the NAFAM [non-adversarial feminist argumentation model] model remains adamant on maintaining a universal conception of politeness within argumentation, I wonder which women does their work serve?" The implication in this question is that the model only concerns itself with white women, or white centric norms of civility within argumentation.

Within this chapter it is not my intent to present an argument that the model, as articulated thus far, is ignorant of other argumentative practices. My aim is to show how the model as it currently stands cannot handle passive aggressive tactics that arise from anti-Black racism within academia and the world at large. Given the ways in which the model is articulated, it cannot account for certain aggressive, domineering, or oppressive argumentative tactics pertaining to anti-Black racism. The models can handle more overly hostile anti-Black racist remarks, but arguments or assertions that are said politely, with good intentions, or with affiliative goals, the models seems to let slip by.⁴⁵

Let us look at an example:

Black woman at a conference: Being a Black woman in the academy is extremely difficult. The microaggressions I experience are tiresome and draining. I feel like my work is never good enough to be construed as good exemplars within my research domain, but white people do not hesitate to call upon me for 'diversity' work.

White woman colleague: How could you have this imposter syndrome? I don't see you as a Black academic, but a good academic. Your diversity work is always appreciated. I know I have definitely benefited from your emotional labor. Now I can set other white people straight.

Within this exchange, there is no name-calling, rude language, aggression, interruption, etc. The white colleague listened carefully to her Black counterpart and even complimented her work while expressing gratitude towards her labor. Under a minimal or non-adversarial feminist argumentation model, the following case does not appear to violate any norms.⁴⁶ As long as the interlocutors are using polite tones, non-dismissive

⁴⁵ It may be foolishly optimistic of me to assume that many of these passive aggressive cases come from individuals who do mean well, but with more and more cases like Amy Cooper, where white people – especially white women – weaponize their fragility, I'm starting to believe I'm Boo Boo the fool.

⁴⁶ A microaggression does take place within my example (re: "I don't see you as a Black academic..."), but under the feminist argumentation models, microaggressions are not conceived as adversarial actions. Being charitable, I would think proponents and theorists of the model would conceive of microaggressions as unacceptable within dialogical exchanges. They perhaps would fall

body language, and genuinely attempting to engage in the argument from an affiliative stance, the feminist argumentation model would deem the argument as productive and non-adversarial (or not engaging in ancillary adversariality). However, when we properly attend to the social positioning and power dynamics at play, we can begin to see how this case passes the sniff test for feminist argumentation models but fails to prevent harm and passive aggressive behavior.

In the following section, I take seriously the call set forth by Warren (1988) and Hundleby (2013, 2010) to not abstract social positions out of case examples, by showing the ways in which the case I've presented is an example of the phenomena known as 'white talk.'

IV

White talk is a phenomenon where whites engage in a self-soothing activity to talk themselves out of being responsible for racism. Bailey (2015) describes white talk as a "predicable set of discursive patterns that white folks habitually deploy when asked directly about the connections between white privilege and institutional racism" (38). While this is an apt description, I do not believe that white talk *only* occurs when a white individual is *directly* asked about racial matters. It can occur when racial matters are implied, if the white individual picks up on the implications. White talk involves, but is not limited to, comments such as: *My family didn't own slaves, I have Black friends, I grew up in the ghetto, I've gone to Black Lives Matter protests, I don't see color/race, My spouse/partner/child/second-cousin once removed is a person of color, I have Black students, I listen to rap, I've seen Roots, I put Kimberlé Crenshaw/Patricia Hill Collins on my syllabus, I'm not a member of KKK or Aryan Brotherhood, I'm one of the good ones...*

The concept originated with McIntyre (1997) where she describes a participatory group aimed at interrogating whiteness and racism, but noticed that conversations on racial matters typically shifted away from discourse of whiteness so the participants "didn't have to shoulder responsibility for racism that exists in our society *today*" (45, emphasis in original). Shifting the discourse, McIntyre purports, stems from a need to be guilt free in a racist world. "Their understandings of racism were more about prejudice and discrimination than they were about the institutionalization of racism" (McIntyre 1997, 48). But the prejudice and discrimination were actions seen by *other* white individuals, not by the participants themselves. Here in lies a major difficulty with white talk – if our focal point rests solely on an individuated level of analysis, then individuals can fall prey to a lack of self-examination and self-accountability. Individual self-culpability of white allies has also been evaded through white talk, as can be seen from some of the examples above. *Well, I didn't do this. Uncle Roy is the bigot in the family. It's the individual who is not me who is doing these things.* If the analysis stops at instances of prejudice and discrimination, then the individual unit will be taken into account as racist, but such an individual is not the white ally themselves, but some other individual. It is the person who is a blatant bigot. Or the individual who doesn't quite know the jargon and 'nuances' of the literature who are responsible for individual occurrences of racialized oppression. But hardly the dominant individual doing the theorizing. However, solely shifting the emphasis to the system also can cause cases of white talk. *Cops are the racists ones. The government are the ones who constructed internment camps. Our nation has a genocidal history, but it's progressing. My university's culture is toxic to BIPOC.* Under such modes of analysis, individual culpability is relegated to 'the system.' 'The system' is what establishes and maintains racism. The institutions and structures are to blame for oppression. It is a mindset that easily allows individuals to focus on the aggregate or phantom systemic hand rather than the individual entities that comprise the system.

under within the realm hostility or aggression. However, there is debate as to whether microaggressions are really aggressive behaviors because more often than not, they are not only unintentional, but regular disguised as compliments. For more on microaggressions see Sue (2010) and Freeman and Weekes Schroer (2020).

Regardless of the focal point (individual/systemic), at the end of the day the shift is away from the white individual who is engaging in white talk. It is an evasive discursive maneuver that serves to shift responsibility, but also to virtue signal that they are a good moral person. But this virtue signaling causes more issues and perpetuates the problem, because “Being a good white is part of the problem, rather than the solution to systematic racism” (Applebaum 2010, 20). These comments may be made with an attempt to disrupt racist paradigms, but the result is a reinscribed protection of whiteness.

With a conceptual understanding of white talk, I return to my case example from Section 1 to illustrate how the example engages in white talk that non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models fail to capture. There are two distinct moments within the response from the white colleague which be falling under white talk: 1- “*I don’t see you as a Black academic, but a good academic*” and 2- “*I know I have definitely benefited from your emotional labor. Now I can set other white people straight.*” The first part qualifies as white talk as because the speaker is engaging in color-evasiveness.⁴⁷ They are not fully seeing the Black woman’s oppression. To some a white individual educating others may seem like the appropriate thing to do in order to combat anti-Black racism; however, I qualify this announcement as white talk. Such an announcement to any Black individual seems really close to moral grandstanding and fishing for praise. This exemplifies the boomerang effect previously mentioned – the speaker is talking with another, yet simultaneously shifts responsibility away from themselves by shifting moral goodness towards themselves. White talk is a passive aggressive discursive maneuver that is not currently accounted for within non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models.

Not only can the models not account for this type of exchange, but my aim is also to make the stronger claim that it can encourage this sort of exchange. Ayim calls for a redirection of our thinking that anything running counter to our own beliefs as inherently wrong, which would focus our attention to “integrating tasks of asking how these arguments mesh with other different experience sets, different belief systems, different value codes, and even different reasoning styles” (1998, 189). Recall Govier (1999) also calls for us to engage in argumentative exchanges with assertions rather than the person making them. White talk poses a unique problem for the model because what you’re doing as a BIPOC when you confront white talk is that *you are addressing the person* and just arguments themselves. This places BIPOC in a predicament because then within a feminist argumentation framework, you are now violating their conceptions and are engaging in ancillary adversariality.⁴⁸

Encouragement of white talk also comes from the purported virtue of fully considering a white interlocutor’s social positioning. Ayim states that in order to end harm we must “start by recognizing very clearly the nature of such beliefs, noting in whose heads they reside, and understanding how they shape the world” (1991, 85). While understanding of different argumentative norms and practices are necessary for white allies, understanding is not necessary for racial minorities, because understanding, at times, can be furthering oppression or harm dependent upon the oppressive regimes and certain social power dynamics. The usage of the term understanding within this context is to critically attend to another person’s reasoning or rationale, which is what Ayim (1988, 1991), Govier (1999), and Hundleby (2012) encourage us to do. But this call seems

⁴⁷ Color-evasiveness is akin to color-blindness without the ablist. For more, see Annamma et. al (2017).

⁴⁸ It is also just in general very difficult for BIPOC to point out to white individuals’ instances when they are engaging in white talk. Two factors contribute to this issue: 1- whenever someone is addressing you as a person, it’s just difficult to hear, regardless of who you are and 2- it’s difficult to share epistemic resources across these types of power dynamics. Pohlhaus states “On the one hand, marginally situated people cannot demonstrate to dominantly situated people that there is a part of the experienced world for which dominant epistemic resources are inadequate because that part of the world is one to which dominantly situated knowers do not attend. On the other hand, the marginally situated cannot call the attention of dominantly situated knowers to those parts of the experienced world, because the epistemic resources to do so are unavailable or preemptively dismissed” (2012, 748).

misplaced to me. “Understanding another’s reasoning requires one to do more than hold a particular set of claims in the mind. It requires one to follow the sense of those claims, so that the claims may be evaluated for what they mean” (Pohlhaus, Jr. 2011, 225). The achievement of understanding can be harmful and detrimental to the psyche of racially marginalized individuals. To force the oppressed to understand the logic of their oppressors is a form of oppression. Rooney (2012) acknowledges that some argumentative practices within philosophy “facilitate implicit as well as explicit bias” (318). I believe the calls for seeking mutual ground and deep understanding is an argumentative practice that facilitates biases.

The model, in its current formation, does not adequately consider instances of white talk, but it also encourages the boomerang effect. If white talk is done without violating any purported norms of civility, then it gets a pass. If the model continues to place a heavy emphasis on mutual understanding and attending to the social positionality of each interlocutor, then white talk not only goes undetected, but it will be encouraged, which I believe is antithetical to the model’s goals. The model cannot profess to condemn aggressive argumentative behavior, while simultaneously encouraging passive aggressive discursive exchanges. If I encounter white talk, many of the argumentative elements (cooperative/collaborative AAL, signification, or latching), which are natural to me, would be ill received within the academic setting. Collaborative or cooperative speech practices found in AAL I do not believe are what Govier, Ayim, Rooney, or Hundleby have in mind when they call for cooperation within argumentation. For the literature to move forward, a more conscientious effort must be made to incorporate women of color argumentative practices.

I do not want to give the impression that abandoning a non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation model will cure the problems I am laying out. Many advocates of universal norms of civility within argumentation can also fall prey to white talk, causing argumentative smothering of Black individuals. My focus on non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation models is twofold: 1- self-proclaimed feminists tend to be more ‘woke’ in terms of intersectional approaches and methodologies, and 2- for the sake of time and space a narrow scope is required. Internally, the models make it extremely difficult to respond to instances of white talk. This problem becomes amplified when we consider AAL argumentative practices, which the non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation model would deem as hostile.

Prior to concluding this chapter, I want to reiterate that argumentative smothering can and does occur outside the ivory tower. It happens during police encounters, while calling customer service, job interviews, within court rooms – pretty much anywhere white talk and white ignorance rears its head (everywhere) racialized argumentative smothering occurs. I limit my parameters to academia because 1 – one article cannot solve all the problems of racialized oppression and 2 – this is one small niche I, as an individual, can say my peace.

V

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to show non/minimal-adversarial feminist argumentation theory coupled with white talk shapes the ways in which we argue, which leads to a negative reshaping of our arguments I deem to be argumentative smothering. In lieu of a formal conclusion, I leave you with a few suggestions on how to avoid argumentative smothering within academia.

- 1- We all hold argumentative and language ideologies. Identify and name yours. Then, if yours are derivations of the larger white framework, interrogate them. Interrogate yourself. And fix em.

- 2- I've said it multiple times, but I'll say it again – cite BIPOC women. Cite not only our bonafide academic work (books and journals), but read and cite our blogs, our tweets, our self-published books, our literature, and our auto/biographies.⁴⁹
- 3- Keep in mind that not everyone speaks White Mainstream English (WME). Just because someone doesn't doesn't mean that they aren't smart, well read, or know what they're talkin about.
- 4- If you're white, utilize your privilege. Call out your racist peers.

⁴⁹ For Black feminist theory, many of our theories and ideologies were housed in novels, poems, and biographies rather than academic forums throughout the late 1800s into the 20th century. This remains true today. For more on the history of academic gatekeeping on Black feminism, see Cooper (2020) and Dotson (2016).

Chapter 3⁵⁰

“Naw, Ah ain’t no young gal no mo’ but den Ah ain’t no old woman neither.
Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah’m uh woman every inch of me,
and Ah know it. Dat’s a whole lot more’n you kin say.
You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag,
but ’tain’t nothin’ to but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ’bout me lookin’ old!
When you pull down yo’ britches,
you look lak de change uh life” – Zora Neale Hurston
Their Eyes Were Watching God

When we dissent, ideally, we enter an argument in which each interlocuter approaches and engages holding argumentative civility norms in mind. Within the argumentation theory literature, it is not uncommon for reasonable dissension to involve civil words (Aikin and Talisse 2008, van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, Burrow 2010) and treatment of interlocutors as epistemic peers (Cohen 2002, Hundleby 2013, Aikin and Talisse 2008), which includes properly addressing arguments towards interlocutors rather than using proxies or argumentative surrogates. To deviate from these practices and to intentionally subvert these norms is considered at best an argumentative faux pas and at worse vicious. However, such norms are specifically modelled after ‘dominant’ Western argumentative practices and conceptions.

This chapter seeks to complicate two primary norms within Western argumentation theory and White Mainstream English (WME): 1- engaging with one’s interlocutors in a ‘pleasant’ tone and 2- speaking directly to one’s target audience/interlocutor. Moreover, I urge argumentation theorists not to make universal (re: Western and white) assumptions regarding the pragmatics of how people argue. While there has been some literature on gender norms of argumentation spanning across decades⁵¹, there is even less work being done on a cross-cultural level regarding argumentation.⁵² When we shift the demographics to women of color, the literature drops to abysmal levels. I find this to be deeply problematic for multiple reasons: 1- it is a disservice to argumentation theory not to include argumentative practices of women of color. A cross-cultural or multicultural analysis of communicative and argumentative practices not only tests the current theories of argumentation but offers up the opportunity to formulate new theories. 2- Argumentation theory will have a wider breadth and further depth – globally speaking, white Western society is the minority. And finally, 3- incorporating such analyses has the potential to reduce instances of argumentative injustice. It is pertinent that the literature begins to explore various cultures’ argumentative norms and practices when attempting to formulate more universal theories regarding the nature of argumentation.⁵³ This project is a diagnostic enterprise, so the scope does not include a prescriptive program. The prescriptive project of an ideal cross-cultural model is in the works. Here, I aim to show that the two previously mentioned norms within argumentation obscures and misrepresents many argumentative practices within African American Language (AAL) – or Ebonics, specifically the art of signifying.

I proceed in the following manner: first, because many within my audience will be unfamiliar with the practice of signification within AAL, I provide a brief description along with a case example to highlight the ways in which signifying does and does not work. It is a practice that is not only appropriate, but in many ways

⁵⁰ Adapted with permission from *Informal Logic*, 2021, 41(1): 17- 39.

⁵¹ See Ayim (1991) (1988), Govier (1999) (1988), Hundleby (2013) (2010), Burrow (2010), Moulton (1983), Orr (1989), Stevens (2019) and Rooney (2012) (2010).

⁵² See Kim et. al. (2020), Demir et. al. (2019), Xie et. al. (2015), and Mohammed (2015).

⁵³ Of course, such endeavors need to be done in an ethical manner as to not partake in epistemic exploitation. Some of the work that has been written examining non-Western argumentative practices I do find to be somewhat problematic, but that is a topic for another paper. For more on the dangers of epistemic exploitation, see Berenstain (2016).

within Black African American women's communities expected to be mastered and deployed. Engagement with signifying is paradoxically a disrespectful signal of respect. In some settings it is entirely playful, while in others it may appear playful, yet very serious and firm. From here, I give an exegesis on norms of engagement utilizing a 'pleasant' tone. I engage with Aikin and Talisse's conception of 'modus tonens' along with several different variants of non-adversarial feminist argumentation models (NAFAM). Aikin and Talisse conceive deployment of an incredulous tone of voice, which implies that the interlocutor is cognitively subordinate, as vicious. NAFAM also perceives such practices as vices; moreover, all the models attribute such practices to the furthering oppression of women.

I use signifying within Black African-American women's speech communities (BAAWSC) as an example to show not only that such practices should not be construed as vicious (even though they are utilized to display dominance and support subordination), but that they are forms of argumentative bonding and empowerment. From here, I review the norm of proper addressment with an interlocutor/audience. It is considered rude and 'bad' argumentation to not properly address the target for one's dissension, especially if some of the only acknowledgment is exercised in a demeaning or belittling way. Aikin and Talisse (2008) purport such a maneuver as fallacious. Govier (1999) construes it as a dialogical impediment, since interlocutors would be unable to tract one another's premises. I situate the BAAWSC practice of signifying against this commonly accepted norm and argue that such a norm is not the 'norm' within many of our language communities. Signifying is often modelled after Niger-Congo call and response methods of argumentation, which relies on indirectness, surrogate interlocutors, and 'reading someone to filth.' While such practices are indeed meant to 'turn someone out,' they are also meant as a civil means of argumentation. To not engage in such practices is either flat out rude behavior or the art of signifying is seen as too complicated for outsiders of our practices to deploy. That is to say, you play the game, or you can't hang.

I conclude this chapter with some remarks as to the stakes of not properly nor seriously taking into account other argumentative practices within academia's argumentation theories, especially the norms for dissension. Given the precarious depictions of Black women within the United States (and globally), coupled with a misunderstanding of our communicative norms and practices, it is all too easy to write off standards that deviate from the dominant Western norms as rude and the Black women deploying them as angry, brusque, or 'difficult to deal with.' I rely on Collin's (1998, 2009) notion of 'controlling images' to show that this particular form of oppression, in conjunction with a lack of engagement with our argumentative practices within the literature, forces many of us to resort to practices such as code switching. If code-switching is not properly mastered and our practices of argumentation is utilized within dominant Western settings, then we become more susceptible to what Bondy refers to as argumentative injustice (2010).

I. 'Talkin like a man with a paper in his hand'

The art of signifying is a practice that falls within Ebonics – also known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), African American Language (AAL), Black English, Black Vernacular English, or Black English Vernacular.⁵⁴ The language practice incorporates English words, but retained syntactic features found within Niger-Congo languages and follows distinct linguistic rules including but not limited to: negative concord, deletions of verb copulas, habitual aspect markers, semantic bleaching, and 'it' for the dummy explicative 'there' (Smitherman 2015). Rules such as these are regulated and maintained. There is a proper and

⁵⁴ Ebonics is a conglomeration between the words 'ebony' and 'phonics,' pertaining to the linguistic practices found in West African, Caribbean, and United States African slave descendants. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal linguistic practices. For more on the Ebonics debate, see Blackshire-Belay (1996), Crozier (1996), Smitherman (2015) (2000), and Williams (1975).

improper way of speaking Ebonics, or AAVL, so it is not merely ‘in vogue’ improper English, or simply reducible to slang. Practitioners of AAL can distinguish between individuals who are fluent from those who are making a mockery or attempting to imitate the language. Determining fluency is not racially based but is demarcated by the command of the verbal and non-verbal practices. A grammatically correct example utilizing the invariant ‘be’ as a habitual marker is “She be workin new research.” ‘Be’ here is marking repeated/habitual actions. The verb is not just used recklessly and without purpose, so the sentence “She be 25 years old” is incorrect because there is not a habituated state of being a certain age. However, “She be actin 25 years old” would be correct grammar.⁵⁵ Since there are rules, those who speak AAL are not using poor English enunciation or grammar, nor is its usage signs of cognitive disorders. Kirk-Duggan argue that deficient language should not be marked cross-linguistically; rather, “Language use is disordered or defective when one’s skills register lower than one’s peers” (141). If peers who are fluent in Ebonics possess the ability to distinguish between application and misapplication of the rules, then a misapplication would register as defective. With AAL containing regulative rules and practices enforcing proper usage, its utilization is not a sign of deficiency in linguistic nor argumentative skill. In fact, quite the opposite. I say all of this because I want to stress again that the practice and art of signifying is not bad argumentation run wild, but rather illustrates particularized structured and enforced norms of engagement within a community.

Signifying or signification⁵⁶ is a specific type of speech act within AAL that utilizes exaggeration, irony, and indirection to partake in coded messages, which are riddled with insults, during discourse (Morgan, 2002). It heavily relies of indirection and the focus can be either “on a person, thing, or action either for fun or for corrective critique” (Kirk-Duggan, 142). Gates, Jr. characterizes signifying as a practice that “subsumes other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, and also hyperbole, litotes, and metalepsis” (686). One subset of signifying that the reader may be familiar with is the practice of ‘playin the Dozens,’ where “the one signified usually is a person's mother” (Kirk-Duggan, 142). And examples of such would be ‘yo momma so dumb, I gave her a penny fo her thoughts, and I gots change.’ Within a ‘Dozens’ exchange, an indirected discourse takes place where, in my example, the person being signified is acting as a surrogate or intermediary for the targeted exchange – they are an associated or ancillary target, while the real target is the overhearer. Morgan states “speakers who use indirectness actually mean to target certain individuals and they mean to do so indirectly” (2002, 47). The dissension is coded, and at face value might not be seen to others outside of BAAWSC as targeting someone other than ‘their momma.’ Morgan notes that often within AAL, indirectness can take two forms: pointed indirectness and baited indirectness. Within this chapter, I focus on pointed indirectness, which is enacted either when a speaker is acknowledged to say something to a surrogate receiver, but the target is different, or when local knowledge is drawn upon to target someone seemingly ancillary to the discussion.⁵⁷

Within the following segmented conversation,⁵⁸ I hope to highlight some of the key features within signifying. The conversation takes place between three members of my paternal family and myself: Sherry – also known as Baby Alice (a Black 62-year-old social worker), cousin Deborah (a Black 61-year-old social worker), and my grandmother Geraldine (a Black 84-year-old retired factory worker). The argument involves why Sherry, who is older than Deborah, is referred to as the baby of the family, despite being my father’s older sister and older than her cousin Deborah. We are sitting around my grandmother’s kitchen table, with everyone directing their responses towards me, despite me only speaking twice and raising two questions.

⁵⁵ Since the grammatical features of AAL is not the focus of this chapter, I will not give further examples. For more, see Young et al. (2014), Smitherman (2015), and Baugh (2000).

⁵⁶ It is also referred to as sounding or snapping.

⁵⁷ Conversely, baited indirectness is “when a speaker attributes a feature to a general target and audience that may be true for a segment” (Morgan, 2002, 47). This tactic is often used to see which members of the audience ‘speak up’ or ‘fess up’ to the generalized feature and in doing so, exposes themselves – hence the name “baited indirectness.”

⁵⁸ I was graciously given permission to publish this familial conversation.

Tempest: Just gettin' somethin' straight – Aunt Sherry, you're older, yea? Than
 Deborah?
 Sherry: Older and wiser hon, but *none* would know just by lookin
 Tempest: So, why we call you 'baby Alice'?
 Deborah: No, no, no, now now Tempie... Baby Alice gets mad when we call *it* that
 Sherry: Don't *you* be listenin to that nonsense now, *some peoples* just mad cause I'm the
 baby with baby privileges
 Deborah: Nah she means *she* gets babied... Tempie, now listen here...
 Geraldine: But she *aint*' the baby – that's your daddy
 Sherry: Right, but *I'm* my momma's baby
 Deborah: "I'm my momma's baby" [tone] - Nah, Tempie *it gets babied*
 Sherry: [cackles] Tell her Tempie, I get babied because I'm the baby. There's a *whole
 lotta peoples* who get jealous of that fact – gotta watch out for ems
 Deborah: Whatchu gotta watch out for are dems peoples who get dems special treatment
 and favoritisms. They end up not being able to do nothin fo demselves
 Geraldine: uh...watch out now! Girl [addressing Tempest], why you gone and start up
 nonsense?

Within this dialogue, Sherry, Deborah, and Geraldine all offer competing conceptions of what it means to be the baby of the family – an obvious case of disagreement. Sherry views being the baby as specialized treatment – pampering and attention, offering up a stipulative definition. Deborah expresses conflicting notions specifying that such special treatment marks the individual as incompetent, perhaps a definition of 'baby' that is functioning persuasively (i.e. – being the baby is a negative thing). While Geraldine offers up an interpretation of being the baby of the family as someone who is lexically just that – the baby of the family (i.e. – the youngest, so a very lexical definition). While reading the argument, it might seem like mere playing around, but there is a definitive and substantive disagreement as to how one ought to interpret the meaning of being the baby in the family. The signification specifically occurs when all three members engage in the argument through me, the surrogate receiver, but each of these women's comments are signals to one another. It is also occurring through the quips and put downs between my Aunt Sherry and Cousin Deborah. There's double meaning not only in what they are saying, moreover how they are saying it. The tone at times is not pleasant; however, it helped more the argument along. Sherry and Deborah are arguing with one another through my presence initiated only by my preliminary questioning. Moreover, the indirectness discourse and reference to one another as 'that,' 'it,' or 'a whole lotta peoples' utilizes unambiguous referents commonly used within AAL. Such referents are often used to signal who the specific target is regarding the signifying – in one case it's a pointed indirectness when Deborah refers to Sherry as 'it,' and in another case towards the end of this segment, Sherry deploys baited indirectness invoking 'a whole lotta peoples' to illicit a response from Deborah and Deborah responds in turn. But each woman directs their responses to one another through me, the surrogate receiver. Sherry also 'reads' Deborah in her initial response to my question, by insinuating that while she is older than Deborah, Sherry looks better. Deborah also engages in a practice called 'marking' when she mimics Sherry (restating "I'm my momma's baby). 'Marking' according to Green (2002) "involves careful repetition of a person's words and mannerisms, but some implication is made about the person's attitude, character and/or disposition" (142). It can easily be seen to outsiders as mocking, but there is more going on than mere mimicking. "The commentary that the marker makes by his actions is that the speaker shares characteristics and views of a different class or group" (Green 2002, 142). The conversation ends with my grandmother shaking her head and criticizing my initial line of questioning.

Within BAAWSC there is a saying “Talking like a man with a paper in his hand.” The saying refers to individuals who lack the skill and know-how to understand that raising questions within social contexts need to be grounded in specific contexts “which incorporate or reflect their reasoning, rather than simply satisfy[ing] institutional or intellectual curiosity” (Morgan, 52). Directed discourse, within AAL, is devoid of any notion that discourse is co-constructed intent. Morgan demarcates directed discourse from indirect discourse not only via the lack of indirection, but also the lack of audience collaboration along with lack of nuance and attention to varying social contexts (1989). At the end of this conversational segment, my grandmother was critiquing my direct question and insinuating that I should have used better reasoning for my questions.⁵⁹ Directed discourse is seen as a ‘work’ or ‘school’ communicative style,⁶⁰ and the proper employment or shifting from indirected discourse within AAL to directed Standard English discourse is known as code-switching. More will be said on this phenomenon later.

Direct discourse is seen, within WME, as the agreed upon (and preferred) mode of communication between interlocutors. Since most of the argumentation theory literature is written in accordance with Standard/Dominant English and articles cite each other, the direct discourse modus operandi trickles down and in effect latently gets taken up. For the white Western NAFAM and other dialectical models (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, Jackson and Jacobs 1980), parties enter argumentative discourse with the understanding to resolve disagreement. And this intent is seen to be understood by both parties in dialectical models, but such an intent within BAAWSC is perceived to be merely institutional ways of knowing, so lines of questioning enacted directly are “confrontational, intrusive, and presumptuous” (Kochman, 99). The argument between my family members started with me ‘talkin like a man with a paper in his hand’ and it proceeded in an attempt to settle the question ‘what is the meaning of being the baby in the family?’ Jones takes a stronger stance and asserts that directed questions are potentially harmful to the respondents (1988). Within the following two sections, I will expand more upon the argumentation literature that endorses ‘polite’ directed discourse.

II. MODUS TONENS

Within the previous section, I outlined the basic practice of signifying and having given the reader a basic understanding of how the practice functions, I will now give an overview of an argumentative vice⁶¹ within argumentation theory regarding politeness, ‘modus tonens,’ which stipulates that condescending tones and inflections should not be used in insincere manners. I view the ‘vice’ of ‘modus tonens’ originating from the conglomeration of adhering to both the virtues of the sincerity principle and the politeness principle.

Below is an illustrative example of ‘modus tonens’ entitled “Gun Control”:

Speaker 1: You see – if we allowed more people to carry handguns, then we would have fewer cases of gun violence. Arming people has a deterrent effect.

Speaker 2: so, let me get this straight – *more* people with guns will *reduce* gun violence?

⁵⁹ Specifically, I should have known better than to have asked such things given what all I know about each woman and the family dynamics.

⁶⁰ In full disclosure, I initiated this conversation in hopes of eliciting examples of signification, so my grandmother’s critique was apt. The communicative style of directed discourse here was indeed used for work.

⁶¹ My use of the term vice here is not in direct connection with virtue argumentation theory. Aikin and Talisse categorize ‘modus tonens’ as a vice; however, I interpret their usage to be more synonymous with fallaciousness as opposed to a vice in the Aristotelian tradition. On some levels, I believe Aikin and Talisse would see ‘modus tonens’ as a vice in the sense that it impedes on the development of virtuous habituated argumentative characteristics, but their argument seems more structured around the fallacious nature of negatively stage setting another’s argument.

(To the audience): *More people with guns will reduce gun violence?!?* (Aikin and Talisse, 522, emphasis in original).

'Modus tonens' refers to the adverse use of tone in a speaker's voice, which is used to manipulate the audience/overhearers. While Aikin and Talisse acknowledge, that certain viewpoints are so ludicrous that we may react out of surprise, what makes 'modus tonens' particularly insidious and vicious is that "it controverts the goals of argumentative exchange" (532). This tactic does not adhere to the goals of argumentative exchange because it 1- shifts the burden of argumentative proof in an inappropriate way and 2- epistemically subordinates one of the interlocutors. Within the Gun Control case, Speaker 2 rejects Speaker 1's claims, but does so without offering up reasons why they reject the claim or reasons why the audience should reject the claim. As a consequence, Speaker 2 has placed the argumentative ball back in Speaker 1's court without having to 'dirty their hands.' Moreover, Speaker 2 has not only steered the argumentative ball away from their court, but they have done so in a manner that "one's interlocutor is cognitively subordinate" and gives "an assessment of the dialectical situation disguised as a directive within it" (Aikin and Talisse, 524). So, these speech acts are not a form of commissive that displays non-acceptance of a standpoint or argumentation.⁶² Aikin and Talisse argue that such directives such as these not only assert that the interlocutor is not to be considered an epistemic peer, but also do so in a manner that offers up the claim that the interlocutor is not to be considered an epistemic peer by using *non-argumentative means*. Given this, 'modus tonens' not only shifts the argumentative burden, but also puts interlocutors, such as Speaker 1, in a position to defend their cognitive ability.

However, not all cases of 'modus tonens' are created equal. Aikin and Talisse distinguish between using this tactic at the opening and closing of argumentative exchanges. If 'modus tonens' is deployed at the closing of arguments, then the conclusion "still registers non-acceptance, but its vice is that it does not provide any reason for rejecting the conclusion beyond is supposed prima facie implausibility" (525). It merely is a failure of good argumentative cooperation. If the tactic is used at the opening of argumentative exchanges, then Aikin and Talisse deem it to be vicious, because the stage has been set, without proper justification, that we should reject the interlocutor's standpoint and arguments.

Returning to signifying, we can now better see how at first glance such a practice might be construed as falling under the category of 'modus tonens.' Recall my previously mentioned exchange – many of the comments were laced with incredulous and sarcastic tones directed towards me, regarding the other interlocutors (namely Sherry and Deborah). Deborah clearly restated Sherry's comment "I'm my momma's baby" with well-placed inflections to dismiss and render Sherry as epistemically subordinate. Aunt Sherry got marked. Deborah even takes it one step further and directs me not to listen to my Aunt Sherry and corrects Sherry's interpretation of the topic at hand (why Sherry is called Baby Alice) stating "*It gets babied.*" The argumentative ball also gets thrown around a few times without actually addressing each other's objections or claims. My assenting to one view of the argumentative claims was a test to see where exactly my loyalties lie – with my cousin or with my aunt. Although, as a quick aside, the surrogate interlocutor or overhearer is typically not to be heard, only seen. Any overt interjections would have been perceived as engaging in directed discourse, which would have been rude. Also, I will note that seniority plays a salient role within signification exchanges. Although I am a grown woman, with a household of my own, compared to my older matriarchs I am still a girl and it would be inappropriate for me to interject myself in such an argument.⁶³

Strong or extreme cases of 'modus tonens' involve using the tactic as "purely oratorical...in which the speaker is actually making a gesture wholly for the sake of the onlooking audience" (Aikin and Talisse, 527). One could easily (albeit mistakenly) surmise that the art of signifying is done for the overhears or surrogate

⁶² Van Eemeren and Grootendorst define commissive speech acts as "acts in which the speaker or writer undertakes vis-à-vis the listener or reader to do something or to refrain from doing something" (64). I will say more later as to whether signifying should be viewed as commissive or directive speech acts. I argue that Aikin and Talisse wrongfully see 'modus tonens' as strictly directive.

⁶³ For more on the roles of BAAWSC in terms of 'rites of passage,' see Morgan (2002).

interlocutors, especially since all the comments within the aforementioned example were directed towards me. The women were speaking to me, yet I was not the target for their claims, rather I was serving merely as a proxy or surrogate. I was the observing audience. But signifying is not just for the audience, the practices are done for the speaker, hearer, and overhearer. The practice is one in which not only the audience is taken into consideration, but also the interlocutors along with the speaker themselves. It is a collaborative endeavor that requires all parties assenting to the rules of AAL.

I would hardly classify such an exchange as vicious or derailing of argumentation itself. Aikin and Talisse purport that speech acts laced with incredulous tones (such as marking in AAL) and that assert epistemic subordination are best construed as directives rather than commissives. I disagree. Commissive speech acts can serve various roles within argumentation including:

- (1) accepting or not accepting a standpoint, (2) accepting the challenge to defend a standpoint, (3) deciding to start a discussion, (4) agreeing to assume the role of protagonist or antagonist, (5) agreeing to the discussion rules, (6) accepting or not accepting argumentation, and – when relevant – (7) deciding to start a new discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 68).

The start of signifying, on my view, serves as a commissive since it fulfills van Eemeren's and Grootendorst's points 3 and 4 – the onset and agreeance to play particular roles. Within my example, the onset of signifying began with Deborah's entry into the conversation and by continuing the argument, both Sherry and Geraldine assented to the rules (5) and roles (4). Later within the argument, we can see how directives do come into play, and on my view, the directives serve more than just articulating or settling of a difference of opinion.

But the opening of the signifying, would improperly be viewed as a 'modus tonens,' despite possessing all of its characteristics. It should more properly be construed as a commissive, because like some commissives, "such as agreeing to discussion rules," is only feasible when "performed in collaboration with the other party" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 68). Signifying is a collaborative enterprise that involves not only the participation of speakers, but also hearers and overhearers. Aikin and Talisse assert "just as incredulous stares cannot be refuted, one cannot refute a modus tonens" (526). However, I believe the practice of signifying is a way to refute 'modus tonens,' due to its affiliative properties and onset agreement of indirectness, misdirection, and subordination 'play.'

III. Whose politeness norms?

Stressing the importance of affiliative and communal argumentative practices has often fallen under the purview of non-adversarial feminist argumentation models as I have argued in the previous two chapters (Hundleby 2013, Rooney 2010, Cohen 2002, Burrow 2010). Many variants of NAFAM object to the decontextualized practices of indirectness. Yet scholars working on signification have argued those within the BAAWSC find directed discourse discomfoting or downright rude (Kochman 1981, Jones 1988, Morgan 1989). While both the BAAWSC and NAFAM purport to engage in more contextualized communicative and argumentative styles, NAFAM views many of the practices within BAAWSC to be hostile and partaking in the adversarial method.⁶⁴ Within this section, I highlight some of the ways in which NAFAM, while calling for more intersectional and affiliative argumentation models, alienates and would consequently render the practice of signifying as oppressive and adversarial. For the NAFAM, not only would the brusque language and culturally toned diminutives be problematic, more importantly the act of indirected discourse would be construed as disrespectful and rude.

⁶⁴ As shown in Chapter 1.

Under the NAFAM, "feminine politeness strategies aim at cooperation through connection and involvement, reflecting values of intimacy, connection, inclusion and problem sharing" (Burrow, 247). What exactly are "feminine politeness strategies? They are argumentative and communicative styles that are affiliative, bereft of rude language, name calling, direct engagement with one's targets, and non-dismissive tones (Cohen 2002, Burrow 2010, Hundleby 2013). Govier (1999) stresses the importance of direct interaction, because "[w]hen others speak to and argue *directly to us*, we can interact with them, challenge, hear their responses, and conduct a genuine, real, critical discussion" (191, emphasis my own). That is to say, communication and discourse (under a commitment model of argumentation) should be oriented directly towards our interlocutors, rather than an ancillary communicator. This explicit and direct mode of discourse not only promotes respect between interlocutors, but also is a sign of respect because "an arguer, in actually or potentially addressing those who differ, is committed to the recognition that people may think differently and that what they think and why they think matters" (8). Engaging in directed discourse, for Govier, is a step towards mutual understanding of another's point of view and signals that a differing stance matters. In a cooperative argumentation model, it is demanded that we attempt to understand our interlocutor "as they wish to be known and understood," and engaging in direct discourse would facilitate such a goal (Makua and Marty 2013, 69).

With such a brief introduction to NAFAM, I hope the problems the models would have with signifying are clear to the reader. As previously stated, both NAFAM and many BAAWSC practices are in agreeance that argumentation in many cases should be affiliative and communal. However, one person's politeness norms, is another's disrespect. Crude and even obscene language is acceptable within many of our exchanges. As is the practice of name-calling. Recall my primary example of signifying – Deborah, on a few occasions referred to Sherry as 'it' or 'that.' Such name calling and demeaning language would be unacceptable under NAFAM, due to its function of subordination and display of dominance. Although tone is difficult to convey via text, it would not be unreasonable to interpret much of what was said in an angry or abrasive manner. For Tanesini (2018), anger or displaying an angry tone is distracting at best – at worst destructive towards reasoning. Howes and Hundleby (2018) situate anger as informative within arguments, so it does not quite have the destructive consequence as Tanesini perceives anger to have. But Howes and Hundleby focus on anger within arguments concerning oppressive systems. No oppressive systems were at play throughout the dialogue. Sherry's opening response would also more than likely be problematic for such a model, due to her insinuation that she was better looking than Deborah. Rooney (2004) calls for a practice in which interlocutors engage with one another's reasons, as oppose to 'verbally attacking' each other. Criticisms should not be directed towards the person, but a person's argument. By insinuating Deborah as less attractive and looking older than Sherry (despite Sherry in reality being the older person), Sherry was, under NAFAMs, attacking Deborah as a person rather than engaging Deborah's arguments. These 'attacks' continued throughout the dialogue, especially with the references to 'it' or utilizing 'they,' as though the other person was not sitting around the same table. Moreover, there was no direct interaction between the interlocutors of this debate. Each interaction was addressed towards me, but I served the role as a surrogate interlocutor. Morgan (2002) likens such examples as akin to 'talking behind someone's back.' Both Sherry and Deborah were speaking to me about one another as though the other individual was not also sitting at the table. Other than my opening questions, there was no direct engagement. And at the closing of the argument, I was even chastised by my grandmother for engaging in such a direct and inappropriate manner. I was using a directed manner of speaking (recall that I asked the question to gain material for research), which is only appropriate for 'paper in hand' type of situations.

NAFAM proponents could contend that my exemplary case, and signifying in general, is done out of jest or fun. If all parties know the rules and all are privy to insider information, then their conceptions of politeness norms are still maintained. However, within signifying, there are elements of explicit and intentional dominance. It is *play play*, but also *for real for real*. Signification is not a case of feminist 'non-antagonistic playfulness.' Signifying is paradoxically an act of endearment and empowerment, but there are real stakes in

the game. Slights are meant, and the verbal jabs do sting. Even though all three women have a deep respect and love for one another, they (especially Sherry and Deborah) were legitimately attempting to assert epistemic dominance over one another and purposely did not directly engage one another during the argument. Similar to back-handed compliments, signifying is meant to be fun, but at times painful. It is riddled with burns or ‘playin by the dozens,’ but done so out of love and affection. Practices like signifying within BAAWSC aren’t typically used unless it is with those whom we share an affinity. This is due to the communicative and affiliative nature of indirect discourse. If one is to immediately turn to directed discourse, especially with the knowledge that the interlocutor knows the game, then that’s a pretty keen signal that they really don’t want anything to do with you. We turn to directed discourse when we don’t feel a community bond with our interlocutor.⁶⁵ I am sure to many readers the practice seems paradoxical or counter-intuitive, but because there aren’t many instances of such exchanges within White Mainstream English, it can be a bit difficult to explain to those without local knowledge of these communicative practices and the reasoning behind them. Focusing on this difficulty, within the next section I will highlight how incredibly salient these communicative and argumentative and argumentative practices are to us within BAAWSC.

IV. HOW..?

In a passage, quoted by Brown (2001), writer R. DeCoy asks:

How...can you ever hope to express what you are, who you are of your experiences with God, in a language so limited, conceived by a people who are quite helpless in explaining themselves? How can you, my Nigger Son, find your identity, articulate your experiences, in an order of words? (59-60).

While DeCoy is addressing his son regarding the lack of effectiveness within White Mainstream English and their argumentative practices, I believe such a passage serves our daughters as well. How indeed can Black African American women express themselves and offer dissent in such a way that is restricted by Eurocentric white norms that do not adequately encapsulate our argumentative norms? In what ways does learning WME and argumentative practices serve us? Within this section, I give an account of the benefits and downfalls of us utilizing and adhering to the argumentative norms outlined within the previous two sections. While there are a few pragmatic upshots to us adhering to such norms, ultimately, I argue that in constantly and permanently doing so, we forgo a large understanding of ourselves and our cultural roots.

The mastery of Standard/Dominant English or WME can be truly transformative within Black African American lives. Over the centuries, we have learned that mastering this linguistic style and language can make or break us in specific courses of study and fields of employment that are dominantly white. This realization has led to the practice of code-switching, which is the ability to invoke White Mainstream English rules and intonations.⁶⁶ For example, I highly doubt Mr. Isiah Carey (the reporter mentioned in the previous chapter) would have gotten his job as a reporter if he used AAL at his job interview. And I don’t mean just his obscenities, but also his intonation. However, while code-switching has been fiscally beneficial and has generated mobility with white spaces, the practice is one that is a coerced engagement. Young argues that code-switching is an oppressive survival tactic to Black women and does not accurately track cognitive abilities nor achievements within diversity (2009). Fordham and Ogbu have noted that while the ‘burdensome benefits’ of code-switching is largely known within Black African-American communities, Black girls have reported on being hesitant to engage in the practice in fear of losing their blackness in favor of ‘sounding or acting white.’ It

⁶⁵ Either that or we have good reasons to believe that our interlocutor does not know the art well enough to hash out any dissension.

⁶⁶ Basically, we have mastered the ability to ‘sound white.’

is semi-interpreted as cosigning dominant white linguistic and argumentative practices.⁶⁷ Some opponents of AAL may concede that code-switching is a necessary adaptation to mainstream dominant American culture, but I argue that this is a failure of understanding the centrality of such argumentative and communicative practices, such as signifying. Moreover, as the epigraph in my introduction illustrates, we can speak WME all we want. Give clear directives in WME. And it won't stop our deaths. Kirk-Duggan state "These opponents of Ebonics failed to recognize the extent to which Ebonics is celebratory of African American life. They failed to acknowledge its distinctive fluidity, the way in which its speakers use intonational, stylistic, and often indirect methods in order to make a point" (150). As Lakoff states "Language uses us as much as we use language" (54). The utilization of signifying and some of its key features that fly in the face of many dominant argumentative norms pertaining to viciousness and politeness are vital aspects of many Black African American's cultural and socio-historical understanding. It shapes us as much as we shape them.

Moreover, Yancy argues that his experiences being a Black man in America cannot simply be captured within Standard English – "Some forms of knowledge become substantially truncated and distorted, indeed, erased, if not expressed through the familiar linguistic media of those who have possession of such knowledge" (Yancy, 275). I, myself, within my own work on anti-Black oppression, specifically misogynoir, have struggled to put into words not only my experiences, but also my knowledge regarding misogynoir. It isn't an issue of the ineffable, but at times a translation issue. A worry that I will not be properly understood due to language differences. Or a concern that my work won't be taken seriously because of the way I write when I do choose to code-mesh. Operating within the white academic framework, making particularized argumentative moves, and adhering to the norms has been a long and bumpy road. I am often misunderstood, deemed to be an ill-educated interlocutor, who is mean, brusque, and angry – reduced to yet another exemplar of the 'angry black woman.' Yancy poignantly articulates several of my sentiments in the following passage:

To write in this language is to reproduce the professional culture of philosophy, to perpetuate lines of power, and to show that you have been 'properly' educated and worthy of hire. Moreover, to engage in this discourse is to perform linguistically before an audience of gatekeepers who probably fear too much fat in their discourse, too much play, too much signifying, too much indirection, too much ambiguity, too much vagueness, too much concrete, everyday reality (276).

I urge philosophers and theorists delineating the norms of argumentation to consider alternative norms and argumentative practices. It is not merely out of my own discomfort that this call to action is made, but there are serious harms at stake, which will be outlined more explicitly within my concluding section.

V. "They don't think it be like it is, but it do"

In lieu of a traditional conclusion, I offer up some closing thoughts on the lack of research done to incorporate AAL practices, specifically signifying, within argumentation theory. As I stated at the onset of this chapter, my aim is more diagnostic rather than to offer up prescriptive suggestions for moving forward. With these closing words, I hope to drive home the stakes of having this particular lacuna within the literature. A lack of robust cross-cultural engagement within the argumentation literature can contribute to what Bondy refers to as 'argumentative injustice' (2010). Bondy construes argumentative injustice as "cases where an arguer's social identity brings listeners to place too much or little credibility in an argument" (265). The misconceptions pertaining to another's social identity are due to employing false stereotypes, such as Black women are angry or hostile. Particular false stereotypes such as these regarding Black women are often

⁶⁷ For an analysis offering conflicted findings regarding Fordham and Ogbu's study, see Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005). For me personally, I often feel a tinge of sadness with my ability to code-switch, because I don't want it to seem as though I'm a proponent of White Mainstream English over AAL.

promoted and perpetuated within mainstream American media, which Collins denotes as “controlling images” (2009). These false stereotypes skew reality and attempts to render the falsity as natural and factual, in an attempt to justify Black women’s oppression. Images and false external narratives depicting us as ‘hot-head,’ ‘hard-headed,’ ‘rude,’ or ‘disrespectful’ gives way to argumentative injustice, specifically credibility deficits. When we enact certain argumentative practices, such as signification, we are no longer interpreted as giving arguments, rather we are reduced to these controlling images. So instead of being viewed as a reason giver, an arguer, a dissenter, we are seen as just another rude, disrespectful, uneducated Black woman/girl.

Bondy asserts that argumentative injustice is harmful in three primary ways: 1- “it undermines the rationality of the endeavour [sic],” 2- “it can distort an arguer’s status in the community of arguers,” and 3- “if repeated enough, credibility deficits can damage the ability of the person to whom the prejudice attaches to engage productively in arguments” (266). Now, I am a bit suspicious as to how exactly Bondy is conceiving ‘productive arguments,’ but nevertheless, the model of argumentative injustices is useful to help illustrate the importance of accurate dissemination of our argumentative practices in conjunction with greater diversity within the academia’s argumentative theories. Signifying, along with several of our other practices when engaging in arguments, are means of productive argumentation. Given our approach to community orientated discourse, we are incredibly aware of our interlocutors and overhearers.

Aikin and Talisse state, “[g]iven that arguments are designed not only to gain the truth about some matter but to resolve disagreements, both parties should contribute to the discussion in ways that promote those ends” (525). Due to controlling images and misunderstandings pertaining to the practice of signifying, it commonly appears to outsiders of BAAWSC that the ways in which we argue does not contribute to disagreement resolution. But as I have shown, it is not merely an attempt to corrupt argumentation nor is it a corrupted argumentative practice. Such a practice is corroborative, paradoxically respectful, and celebrates our rich heritage of communication.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ I would like to thank the panelists and my commentator, Catharine Hundleby, at the European Conference on Argumentation. An earlier draft of this paper was published in the 2019 ECA Proceedings.

Chapter 4

“As Black people, we have not been tutored for our benefit, but more often than not, for our detriment. We are tutored to function in a structure that already existed but that does not function for our good. Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.”

-Audre Lorde, Interview with Claudia Tate in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 1982

“Your body must be heard.”

-Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 309

Much of the literature concerning testimony and ethical knowledge acquisition, there is a strong implicit (and sometimes explicit) conceptual definition of testimony as concerning solely illocutionary acts. The conceptual framing of testimony merely referring to the act of speaking and hearing is not usually defended but presumed. Few who incorporate and focus on the practice and concept of testimony include the body and specifically the ways in which the body either contributes or construes testimonial acts. Similarly, insufficient attention is paid to how epistemic injustice can also include the body, especially concerning marginalized individuals.

This chapter is an investigation into the prospects of bodily censorship, regarding the politics of Black female respectability, being conceived as cases of testimonial injustice. At this junction, I want to shift my dissertation’s focus away from argumentation directly. Instead, I am homing in on the utilization of our body with AAL. I argue that the politics of Black respectability reshapes and comports Black female mannerisms, which suppresses communicative affects, concepts, and non-conceptual knowledge. Testimony under my investigation will be construed within a broader sense not only pertaining to illocutionary acts, but bodily gestures and facial expressions that can communicate different forms of non-conceptual knowledge and various affective states. The body can be a medium in which we communicate, or testify, with other embodied individuals. Communicative bodily phenomena such as eye rolling, a twist of the neck, side eye, and pursed lips all can be a testament to certain knowledge claims or affective states. The suppression of such knowledge and affective communication, I argue, falls under the conception of testimonial smothering, which is the coerced truncation of an individual’s testimony. The testimony is edited to only convey certain content in which the receiver has shown competence. Within the realm of Black respectability politics, not only is content being edited, but various modes of testifying are being jettisoned due to receiver incompetence to accurately uptake the content and/or correctly understand the mode of testimony. Much of the literature regarding testimonial injustices, specifically testimonial smothering, conceives of testimony as solely involving illocutionary acts. This chapter seeks to bring the body into our conceptions of testimony and examine the ways in which, as a mode of ‘speaking,’ the Black female body is oppressed and can experience a new mode of testimonial injustices. Such an examination will be more able to account for the various forms testimonial smothering can occur.

I will first provide an orientation to Black female politics of respectability via contemporary narrative examples, which will be grounded in a historical context highlighting the ways in which the Black female body and bodily gestures have been regulated within America. From this historical and contemporary understanding of the parameters of acceptable and permissible behavior exhibited by Black female bodies, I argue that bodies and gestures can articulate knowledge. Not only are these gestures means of knowledge articulation and knowledge acquisition, but I claim certain bodily gestures should be conceived of as testimony. Several theorists assert that the assessment of bodily language is crucial in determining the veracity of illocutionary testimony. I argue such assessments are not merely crediting the illocutionary testimony, but that bodily gestures can be perceived as testimony in itself. Testimonial knowledge that is articulated via the body does not mandate that it be conceptual, which I argue is related to the distinction between knowledge being transmitted through testimony and knowledge being gained via testimony (due to the symbolic meanings of the testimony itself). From here, I will be in the position to examine the case of epistemic smothering that is not verbally based but is grounded within the body. Black female bodies which self-regulate bodily actions, either due to said actions being used against the woman enacting them or to the understanding that their actions will be misunderstood (that is to say, misread), are experiencing a form of epistemic smothering. I conclude the chapter examining the ways in which an account of epistemic smothering that does not include the body, is ableist and does not include those who do not participate within illocutionary testimonial acts.

I. Don't you look at me that way!

One day while lining up for outdoor recess, as I grabbed my jacket my white kindergarten teacher noticed my coat in hand and told me that I would not need it because it was warm outside. I have always tended to wear an extra layer of clothing, unless it is in the high 80's and humid, because I like to be warmer than most individuals. My five-year old self knew this - that I would be cold without my jacket given that it was not hot (to me) outside. I squinted my eyes (commonly referred to as 'side-eye') in protest to her statement. She responded, "Don't you look at me that way! Young lady, you have an attitude problem." Immediately I was sent to the office for not listening and having a 'bad attitude.' I was told that I was being disrespectful. While the other white children played outside, I sat in an office struggling to figure out 'the way' I had looked at her. It had seemed odd to me that I was the one being perceived to be disrespectful, when she was going to take my coat when I signaled to her that I didn't want to do such, or thought it was a bad idea. Stranger still, I had noticed other children giving her similar facial expressions. They had not been sent to the office or told that their attitude was 'wrong.'

This is my first recollection of my body being policed or 'tutored' as a Black girl.

Within the United States, there is a longstanding history of Black women and girls' bodies being controlled – not only our physicality but also through images and representations of our bodies. Collins argues that this regulation of Black female bodies stems from the enslavement of Black-Africans as not merely justification for enslaving them, but as exculpations in utilizing their bodies and fertility for economic purposes (2009, 86). The subjugation of the Black female body facilitated the systemic rape of women and girls. Weaponizing rape in this manner served two primary purposes: 1 – it bred terror and enslaved complacency, and 2 – it was literally a breeding. Children born from these rapes added property value and increased the aggregate worth of African slave labor. It was the Black female body that served as the site of African enslavement, "because it was the conduit through which enslavement passed to her descendants, [and] was historically deemed the ground-zero site for the propagation of Black inferiority" (Cooper 2017, 20). White slave owners were able to accomplish multiple acts of violence through rape – physical harm, psychological harm, and economic exploitation. However, this history of rape also has epistemological elements, which has

carried into the present (Collins 2009, 272). Black women who behave in a way that is not in line with the white dominant knowledge validation process are dismissed as knowers, members of society, and in extreme cases even human. Breaking from the white centric ‘respectable’ norm, lands Black women and girls to be stereotyped as jezebels, angry, inexorable, and an overall menace and danger to the dominant framework of society. “Black girls are scripted as angry, bitter, ungrateful, savage beings that are denied the ability to be seen as dimensional or nuanced” (Skackelford, ‘Black Attitudes Matter...’). Within mainstream society, Black female bodies and their mannerisms often are portrayed as savage and crazy. Their ‘natural’ bodily compartments are nonsensical and/or affective, thus making them unable to produce or articulate knowledge. We are not allowed to be multidimensional. However, complexity of character, *prima facie* extending respectability, and the capability of being epistemic agents is extended to whiteness. Whiteness is respectable. Whiteness is knowledgeable. Whiteness is acceptable.

Such a history and present-day images and representations has led to the deployment of practices of Black respectability politics. Adhering to normative scripts that are controlled by the white dominant framework is to present oneself as respectable. It is an attempt to appeal to a humanist ideology. If Black women and girls can show that they are human, i.e. – respectable, then human rights will follow. Within the United States, this political strategy seemingly arose as a collective group effort, albeit with complex methods.⁶⁹ Hines traces this focus to the late nineteenth century:

While white Americans, north and south, accepted Black subordination as representing the Darwinian natural order, Black leaders of the race focused almost completely on winning education, political, and economic rights. Black women, on the other hand, focused on eradicating negative images of their sexuality” (1994, 12).

The desire to jettison the images and stereotypes produced by white America which justified the systematic rape of Black women and girls, gave birth to the practices of Black respectability. The politics of Black female respectability is to obtain “White approval” (Collins, 2005, 72). In the attempt to obtain ‘white approval,’ Black women and Black female images are encouraged to conform to white standards of bodily comportment. Historically speaking, Wolcott argues that one of the earliest forms of systematic assimilation of Black women’s bodies was the bodily regulation within the school system during the integration of white public schools. Black reformers during this era encouraged the assimilation and “focused on respectability – cleanliness, restrained religiosity, and sexual morality” as means of obtaining white approval (48). Cursing, particular facial expressions, hair styles, specific means of bodily comportment, and expressing dissent are all perceived to be inappropriate or ‘unbecoming’ for Black women and girls. Morris (2007) notes that Black female teachers often experience friction over the expectation that school age girls behave “ladylike” and avoid being loud or talking with an attitude (506). In order to be perceived as worthy of respect, one must enact gender norms that are befitting of a lady. Such an adherence to the paradoxical trope of Black respectability,⁷⁰ reinforces negative images and stereotypes of dissenting Black female bodies. To fall in line with Black respectability politics supports white conceptions of femininity. In many ways it is to cosign the markers of gender and humanity. A gendered analysis of anti-Black racism almost becomes logically impossible. This is because the category of gender already has a built-in component of humanity – to have a gender, one must be human. Anti-Black racism, on the other hand, is purported to rely on the assumption that Blacks are not people, or they are sub-human. Gender’s “assumptive logic...maintains that all women have the same gender. This

⁶⁹ This political strategy is unique to the United States. Black respectability within the Caribbean “evolved as a set of cultural practice that were the offspring of class hierarchies and color caste systems” (Morris 2014, 5). The strategy in the United States did not rely as heavily on colorism nor did it rely on a caste system. For more on the multifaceted approaches to US Black respectability politics, see Copper (2017).

⁷⁰ I use paradoxical here to harken Fred Moten’s conception of a freedom dream – “the surreal utopian ‘nonsense’ of a utopian vision, the freedom we know outside of the opposition of sense and intellection” (2018). It is a paradoxical respectability because it is outside of the conceptions of sense and rationality.

orientation of thought does more than render Black gender invisible or silent. It makes it conceptually impossible to think of gender violence as orientating more than the realm of gender” (Douglas 2018, 115).

The encouragement of a certain, moreover ‘proper,’ bodily comportment of Black girls and Black women still exists, even for members of the Black community who are attempting to subvert the white dominant framework. For example, the hashtag ‘#carefreeblack girl’ originated as a hashtag to combat the stereotype of angry, hyper-activist, and downtrodden Black woman. Upon searching for ‘#carefreeblack girl,’ one can find images and posts of Black women and Black girls hiking, reading, enjoying brunch, painting, practicing yoga, etc. The developer of the hashtag began this project to illustrate that “We’re [Black women and Black girls] multidimensional, and we’re OK” (Shakelford, ‘Trap Queens...’). However, the overwhelming majority of these supposedly liberating images are only representing a certain type of feminine ‘Blackness’ that is permissible to be ‘carefree’ under the white gaze – i.e. *respectable* female Blackness. In the attempt to liberate us from the white gaze, the hashtag movement has served to reinforce the politics of Black female respectability. Shakelford asks “Where are the trap queens, the squad up girls, the round-the-way girls, the freak hoes, thotties, and the bald-headed scallywags with no edges to speak of? ... Do we give license to carefree identities to be loud, poor, unpoetic, fat, permed, scowling, no formal education, unkempt, ain’t shit, or ratchet?” (‘Trap Queens...’). Putting the question in a different way, Morris asks “So what does it mean when what is touted as a primary way to secure honor and respect in one’s community or in society at large is connected to practices that can be alienating, difficult, or even exclusionary?” (2014, 3). If the politics of Black female respectability are tied to notions of white femininity, then Black women and girls will *always* fail. We will forever be attempting to place a square peg in a round hole. For some of us will be loud, ratchet, thotties, and scallywags.

The politics of Black female respectability condemn these practices, expressions, and traits as disrespectful and those who embody these traits are often given a credibility deficient in regard to epistemic exchanges. A fear of societal backlash when one enacts unrespectable traits or expresses themselves in unrespectable ways causes certain Black women to not engage in such practices, gestures, or acts, which I argue is a form of testimonial smothering. My argument does necessitate a broader conception of testimony that is not solely based upon illocutionary acts. Within the next section, I put forth such an account.

II. Situating body language and gestures within the realm of knowledge

‘Respectable’ Blackness does not merely pertain to social norms and mores, but respectability politics, as previously mentioned, contains an epistemic component. This section will examine the ways in which body language and bodily gestures can fall within the realm of testimony. Bodily mannerisms and gestures can convey knowledge; albeit, such knowledge does not necessitate that it be conceptual, nor does it demand that the knowledge be non-propositional. After examining the literature on testimonial credit that does include the examination of the body, I will revisit select examples from Section II to reexamine the ways in which the bodily gestures and mannerism of Black women can be perceived to be conveying knowledge and can be conceived as testimony. Such moments are moments of testifying, even though they are not illocutionary speech acts.

Feminist standpoint epistemologies⁷¹ have argued that the body is a site of knowledge and knowledge generation. One of their most salient contributions to epistemology is that knowers are always located somewhere. The proposition “S knows that P,” implies that each S will have the same access to P; however, the

⁷¹ See Hartstock (2004), Harding (2009) (1993) (1991), Code (1993), Kournany (2009), and Rouse (2009).

social positioning of each S can produce ignorance involving P (Code 1993, 39). In addition to an individual's social positioning aiding or handicapping them in terms of knowledge acquisition, an individual's own particular history and experience must be included in their ability to know, but I would extend that such factors also effects their bodies ability to communicate said knowledge. Not only do we need to pay attention to the social location of S when they know that P, but we also must pay attention to the ways in which P can be illustrated to be known by S. That is to say, we must care about the ways in which subjects can illustrate their knowledge that p based upon their positionality as much as we concern ourselves with the ways in which various subjects can know p dependent upon their social positionality. For example, if a subject is raised within a culture that utilizes a specific musical time signature over others, then musical counting can be an embodied act where the counting is *felt* rather than *thought*. Certain bodies, dependent upon their social positioning, are more apt to display specific knowledges of time signatures via bodily movements, whereas other bodies who may be situated within a different social position may lack the embodied ability to either know the rhythms and the beats or lack the physical ability to demonstrate their knowledge of certain time signatures. Bodily mannerisms and gestures can 'articulate' knowledge which could otherwise not be expressed through words.⁷²

With the notion that the body can articulate knowledge, I am committing myself to the assertion that knowledge has the possibility of being non-conceptual. That is to say that an individual can enact their world and the knowledge of their world without the representations being determined by the conceptual capacities of the individual. I want to be careful here, because I do not want to close of the possibility of bodies possessing concepts or concepts being embodied. However, bodies can possess knowledge when there are no hermeneutical tools available. Bodily language and movements can express a knowledge or a knowing when there is no concept currently available within the collective epistemic resources.

For example, in describing a hermeneutical injustice Fricker (2009) utilizes the example given by Brownmiller, which highlights the frustration women experienced being sexually harassed within the workplace before the conceptual term (sexual harassment) was known within the collective vernacular. Brownmiller states "We were referring to it [instances of unwanted sexual advances while in an unbalanced power position related to the workplace] as 'sexual intimidation,' 'sexual coercion,' 'sexual exploitation on the job.' None of those names seemed quite right. We wanted something that embraced a whole range of subtle and unsubtle persistent behaviors. Somebody can up with 'harassment.' *Sexual harassment!* Instantly we agree. That's what it was" (281, emphasis in original). From this example, Fricker argues that both the perpetrators and the victims of sexual harassment were in the same epistemic disadvantage because "neither has a proper understanding of how he is treating her" (151). Moreover, Fricker argues that such a disadvantage "prevents her from understanding a significant patch of her own experience: that is, a patch of experience which it is strongly in her interests to understand, for without that understanding she is left deeply troubled, confused, and isolated, not to mention vulnerable to continued harassment. Her hermeneutical disadvantage renders her unable to make sense of her ongoing mistreatment, and this in turn *prevents her from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it*" (151, emphasis my own). To state that a victim of sexual harassment who may not have the concept within their society's epistemic means is unable to protest said harassment is intuitively incorrect to me. Within Fricker's assertions, she presupposes that a victim's body during an incident (or repeated incidents) of sexual harassment is remaining static as though the harassment is not taking place – that the body is not communicating or protesting the harassment via gestures, facial expressions, or the shifting of body weight.

I offer the possibility that bodies in such instances do convey an understanding of what is occurring, and bodies can protest against further physical advancements, which, contrary to Fricker's assertions, can signal to stop harassment. A step backwards, putting one's hands up, or a hesitant glance can signal to a harasser to stop. Furthermore, Fricker also assumes that with the hermeneutical tools to describe the incidents conceptually and

⁷² Montero construes this phenomenon as a form of expertise 'amnesia' (2019).

cognitively, victims will no longer be “left deeply troubled, confused, and isolate, not to mention vulnerable to continued harassment” (151). The concept has indeed been added to our epistemic repertoire and individuals who experience sexual harassment can still feel ‘troubled, confused, isolated, and vulnerable.’ I argue for the possibility of non-conceptual knowledge that bodies can articulate, to foreclose assertions that hermeneutical lacunas utterly prevent an individual from expressing something signaling to an incident or phenomena. There can be a ‘*this*’ or a ‘*that*’ which has no name but can still be articulated by the body.

In what ways can we conceive of non-conceptual knowledge? Hofmann refers to non-conceptual knowledge as knowledge that is not belief dependent stating that “The hypotheses that there is non-conceptual knowledge is intended to contradict the orthodox view that knowledge requires belief. It is simply a re-formation of the rejection of the belief condition in our account of knowledge (as a necessary condition on knowledge), *given that belief requires the use of concepts*, i.e., given that belief has conceptual content” (185, emphasis in original). To hold a belief is to embrace an idea or employ and/or assent to particular concepts. The embracement of a belief does not have to be directly known to the knower. An individual can hold a belief while unaware that they harbor such a belief. Beliefs are also not solely restricted to the realm of the mental. Bodies can hold beliefs. Colloquially, we often refer to bodies holding beliefs as bodies having ‘feelings,’ i.e. – ‘I felt thus and so in my bones’ which can also be interpreted as ‘I believed thus and so within my body.’

An individual can also have knowledge and subsequently articulate knowledge without assenting to believing their own knowledgeable testimony. To consider such, Lackey (2008) utilizes a case involving a Creationist, where a biology schoolteacher is deeply religious and believes in the truth of creationism; however, she teaches at a public school whose curriculum involves teaching the scientific evidence for evolutionary theory. The schoolteacher believes it is her duty to teach in accordance to the curriculum, so despite disbelieving evolutionary theory, she asserts the truth of the theory and testifies such to her class (48). It would be amiss to state the teacher believes in *p*, when she clearly believes creationism is correct, but she successfully articulates the knowledge to her students regardless of her belief. This example illustrates that knowledge is not dependent upon belief. It was the schoolteacher’s testimony that facilitated her students to obtain knowledge. In this example, since the schoolteacher does not possess the belief present in the public-school district’s curriculum, we cannot say knowledge acquisition via testimony is true belief transmission from a warranted or justified source. What I am proposing by presenting the body as a conduit of testimony runs orthogonal to Lackey’s case example. My notion of non-conceptual knowledge merely rejects the necessity of the belief aspect within traditional formulations of knowledge – that knowledge must be a justified true belief.⁷³ That does not mean that knowledge in this sense would lack content - knowledge without such would be empty – but what it can lack is the employment of concepts that is representational of said knowledge.

What I am proposing is a notion of perceptual knowledge with non-conceptual content. One can possess knowledge even though the individual does not possess the concepts that are commonly thought to specify their content. Infants and small children lack a plethora of concepts, but their experiences of the external world still contain content. They still have sensory perceptions regarding their experiences which can induce mediated mental states.⁷⁴

McDowell refutes a notion of non-conceptual content, following Kant, and asserts that mental states with non-conceptual content are “blind, because they are intuitions without concepts” (54). For the subject, McDowell argues, to understand the experiencing of the world around them, they need to possess the ability for spatial-

⁷³ There are multiple formulations to the question ‘what constitutes knowledge.’ At various points in epistemology, knowledge has been defined as a true belief, a justified belief, a reliable belief, or a certain belief. However, post-Gettier the most common conceptual definition of knowledge is a well-justified true belief.

⁷⁴ Mediated content here is not equivocal to Wilfred Sellars’s notion of ‘the Given.’ Content can be mediated through bodily habituation, as Aristotle illustrates via his conception of second nature or as Montero asserts through her employment of dancing expertise examples. See Montero (2019) (2013).

temporal awareness of their particular world view. That the subject must possess the abilities to ‘glimpse their world’ which would render their world as intelligible. However, we can conceive of knowledge as a two-step process, one of sensorial experience that is then conceptualized. Sensory perceptions are a necessary component to knowledge. If experience and knowledge is solely grounded upon the conceptual, or if the conceptual is the most salient factor concerning the production and articulation of knowledge, the question of our ability to learn and know new concepts arises. It is implausible to conceive of learning new concepts and knowing new concepts as a composition of other concepts, which would mean that these concepts must then be innate to the individual, which is also a doubtful assertion.

Hofmann conceives of two different notions of non-conceptualism: state non-conceptualism and content non-conceptualism. State non-conceptualism refers to mental states that are content full but does not essentially necessitate concepts. Conversely, content non-conceptualism are content full mental states; however, the content within such mental states differ fundamental from content within beliefs or other propositional attitudes. Content non-conceptualism, according to Hofmann, implies state non-conceptualism (186). He argues for the stronger claim, content non-conceptualism; however, the illustration of state non-conceptualism is sufficient for the confines of this chapter. In order to support my thesis, I do not need to prove or find it plausible that non-conceptual content is different in kind from state non-conceptualism. The successful illustration of state non-conceptual knowledge is satisfactory.

One reason I do not to commit to Hofmann’s notion of content non-conceptualism is because I want to leave open the possibility that non-conceptual knowledge can still be propositional. For example, I may perceive, have the sense perceptions, that someone is dismissing or diminishing my accounts of a racialized incident. I may say something akin to ‘I just didn’t feel heard’ or ‘I don’t know how to articulate my knowing that I was experiencing discrimination.’ Likewise, my body may become suddenly tense, fidgety or my face may display a sense of desperation or disappointment. Dismissing someone or telling them that the incident was not that serious when they recall an instance of being racially discriminated is gaslighting.⁷⁵ My knowing that someone was dismissing my statements or downplaying a racialized experience does have a nominal designation which would contain conceptual content; however, akin to my critique of Miranda Fricker’s example highlighting hermeneutical injustice, I can know that such states occurred without having the conceptual content or conceptual framing to articulate those states. There is a propositional element within this example due to the veridical component. The events may not or may have happened.

An individual may object to the notion that non-conceptual perception contains an anti-luck truth component. Following our example, a person may refute the claim that I obtained non-conceptual knowledge via my perception, because what I was sensing was actually a hallucination. An incident of gaslighting did not occur due to mental delusions (which ironically such a refutation regarding gaslighting would be the very instantiation of gaslighting if the original event did indeed occur). To this refutation or one akin to such, Hofmann posits that the act of hallucinating does not prevent the perception from being knowledge, because “[i]f one is perceiving at t [the time where the knowledge assertion would be rendered true], one’s perceptual representation is non-accidentally correct” (189). The accurate internal perception of the external world was not an accident if the conditions for accuracy in a near possible world includes a hallucination still obtaining the same accuracy. The achievement of veridicity swamps the fine-grained reliability of the methods used to obtain true and accurate knowledge representations of the external world. Hofmann contends that such an achievement on some level mandates that one has employed specific skills and/or abilities. That is “perception is an achievement, a cognitive achievement. It requires quite a significant ability to perceive objects and properties as we normally do it” (189). If I obtained truth through my utilization of my sensory perception

⁷⁵ Veronica Ivy (nee: Rachel McKinnon 2017) conceptually reworks gaslighting within a domestic violence context to describe incidents of dismissal by allies who are hearers of racialized incidents of oppression and/or microaggressions.

abilities in regards to my sensing of an individual ‘gaslighting’ my experience, then I have achieved in obtaining knowledge regarding my world.⁷⁶ The articulation of my knowledge of such would fall within the realm of testimony; however, the necessity of speech acts in regards to testimony is unclear within the testimonial literature.

III. Body language and gestures within the realm of testimony

Colloquially, we tend to conceive of testimonial acts as instances where a speaker articulates a statement. However, the literature on testimony does not unanimously conceive of testimony as solely pertaining to speaking. This section briefly examines the various ways in which testimony has been articulated. I show that there are broader definitions of testimony that will allow for Black women’s bodily gestures and mannerism to be included within the realm testimony. I also assert that within several accounts of testimony that explicitly define testimony as illocutionary acts, there still lies an embodied component that enables one to obtain knowledge via testimonial illocutionary acts. It is not merely the transmission of conceptual content that allows for individuals to know from testimony, but also other states, i.e. various content states which can be embodied. I conclude this section by reexamining my example from Section II. Within this reexamination, I highlight the ways in which under a more embodied conception of testimony, several of the bodily gestures and mannerisms enacted by Black women are indeed moments of testifying.

While the literature on testimony has defined testimony explicitly as illocutionary speech acts, there are several definitions that would not confine testimony to illocutionary acts. It is these definitions that I would like to utilize in support for the notion that Black women’s bodily gestures can be counted as testimony. Audi broadly construes testimony as “...people’s telling us things” (406). Despite the historical norm⁷⁷ denying attributions of humanity to Black women, most individuals would classify Black women as humans. We are people who tell things and telling things does not necessitate that such occur via illocutionary acts. In a similar fashion, Elizabeth Fricker characterizes testimony as “tellings generally” with “no restriction either on subject matter or on the speaker’s epistemic relation to it” (396-397). Again, there is no stipulation that testimony must be spoken and heard. The final definition I highlight is Lackey’s: “S testifies that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if (in part) in virtue of *a*’s communicable content, (1) S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p* or (2) *a* is reasonably taken as conveying the information that *p*” (2008, 30, emphasis in original). Lackey’s definition differs from the previous two insofar as the issue of content is included as well as a sensing of either intentionality and/or⁷⁸ perceived intentionality. Here testimony is a communicative act with *content* that either is intended or interpreted to be intentional. The gestures or mannerism enacted by Black women do harbor content and if they were intended by the agent or perceived to have been intended, under Lackey’s definition such gestures would qualify as testimony.

However, later the book *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*, Lackey asserts that learning through testimony can only occur via words, not the epistemic justification of belief regarding the

⁷⁶ If one is not convinced by the low level of epistemic reliability that I have argued can be construed as an achievement, then an easy solution to my argument would be inclusion of the caveat of safety. A revised argument would assert that reliable perceptual knowledge can be non-conceptual. The additional requirement of reliability does not necessitate that I define what perceptual epistemic practices are and are not safe. Within the recent resurgence of virtue epistemology, reliability could entail modalities that are sensitive, safe, properly or virtuously formed, etc. Please see Nozick (1981), Sosa (2000) (2002), Williamson (2000), and Pritchard (2005) respectively.

⁷⁷ Some would even argue that the refutation of humanity and personhood is still operating as a norm within American Society. See Nash (2019), Douglas (2018), Warren (2017), and Spillers (2003). For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to optimistically presuppose that Black women being rendered as human is the norm.

⁷⁸ Lackey is explicit that ‘or’ functions non-exclusively (71 n.8).

testifier. It is not the states of knowing, she argues, that allows us to gain knowledge from another individual's testimony. Rather, we need to focus "on what speakers *say*" (2008, 2, emphasis in original). From this statement, it is reasonable to assume that she would not construe bodily gestures that meet her criteria of testimony, quoted above, *qua* testimony. There is an inconsistency within her testimonial metaphysics. The assertion made is that the epistemology of testimony should shift from examining justification of knowledge and belief of testifiers to the words of said testifiers; however, she defines testimony to be communicative acts and explicitly states that her project is one that moves away from "epistemic status of internal states of speakers" (2008, 2). The inconsistency becomes more peculiar given her statements regarding testimony and the body in other essays. For example, Lackey states "If, for instance, I come to know that you have a soprano voice by hearing you say, in a soprano voice, that you do, then my resulting knowledge is testimonial only if it is based on the *content* of your report rather than on *features* about your testimony, such as the way in which it was expressed" (2014, 78, emphasis my own). Here again, what is construed as testimonial is not necessarily the act itself or a communicative act that involves speech, but the intentional content is what renders a communicative act to be testimonial. The body is a medium in which content can be expressed or communicated intentionally.

Lackey focuses on the content of testimonial exchanges as opposed to the medium in which it is being exchanged stating "I advance a new theory that instead focuses on the linguistic or communicative items in testimonial exchanges – such as *statements* and other *acts of communication*" (2008, 2, emphasis in original). A demarcation is made between testimonial exchanges that occur through statements and testimonial exchanges that can occur by other communicative acts. Due to the inclusion of communicative acts within Lackey's definition of testimony and a distinction between statements and communicative acts, I propose a reinterpretation of Lackey's thesis that our knowledge acquisition within testimonial exchanges is attributed to the words of the testifiers. It is the content of the communicative act in conjunction with the intentionality, which can merely be perceived by the testimonial recipient which allows us to know from testimony. I argue for the inclusion of Black women's bodily gestures utilizing Lackey's argument against the orthodox view that knowledge in testimony is transmitted. The focus is on the content of the communicative acts and Black women's bodily gestures do indeed have content. Such content may be non-conceptual, but within the previous section, I illustrated that knowledge can be non-conceptual. Therefore, regardless of the conceptual status of the content being articulated through the mannerism and gestures of Black women's bodies, the communicative acts must be perceived as testimony.

Philosophers working within the realm of epistemology of testimony have not entirely neglected the body. For example, arguments have been made to observe bodily cues in order to assess the truthfulness of a testimonial statement. Examination of the body has also been used to determine the reliability of a testimonial exchange. Moreover, in order to obtain credit for knowledge acquisition via testimony, several philosophers include assessing the bodily gestures of the individual who is speaking.⁷⁹ These arguments concerning the body within testimonial literature situates the body in an auxiliary position, whereas I render the body not as ancillary to knowledge acquisitions via testimony, but as a source of knowledge procurements itself.

To flesh out the notion of Black female mannerisms and gestures properly being included as testimony, or intending communicative acts conveying knowledge, I want to reexamine some of the examples given in Section II. Given the conceptual work asserting that non-conceptual knowledge does exist and the definition of testimony, albeit inconsistent, does give room to include communicative acts via the body. A reexamination of a previous example will highlight the ways in which under a more corporeal notion of testimony, many of the mannerisms and bodily gestures were indeed moments of testifying and testimony. Regarding my experience as

⁷⁹ For a more in-depth argument for each of these utilizations of the body regarding current testimonial literature, see Hume, Pritchard (2004), and Lackey (2007) respectively.

a kindergartener, the bodily gesture ‘side-eye’ was an intentional, as well as perceived to be intentional, communicative act. I was communicating my disapproval of the proposition ‘leave my jacket.’ My ‘side-eye’ was my testimony. I want my jacket. I need my jacket. I get cold without my jacket. My act, rather than being construed as a disrespectful action seeped in attitude, should more properly be understood to be a moment of testimony. My gesture was me testifying that I did not want to leave my jacket inside. Another example of bodily testimony involves a dinner I once attended involving another Black male philosopher. He and I were having dinner with 3 other white philosophers and the conversation turned to a course I was taking at the time. He asked me how the course was going, and I made a particular gesture. He responded “Oh, it’s going like that huh?” The other members in our party seemed slightly confused because I had not said anything verbally, but by body was able to give testimony in a way that I knew the other members would not be able to understand. In this instance, I was not smothered and was able to utilize the ignorance of others to communicate something that I did not want others to know.

IV. Epistemic Smothering

Having articulated the ways in which Black female bodies can and do testify, I am now able to consider if epistemic injustices can occur when the body is the mode of communication. I am particularly interested in the epistemic and testimonial injustice conceived as epistemic smothering. This specific manifestation of testimonial injustice, I argue, is directly linked to the policing and censorship of Black female bodies under the norms of Black female respectability politics. This section will contain an exegetical accounting of the concept epistemic smothering. Based upon the arguments made within Section II and Section III, I extend epistemic smothering to bodily testimony of Black women. I will conclude this section examining another upshot of reconceiving testimony and testimonial injustices to include the body. I posit that under the current definitions of testimony and epistemic injustices related to the testimony, if we conceive of testimony as only being a faculty of illocutionary speakers and hearers, then the literature has excluded those whose bodies are *unable* to hear and speak.

Not all testimony or communicative acts are safe to give. José Medina argues that particular social groups or individuals who occupy a marginalized group may remain silent within the public sphere, because their testimony is vulnerable. Their testimony may incur further oppression. Medina states “In my view, this amounts to a hermeneutical injustice because these publics – unlike hermeneutically privileged ones – are forced to inhabit communicative contexts in which they cannot exercise their hermeneutical capacities to make sense of their experiences, or they can only exercise them at high costs that others do not have to pay” (101). Individuals and groups are being forced into silence, because the content⁸⁰ of their testimony while not be properly taken up by dominant groups or their testimony may possibly be used against them which can further their oppression. The speech or testimony that is being offered is unsafe to give due to hermeneutical injustices that are structured systematically and reinforced on an individuated level. Kristie Dotson refers to such a silencing as a type of testimonial injustice – “epistemic smothering.” Forced silencing is construed as an epistemic harm because there is a lack of engagement by the marginalized or oppressed individual due to the potential threat of their testimony being misunderstood or used against them. Dotson states that epistemic smothering is:

“A linguistic exchange that might prompt testimonial smothering concerns situations where ‘unsafe’ testimony, which is testimony that an audience can easily fail to find fully intelligible, runs the risk of leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political, and/or material harm. In

⁸⁰ It is unclear whether the content must be conceptual. To my present knowledge, no theorist who engages in testimonial injustice literature has commented on the necessity of conceptual testimonial content.

testimonial smothering, testimony is omitted that is both unsafe and carries the risk of causing negative effects by virtue of being unsafe” (244).

Dotson’s conception of epistemic smothering pertains to situations in which the speaker occupies a marginalized social position, and the listener resides in a dominant orientation. Epistemic smothering refers to the risk that the dominantly situated listener will misunderstand the testimony either due to testimonial injustice or a lack of hermeneutical tools to understand the testimony that the marginalized speaker is giving. The testimony of a marginalized individual is being coercively truncated due to the social and epistemic norms within society. Testimony is edited to only convey certain content in which the receiver has either shown competence or the content and modality of the testimony is deemed acceptable within social norms.

Receivers can be limited in their capacity to understand or properly interpret testimony from others. A limited capacity for understanding does not always incite epistemic smothering. For example, when speaking with my two year old, I will often censor my statements and testimony about anti-Black police brutality within our country.⁸¹ My child does not have the capacity to understand my testimony.⁸² However, if I were to communicate with a colleague on such a matter and I felt the need to censor my testimony for fear of such being perniciously misunderstood, such would be an incident of testimonial smothering. The difference is not in the capabilities of my child versus my colleague to understand my testimony nor does it lie in the intentionality to misunderstand. The difference is whether I feel safe testifying with one versus the other. If we are to include intentionality regarding my colleague misunderstanding my testimony on anti-Black police brutality, the Dotson describes such to be cases of contributory injustice, which occurs in situations where “an epistemic agent’s willful hermeneutical ignorance in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources thwarts a knowers ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community by compromising her epistemic agency” (2012, 32). Unlike hermeneutical injustice, cases of contributory injustice do not involve someone being unable to express herself due to a structurally biased gap within as set of hermeneutical resources. Rather, a person encounters contributory injustices through another’s refusal to acknowledge or acquire requisite hermeneutical resources other than the dominant ones.

The literature on public silences and epistemic smothering positions testimony as illocutionary acts. That is to say that the testimonial relationship takes place between a speaker and a hearer. I extend practices of public silencing and epistemic smothering to bodily testimony. If the gestures and mannerism of Black women can be understood to have knowledge content (be it conceptual or non-conceptual), and if bodies can indeed testify, then the suppression of Black women’s bodies due to social norms and the lack of safety concerning their testimony, should be understood as another mode of epistemic injustice. Black women who edit their bodily testimony due to the receivers’ lack of competence and trust, creates not only an epistemic harm to Black women, but is also a testimonial injustice. Black women are experiencing another mode of epistemic smothering. If I have been ‘trained’ via social norms and/or experience, to not give side-eye (the decision to do so being made out of a lack of my interpreted safety) to colleagues whenever they make racist statements, I am experiencing a form of testimonial smothering. My intentional communicative gesture of side-eye can be testimony to illustrate disapproval of the racist remark. In other words, my bodily testimony is communicating $\sim p$, upon hearing p (the racist statement). However, I may not communicate such disapproval or communicate

⁸¹ Interestingly, Dotson would probably still locate such a case as being epistemically violent. Dotson conceives of epistemic violence “as a failure of an audience to communicatively reciprocate, either intentionally or unintentionally, in linguist exchanges owing to pernicious ignorance” (2011, 242). This definition may appear to be too inclusive, since epistemic violence would include such cases as the one I have given. However, Dotson states that such is the point. “The charge that the definition of epistemic violence is too broad fails to recognize the reality that epistemic violence is a broad practice” (2011, 240). She goes on to state “Epistemic violence does not require intention, nor does it require capacity. It does, however, require a failed communicative exchange owing to pernicious ignorance” (ibid.).

⁸² Some may even argue that to speak of such matter to a toddler would be inappropriate; however, I would argue that depending upon social positioning, different epistemic exchanges require a different set of social norms.

disapproval via that particular modality, out of fear of being interpreted as ‘the sassy Black woman,’ ‘having attitude,’ or ‘being angry/hostile.’ This censorship of my body and my truncation of bodily testimony is an epistemic injustice, specifically testimonial smothering. Re-conceptualizing testimony to include the body extends the definition of testimonial injustice and epistemic smothering, which allows these concepts to be more able to account for the various ways in which testimonial smothering and testimonial injustice occurs.

V

While the scope of this chapter has been to include Black women’s bodily gestures within the conception of testimony and the suppression of such as another mode of testimonial injustice, in lieu of a formal conclusion, I briefly posit another upshot of my argument to include bodily gestures as means of testifying. My expansion of testimony to include bodily gestures is not at odds with Dotson’s or Medina’s examinations of epistemic injustices. However, I am inclined to wonder whether their current (usually explicit) definition of testimony and epistemic smothering is ableist. Since the metaphysics of testimony comprises of hearers and speakers, can epistemic smothering or testimonial injustices involve those whose bodies are unable to speak or hear?

I highly doubt that many of the philosophers whose work engages in epistemic injustice, specifically Medina and Dotson, would explicitly argue that individuals who are blind or deaf could not experience or perpetrate a testimonial injustice. However, the consequence of limiting testimony to illocutionary acts is to imply that individuals must either be speakers or hearers. In defining a successful linguistic exchange, Dotson states “reciprocity requires that an audience understand a speaker’s words and understand what the speaker is doing with the words” (2011, 237). A speaker, under this account, needs to be able to deploy and intentionally employ words. Furthermore, Dotson states “to communicate *we all need an audience willing and capable of hearing us*” (2011, 238, emphasis in original). Not only are successful testimonial exchanges dependent upon a speaker, but they are also reliant upon hearers being capable of hearing. At times, Dotson does utilize the term ‘audience’ to designate the recipients of testimony; however, the testifier is labeled as ‘the speaker.’ Medina offers a slightly more inclusive definition of testimonial exchanges being instances in which “communicators participate as knowers and possible epistemic benefits can be obtained” and goes on to state that “[T]estimonial knowledge can be obtained through a wild *variety of interactions*: speakers engaged in conversation, writers and readers exchanging texts, artists and audiences sharing symbolic constructions, people giving signals to each other in a shared situation or jointly witnessing an even, and so on” (28, emphasis my own). However, throughout the book, Medina usually refers to those who are testifying as speakers and those who are recipients as hearers.

I recognize that such references for both Dotson and Medina (and many others) are merely instances of the way in which we colloquially discuss testimony; however, as Medina states “ordinary language is *plagued* with visual metaphors to talk about communication, understanding, and knowledge” (xi-xii, emphasis my own). There is a recognition and acknowledgement of the harms in employing sensory perception metaphors when engaging in discourse on epistemic injustices, virtues, and/or vices. Given that there is recognition on the harms of visual metaphors, I want to press on the potential harms and implications of utilizing ordinary speech (speakers/hearers) when we engage in work regarding testimonial injustices. The usage of such a metaphor is an exemplification of denying or failing to acknowledge an individual’s capacity to testify. Perhaps the terms ‘*testifier*’ and ‘*audience*’ or ‘*recipient*’ would help to remedy this ableist exclusion.

While the received assumption that testimony only refers to illocutionary acts, which then extends to conceptions of epistemic and testimonial injustices, at best merely fails to capture the full scope of the metaphysics of testimony along with the epistemology of testimony and testimonial injustices. At worst, the received assumption is ableist and implies that those who cannot hear or speak are incapable of experiencing a

testimonial injustice, specifically within the scope of this chapter – epistemic smothering. This chapter has tried to show that Black female bodies can possess knowledge. If there is bodily knowledge and testimony does not overwhelmingly specify that it must be illocutionary acts, then Black women’s bodily gestures and bodily communicative acts can be modes of testimony. The politics of Black respectability that censors the bodily gestures and mannerisms of Black women is potentially a suppression of testimony. This suppression of testimony falls under the specific conception of testimonial injustice: epistemic smothering. Bodily comportment plays an important role within AAL. As mentioned within the previous chapters, how one should read into signification, bringing wreck, or marking, is the other person’s body language.

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have given an account of AAL and BAAWSC's argumentative practices, which clash with several different versions of NAFAMs. It is not only the lack of diversity while leads me to ultimately reject NAFAMs – one camp which completely rejects adversariality while the other camp is accepting of some level of minimal adversariality in virtue of arguments being situated as disagreements. I reject these feminist stances on their basis of being leery, if not outright rejecting, oppositionality. AAL and BAAWSC's practices are fundamentally oppositional. Rickford and Rickford maintain that this oppositionality is in part why AAL is a living and evolving language, which for many Black youths can serve as a "litmus test for anyone who claims to be black" (2000, 223). AAL is not only a way to enact, and as I argue in Chapter 4 to embody, Black identity and a Black mode of argumentation, but it also very much remains a secretive mechanism of communication and argumentation style. On the need for our language and arguments to remain resistant, secretive, and oppositional, James Baldwin states:

There was a moment, in time, and in this place, when my brother, or my mother, or my father, or my sister, had to convey to me, for example, the danger in which I was standing from the white man standing just behind me, and to convey this with a speed, and in a language, that the white man could not possibly understand, and that, indeed, he cannot understand (1979).

Argumentation under a Western conception, especially within NAFAMs are explicit that arguments should be accessible and open for everyone. That we either assent to a shared well-reasoned view in the end, or there are epistemic goods for the person who 'loses' an argument – that is to say the 'loser' has either switched to an epistemically 'better' stance or has gained new tools or insights to improve their original position. For NAFAM, the end goal of argumentation is various conceptions of consensus, which for any of the various models does not involve viewing either the interlocutor or the audience as oppositional. AAL is oppositional.

Chapter 1 examined NAFAM stances and illustrated the ways in which BAAWSC would fall under what NAFAM describes as the 'Adversary Method' or engages in 'ancillary adversariality.' I argue against this conclusion and present the case of NAFAMs being whitewashed, especially given the consensus that many NAFAMs are adamant on showing reasons against oppositionality. I consider it a privilege at best (naïve at worst) to be able to approach each disagreement exchange as a potential to engage in a 'barn raising' activity. Within Chapter 2, I expand this notion highlighting one of the potential stakes of adhering to a NAFAM: argumentative smothering. While this chapter presents the case of argumentative smothering within the domain of academia, I am willing to say that it happens in any white dominant setting. Chapter 3 continued the engagement with politeness norms, specifically regarding tone. I argue that the notion of 'modus tonens,' despite adjusting for appropriate asymmetrical epistemic authority, still does not capture the ways a 'hostile' or 'degrading' tone can add an argumentative element to the discussion. This is especially true for the case of signification, where it's not just the words that are being said that plays a role within the argument but *how* it is being said. Within the case example between my family members, each woman was talking to me but arguing with one another. And the tone in which they said certain statements added new layers to the argument at hand. In Chapter 3, I also addressed the practice of using audiences as proxy members rather than speaking directly to one's interlocutor. The case example argument involved various levels of not only 'hostile' tone, but also body language. I examine the notion of body language as a medium of testimonial exchanges, which can serve as avenues in giving reasons in Chapter 4. Here, I focus on bringing the body to the forefront of testimonial exchanges and articulate some of the difficulties this can bring for Black women and girls. I made the case that

due to controlling images and respectability politics, we should conceive of Black women and girls altering their bodily comportment within predominantly white spaces as another example of testimonial injustice.

Anti-Black argumentative injustice cannot be solved by a few new case studies and inclusive footnotes on different women's collective argumentative styles. I want more than just a mere examination of white argumentative hegemony and how it affects us. One of the next phases of this project is to expose the deeply Western and white conceptions of how we *should* even argue and the purposes or 'end goals' of argumentation. Regarding 'good' arguments, it is incredibly common that we as philosophy professors teach our general logic students that one should stray away from committing certain informal fallacies and aim for validity.⁸³ Law of non-contradiction, double negation, the notion that we attack arguments and not people – I believe there perhaps are counter examples to all of these in AAL which can be pinpointed back to Niger-Congo conceptions of communication and argumentation. So, I aim to continue this work and I hope to eventually develop more prescriptive work. While it is not overtly stated within the scope of the preceding chapters, moving forward I aim to complicate not only conceptions of argumentative vices, politeness argumentative norms, but also interrogate philosophy's notion of fallacies which are grounded in a Western tradition. Some areas of further exploration include the conception of double negation as well as the informal fallacy *ad hominem*.

For example, the rule of equivalence on double negation does not universally apply within AAL. I believe the heavy usage of negative concord within AAL is one of the reasons it is often seen as bad English and seemingly renders its users as irrational. Double negation conceives P as equivalent to $\sim\sim P$ (i.e. – 'It is raining' is equivalent to 'It is not not raining'). AAL appears to fall in line only sometimes with this Western logical rule. For example, 'I ain't no dumb chick' can be translated to 'I am not a dumb chick.' With the double negative, it appears that the AAL should be translated into 'I am a dumb chick.' Whereas 'I ain't never seen nothin like it,' can be translated to "I have not ever seen anything like it." Here we have a case with three negatives in the AAL version, which also reflects a negative within WME. Now there are different rules for negative concord languages insofar they "require use of negative words instead of indefinite words. This is not an error; it is a demand of the grammar, rather like an agreement rule" (Pullum 1999, 49). There is also the issue of tracking the interaction of negation with quantifiers. But this is one of the areas after this project that I aim to explore – the logical implications of double negatives within AAL. I hope to take a deep dive into examining whether what is actually going on in AAL negative concord really double negation. Or do people who perceive it as double negation simply not understand logic, which coupled with implicit anti-Black bias gives rise to AAL's practice of negative concord as illogical.

Another area for further development that has arisen from my work on this project concerns informal fallacies, specifically the case of *ad hominem* (attacking the person). Regardless of the taxonomy of logically fallacies, whether it lists 30 informal fallacies or 300, there is always *ad hominem*. And *ad hominem* is usually further divided into multiple forms. Within Chapter 3, which focuses on signifyin/signification, I showed how tone can play an additive force to arguments within AAL. When one engages in signifyin in an argument, you are putting down or talking about *someone*. There is a norm within WME that when engaging in arguments, refutations or retorts should not be against a person, rather objections should be raised against the arguments themselves. As Bailin and Battersby state "confrontation is really between views and not between people" (2020, 48). However, signifyin could easily be construed as an *ad hominem* fallacy because you are *attacking* the person. One is saying something about not just views or arguments, but the persons themselves while simultaneously addressing their arguments. If you take away the personal element, then it no longer is signification. The personal 'attacks' aren't just for kicks and giggles neither. Signifying is not just a way to secure in group solidarity. It is an argumentative and communicative practice that can be quite serious and even

⁸³ I have yet to see an introductory textbook for logic, argumentation, or critical thinking that does not put forth these parameters for 'good' or 'successful' arguments.

used to exclude others from groups. I plan to further examine whether engagements of signification are inherently fallacious. Do the personal attacks fall under the exemption of 'relevant' critique? Are they flippant attacks against a person, which constitute an ad hominem fallacy? Or can they indeed be personal attacks with no relevancy to the arguments, but still not be fallacious?

I am not willing to say that there are no tactics or structures in argumentation that shouldn't be avoided. That arguments can just run amok and we can all be assholes to one another. But I am concerned with the possibility that numerous informal fallacious and some of philosophy's 'natural deduction' are whitewashed.

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