5-2022

Metaphor, Gendered Slurs, and Epistemic Injustice

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An Honors Philosophy Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Philosophy
Bates College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
by
Sophie Cohen
Lewiston, Maine
03.30.2022

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge and give my sincere thanks to my advisor, Lauren Ashwell, for all the support, guidance, and wonderfully interesting conversations you have provided me with, throughout both the thesis writing process and my entire undergraduate career. I am so grateful for your help and kindness. I would also like to thank David Cummiskey, Susan Stark, and the rest of the philosophy department at Bates for fostering an environment where I have been able to develop a genuine passion for philosophy. Lastly, thank you so much to my wonderful family, your support means everything, and without you all none of this would have been possible.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the structure, function, and implications of gendered slurs as a kind of metaphor, and how these kinds of metaphor constitute instances of epistemic injustice, specifically hermeneutical injustice. In setting a foundation for this argument, a background on the pervasiveness of metaphor and prevalence of linguistic sexism in everyday discourse will be provided. An analysis of the nature of metaphorical meaning will introduce different perspectives, where I argue according to the view of Max Black, that the function of metaphors integrates the salient qualities of one thing with another. Discussions on the structural and cognitive analyses of metaphor and gendered slurs, drawn from Katya Plemenitaš which will reveal important similarities between the two, and help to bolster my claim that gendered slurs are a kind of metaphor. These points of comparison will thus reflect important epistemological impacts of gendered slurs and will help to defend a novel way of understanding the nature of a gendered slur's offensiveness, that can serve as a more expansive mechanism in accounting for its offense across contexts. Finally, I will discuss the argument that the use of gendered slurs constitutes cases of hermeneutical injustice and will encourage discourse on ways to effectively address these injustices.

Introduction

Throughout this paper, I will be developing and supporting the claim that the use of gendered slurs, as a kind of metaphor, constitutes instances of hermeneutical justice, a type of epistemic injustice. This paper will be divided into three chapters, and throughout the thesis, the scope of my claim on gendered slurs will differ. Firstly, I will address two philosophically significant perspectives on metaphor, those of Donald Davidson and Max Black. While analyzing these two perspectives, I will argue in favor of Black's view, as it provides a more effective and fruitful mechanism in illuminating the functioning of metaphor. After discussing both the structural and functional characteristics of metaphor under Black's metaphorical framework, I argue that some gendered slurs can be considered a kind of metaphor, drawing from the work of Katya Plemenitaš. One example of a gendered slur that operates as a kind of metaphor, and that I will focus on throughout this thesis, is the slur 'bitch'.

The second chapter focuses on the epistemic impacts of gendered slurs and discussion on linguistic power, intra-linguistic dominance, and linguistic sexism. I will be arguing for the consideration of gendered slurs as a kind of linguistic sexism and will do so by drawing relevant connections between the use of gendered slurs and other kinds of linguistic sexism such as false gender neutrality and sex marking. I will then discuss the epistemological consequences that these specific kinds of sexist language have upon their targets. In this chapter, I am arguing for the consideration of all gendered slurs as kinds of linguistic sexism.

After analyzing the epistemic effects of gendered slurs, I will outline another kind of epistemic effect of slurs known as variable offense. I will defend a novel way of understanding the nature of a gendered slur's offense, that can serve as a more expansive mechanism in accounting for its offense across contexts, focusing specifically on the gendered slur, 'bitch'. I

will then provide insight into why current philosophical discussions on slurs take the idea of variable offense as a datum that needs to be explained by any theory of slurs. I identify a kind of offense variability that is not captured in existing literature. In this section, I will be basing my original view on offense variability across only the gendered slur 'bitch'. However, this is intended to highlight that if other slurs function through metaphor in a similar way, they will have the same kind of variability.

Lastly, I will develop an argument drawing from Miranda Fricker's discussion of epistemic injustice, in which I will defend the claim that gendered slurs–understood under a metaphorically centered view– constitute cases of hermeneutical injustice. I focus on arguing for use of gendered slurs to be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice and comparing the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice to a case involving a gendered slur. I explore how central aspects of hermeneutical injustice can be identified in the case of a gendered slur, and finally, I conclude by examining potential pathways for addressing and eliminating these kinds of injustice.

The discussion of the general nature of sexism revolves around the prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination typically imposed upon women. Often, what concretizes these kinds of oppression are the words used to invoke such sexist ideals. This kind of sexism, in which words oppressively assign certain characteristics unto someone on the basis of their gender, is what is known as linguistic sexism. Linguistic sexism stems from the "larger societal forces, wider institutionalized inequalities of power, and ultimate, therefore, conflict of who has rights to certain positions and resources".[1] Thus, studying the prevalence of linguistic sexism, particularly within the English language, allows people to not only develop an understanding of

[1] Mills, Sara. *Language and Sexism*. Cambridge University Press, 2008, 1.

the ways in which inequalities of power manifest in society, but also how language is used as an oppressive mechanism in order to uphold this institutionalized inequality.

This paper is centered around particular kinds of language that are argued to serve as these oppressive mechanisms: metaphors and gendered slurs as kinds of metaphor. Firstly, it is extremely important to understand the influential and pervasive nature of metaphors. Not only are metaphors influential insofar as they aim to provide a description of reality, and as I will argue, function to create novel metaphorical meanings, but their influential nature also stems from their pervasiveness within the English language. Metaphors are often seen as merely forms of linguistic embellishment or forms of poetic expression. However, because they provide a description of reality–poetic or not– they are fundamentally important to how we conceive of ourselves and the world around us.

Consider examples from Lakoff and Johnson's "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language", where they metaphorically describe arguments as war. They write, "he attacked every weak point in my argument", and "I demolished his argument". [2] It may be hard at first, to recognize exactly where the metaphor lies, since this use of language (the metaphorical concept of "Argument as War") is so entrenched in our everyday experience and use of language. The words "attacked" and "demolished" are used metaphorically, to express something else, perhaps a strong rebuttal or counterargument. However, it is not always simple to identify metaphorical utterances, especially when those utterances are so deeply ingrained into one's typical use of language. As I will discuss, a classic example of metaphor revolves around a particular relationship between two seemingly distinct things and encourages a connection to be drawn between the two. However, is it true that metaphor always follows this method of function?

[2] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77, no. 8, 1980, 453.

One example of a kind of metaphor which is often overlooked as a metaphorical utterance, is what is known as a dead metaphor. As William Lycan puts it, dead metaphors are "phrases that evolved from what were originally novel metaphors but have turned into idioms or clichés and now mean literally what they used to mean metaphorically".[3] For example, consider the use of the words 'hands' and 'face' when referring to a clock. In describing the time, one may explain that the hands of the clock are pointed toward a particular direction. But this doesn't immediately invoke the same kind of connection as a more explicit example of metaphor would, such as "the child is a ray of sunshine". In that statement, one of the first questions a hearer may ask themselves is why it is the case that the child is a ray of sunshine, whereas in the case of the clock, the metaphorical use of 'hands' is not questioned as explicitly.

Consider the term 'dead metaphor' itself. Even though it is false that a metaphor is truly alive or dead, the term 'dead' still refers to a literal element. This distinction, I argue, is due to the especially pervasive nature of metaphors in language. As we can see through examples of dead metaphors, metaphors have the capacity to transform into literal meanings, and in doing so, their metaphorical nature 'dies'. But it doesn't cease to exist; it disguises itself as a literal meaning. Thus, it is this disguise that provides some reasoning for the pervasiveness of metaphor, and its underlying linguistic power and prevalence. Throughout this paper, I aim to explore this disguise metaphors often assume, as seen in the case of dead metaphors as well as metaphors in general, and how it affects our perception of reality.

I will first discuss various philosophical perspectives on metaphor and defend the perspective which emphasizes the complex structural nature of metaphor and existence of metaphorical meaning. I will then utilize this framework in developing an argument for gendered

[3] Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 2019, 17.

slurs as kinds of metaphor. Following this, I will argue that metaphor, and thus gendered slurs, constitute cases of epistemic injustice. Finally, I will explore potential pathways for addressing, dissolving, and preventing such cases of injustice.

Chapter One

Philosophical discourse on metaphor centers around exactly how one can understand one kind of thing in terms of another and if it is even possible for a metaphor, a figure of speech, to integrate the salient qualities of one thing with the terminology of the other without any other kinds of underlying factors. One side of the philosophical conversation questions why metaphors, over other literary tools, are to be taken more seriously, and are not likely considered as kinds of "stylistic embellishment".[4] Do metaphors themselves function to integrate the salient qualities of one thing with another, or is that process reliant on other factors, with metaphor used merely as a mechanism for doing so?

Donald Davidson proposes a thorough argument as to why metaphors mean no more than their literal interpretation, and thus denies the existence of metaphorical meaning. In denying the existence of metaphorical meaning, Davidson rejects the idea that metaphors are more than cases of stylistic embellishment. Max Black, on the other hand, provides an analysis of metaphor which contrastingly highlights the prevalence and importance of metaphorical meaning, insofar as it engages in cases of linguistic embellishment and works in an epistemological manner, to reorganize the connections we make between our perceptions of the world and our construction of reality.

I will be arguing from a perspective in accordance with Black, and in accordance with the idea that metaphors enable speakers to communicate contents that cannot always be stated in fully literal and explicit terms, and that these contents largely affect one's conception of reality. I argue that while it is true that metaphors can be utilized as instances of stylistic embellishment, they also have and express the capacity to do much more.

[4] Rooney, Phyllis. "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason." *Hypatia,* vol. 6, no. 2, 1991, 86.

Davidson on Metaphorical Meaning

To better develop my argument that metaphors are linguistically pervasive and epistemologically powerful, it is important to examine Davidson's argument in more detail and highlight certain points of disagreement. The crux of Davidson's argument relies on the distinction between "what words mean and what they are used to do", as he argues that metaphors belong "exclusively to the domain of use". [5] Thus, according to Davidson, there is no important structural break-down of metaphor; its meaning is not dependent on some relationship between domains and thus does not result in the creation of novel meanings. Instead, a metaphor is to be understood in terms of its causal function. He argues that it is not the metaphor itself which integrates the essences of two particulars, but that the use of the metaphor causes one to perceive such an integration.

However, there seem to be some gaps in Davidson's reasoning. For example, if it is true that the meaning of a metaphor is equivalent to its literal meaning, then it cannot account for any metaphorical truth. Instead, they will almost always be false, and only accidentally true[6]. Consider the metaphor, 'the child is a ray of sunshine'. According to Davidson, the meaning of this metaphor is nothing other than what it states. The truth-value for this statement, however, is false. It cannot be true that the child is actually a ray of sunshine.

I argue that metaphor is an undeniably pervasive use of language. As Lycan explains, "few human utterances are entirely free of metaphorical elements. If metaphorical utterances are rarely true, then utterances are rarely true".[7] In other words, Lycan is arguing that by recognizing the frequent and pervasive nature of metaphor, insofar as it is identified in almost every utterance of language, we can then understand that if Davidson is correct, and if most metaphors are false

[5] Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 178.
[6] Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 178.
[7] Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 179.

and most statements include metaphors, then it must follow that most statements are false, or only accidentally true. Thus, in claiming that most utterances are false, or only accidentally true, we have more reason to reject Davidson's view about metaphorical meaning. I argue in agreement with Lycan, that by discussing where and how one might identify a metaphor, we can better understand that they are included in many more of our utterances than we may initially think, and thus, are deserving of necessary discourse.

Black on Metaphorical Meaning

In arguing that metaphors belong strictly to the domain of use, Davidson is also arguing that there exists no structure, or linguistic results that determine that which is metaphorical. Black argues in direct contrast to this claim, in highlighting the structural make-up of metaphors, and how a focus on the relationship between subject and object domains contributes to the metaphorical meaning and can potentially result in novel ideas. He writes, "to call a sentence a metaphor is to say something about its meaning, not about its orthography, its phonetic pattern, or its grammatical form".[8] Black focuses on the interplay between metaphorical structure and function in explaining the meaning of metaphor, rather than explaining the meaning merely through literal translation.

While Black does argue that metaphors are more than just literal translation, he does acknowledge the use of metaphors in place of some equivalent literal expression, which is known as the substitution view of metaphor. For example, consider the statement, (a) "the lecture flew over their head". As Black puts it, "the author substitutes M for L; it is the reader's task to invert the substitution, by using the literal meaning of M as a clue to the intended literal meaning

[8] Black, Max. "XII.—Metaphor." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1955, 276.

of L".[9] So, in the case of our statement (a), we have used the metaphorical expression 'flew over' (or M) as a substitute for some other literal expression (L), with the intent of using the literal meaning of 'flying over something' as a clue to the intended literal meaning of the concept of incomprehension.

While Black and Davidson share some insight on the ways in which metaphors implicitly or explicitly represent a literal translation, Black aims to prove through other views on metaphor, and what I concur with regard to my own argument, that defining metaphor is not as simple as "saying one thing and meaning another".[10] Thus, he introduces the interactive view of metaphor. This view in particular contrasts more with Davidson's interpretation of metaphor, as it introduces the idea of a metaphor creating a similarity between two concepts. While the interactive view implies a development of metaphorical meaning, it can help to illuminate other answers to certain questions, such as whether metaphors themselves function to integrate the salient qualities of one thing with another, or if that process is reliant on other factors, with metaphor used merely as a mechanism for doing so.

Davidson denies that the function of metaphors integrates the salient qualities of one thing with another, while Black affirms such a function. Black writes, "when we use a metaphor, we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction".[11] The key word here is interaction. Black is claiming that the interaction of two words in each metaphorical context involves one term imposing an "extension of meaning" upon the other.[12] There is a necessary connection made here, by the listener or reader, between two distinct ideas that results in metaphorical

[9] Ibid., 280.
[10] Ibid., 280.
[11] Ibid., 285.
[12] Ibid., 286.

meaning. In order to better understand exactly how these ideas interact it is first necessary to distinguish between the two terms, or domains, used in the metaphor.

Consider again the metaphor, 'the child is a ray of sunshine'. The two domains, in this case, include 'the child' as the primary domain, and the 'ray of sunshine' as the secondary domain. Now that we understand exactly what it is in the metaphor that undergoes this kind of interaction, we can develop a better idea of what the interaction itself entails. Black argues that "to speak of the 'interaction' of two thoughts… or…their 'interillumination' or 'co-operation' is to use a metaphor in emphasizing the dynamic aspects of a good reader's response to a non-trivial metaphor".[13] One might argue that this method of understanding metaphor is regressive, as it relies on the use of metaphor itself. How can one adequately explain what a metaphor is if the definition entails a metaphor in itself?

While this is a valid concern, I don't think it takes away from Black's explanation overall. I think it speaks to the pervasiveness of metaphor within language and emphasizes the fundamental and necessary qualities that metaphor provides in understanding language. If one were to argue that because a metaphor is utilized in defining the term itself, then that would consequently discredit any other sorts of explanations of things that rely on the use of metaphor as well. Consider again the hands of a clock. In explaining the clock's function, one (often unknowingly) utilizes a metaphor in doing so. This does not take away from the explanation of the clock's function, but instead, provides a bridge for someone to better understand that explanation. In other words, as the hands of a clock are necessary to the explanation of its function, the use of metaphor is necessary to the explanation of its function as well.

[13] Ibid., 286.

Paraphrase vs. Metaphor

Another important aspect of metaphor that is important to discuss in defining metaphor and building the argument that it provides more than just a literal interpretation, is what a metaphor is not. In *Speech Acts*, John Searle develops a principle that is often brought up in contemporary discourse on the philosophy of language. This principle is known as the Principle of Expressibility, which, in simple terms, refers to the idea that whatever is meant can be said.[14] If one does not agree with Davidson's view that metaphors are merely literal expressions, yet they still deny that there is something special or unique about metaphorical meaning, they tend to rely on the Principle of Expressibility, and argue that whatever is meant in a metaphor can be paraphrased.

To develop my claim for the pervasive and unique nature of metaphor and its meaning, I will be arguing against the idea that metaphors are equivalent to paraphrases, and thus I will be arguing in accordance with Elisabeth Camp, and her discussion on "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi'", specifically the claim on metaphorical importance and the capacity of metaphor to extend our cognitive resources.[15] Camp draws arguments from Black's work to clearly distinguish the difference between metaphors and paraphrases and highlights first, that "the standard for an adequate paraphrase is higher than some have thought…".[16] What Camp highlights in Black's discussion here is that while a paraphrase attempts to capture the content of a metaphor, it does so in a way that directly contrasts the metaphor's unique function: as being able to not only "express such complex contents in so few words", but also to express the rich

[14] Searle, John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011.
[15] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 5.
[16] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 6.

structure among those contents.[17] Thus, a paraphrase, due to its less-compact and less-complex structural nature, cannot be seen as equivalent to a metaphor.

Another argument that is often posed against those who wish to equate paraphrases and metaphors describes the explicit nature of both kinds of language. Davidson himself describes the process of understanding metaphorical meaning as a process to which there is "no end to what we want to mention".[18] While he conclusively denies metaphorical meaning, this hypothetical implies that the content of a metaphor is extensive and implicit. If this conception of metaphor is true, and the content of a paraphrase is not extensive and implicit, then it seems that no paraphrase could adequately substitute a metaphor without a major loss of cognitive content.

Camp discusses an example that effectively highlights these differences between metaphor and paraphrase. The metaphor reads as follows: "when he finally walked out the door, I was left standing on the top of an icy mountain crag, with nothing around me but thin cold air, bare white cliffs, and a blindingly clear blue sky". [19] The way in which one can understand this metaphor and its argued meaning is through the consideration of both the speaker's intent and the hearer's current body of knowledge. Because the analysis of this metaphor is dependent on both speaker and hearer, it seems even more challenging to try to come up with a constant and universal algorithm for determining metaphorical meaning. Even though this is challenging, it does not imply that there exists no meaning.

Camp argues that while it may seem possible to translate this metaphor into a paraphrase, it inevitably runs into some problems. For example, If the metaphor above were translated into a paraphrase, it may read something like this: "I experienced an emotion which is like the physical

[17] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 4.
[18] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 6.
[19] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 11.

feeling of standing on an icy mountain crag…in respects i, j, k…".[20] The problems that arise here, and thus prevent the paraphrase from literally expressing that which is described in the metaphor, have to do with attributing unintended content to the speaker. In the original metaphor, the speaker is not saying anything about the characteristics of "icy crags", nor what it feels like to be standing on one. Instead, the speaker merely utilizes common knowledge about icy crags to characterize her emotion. Thus, the problems the paraphrase runs into—ability to appropriately represent the speaker's meaning and simultaneously respecting the speaker's initial intention— directly counters the argument that metaphors can be paraphrased in fully literal terms.

The problems one faces in trying to explicitly paraphrase a metaphor highlight the unique qualities of metaphors themselves, which includes the inclusion of speaker intent and hearer understanding. Maintaining a focus on this important characteristic of metaphor can help us in trying to better understand and aim to develop as close to an algorithm as possible for understanding metaphorical meaning. I do think, however, that the lack of a clear algorithmic process of understanding metaphor contributes to the open ended and complex nature of metaphor itself, as another characteristic which distinguishes it from paraphrases. Thus, we may not be searching for an explicit algorithm, but more so a metaphorical framework that can aid in the expression and analysis of metaphorical meaning.

Gendered Slurs as Kinds of Metaphor

The discussion of the structural and functional distinctions made between paraphrases and metaphors, specifically the way in which paraphrases express more of an explicit nature than metaphors, leads to important discussion on what and how social or epistemic consequences are

[20] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 12.

involved in using a paraphrase versus a metaphor. This is an especially important question when considering the influence of certain kinds of metaphor, as the nature of metaphor is personally dependent upon both the speaker and hearer in question. An example of a kind of metaphor which I argue requires this necessary analysis includes certain gendered slurs.

It is first necessary to defend the claim that gendered slurs are to be considered a kind of metaphor, before delving into their epistemological impacts. I will be utilizing Katja Plemenitaš work on the "Metaphorical Elements in Gendered Slurs" to solidify this claim. Plemenitaš focuses on the metaphorical meaning of gendered slurs in the English language and argues that the analysis of gendered slurs strongly resembles the analysis of the cognitive concept of metaphor. If we return to Black's discussion of metaphorical structure, we can understand metaphorical meaning as the blending of two conceptual spaces, specifically the interaction between the primary and secondary domains. Plemenitaš refers to the primary domain as the "target" and the secondary domain as the "source".[21] To maintain some parallelism within my argument, I will be using the terms primary and secondary to refer to the distinct domains.

Putting aside the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs for a moment, it is especially important to recognize the implications and effects of the use of derogatory terms, specifically gendered slurs. As Plemenitaš describes, drawing from the work of Charles Mills, "[t]he concept of linguistic sexism has long played an important part in discussions about the general nature of sexism", insofar as it is largely influenced by "larger societal forces, wider institutionalized inequalities of power and ultimately, therefore, conflict of who has rights to certain positions and resources". [22]

[21] Plemenitaš, Katja. "Metaphorical Elements in Gendered Slurs". *British and American Studies; Timisoara.* West University of Timisoara, vol. 23, 2017, 207.
[22] Plemenitaš, Katja. "Metaphorical Elements in Gendered Slurs", 208.

While the definition of a slur is often hard to express, as its derogatory connotations vary, there does seem to be a unifying and potentially problematic feature of slurs, insofar as the process of defining a slur includes the consideration of the neutral counterpart that correlates with the slur. The neutral counterpart of a slur represents the word that may be used to refer to the same group or individual but does not convey any derogatory connotations. For example, a neutral counterpart for the word f***ot would be a man who is homosexual. According to current literature, the neutral counterpart is tethered to the slur, and a slur is often defined in terms of this counterpart. This is especially true for the pragmatic analyses of slurs, which argue that a slur and its neutral counterpart are semantically equal. In other words, the pragmatic view argues that a slur makes the same truth-conditional contribution as its neutral counterpart.

Relying on the existence of the relationship between a slur and its neutral counterpart in explaining the offensiveness of a slur, however, leads to some problems. Throughout this discussion, I have referred to gendered pejoratives as gendered slurs, but by investigating current definitions on slurs, it seems that paradigmatic gendered pejoratives lack a (supposedly necessary) neutral correlate. Neutral correlates are terms that are similarly directed towards a target group, but do not have the same derogating quality as a slur. If neutral correlates are a necessary component of slurs, and gendered slurs do not have neutral correlates, does this mean that words like "bitch", or "slut" are not considered slurs?

Lauren Ashwell highlights these problems in her article "Gendered Slurs". She explains that the "existence–or even possible existence–of such a neutral correlate is not essential for a term to be a slur", and this can be recognized in cases of gendered pejoratives.[23] Importantly, "there are uses of racial slurs that clearly operate in the same way" because gendered pejoratives

[23] Ashwell, Lauren. "Gendered Slurs." *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, 229.

and racial slurs both target a subordinate group or individual.[24] This supports the overall claims that gendered pejoratives *are* to be considered slurs, despite the lack of a neutral counterpart, that the words are insulting to even those who are not targeted by them, and that the developed definitions for racial or ethnic slurs should be re-evaluated to provide a more inclusive representation of slurs overall.

One connection between metaphor and gendered slurs, is that both concepts are especially societally pervasive and inextricably intertwined with levels of power. As discussed earlier, dead metaphors, for example, are a clear representation of the pervasive nature of metaphor, as they can become so deeply ingrained in everyday language. Gendered slurs, on the other hand, express this pervasiveness and explication of power through the "relations of dominance they help establish" and help to maintain.[25]

The central point of connection between metaphor and gendered slurs as Plemenitaš describes however, revolves around their respective cognitive analyses. Drawing from Black's interactive view on metaphor, metaphorical meaning is constructed from "two thoughts of different things" being "active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is the resultant of their interaction".[26] Plemenitaš would refer to these "two thoughts" as the primary and secondary domains, and to this kind of "interaction" as the act of conceptual blending.

She continues to highlight this notion of conceptual blending as consisting of two specific kinds of correspondences between domains. First, there exist ontological correspondences that "hold between elements of one domain and the elements of the other domain". Secondly, there

[24] Ashwell, Lauren. "Gendered Slurs.", 229.
[25] Plemenitaš, Katja. "Metaphorical Elements in Gendered Slurs", 209.
[26] Black, Max. "XII.—Metaphor.", 285.

exist epistemological correspondences between the "relations holding between elements in one domain and the relations between elements in the other domain".[27] In other words, the conceptual blending of two domains is not limited merely to their relation to each other as distinct domains, but also importantly considers the relations between the specific qualities of each domain itself. For example, if one were to examine the metaphor, 'the child is a ray of sunshine', in order to decipher the metaphorical meaning of this statement, one would have to not only consider how a child is related to a ray of sunshine, but also the different epistemological relations between the specific qualities of the child (being joyful, having a cheerful attitude, etc.) and the epistemological relations between the specific qualities of the ray of sunshine (being extremely bright, warm, etc.).

Thus, Plemenitaš applies this framework of conceptual blending between domains of metaphor to examples of common gendered slurs. Specifically, she utilizes this framework when considering the slur, *bitch* as presented in the table below.

woman	**bitch (female dog)**
female of humans	female of dogs
sexually mature	sexually mature
aggressive in social behaviour, trying too hard	aggressive in physical behaviour, biting
unpredictable, irrational	unpredictable, instinctual
controlling (in conversation, career)	controlling (over her young)
overly vulgar, sexually available	ready to mate, in heat

As we can see from this table, there exist multiple ontological correspondences between the terms *woman* and *bitch*, where *woman* is the primary domain and *bitch* is the secondary domain. One example of such an ontological correspondence between *woman* and *bitch* includes the epistemological correspondence between 'female of humans' and 'female of dogs'.

[27] Plemenitaš, Katja. "Metaphorical Elements in Gendered Slurs", 210.

Pleminitaš's cognitive framework, however, may run into some problems depending on certain context. She claims that there exists an epistemological correspondence of aggression between a woman and a female dog. If we understand 'bitch' to be used in a context of phrases like, "that woman is a bitch", then these epistemological correspondences seem to remain intact, as one could understand that phrase, according to the relevant ontological correspondences between a woman and a dog, as saying, "that woman is aggressive". However, if this context changes, to a phrase like, "she's my bitch", the epistemological correspondence of aggression no longer seems to hold.

This concern highlights important worry about the relevance and applicability of certain epistemological correspondences between domains. However, with respect to the example, "she's my bitch", despite its contextual differences, the word 'bitch' still emcompasses its original qualities as seen in the table. The possessive context does not make any epistemological correspondences less relevant than others, but, in fact, sheds light on another kind of correspondence between a woman and a female dog, perhaps, the characteristic of being objectified, or seen as a kind of personal property.

Another example of a common gendered slur to which Pleminitaš applies this conceptual framework, is the word 'feminazi', as presented in the table below.

woman	**Nazi**
follower of feminist ideology	follower of Nazi ideology
violently seeking social dominance over men	violently seeking social dominance over Jews and other marginalized groups
imposing feminist views on others	imposing fascist ideology on others
claiming total control of the discussion	claiming total control of the state
taking away spiritual freedom	taking away physical life
blaming men for everything	blaming Jews for everything
having abortions/killing babies	killing Jews
humorless, serious in appearance	strict, military in appearance

As we can see from this table, similarly to the word ‘bitch’, there exist multiple ontological correspondences between the terms *woman* and *Nazi*, where *woman* is the primary domain and *Nazi* is the secondary domain. One example of such an ontological correspondence between *woman* and *Nazi* includes the epistemological correspondence between a ‘follower of feminist ideology’ and a ‘follower of Nazi ideology’.

Other gendered slurs, however, don’t seem to fit as clearly into the cognitive analysis that resembles that of a metaphor. For example, consider the gendered slur ‘slut’. It is undeniable that the slur is targeted towards women, insinuating sexual activity as being a defining characteristic of the value of women. It is unclear though, that a ‘slut’ typically refers to anything other than a derogatory remark targeted towards women. Thus, it seems that there aren’t any metaphorical associations between the terms ‘woman’ and ‘slut’.

However, ‘slut’ “didn’t begin as a bad word–or a word for women at all” but was used by Chaucer in referring to a sloppy masculine character as “sluttish” in the Canterbury Tales.[28] Because of its history as a term that doesn’t directly translate to the current meaning of the word, it is then possible to consider the metaphorical nature of ‘slut’ as a dead metaphor. Again, a dead metaphor is a term that now means literally what it used to mean metaphorically. By maintaining awareness of the potential for terms to be considered dead metaphors, and thus have the capacity to be analyzed according to their metaphorical nature, we can utilize this metaphorical framework to discuss and reveal important epistemological impacts that certain gendered slurs maintain.

Overall, Plemenitaš clearly emphasizes the strong resemblance between the analysis of metaphor and gendered slurs, specifically that both kinds of language share the conceptual

[28] Bennett, Jessica. “Monica Lewinsky and Why the Word Slut Is Still so Potent.” *Time*, Time, 20 Mar. 2015, https://time.com/3752821/monica-lewinsky-ted2015-slut-play/.

blending of the correspondences of and between primary and secondary domains. We can thus confidently draw from these common analyses, that gendered slurs can be recognized as kinds of metaphor.

Keeping the distinctions that we have made between paraphrase and metaphor in mind, consider an example to solidify this discussion:

A) "That woman is a bitch."

B) "That woman is like a bitch, with respect to her aggression and irrational behavior."

What is the difference between these two statements? In this case, it seems that the implicit nature of A seems less obvious, while the nature of B seems more obvious. In saying that a woman is like a bitch, with respect to certain qualities, is like saying that one "experienced an emotion which is like the physical feeling of standing on an icy mountain crag…in respects i, j, k…", going back to Camp's previous example.[29] The problem here, as explained earlier, is the attribution of unintended content unto the speaker. In A, the speaker is not saying anything about the nature of a bitch, nor characteristics of what resembles a bitch. Instead, as the speaker does so with the concept of icy crags, in this case, the speaker utilizes common knowledge about 'bitches' to characterize their opinion. The characteristics and assumptions about a 'bitch' do not necessarily have to be true for the metaphor to make sense (which is what the paraphrased translation pre-supposes). But rather, the interpretation is dependent upon the shared common knowledge between speaker and hearer, and their respective characterizations of relevant phenomena having to do with a 'bitch', which seems undoubtedly more complex to pin down and define.

[29] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 12.

While this example helps to highlight the difference in the level of structural complexity between paraphrase and metaphor, that is, that paraphrases do not involve nearly as strong of a dependence on the speaker or hearer as do metaphors, this is not to say that paraphrases are void of anything having to do with the speaker and hearer. A paraphrase is successfully uttered necessarily involving both speaker and hearer, insofar as the speaker is using known characteristics about one concept, p, in the effort to describe another concept, q, and the hearer is responsible for drawing a connection between those characteristics of p and q. The difference in the case of metaphor, however, is the lack of the conceptual characteristics of p, which give the reader a starting point for making connections between p and q. The use of metaphor involves a more complex and less specific connective responsibility for the hearer when making connections between the two concepts. This speaks to the discussion on the implicit nature of metaphors. The connective points, or the characteristics implied about p, are not explicit, and thus leave the hearer to develop a different understanding of q, one which is not based on the implied characteristics.

Another distinguishing quality of metaphor that is worth important discussion is its concise contextual nature of expression and focus on emphasis. Consider another example of paraphrase and metaphor:

C) “The sad story ripped the woman apart.”

D) “The sad story made the woman feel a way that resembles being ripped apart.”

Not only is C literally expressed in fewer words, but there also seems to be an important point of distinction of concision regarding the placement of emphasis. In the first statement, the emphasis is placed directly on the action of the woman being ripped apart. In the second statement, however, the emphasis seems to be placed on the way that resembles being ripped

apart. While this difference may not seem as important in many utterances of paraphrases and metaphor, the difference does exist, and it is especially important to consider when discussing gendered derogatory slurs, and their epistemological impacts. Consider again the example raised before the last, where A is the statement: “The woman is a bitch”, and where B is the statement: “The woman is like a bitch, with respect to her aggression and irrational behavior”. If we analyze these statements in a similar matter as the previous ones, we can understand that in the first statement, the emphasis is placed directly on the word ‘bitch’, directly relating to the ‘woman’, whereas in the second statement, the emphasis is placed instead on that which is ‘like a bitch’, or the ways in which the ‘woman’ is related to that which is ‘like a bitch’. This distinction, between the concision and emphatic natures of gendered slurs and paraphrase, importantly highlights their distinctive linguistic powers.

Overall, the resemblances between important qualities of both metaphor and gendered slurs so far can be recognized in their similar cognitive analyses. By recognizing and accepting this relationship, one can then draw more connections between metaphor and gendered slurs, especially the ways in which gendered slurs, as a kind of metaphor, also are structurally and cognitively different from a paraphrased version of that metaphor. By developing and defending the arguments for the existence of metaphorical meaning, the distinction between metaphor and paraphrase, and the distinction between gendered slurs and paraphrase, one can then understand how certain gendered slurs can be recognized as a kind of metaphor.

Chapter Two

Gendered Slurs, Metaphors, and Linguistic Power

It's now important to note exactly what is meant when talking about the epistemic influence of gendered slurs and metaphors. It is undoubted that gendered slurs have a distinct impact on oneself, compared to general language. For example, it is obvious that there exists an important difference between a statement in which someone states, "she is an angry person" versus a statement such as "she is a bitch". While it may be true that these statements are drawing upon similar qualities having to do with the woman as the subject, they do seem to exhibit distinct qualities. Here, we will investigate the questions of how to define linguistic power, explore examples of linguistic power, such as linguistic dominance, and investigate the ways in which gendered slurs, as a kind of linguistic sexism, reinforce the problematic promotion of androcentrism throughout the English language. We will then discuss the epistemological effects of engaging with an androcentric language. More specifically, we will discuss the epistemological influence that the use of gendered slurs has upon its targets, and how the use of this kind of sexist language can constitute instances of injustice.

Trying to define exactly what linguistic power represents, or what kinds of "powers" that language may consist of, may prove to be a challenging and overly broad task. One way to try and make sense of what linguistic power entails is to recognize different uses of language, and what effects these particular uses have upon oneself, and one another. For example, let us explore the ways in which certain kinds of language help particular groups and members of society establish and maintain dominance over others.

Kathryn Accurso clearly defines linguistic dominance as "a social process in which different languages have come to be assigned different levels of importance, such that one

language and its speakers carry higher social and political status than others". [30] Linguistic dominance can also be used to describe the specific ways in which certain kinds of language are used to maintain status and power structures.

For example, consider Standard American English (SAE), a language that is dominant within many countries, and because of this, the use of SAE reflects a powerful social standing and level of privilege. The dominant position of SAE is especially highlighted when considering other less dominant American-English dialects, such as African American English and Southern American English. As Accurso points out, "[i]n addition to class information, ideas about race, intellect, and ability have also been deliberately linked to language in the United States, such that certain speakers must struggle for recognition while others enjoy a broader audience".[31] What Accurso is pointing out here is that not only does linguistic dominance reflect the prevalence of one language over another in a given context, but also, and especially, the ways in which a particular language or dialect's prevalence simultaneously contributes to the preservation of white middle-class dominance, as well as the silencing and subordination of others who do not utilize that particular dialect. [32]

My conception of linguistic dominance shares the same subordinating qualities that Accurso provides, yet the focus on language I aim to emphasize here has to do with consideration of the individual words used within a language, and even within specific dialects.[33]

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[30] Accurso, Kathryn. "Language Dominance/ Linguistic Dominance." *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice,* 2015, 656.
[31] Accurso, Kathryn. "Language Dominance/ Linguistic Dominance.", 657.
[32] Terms such as "speaker" or "utterance" are intended to be inclusive of non-spoken languages as well such as written communication and sign-language.
[33] It is important to understand the comparisons in status that exist between dialects, and those that exist between words. How the status of a particular person is socially governed according to their dialect, for example, obviously may contribute to their status that is socially governed according to their words.

I will refer to this narrowed down idea of linguistic dominance within the English language as intra-linguistic dominance. I will begin by providing some concrete examples of sexist intra-linguistic dominance–false gender-neutrality and sex marking– and discussing their respective epistemic consequences–invisibility of women and encoding of androcentric worldviews. After discussing the epistemological consequences that these forms of linguistic sexism present, I will then be utilizing the characteristic of status preservation that is central to the idea of intra-linguistic dominance and will be exploring the ways in which gendered slurs perpetuate the same kind of power structure as recognized in the discussed cases of linguistic sexism. The use of gendered slurs, I argue, is not only a form of linguistic sexism, but clearly presents the same status promoting mechanism that is recognized in intra-linguistic dominance.

A specific and relevant example of intra-linguistic dominance is linguistic sexism. Ivy and Backlund develop an important definition of linguistic sexism, based on the definition of sexism in general. They write, "*sexism* is attitudes and/or behavior that denigrate one sex to the exaltation of the other. From this definition, it follows that *sexist language* would be verbal communication that conveys those differential attitudes or behavior".[34] In the effort to develop and socially maintain androcentric dominance, linguistic sexism can be recognized in different forms across various contexts. In discussing examples of linguistic sexism which include false gender-neutrality and sex-marking, that result in problematic epistemic consequences upon the targets of that language, I will also be arguing for the consideration of gendered slurs as a kind of linguistic sexism and will do so by drawing relevant connections between the use of gendered slurs and other kinds of linguistic sexism such as false gender neutrality and sex marking. After

[34] Ivy, Diana K., and Phil Backlund. *Genderspeak: Personal Effectiveness in Gender Communication*. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2008, 72.

highlighting these connections, I will then discuss the epistemological consequences that these specific kinds of sexist language have upon their targets.

A common example of linguistic sexism in everyday English language can be recognized in the use of masculine generic terms or pronouns to function as gender-neutral pronouns. For example, consider the following four statements.[35]

1. He drank the wine.
2. A man went into a bar.
3. When a student comes into the room, he should pick up a handout.
4. Man is a primate.

According to these statements, it appears true that masculine gender-specific pronouns (as seen in statements 1 and 2) can fill in for the gender-neutral application of pronouns (as seen in statements 3 and 4). However, the grammatical correctness of these statements does not assume that these particular pronouns can actually be considered *both* gender-specific and gender-neutral. Some counterexamples to the statements above, as put forth by Adele Mercier and Janice Moulton include the following:[36]

a. Man has two sexes; some men are female.
b. Man breastfeeds his young.

In the statements *a* and *b,* the use of "man" (as used in statements 3 and 4), is meant to express gender neutrality. However, especially because of the given context, the statements are "making a classificatory error", insofar as they utilize (supposedly) gender-neutral pronouns to refer

[35] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 21 Aug. 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language/.
[36] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language." https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language/.

"exclusively to persons known to be female".[37] Not only is this problematic insofar as it misgenders a group of self-identified women, but it also further promotes the problematic exclusion of intersex and gender non-conforming people in language. This analysis, although it importantly highlights the incomprehensible nature of the use of 'man' as a supposedly gender-neutral pronoun when referring to a group of people, it does not effectively address any problems with statements 3 and 4, as those are used in reference to a combination of people with different genders, rather than one group in particular. As Saul explains, there is nothing in fact "wrong with the actual uses of the term in question", and that "further reasons are needed in order to object to the use that is made of these terms".[38]

In the effort to provide this further reasoning, I will argue that the consequential impacts of using masculine pronouns in replacement of gender-neutral pronouns contributes to other notable forms of misrepresentation and oppression, such as the promoted invisibility of genders other than men.

Before addressing the other kinds of epistemological effects of false gender neutrality however, I will first discuss another example of linguistic sexism, known as sex-marking, which also poses oppressive epistemological and psychological consequences upon non-masculine genders.

Sex-marking, according to Marilyn Frye, is a way in which sexist behaviors manifest within linguistics.[39] Not only are gendered-pronouns considered a prime example of the ways in which one can attempt to identify someone else's gender, but their use coincides with a "constant

[37] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language.".
[38] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language.".
[39] It is important to note here, that I am taking Frye's use of the term 'sex' in 'sex-marking' as intended to refer to gender. I still aim to emphasize the importance of distinctions between sex and gender and will understand Frye's framework according to gender in order to provide more inclusive, contemporary, and representative terminology.

and urgent need to know or be able to guess the sex of every single person with whom one has the slightest or most remote contact of interaction".[40] While the use of gender-specific pronouns contribute to this insatiable desire to mark (correctly or incorrectly) someone by their gender, this is not to take away from the fact that gender-specific pronouns do provide ways in which individuals can understand and express their own identities and lived experiences.

In highlighting the pervasive ways in which one's gender is taken to be at the forefront of most discussions, whether these discussions have anything to do with gender, through the use of gender-specific pronouns, for example, Frye is describing the ways in which this hyper-identification of gender contributes to the perpetuation of androcentric dominance. Furthermore, as expressed by Saul, "male dominance requires the belief that men and women are importantly different from each other, so anything that contributes to the impression that sex differences are so important is therefore a contributor to male dominance".[41] The contribution sex-marking makes to the perpetuation of this kind of dominance clarifies the practice of sex-marking as a form of linguistic sexism.

As we reflect on the defining characteristics of false gender neutrality and sex marking as clear examples of linguistic sexism, it is important to understand exactly what these kinds of language have in common, in order to understand why and how the use of gendered slurs is to be considered a kind of linguistic sexism as well. We can identify specific resemblances between gendered slurs and linguistic sexism when considering the epistemic effects of the utilization of false gender neutrality and sex marking. Before discussing in detail what these epistemic effects are, I will map out where this discussion will go. First, it can be recognized in both cases of the use of false gender neutrality and gendered slurs, that the targets of that particular language are

[40] Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Crossing Press, 2007, 22.
[41] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language.".

likely to experience a sense of invisibility. Secondly, insofar as sex marking promotes the encodement of androcentric worldviews upon its targets, the same can be recognized within the use of gendered slurs.

Let us discuss the epistemic influences of false gender neutrality and sex marking, draw connections between these particular kinds of sexist language and the use of gendered slurs, and use these resemblances to bolster the argument that gendered slurs are to be considered a serious and important kind of linguistic sexism.

When we understand the ways in which sexism embeds itself within a society's use of language, we can then better comprehend the epistemological impacts that these linguistic qualities have on members of that society, and how sexist language affects one's own comprehension of reality. As mentioned briefly before, the consequential and epistemological impacts of using masculine pronouns in replacement of gender-neutral pronouns contribute to the promoted invisibility of genders other than masculine. Similarly, it seems that the consequential and epistemological impacts of sex-marking also contribute to the promoted invisibility of non-masculine genders as well as maintaining problematic encoding of androcentric worldviews within language.

Thus, we can come to understand specific kinds of linguistic sexism–false gender neutrality and sex-marking– as having various and substantial epistemological effects– invisibility of non-masculine genders and encoding of androcentric worldviews– on those involved in any way with the language being used. Firstly, the invisibility of non-mascluine genders is promoted through the use of false gender-neutral pronouns. Invisibility, in these cases, refers to "obscuring women's importance, and distracting attention from their existence".[42] More

[42] Ibid.

specifically, in using the terms ‘he’ in a supposedly gender-neutral manner not only obviously prioritizes the masculine gender, but does so while limiting women and other genders from understanding and applying the statement representatively and inclusively. By not being able to identify oneself within a statement that is meant to express something about society as a whole in a gender-neutral manner, it seems extremely challenging then, for someone to make sense of themselves as a member of society when the gender-neutrality is false. For example, re-consider statements 3 and 4.

3. When a student comes into the room, he should pick up a handout.

4. Man is a primate.

In these cases, the supposedly gender-neutral terms “he” and “man” used in these statements can be understood equivalently through other statements. More specifically, according to the intended gender-neutrality of statements 3, these statements can be understood in the same ways as the following statements 3a and 4a.

3a. When a student comes into the room, the student should pick up a handout.

4a. A human is a primate.

This proves problematic for those who do not identify with masculine terminology, as it places a non-masculine identifying audience member in a place that only is representative of the masculine gender, which consequently renders them and their own experiences as invisible to other audience members. In other words, if a woman student were to understand and make sense of statement 3, it remains unclear, and even incorrect for that woman to pick up a handout, as she is not recognized as a student in that particular case by herself, the speaker, or the audience. However, if a woman student were to understand and make sense of statement 3a, there would be no case in which the woman may fail to identify as a student, since the required action of the

student is not predicated upon their gender, and thus those who do not identify with the masculine-gender are not rendered invisible to themselves or others.

In the case of statement 4, similar issues arise. Although the statement itself is entirely true, it is only true if it is explicitly referring to only the masculine gender. If the statement is used to express something about a group of people *despite* their gender, it seems then that the statement is not only false, but that it simultaneously excludes the possibility of people of other genders to fully understand their personal situatedness within a classification of primates, as well as the possibility for people to recognize non-masculine gendered people as primates.

The second important epistemological effect upon people who are targets of linguistic sexism includes the problematic encodement of the androcentric worldview within everyday uses of language, concepts, and knowledge in general. Encoding of the androcentric worldview refers to the use of words in the effort to promote androcentric ideas as being universal. Such a promotion often results in the ideas having to do with non-masculine genders as again, invisible, or lesser than. In other words, the idea that some terms encode an androcentric worldview refers to the ways in which "certain terms seem to divide the world up in a way that is more natural for men than for women".[43] When considering Frye's concept of sex-marking, and the constantly explicit designation of gender upon others, we can better understand the ways in which this hyper-identification of gender contributes to the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance, and consequently encodes an androcentric perspective of the world in our language. An example of sex-marking includes the distinctions made between one's career title, based on their gender. Consider the following statements referring to a particular moment in time:

X. The manager called all the waiters to the back.

[43] Ibid.

Y. The manager called all the waiters to the back, leaving the waitresses to serve the tables.

In statement X, the term ‘waiters’ is used to describe all serving staff members, despite their gender identity. In statement Y, the same term is used to describe only masculine gendered people. Not only does the use of the term “waiter” similarly render all female staff members invisible, as seen in X, but it also promotes the dominance of staff members who identify as men, and the encodement of the word as referring to the masculine gender, despite the fact that there exist non-cis men within the staff, as seen in Y.

There is also something important to be said about the development of gendered kinds of the same word. Examples of these other than waiter and waitress include words like master and mistress, steward and stewardess, policeman and policewoman, and many others. It seems that these gendered distinctions fail to account for non-binary or non-gender conforming people. It also seems that by highlighting the distinction in career titles depending on one’s gender identity, while using the masculine-gendered version in the universal sense, these gendered distinctions blatantly separate the singular career into two or more subcategories, where the dominant one is encoded as masculine.

From this discussion, we can conclude with a more specific understanding of linguistic sexism as a form of verbal communication which expresses sexist ideals by an examination of examples of this type of communication such as the use of false gender neutrality and sex marking. We can also recognize that these linguistic indicators of sexism do not merely perpetuate sexist ideals, but they also perpetuate the ways in which such ideals affect one’s understanding of themselves, of the world, and of knowledge in general. I argue that the use of gendered slurs does the same.

I argue that the resemblance of the epistemic consequences of both the provided examples of sexist language and gendered slurs clearly categorizes the use of gendered slurs as a form of linguistic sexism, and that the use of gendered slurs utilizes the same power and status preserving mechanism that is central to the concept of intra-linguistic dominance. We can understand the use of gendered slurs as a form of linguistic sexism, and as a perpetuator of intra-linguistic dominance by looking at the ways in which the overall concept of gendered slurs fits into the definition of both linguistic sexism and intra-linguistic dominance. Furthermore, we can and will continue to classify gendered slurs as a serious kind of sexist language by examining the resemblances within the epistemic consequences of previously discussed forms of linguistic sexism and those from the use of gendered slurs.

It is important now to question the role of gendered slurs, specifically. What is it about gendered slurs that is responsible for negatively impacting one's social and personal identity? The purpose of this next section is to explore in detail these distinct qualities of gendered slurs and how these specific characteristics produce harmful epistemic effects upon their targets.

One way in which we can go about arguing for the recognition of a gendered slurs' oppressive epistemic impact upon its target is by comparing the use of slurs to our previously discussed definitions and examples of intra-linguistic dominance and sexism. I will first look at the ways in which gendered slurs fit into our definitions of linguistic sexism and intra-linguistic dominance, in the effort to show that the examples we talk about correspond to our understanding of forms of linguistic oppression. Secondly, I will highlight the ways in which the use of gendered slurs can result in the same epistemic consequences we have discussed to result from the use of false gender neutrality and sex marking. These consequences are recognized as having to result from a slur's derogating and subordinating capacities. The general idea here is to

draw a comparison between the use of gendered slurs and other kinds of sexist language, in the effort to highlight the severity and importance of understanding the damaging consequences that the use of gendered slurs has upon their targets.

The overall concept of gendered slurs fits into our definitions of linguistic sexism and intra-linguistic dominance, in order to highlight their problematic effects upon their targets. Let us return back to our definition of linguistic sexism as "verbal communication" which communicates sexist "differential attitudes or behavior".[44] As discussed earlier, gendered slurs are used to express an offensive and oppressive attitude towards a particular target group. For example, in calling someone a "bitch", one is engaging with a salient and oppressive metaphorical association between a woman and someone who is aggressive, a quality that is not often comprehended in a positive manner. It becomes clearer now that gendered slurs, insofar as they promote and convey problematic ideals, sexist normativities, and offensive "attitudes" which take the form of verbal communication, that slurs are to be considered a specific and important type of linguistic sexism.

Let us also return to the definition of linguistic dominance as "a social process in which different languages have come to be assigned different levels of importance, such that one language and its speakers carry higher social and political status than others".[45] We can begin to visualize the ways in which gendered slurs fit into this definition by understanding the role gendered slurs play in establishing and upholding certain levels of power and status within one language and potentially throughout different languages. Our concept of intra-linguistic dominance is responsible for mapping out the discrepancies of the levels of power and status between kinds of language usage within a particular language overall. Gendered slurs, on the

[44] Ivy, Diana K., and Phil Backlund. *Genderspeak: Personal Effectiveness in Gender Communication*., 72.
[45] Accurso, Kathryn. "Language Dominance/ Linguistic Dominance.", 656.

other hand, are specific kinds of language which not only function to express offensive attitudes, but also govern how and where these measurements of status are distributed.

For example, in calling a woman a 'bitch', a speaker simultaneously designates the status of the target of their language as being aggressive or controlling, and themselves as being situated at a separate and higher status than that of their target. Elizabeth Camp's discussion on perspectivalism nicely highlights these designations of social status among users and targets of slurs. Overall, Camp's discussion on slurring perspectives is centered around the argument that slurs work to "conventionally signal a speaker's allegiance to a *derogating perspective* on the group identified by the slur's extension-determining core".[46] In other words, Camp highlights that the offensive nature of slurs, and their derogating qualities are to be recognized in the perspectives held by the speaker of the slur. Slurs develop this kind of derogating power because they "signal an allegiance" to a perspective about the target group, and in doing so, simultaneously commit to the ideologies associated with that perspective. Thus, if we recognize this "signal of allegiance" by a speaker as a way in which a speaker commits to a specific level of power or status, which upholds a derogatory perspective upon the target group.

In offensively categorizing a target, the speaker of a slur concurrently categorizes themself as a promoter of that perspective. This perspective does not fit into other accounts of slurs, such as an expressivist view, which takes the offensive nature of a slur to be centered around the explosive nature of the slur itself. However, by focusing on the slur's ability to present a particular perspective, the explosive nature of that slur does not go unaccounted for and can actually further contribute to the upholding of the problematic perspective whose engagement with is the central source of a slur's derogating capacities.

[46] Camp, Elisabeth. "Slurring Perspectives." *Analytic Philosophy*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2013, 331.

As we have recognized prior, the use of false gender neutrality in language tends to highlight the experiences and identities of the masculine gender, while rendering the experiences and identities of women and other genders invisible. I argue that this epistemic effect can also be recognized within the use of gendered slurs. In the case of false gender neutrality, those who do not identify with the masculine pronouns he/him/his, are limited in their ability to recognize themselves within the given statement.

Consider again the statement: 'When a student comes into the room, he should pick up a handout'. If I, for example, as a self-identified young woman and student, am on the receiving end of this statement, I will only clearly identify with the first clause. I will not comprehend the second clause as explicitly, since the targets of that suggestion are categorized by masculine pronouns only. In sum, by disguising a supposedly gender-neutral pronoun behind a masculine one essentially render people who do not use masculine pronouns invisible. The use of gendered slurs proves to have the same effect.

The use of slurs can be recognized to promote this kind of invisibility by taking a closer look at its specific mechanisms. As the use of a false gender-neutral pronoun contributes to the dismissal and exclusion of non-masculine genders, slurs similarly contribute to this dismissal and exclusion by means of expressing derogating, subordinating, and generalizing powers unto their targets. It is important to note the kind of invisibility we are discussing here, as some gendered slurs are meant to emphasize and promote the hyper-visualization of gender. In the case of gendered slurs, invisibility refers to the lack of a target's control in their self-identification process, whereas invisibility in the case of false gender neutrality is used to describe the invisibility of the target's social identity more generally. Quill Kukla provides an extensive discussion on how slurs interact with particular ideologies, and within this discussion, gives

important reasoning as to why and how slurs can cue and strengthen problematic ideologies. This reasoning is centered around the consideration of slurs as a kind of interpellation, in which a slur functions to "reduce its target to a *generic* identity and *derogates* and *subordinates* its target".[47] Let us focus on these characteristics of slurs which Kukla provides: their mechanisms of generalization, derogation, and subordination, and draw connections between these characteristics and the epistemic influences of recognized forms of linguistic sexism.

According to Kukla, slurs are interpellations which derogate insofar as they "recognize someone as having an abject or lesser identity".[48] Keeping the logic of Kukla's definition of ideology in mind, we can also then understand these derogating capabilities as inhering "'naturally' in the person's character rather than being a contingent product of social relations", which also importantly highlights the pervasiveness and prevalence of slurs throughout language.[49] The connection I am making here, which bolsters the idea that gendered slurs contribute to the invisibility of non-masculine genders, is found in the resemblance between recognizing "someone as having an abject or lesser identity" and promoting someone or some target group as being invisible.

Kukla provides an example and discussion of the slur "redneck" to ground the idea of how a slur is used to recognize or subject someone to a "lesser identity". They write, "[c]alling someone 'underpaid' is not a slur, because it refers to their location in a system of social relations. But calling someone a 'redneck' is, as it recognizes them as inherently suited to occupy various derogated and economically disadvantaged social roles because of who they *really are*".[50] Here, Kukla is highlighting the specifically derogating effects that a slur presents, in

[47] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 56, 2018, 7.
[48] Ibid., 20.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

contrast to a word which is not a slur, and rests the distinction upon the fact that the slur is involved in governing the social roles that the target identifies with, while the non-slur merely *refers* to the position of the target in a system of social roles.

Let us try to identify this application of derogation in the case of a gendered slur. For example, calling someone "aggressive" is not considered a slur, as it merely refers to their emotional expression (amongst other things). Calling someone a "bitch", however, similarly identifies the target's aggressive characteristic, but also works to recognize the target as being inherently suited to present aggressive qualities. In other words, the slur not only illustrates the location of a target within a system of social relations, but it also is responsible for governing which social role it is that a person sees themselves as within that system of social relations.

Another mechanism in which slurs cue and strengthen problematic ideologies, as noted by Kukla, is through subordination. Kukla argues that slurs "exercise power by positioning the interpellator above the one interpellated on some sort of hierarchy, at least locally".[51] And, as discussed by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt later on, Kukla similarly argues that the use of slurs "not only *reflects* but *constitutes* a kind of subordinating speech".[52] At first glance, derogation and subordination seem quite similar, as instances of derogation often involve a process of subordination, and vice versa. However, in the case of slurs, the distinction importantly lies in the idea that derogation is a negative classification of a target's identity, while subordination is the placement of that negatively classified identity in relation to the identity of the speaker of the slur.

Let's return to a statement using false gender neutrality:

"When a student comes into the room, he should pick up a handout.

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 20-21.

In this case, not only does disguising a supposedly gender-neutral pronoun behind a masculine one essentially renders people who do not use masculine pronouns invisible, but it simultaneously positions those people at a lower status in relation to those who identify with the pronouns 'he'. In not having the ability to identify with a direction from an authoritative speaker, not only are those people made to fail in recognizing themselves as part of a larger group and complete the relevant task of picking up a 'handout', but they are also positioned in a way which deems them as less important, and at a lower status than both the teacher and those who are able to identify with the statement, and thus complete the task. This same kind of subordinating quality can be seen in the uses of gendered slurs.

For example, in calling someone a "bitch", the slur derogates its target insofar as the target is now recognized by the speaker as assuming an identity associated with that which is a 'bitch', and the slur subordinates its target insofar as the target is now recognized by the speaker as being at a lower, less important position than that of the speaker.[53] Put simply, if someone said to another, "you are a bitch", they are derogating the target of that slur by identifying them with a negative association, and they are subordinating the target of that slur by making it clear that the negative association which they are classifying the target with is to be understood as a less powerful and hierarchically lower social role than that of speaker.

Thus, we can come to understand a slur's derogating and subordinating capacities as a reflection of the epistemic consequences associated with various cases of linguistic sexism: the promoted invisibility of women.

Let us now try to draw more connections between the epistemic effects of sexist language and the epistemic effects of gendered slurs. As both uses of false gender neutrality and gendered

[53] The derogation and subordination of the target can be recognized by others, not only the speaker.

slurs result in the promotion of invisibility of their subjects and targets, we can also find that uses of sex-marking and gendered slurs both result in the encodement of the androcentric worldview. To recognize this connection, consider the examples of sex-marking alluded to before, such as the unnecessary and arbitrarily designated career titles that are designated based on gender. These examples include terms such as "policeman" and "policewoman", "waiter" and "waitress", as well as other examples which often go unrecognized as instances of sex-marking, yet explicitly highlight the problematic delegation of meaning as a result of sexist ideologies, such as "master" and "mistress".

As we have discussed previously, the use of gendered kinds of the same words, such as "waiter" and "waitress", or "policeman" and "policewoman" separates the singular career into two or more subcategories, where the dominant one is encoded as masculine. In recognizing the unnecessary classification of gender between the same career, Frye takes this to be an "instance of a general tendency to make sex relevant where it need not be, which she takes to be a key feature of sexism".[54] Furthermore, by making these distinctions relevant, we are simultaneously perpetuating patriarchal norms and dominant ideologies. So, how can the encodement of androcentric worldviews, as recognized in these examples, be similarly recognized as an effect of the use of gendered slurs?

In order to answer this question, we can turn to another defining mechanism of slurs which Kukla provides: a slur's reduction of its target into an "instance of that identity–as interchangeable with any other member of the group".[55] In other words, by using a slur against a specific target, the speaker is perceiving the target as being "indistinguishable from any other

[54] Saul, Jennifer, and Esa Diaz-Leon. "Feminist Philosophy of Language.".
[55] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology.", 19.

group member".[56] Through this generalization, the target is immediately categorized according to the discretion of the speaker, and is in such a way that reduces the target's individual identity to one which is generic, un-individualized, and centered around oppressive ideologies.

It is important now to understand how this generalizing quality can be recognized in gendered slurs, and why the effects of this quality can be understood as instances of the encodement of androcentric worldviews upon both speaker and hearer. For example, consider the following statement.

"That girl is such a slut."

In this case, the target is not simply just being reduced to the identity of an overly sexual woman, but the target is also being reduced to the idea that they are, in effect, interchangeable with those who are being marked out as having a certain social identity and position. Not only does this reduce the level of visibility of the target's experience and identity, but it also reinforces the patriarchal ideological connection that is made between what it is to be a 'slut' and what it is to be a 'woman'. This is largely related to the reinforcement and perpetuation of patriarchal norms and corresponding dominant ideologies that is identified as a result of sex-marking. As the unnecessarily forced relevance of differences in gender that are recognized in words like "waiter" and "waitress" perpetuates patriarchal dominance and reinforces the absorption of the perspective of cis men, so does the reinforcement of the generalization of women as sluts. Thus, we can come to understand a slur's generalizing capacity as a reflection of another epistemic consequence associated with various cases of linguistic sexism: the encodement of the androcentric worldview.

[56] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology.", 19.

In practicing forms of linguistic sexism, whether that may be sex-marking, the utilization of gender false neutrality, or the use of gendered slurs, not only does one contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance, but they also contribute to the negative and oppressive epistemological effects associated with such an ideology. We can thus describe these kinds of linguistic sexism as facilitators of the perpetuation of intra-linguistic dominance, as these specific kinds of language promote the status, visibility, and representation of men, and the subordination and derogation of women.

Apart from the discussion on a slur's derogating, subordinating, and generalizing qualities as indicators of resemblance between the epistemic effects of sexist language and of gendered slurs, I aim to highlight yet another way in which a slur displays its epistemic power. I argue here that the epistemic power of a slur is largely explained by its capacity to encompass the myriad of possible epistemological connections that exist in the slur's metaphorical nature.

In order to better understand this all-encompassing and largely variable characteristic of slurs, it is necessary to understand what it is that the slur is encompassing to produce this epistemic power, and thus to bring our discussion back to metaphor. However, before investigating the epistemic consequences of gendered slurs, let us explore first the consequences of slurs more broadly, specifically, the epistemic effects of metaphors in general.

Epistemic Influence in Metaphor

When trying to identify the salient qualities of metaphor in general which prove to have some kind of epistemological effect upon both speaker and hearer, it would seem logical to turn to the derivation of metaphorical meaning: the structural relationship between a metaphor's two domains. Consider again the metaphor, 'the child is a ray of sunshine'. The two domains, in this case, include 'the child' as the primary domain, and the 'ray of sunshine' as the secondary

domain. According to Black's interpretation of metaphor, we can understand that metaphorical meaning is derived from the interaction of these two domains, in which one term imposes an "extension of meaning" upon the other.[57] There is a necessary connection made here, by the hearer or reader, between two distinct ideas that results in metaphorical meaning.

However there still remains an unanswered question behind this interaction of domains. If we are to understand one domain, i.e., the ray of sunshine, as imposing an "extension of meaning" upon the other domain, the child, how does this extension of meaning originate, and what does the extension of meaning translate to?

According to Black's interactive view, metaphor functions as an impetus for a listener to draw any particular connections between the two domains that they have gathered from current context and past experience. This collection of connections that the listener engages with is what Black refers to as a "system of associated commonplaces".[58] Thus, the idea of a ray of sunshine, as the secondary subject, is part of a system of ideas, which the term itself gives rise to, in which joy, free-spiritedness, and peacefulness are examples of a light-associated system of commonplaces. It should also be importantly noted that the systems of commonplaces do not necessarily have to be true, they just have to be "readily and freely evoked".[59]

However, there still exist other potential commonplaces related to a ray of sunshine. For example, such a term could be associated with intense heat or blinding light. There seems to be a difference here between the two potential systems of commonplaces. What makes one more associative than the other? What reasoning allows one to understand from experience with this

[57] Black, Max. "XII.—Metaphor.", 286.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Rooney, Phyllis. "Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason.", 84.

language, keeping in mind the contextual relation to the child, that a ray of sunshine is often associated with something positive or that which brings joy?

The answer lies in the recognition of the social pressures involved in the relationship between domains, which in effect, largely influences one's invoked system of associated commonplaces. If we analyze these epistemic connections as being part of a social epistemology, then it seems clear, due to social structures, specific group characteristics, and normative ideologies, that someone's understanding and knowledge is largely dependent on and interconnected to their respective social environments, encompassing one's system of associated commonplaces.

Black emphasizes this key relationship metaphors have with environmental and social factors. Through the embedded structural relationship between domains, which gives rise to a system of associated commonplaces, we are able to "reorganize the connections we make between our perceptions of the world" and can potentially allow for the "creation of novel meanings and creating new possibilities for obstructing modes of reality".[60] Thus, it is this reasoning, the epistemic influence of social norms on metaphorically invoked systems of commonplaces and on knowledge overall, that answers the question of what exactly is being conveyed.

Relying on the social pressures involved in the relationship between domains, as a central and largely influential reason behind the development of one's invoked system of associated commonplaces still leaves a lot of open possibilities. In other words, social pressures, ideologies, and norms are not necessarily stagnant entities, and can be hard to trace back upon when attempting to understand the true derivation of a particular metaphor's meaning.

[60] Black, Max. "XII.—Metaphor.", 286.

It seems that this unanswerable and inexplicit quality of metaphor however, actually serves as an indicator of the epistemic influence of metaphors. In other words, because the development and expression of one's system of associated commonplaces is dependent on inconstant social normativities, there exist various epistemic pathways for metaphorical meaning to be construed and expressed, and these pathways are continuously changing. Thus, when considering the epistemic influence of gendered slurs as kinds of metaphor, we can understand the instability of metaphorical meaning, and the possibility for differing interpretations as a reflection of the various pathways in which one may experience a kind of offense or oppression from being the target of a gendered slur.

Epistemic Influence in Slurs

We should ask ourselves the same question as we did earlier: why does the word 'bitch', when used as a slur towards a woman, more often than not give rise to a system of associated commonplaces that associates a bitch with an angry woman, amongst other oppressive qualities, rather than merely a female dog, or other more positive associations? What reasoning allows one to understand from experience with this language, keeping in mind the contextual relation to the word 'bitch', that a woman is to be associated with someone who is aggressive and controlling?

The answer to these questions, as alluded to in the discussion of the epistemic influence of metaphors similarly applies here. By analyzing the epistemic connections made between the domains of 'woman' and 'bitch' as being part of a social epistemology, then it seems clear, due to social structures, specific group characteristics, and normative ideologies, that someone's understanding, and knowledge is largely dependent on and interconnected to their respective social environments. In the case of gendered slurs, and the use of the term 'bitch', it becomes increasingly important to recognize the problematic nature of the relationship between a woman

and a bitch as a normative ideology, and how the fluctuating quality of such oppressive normativities contributes to the offense that particular targets of slurs can experience.

The important points of connection we have here has to do with the large number of metaphorical associations and the fact that a slur functions to express those associations. We can see that metaphorical associations are embedded within slurs, and it is the slur itself that functions to present the salient epistemological connections between domains, amongst all possible metaphorical associations.

The point to take away here is that slurs function as a linguistic mechanism which encompass all possible metaphorical interpretations between domains. The slur outwardly expresses only the salient metaphorical associations–the ones that correspond to relevant ideologies and social norms. But it is important to understand how the specific associations expressed by a slur are maintained and examine the ways in which slurs interact directly with relevant ideologies in order to maintain those salient associations.

Quill Kukla's discussion on "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology" provides a clear way in which one can map out the important and complex relationship between slurs and ideologies. Kukla describes an ideology as "a theoretical and political framework or lens through which we interpret actions and relations", and by engaging in these actions, we are simultaneously helping to constitute the facts of the ideology itself as well as ourselves as subjects within that ideology.[61] In other words, ideologies and subjects are co-constituting. So, when we analyze the multitude of potential associations and interpretations a gendered metaphor presents as being central to the lenses through which we interpret the world, or as being parts of a particularly sexist ideology, then we must also understand the ways in which we, as subjects of that ideology,

[61] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology." 12.

contribute to its continued existence. The mechanism that is responsible for constituting subjects within an ideology is what Kukla refers to as "interpellation", a process which recruits subjects to recognize themselves as assuming a specific social identity and position.[62] Interpellations serve to reproduce ideology by producing the subjects that help sustain that ideology. But what does this have to do with slurs?

Kukla argues that slurs are to be considered a kind of interpellation, as they work to "recognize a subject as having a specific identity, and thereby help constitute them as having that identity by calling upon them to recognize themselves as having it and hence as subjected to sets of norms".[63] Thus, we can understand slurs as mechanisms which are used to reproduce the problematic ideologies they represent and preserve the potential for subjects to recognize themselves in a particular slur. It should become clear from this discussion that gendered slurs, and in our case, gendered slurs that can be analyzed according to their metaphorical nature, function in the following ways:

1. Gendered slurs are mechanisms which encompass the possible metaphorical interpretations between particular domains, and outwardly present only salient metaphorical associations.
2. Gendered slurs are mechanisms which function simultaneously to cause subjects to recognize themselves as having a particular social identity, and to reproduce sexist ideologies.

We can understand from these points that gendered slurs encompass the multitude of possible metaphorical associations made by a speaker or hearer, that they express salient associations according to relevant ideologies, and that they are inextricably intertwined with the

[62] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology.",13.
[63] Ibid., 19.

development and preservation of social ideologies and the subjects practicing those ideologies. This is the core of my view. Slurs function to encompass a wide range of possible metaphorical interpretations and use those interpretations as a way of calling upon people to recognize themselves and identify with those interpretations and the ideologies they are centered around.

Now that we are able to identify the important metaphorical associations behind the use of a slur, it is important to investigate the reasons behind why the slur functions to express only certain salient metaphorical associations depending on the given context. As we have gathered so far, gendered slurs are largely intertwined with social norms and ideologies, as they are a linguistic mechanism that reproduce sexist ideologies. While it makes sense to state that certain metaphorical associations are made salient because of relevant ideologies, it is still necessary to take the discussion one step further and examine what it means for an association to be salient, and what about relevant ideologies it is that makes certain metaphorical associations salient over others.

As stated before, metaphorical meaning is a process to which there is "no end to what we want to mention".[64] We can take this to mean that the number of associations that can be made according to a specific metaphor is extremely large. Consider again the statement "the child is a ray of sunshine". As we have alluded to earlier, one answer for why one may understand that statement as meaning the child is "joyful" or "bright" is because of the relevant ideologies that place those potential meanings at a more salient and understandable position. But the process seems a bit more complex than merely stating that prominent ideologies are the determinators of metaphorical meaning. This seems complex because of the extremely complicated nature of

[64] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 6.

ideology and basing the ways in which certain metaphorical associations are made salient (and thus how certain slurs function to offend upon the complexity of ideology.

Qualities of Metaphorical Salience: Valence

To help clarify how ideologies and metaphorical salience are related, let us focus first on what it means for an association to be salient. One characteristic of metaphorical association that seems to be related to whether a particular association is made salient by an ideology has to do with valence.

The valence of a metaphorical association describes whether a particular association is of a positive or negative polarity. The salience of a metaphorical association describes the readiness or level of availability of the metaphorical association to the speaker or hearer. Can we use the level of positive or negative valence of an association to help determine why that association is salient? Initially, this may seem possible. But it's important to explain some problems that may arise from understanding salience as being determined by valence.

It doesn't seem plausible to claim that salience and valence are mutually dependent. The more positive an association is, for example, doesn't necessarily mean that it is the association that is the most salient. This may seem like the case, however, when asking why a child is more associated with joy versus intense heat when being called a 'ray of sunshine'. It may seem that because it is more positive (and generally makes more sense) for a child to be related to joy versus intense heat, this doesn't give *enough* reason as to why the association with joy is more salient than the association with intense heat. It just states that the association has a positive valence, and that the association is salient. But the positive valence of the association of a 'child' with 'joy' still seems relevant, and *part* of the reason why an association may be made salient. In order to further illustrate the connection between salience and valence as independently

operating characteristics of metaphorical associations, it's important to find a common denominator that governs these often-corresponding changes in salience and valence: ideology.

We have established that certain metaphorical associations are made salient according to relevant ideologies. We should then look at the role that valence plays in this process. If we recognize that the valence of an association refers to whether that association holds a more positive or negative connotation, that salient associations often reflect a positive or negative connotation, and that salient associations are distinguished by relevant ideologies, then we can understand that the valence of certain associations similarly results from the ideologies that govern the salience of those associations. This can help to explain why salient associations are often more extremely positively or negatively correlated. Specifically, an ideology assigns valence unto a salient association in virtue of legitimizing the association itself, and the social structures that it is connected to. So, when looking at slurs, for example, we can understand that they have an offensive nature, and a largely negative connotation. It would make sense then for the valence of the salient associations presented by a slur to take on a fairly negative valence. The valence of the association, as assigned by the ideology, functions to embed, and uphold the ideological systems that present those associations as being true.

It seems plausible to argue that the valence does not have to be positive or negative, either. Due to the numerous metaphorical associations encompassed by a slur, it is less likely that every possible association has some kind of valence, when there is no relevant ideological connection between them. But once ideology is involved, and once certain associations are made salient, the valence seems to follow. They follow not because the association is salient, but because the association comes into contact with and is being potentially absorbed by relevant ideologies. More specifically, the ideologies themselves maintain certain norms. They hold

authority in picking and choosing which of the possible metaphorical associations best supports and upholds the norms that the ideology aims to maintain.

For example, consider the statement:

A. Jane was a quick learner because she flew right through the engineering program.

What we want to focus on here, is the metaphor used to describe Jane as flying through the program. This metaphor can be recognized to bring about the association, for example, between 'flying' and 'speed'. Specific contextual references can clue us into recognizing this association, such as the fact that Jane is also described as being "quick" at learning. We can then analyze how 'speed' may be relevant to something that an ideology may deem as being positive or negative. Another common metaphor actually helps us make sense of where this metaphor is assigned valence from.

B. Time is money.

The most obvious salient association that arises here is the association between money and that which is good, positive, or important. Thus, by making the connection between 'speed' and the idea of preserving 'time', and the connection between 'money' and that which can often be deemed as a positive and desirable entity by an ideology, we can make the important connection between 'speed', and even 'flying', with what is positive and what essentially grounds the derivation of valence based on existing ideological norms.

In saying that oppressive ideologies are perpetuated by slurs, we are also saying that oppressive ideologies are perpetuated by making salient certain metaphorical associations (encompassed in the slur). It makes sense then to understand that because an oppressive ideology is perpetuated by the expression of salient metaphorical associations, and that ideology both decides salience and assigns valence, it follows that the valence of those salient associations are

correlated with and determined by the negative, oppressive, and sexist nature of the ideologies themselves, not by the fact that they are merely salient.

To ground this idea in reference to gendered slurs, consider the statement, “the woman is a bitch”. The possible metaphorical associations made between the domains of ‘woman’ and ‘bitch’ are abundant. According to the high number of possible associations made, this metaphor has the potential to express just about anything. However, the statement still portrays some kind of recognizable message unto its audience. This is because certain associations are made salient, such as the association of ‘bitch’ with ‘aggression’. But why is this salient over the possible association of ‘bitch’ with something else? This is because the salience of the association between ‘bitch’ and ‘aggression’ is governed by oppressive and sexist ideologies. What makes the sexist and oppressive ideology choose to make those associations salient over others? Assessing the valence of the salient associations, and specifically the source of that valence can help to answer this question. The association made between ‘bitch’ and ‘aggression’ is assigned a negative valence insofar as it supports and upholds the negative, sexist, and oppressive nature of the ideologies that also govern salience. This negative valence–that upholds the sexist and oppressive norms–can thus give reason as to why that particular association is made salient.

If a slur is used towards a target, then the slur can be recognized as offending the target because of the fact that the ideology of the speaker or hearer promotes salient associations, but it also seems that the offense experienced by the target it dependent on the negative valence that is assigned to those salient associations. In other words, an association is made salient by an ideology, and the ideology makes the association salient partly because it is reinforced by the valence of the association that is also assigned by the ideology. Ideology assigns valence to

associations in order to uphold its norms. The valence assigned by the ideology reinforces the reasons why the ideology makes some associations more salient over others.

So, we can gather that the valence of a metaphorical association is reinforced by the ways in which relevant ideologies make metaphorical associations salient. It is not the fact that an association is salient which governs whether that association is negative or positive, nor does an association's valence determine whether or not that association is salient. But, the valence of the association, assigned by relevant ideologies, can help to highlight the reason behind an association's salience, and can give insight into the positive and negative perspectives of the ideologies that govern salience in general.

The discussion on valence, I hope, served to highlight my view on the metaphorical nature of slurs as a source of its epistemic power, and to ground the following ideas:

1. A slur encompasses all possible metaphorical associations but expresses only salient associations.
2. The metaphorical associations presented by a slur are made salient by relevant ideologies.
3. The metaphorical associations presented by a slur are assigned valence by the interaction between ideologies that pick and choose what associations best uphold and support their existing norms.
4. The utterance of a slur perpetuates the ideologies that have made those associations salient.

Thus, I argue that slurs function as a mechanism that encompasses the largely variable and multifarious interpretive possibilities that a metaphor presents. Although it encompasses all possible associations made between metaphorical domains, it only expresses particular associations–defined as salient. Associations are made salient according to relevant ideologies.

The reason behind why a particular association is salient can be in part explained by the association's valence. Like salience, the valence of an association is assigned according to relevant ideologies. When we question why the association between 'bitch' and 'aggression' is more salient than others, we can try to answer this by looking at the valence of the association. Since the nature of slurs is to offend, the salient associations made by a slur are often presented as having a highly negative valence. It would not be correct to say that the salience of the association is determined by the fact that the association is more positive or negative than others, but instead, it should be said that recognizing the valence of a particular association as being highly positive or negative can give insight into why an association is made salient in the first place.

So far, we have developed the claim that the epistemic influence of slurs can be identified within its metaphorical processes. We can understand that a slur functions to encompass all metaphorical associations, present salient associations, and why those associations are salient. We can also understand that a defining reason why certain associations are made salient over others has to do with the ideologies that are relevant to the slur, the speaker and/or hearer, and the context of the discourse overall. Thus, I claim these qualities are central to understanding from where and how slurs obtain their epistemic power.

One way in which we can apply this information is to a pre-existing discussion on the concept of a slur's variable offense.

Variable Offense

In this next section, I aim to utilize what we have gathered about the nature of slurs that operate through metaphorical means–that they function to encompass all possible metaphorical interpretations, present salient interpretations, and use those interpretations as a way of

perpetuating oppressive ideologies– to help highlight another important epistemic effect of slurs. One existing term that seems to encompass what we have gathered is what is known as variable offense. In this next section, I will provide current literature on the nature of slur's offense, and I will examine how my view works with existing accounts. I will highlight both similarities and differences between my view and existing views in order to simultaneously support the basis of my own account, and to distinguish it as a novel, and more representative way of accounting for the contexts in which a slur offends.

First, I will clearly map out my own account of variable offense according to the importance of the metaphorical and ideologically related nature of slurs, and then I will discuss and compare it alongside some pre-existing accounts. While Kukla's discussion on slurs and ideology does seem like a plausible way of accounting for a slur's offense, I argue that it is their discussion in conjunction with mine that elucidates a more representative and expansive way of understanding the nature of offense in gendered slurs.

Overall, my account of variable offense is largely based upon the metaphorical nature of the slur. The kind of variability I am concerned with is in reference to the numerous metaphorical associations that can arise within one's system of associated commonplaces, that are then encompassed by slurs. More specifically, the variability in potential meaning presented by the metaphor itself, is what I argue a slur to encompass. My idea of variable offense is meant to emphasize that because there are so many possible metaphorical associations that could be made salient and then presented by a slur, there also exists an equally large number of associations that could potentially lead to offense, as the salient associations presented by a slur are often categorized. So, by recognizing the large potential of offense a particular slur has due to the fact that it encompasses all possible metaphorical associations, we can account for the

offensiveness of slurs across a vast number of contexts. But the slur itself functions to encompass all potential metaphorical associations that could lead to offense, and then presents only salient associations. It's important then to understand how the offense is still maintained in those salient associations by reminding ourselves about why a particular association may be salient in the first place.

As Kukla argues, slurs function to call upon people to recognize themselves as a member of the social ideology associated with that slur. As more people use the slur, more people are called to identify with that slur and corresponding ideology, consequently perpetuating the oppressive nature of that ideology. So, we can then understand that the more times the specific slur is used, the more its salient associations work to strengthen and reinforce the problematic ideologies from which they are governed. Additionally, we can gather what we know about the valence of metaphorical associations to give reason behind the fact that the salient associations made by a slur are most often offensive. For the sake of the argument, let's understand an instance of offense to be a consequence of a metaphorical association with a fairly negative valence. More specifically, not only is it the purpose of slurs to offend, but, the reason why salient associations are often the offensive, or of a negative valence, derives from the idea that ideology governs both salience and valence in the effort to best uphold and further reinforce the ideology itself.

Thus, it is by recognizing the complexity of metaphorical meaning—including the high potential for offense within all possible metaphorical associations, and the ways in which the slur presents offensive salient associations—that we can elucidate how a slur functions to offend across different contexts.

There are two views of variable offense in particular which I will discuss, including Anderson and Lepore's prohibitionist account, as well as Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's account that is based on role-power theory. I plan to defend a novel way of understanding the nature of a gendered slur's offense, that can serve as a more expansive mechanism in accounting for its offense across contexts by focusing specifically on the gendered slur, 'bitch'. Firstly, let us consider a slur's quality of variable offense as put forward by Anderson and Lepore.

Anderson and Lepore argue for a non-content based view of slurs, known as *Prohibitionism*, which holds that "slurs are prohibited words, and so, a violation of their prohibition might provoke offense".[65] They argue against other content based approaches to slurs, such as Expressivism or Inferentialism.[66] Instead, they argue that prohibitionism provides a straightforward way of accounting for the "variation in degrees of offense among slurs and their non-offensive uses".[67] Some important things to take away from the prohibitionist account is that the concept of variable offense is meant to refer to the levels of offense presented by slurs, due to their prohibited nature, and that slurs maintain a stable position, insofar as their offense can be accounted for across all contexts. My account of variable offense, on the other hand, is less focused on quantifying the differing *degrees* of offense portrayed by a slur and is rather centered around the capacity of the slur itself to encompass the potential for offense within its metaphorical associations.

However, there is an important similarity to be drawn between my view and the prohibitionist view. This is the idea of stability across contexts. Anderson and Lepore seem to be arguing that a slur does not change meaning in any way across contexts, insofar as they argue

[65] Anderson, Luvell, and Ernie Lepore. "What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words." *Analytic Philosophy*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2013, 353.
[66] See Tirrell (1999), and Whiting (2008).
[67] Anderson, Luvell, and Ernie Lepore. "What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words.", 350.

that "slurs are prohibited words; and as such, their uses are offensive to whomever these prohibitions matter".[68] My view, which focuses on the metaphorical nature of variable offense, also accounts for stability across contexts, insofar as by recognizing that if the possible metaphorical associations are encompassed by a slur, then one can then account for offense across any context.

What we can see so far, is that my view of variable offense resembles the existing account presented by Anderson and Lepore in the fact that both views present a concrete and wide-reaching way in which to characterize the nature and consequences of the use of slurs. However, we can also recognize that my view differs from the prohibitionist view, as it is not as limited as the prohibitionist view might be. One problem with the prohibitionist view of variable offense essentially equates racial, gendered, and ethnic slurs to be prohibited in the same way that other non-slur pejoratives, or common swear words, may be prohibited.[69] Thus, our important considerations of a slur's derogating, subordinating, and generalizing mechanisms, which are central in understanding a slur's epistemic power, seem to be left undiscussed. Another objection that is posed to this view is that the idea of prohibitionism "lacks explanatory power".[70] While the prohibitionist view initially seems to parsimoniously account for the offensiveness of slurs despite changing contexts, the reason and explanation for the existence of prohibition is unanswered. In other words, if the variability in a slur's offense is accounted for by prohibition of slurs, then from where is prohibition accounted for?

My account of metaphorical variable offense actually offers a potential answer to this question. A focus on metaphorical nature could give reason to prohibition. Consider again the

[68] Anderson, Luvell, and Ernie Lepore. "Slurring Words." *Noûs*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2011, 21.
[69] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 175, no. 11, 2017, 2887.
[70] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2887.

question as posed by critics of Anderson and Lepore's prohibitionist view: "if offense variability is explained by the degree of prohibition, then what explains that degree of prohibition?".[71] By recognizing the wide-ranging metaphorical associations encompassed by a slur, we can understand that one reason why some words are prohibited is not only because it is offensive to whomever the prohibitions matter, but also because of the offensive metaphorical associations that are salient to the word, and the resulting offense expressed towards the target.

For example, the word 'bitch' is offensive according to Anderson and Lepore insofar as it is a prohibited word. But why is the word 'bitch' prohibited in the first place? By looking at our new view which focuses on metaphorical nature variable offense, we can see that 'bitch' may be considered prohibited due to the salient metaphorical associations present in the term 'bitch', such as the most obvious association, that between a 'woman' and a 'female dog'. It is because the metaphorical association made between a 'woman' and a 'female dog' are centered around and reinforced by sexist and oppressive ideologies, that gives potential reason as to why certain words are understood as being prohibited.

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt put forth another more inclusive account of variable offense in the article "Slurs, Roles, and Power", which I argue better highlights what I aim to show in my own account, yet still includes some important distinguishing qualities. I identify a kind of offense variability that is not captured in existing literature. According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, if the speaker of the slurring utterance does not fit the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target, then the potential for oppression would be avoided. My view–that focuses specifically on the slur 'bitch'– highlights that there does exist offense even in cases where the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target does not typically "fit" the speaker. This is recognized in the case

[71] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2887.

where a woman calls another woman a 'bitch'. While I focus on the slur 'bitch' specifically, I aim to highlight that if other slurs function through metaphor in a similar way, they will have the same kind of variability.

The authors explain that there is "considerable variation in the degree of offense caused", insofar as the offensiveness of a slur can vary across "*different slur words,* across *different uses of the same slur word,* and across the reactions of *different audience members"*.[72] However, they argue that these patterns of offense are not adequately explained by pre-existing theories, and so they pursue an explanation of variable offense that is based on the "unjust power imbalance that a slur seeks to achieve" with reference to role and power theory.[73] I will set out the central ideas presented by the authors, and then I will compare qualities of the view with my own.

Firstly, the authors put forth work by Robin Jeshion, which provides an account of variable offense that maps out the ways in which slurs can vary in their offensive intensity depending on the slur that is used. For example, it seems widely accepted that the use of the n-word is said to be more offensive than other derogatory slurs that are targeted towards the same social group. Jeshion highlights that not only can different slurs affect separate social groups, but that different slurs can also be used to target the same social group.[74] Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt distinguish this specific kind of variability in offense by slurs as "VT1 or *word-variation"*.[75]

The second kind of variation that Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt discuss has to do with the ways in which slurs vary in their offensive intensity across different uses of the same word. They refer to this kind of variability as "VT2 or *use-variation*".[76] For example, consider the difference

[72] Ibid., 2880.
[73] Ibid., 2879.
[74] Jeshion, Robin. "Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs." *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2013, 233.
[75] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2881-2882.
[76] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2882.

between a case in which a racial slur is spoken by someone who is not part of that social group towards someone who is part of that social group, and a case in which a racial slur is spoken by someone who is in the same social group as the person that the slur is being targeted towards. For example, a white person using a slur targeted towards a black person is more offensive than a black person using a slur targeted towards another black person. While both cases can involve an expression of contempt from one person unto another, there is still a difference despite whether or not contempt is expressed, and that this difference is explained by other pragmatic features of slur, that being the "*speaker's group-membership".* In other words, whether or not a statement is conveyed with contempt is not the only method of identifying the origination of a slur's oppressive effects.

Lastly, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt identify a third type of variability identified in slurs which they call "VT3 or *audience-variation"*.[77] This kind of variable offense in slurs refers to the different degrees in which the members within a particular audience may be offended.

Popa- Wyatt and Wyatt then fit these characteristics into existing accounts of slurs on both sides of the semantics versus pragmatic debate. Firstly, they consider how Hom's semantic theory of slurs nicely encapsulates their view of *word-variation.* Hom's theory explains that "offense can vary with word meaning because of semantic encoding of more or less negative stereotypes for different groups".[78] However, because the theory is based on the idea that different degrees of offense rely on different racist institutions, it then seems problematic for Hom's account to coincide with instances of variation across different slurs which are targeted towards people who are part of the same social group.

[77] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2883.
[78] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2884.

Another account of slurs that raises problems for a kind of variable offense that we have discussed is expressivist semantics, one step removed from traditional semantic accounts of slurs. The expressivist view cannot allow an expression of contempt to vary across terms, because "if this were the case, we would expect the degree of offense to follow from the degree of contempt a word is able to convey", which does not follow for many slurs that express contempt yet are still socially acceptable.[79] These may include, for example, the utterance of a racial slur spoken by and directed towards two people who are members of the same social group.

The discussion is then directed towards a more pragmatic approach, Anderson and Lepore's account on prohibitionism. As noted earlier, this account states that slurs are offensive because they are prohibited. However, Popa Wyatt and Wyatt argue that it is not as simple as it is made to seem. Rather than providing an explanation for these characteristics of variable offense, it seems to "echo the facts of variable offense" and actually is explained by prohibitionism, which seems to originate from another source, perhaps subordination.[80]

In order to account for these problems, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt put forward a new pragmatic approach to offense, that encompasses the distinguishing characteristics of a slur's variably offensive effect. Their account claims that slurs "seek to create (or maintain) an *unjust power imbalance* via role assignment", and that "the degree of offense caused is correlated with the magnitude of the perceived unjustness of the power imbalance associated with this role".[81] It is this account which I argue best encapsulates the epistemic power of slurs, as it clearly

[79] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2886.
[80] Ibid., 2887.
[81] Ibid., 2888.

highlights our previously defined notions of intra-linguistic dominance as well as the epistemic influences present in our examples of linguistic sexism, including the use of gendered slurs.

Firstly, because this renewed account of variable offense is centered around social roles, it can give important insight into our earlier discussions, on how slurs, via those social roles, contribute to our notion of intra-linguistic dominance. The authors explain roles as "social constructs that carry information about permissible and expected behaviors, social status (i.e rank relative to other roles), rights, and responsibilities.[82] Importantly, they aim to highlight the fact that the social roles a person assumes are largely intertwined with discourse in general. As slurs are central to conversation and linguistic discourse, we can clearly recognize the first connection between the use of slurs and their involvement with social roles.

To emphasize the important relationship between social roles and discourse, the authors put forward the notion of "discourse roles", which is a concept used to describe "short-term" social roles that an individual assumes during a particular conversation, and that these "short-term" roles are often inherited from "longer-term social roles".[83] In other words, the discourse roles that a speaker or hearer assumes are only meant to last as long as the discourse itself. However, there exist external social roles that last beyond the discourse, and it is these roles that become salient during a particular conversation.[84] So, in the case of a slurring utterance used by a person in a conversation, because part of the nature of a slur is to subordinate its target, as referenced by Kukla, it follows that "when a speaker slurs the target they assign them a subordinate discourse role", and that in cases beyond that particular conversation, the slurs can function to both constitute and cause oppression.[85]

[82] Ibid., 2888.
[83] Ibid., 2889.
[84] Ibid., 2891.
[85] Ibid., 2894.

What we can take from this discussion so far is that slurs present a kind of linguistic power insofar as they subordinate a target to a specific discourse role within a conversation, and that the power associated with the relevant discourse roles in cases of slur utterances constitute oppression. We can also relate the power presented by discourse roles, and a slurs subordinating effects to our definition of intra-linguistic dominance. As intra-linguistic dominance speaks to the ways in which words within a particular language or dialect contribute to the preservation of a dominant identity as well as the subordination of those who do not use those words in the subordinating manner, it seems that we can understand the dominant identity and the subordinated identity as separate discourse roles that members of a conversation assume.

More specifically, in the cases of slurs, the speaker of the slurring utterance maintains a discourse role that maintains their dominant social position while simultaneously placing the target of that slurring utterance into a subordinated social position. As noted from Kukla's discussion on slurs and ideologies, slurs function to cue and strengthen problematic ideologies through mechanisms of derogation, subordination, and generalization. Thus, when a speaker uses a slur, their role in the discourse maintains a dominant ideological position insofar as the slur functions to derogate, subordinate, and generalize its target.

Again, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's definition of variable offense is summarized as "the degree of offense taken by an audience member in relation to a slurring speech-act is in proportion to the perceived unjustness–according to that audience member–of the power imbalance that is plausibly achieves".[86] We can understand from this that slurs can be used to designate and maintain a set of discourse roles, where the discourse roles inherit a degree of oppression that is associated with the history of oppression behind the longer-term social roles,

[86] Ibid., 2888.

and the degree of offense that a target takes from that slur is in proportion to the power imbalance between the pair of discourse roles. This can thus help to explain the specific kinds of variable offense provided by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, *word-variation, use-variation,* and *audience-variation*. Specifically, we can see that from using this role-power framework, *word-variation* depends on the "extent to which the slur word evokes…a pair of roles from the history of oppression", and on the "extent of the unjust power imbalance present" in those external social roles.[87] This framework also accounts for cases of *use-variation,* insofar as there exists a "dual role assignment" when a slur is involved in discourse. If it were the case that the speaker of the slurring utterance does not fit the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target, then the potential for oppression would be avoided.

As noted previously, my account of slurs is centered around the idea that they function to encompass a wide range of possible metaphorical interpretations, present salient interpretations, and use those interpretations as a way of calling upon people to recognize themselves and identify with those interpretations and the ideologies they are centered around.

Indeed, the overall purpose of Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's account of variable offense, resembling Anderson and Lepore's, has to do with quantifying and adequately accounting for the differing levels of offense expressed by a slur. However, it is this alongside their discussion of discourse roles and role-power theory which sets them apart from other pre-existing accounts, better helps to elucidate my account of variable offense, and overall, will help to distinguish another way of understanding a slur's epistemic power.

This occurs by highlighting two common threads: an all-encompassing framework, and a focus on the interrelatedness between slurs and ideologies. Firstly, as my account is focused on

[87] Ibid., 2889.

the function of encompassing all possible metaphorical associations and thus all kinds of offense, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's account is also focused on encompassing all forms of offense. They do this by highlighting and properly accounting for VT1, VT2, and VT3. Secondly, as my account is focused on the relationship between slurs and ideologies with reference to Kukla's classification of "interpellations", Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's view nicely accounts for the prevalence and interrelatedness between slurs and ideologies through their discussion on discourse roles.

Overall, the purpose of drawing these connections between Popa-Wyatt's account of variable offense and my own working definition, is to provide some grounding to help better clarify my account of variable offense. Even before analyzing these similarities, it seems that although the connections between these views exist, there remain some fundamental differences between what I am trying to explain in my own account, versus what we find here. But, it is my hope that by analyzing the similarities as done so with Anderson and Lepore's account, I can provide a solid foundation for my own account, and by analyzing the differences, I can distinguish my account of variable offense as a potentially new way of understanding parsimoniously explaining the patterns of offense a slur brings across different contexts. I will now review the conceptual steps to understanding my account of variable offense that will hopefully allow us to better grasp the similarities and differences between my account and that of Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt.

My account of variable offense puts forward the idea that slurs function in a way that encompasses a wide range of possible metaphorical interpretations and uses those interpretations as a way of perpetuating oppressive ideologies. Let's examine the first part of the view, the idea that slurs encompass a wide range of possible metaphorical interpretations. In order to

comprehend this mechanism, it is necessary to review the relationship between a slur and a metaphor. As discussed in part one of this thesis, there exists a strong resemblance between the analysis of metaphor and some gendered slurs, specifically that both kinds of language share the conceptual blending of the correspondences of and between primary and secondary domains. Thus, we can see that these slurs can be recognized as a kind of metaphor.

However, my view of variable offense is dependent on more than just the recognition of slurs as a kind of metaphor and requires the understanding of slurs as an all-encompassing mechanism of possible metaphorical associations. Consider the statement, "you are such a bitch". The first step in understanding the effects of the slur upon its target has to do with recognizing the term 'bitch' as a metaphor. We can do this by comparing their respective cognitive analyses and recognizing the existence of multiple ontological correspondences between the terms *woman* and *bitch*, such as the quality of being "aggressive", a "female", "controlling", "unpredictable", etc. These are only examples of salient associations that the metaphor works to incite within a person's system of associated commonplaces.

The next step is to highlight the way in which the slur encompasses all of these potential metaphorical connections that someone may make. When looking at the statement "you are such a bitch", since we understand that slurs are a kind of metaphor that are concise in their nature, and we understand metaphorical meaning as a process to which there is "no end to what we want to mention", then we can confidently recognize that the slur 'bitch' is used in such a way that succinctly encloses the endless possible metaphorical associations made with the word.[88] In other words, when someone says, "you are such a bitch" they are in effect saying "you are aggressive, unpredictable, female, controlling, etc.", with no real end to that list of characterizations.

[88] Camp, Elisabeth. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'", 6.

Now that we have mapped out how and why a slur functions to encompass all possible metaphorical associations relevant to that slur, we can more clearly draw the connection between this idea and the all-encompassing framework present in Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's account. The overall purpose of their view of variable offense was designed to adequately account for the differing levels of offense expressed by a slur. They provide reasoning across three different kinds of variation: *word-variation, use-variation, and audience-variation*. Thus, by understanding the idea that slurs encompass all possible metaphorical associations - thereby also encompassing all potential epistemological connective pathways to offense relevant to that slur, we can relate this to the fact that Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's view also accounts for all relevant and potential pathways to offense that a slur may assume– as varying across words, uses, and audiences. It seems that the stability of my view, the idea that by recognizing that numerous metaphorical associations encompassed by a slur, one can then account for offense across any context, can also relate to the ways in which Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt argue their view to explain a slur's offense across any context.

The second part of my view of variable offense claims that the use of slurs, in their all-encompassing form, function to perpetuate oppressive ideologies. We know that slurs work to "recognize a subject as having a specific identity, and thereby help constitute them as having that identity by calling upon them to recognize themselves as having it and hence as subjected to sets of norms".[89] Thus, we can understand slurs as mechanisms which are used to reproduce the problematic ideologies they represent and preserve the potential for subjects to recognize themselves in a particular slur. So, insofar as slurs derogate, subordinate, and generalize their targets, when a speaker chooses to use a slur, they are making it so that the target members are

[89] Kukla, Quill R. "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology.", 19.

called to recognize themselves as being part of the derogated, subordinated, and generalized social identity and position associated with that slur.

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's account of variable offense is supported by their discussion on role-power theory. More specifically, they argue that slurs can be used to designate and maintain a set of discourse roles, where the discourse roles inherit a degree of oppression that is associated with the history of oppression behind the longer-term social roles, and the degree of offense that a target takes from that slur is in proportion to the power imbalance between the pair of discourse roles. The connection that can be made between this account of variable offense and my own account (partly drawn from Kukla) lies in the shared focus on the ideologies related to the slurring utterance. Thus, we can see that the focus on how slurs function to maintain and set a specific type of social role in a given discourse similarly reflects the ways in which slurs, according to my account, and as referenced by Kukla, reproduce the problematic ideologies they represent and preserve the potential for subjects to recognize themselves in a particular slur.

The differences between the views of Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt and that of myself highlight the ways in which my own account of variable offense can adequately account for the contexts described by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt and simultaneously put forward yet another, perhaps, even more inclusive way of describing the derivation of a slur's offense. First, I will investigate how my view fits into the authors' idea that the offensiveness of a slur can vary across "*different slur words,* across *different uses of the same slur word,* and across the reactions of *different audience members"*.[90] Then, by comparing Popa-Wyatt and Wyatts role-power theory with my view, I will highlight the ways in which my view more efficiently explains the variability in a slur's offense across contexts.

[90] Popa-Wyatt, Mihaela, and Jeremy L. Wyatt. "Slurs, Roles and Power.", 2880.

My view of variable offense can account for the three different types of variability that Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt describe: VT1, VT2, and VT3. Not only does my view fit into these specific kinds of variability, as does the authors' view which is centered around role-power theory, but it also seems to provide an additional and more stable account of variable offense, insofar as it uses the stability of the existence of possible metaphorical associations from which to draw offense and highlights the complexities that occur in contexts involving gendered slurs specifically. First, let us explore the ways in which my view of variable offense fits into the three kinds of variability put forth by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, before looking at the ways in which my view can explain a gendered slur's offense across these provided contexts, and even more.

We can see that in the case of VT1, or *word-variation,* different slurs affect separate social groups (inter-group variation) and different slurs can be used to target the same social group (intra-group variation). An example of inter-group variation is that the n-word is said to be more offensive than 'bitch' and that these slurs are meant to target different social groups.[91] We can analyze this difference in offense by looking at the idea that the salient metaphorical associations presented by the n-word are governed by different ideologies than those presented by 'bitch'. A racist ideology is upheld by salient associations presented by the n-word, whereas a sexist ideology is upheld by salient associations presented by 'bitch'.

In cases of intra-group variation, different slurs can be used to target the same social group. The fact that the slurs are different can be explained by understanding that salient associations that arise from a slur are not limited to a single ideology. It is possible for one social group to identify with one or more of the domains that is present amongst the slur's salient associations, and thus uphold separate norms. For example, the gendered slurs 'bitch' and 'slut'

[91] Ibid., 2881.

are both slurs that present salient associations which function to uphold sexist ideologies. But, if a woman is called a 'bitch', the offense follows from the fact that the self-identified woman, with her specific ideological positionality, can recognize with salient associations that are governed by an ideology which categorizes women as inferior, rather than being called a 'slut', that include ideologies that promote sexual activity as being a defining characteristic of the value of women.

Now let us examine how my view accounts for instances of VT2, or *use-variation,* where offense varies across different uses of the same slur word. An example of this kind of variation as explained by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, involves cases in which one is being addressed by a racial slur that is meant to target the social group that they are a part of, and where one is being addressed by a racial slur that is meant to target a social group that they are not part of. The authors put forth four different statements, two of which express a contemptuous and non-contemptuous use of the n-word spoken by a white person to a black person, and two of which express a contemptuous and non-contemptuous use of the n-word spoken by a black person towards a black person.

1. White person contemptuously uses racial slur towards black person
2. White person non-contemptuously uses racial slur towards black person
3. Black person contemptuously uses racial slur towards black person
4. Black person non-contemptuously uses racial slur towards black person

According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, it is widely agreed upon that (1) and (3) are more offensive than (2) and (4) since they are used with contempt, that (1) is more offensive than (3), and that (2) is more offensive than (4).

Since we are focused on gendered slurs, let's try to develop and analyze similar situations. Consider cases in which one is being addressed by a gendered slur that is meant to target the social group that they are a part of, and that the speaker is not a part of, as well as cases where one is being addressed by a gendered slur that is meant to target a social group that they are a part of, and that the speaker is also a part of. Consider these four cases:

A. Man to woman: "Calm down; don't be a bitch." (Contemptuous)

B. Man to woman: "Bitch, you look so good!" (Non-contemptuous)

C. Woman to woman: "Calm down; don't be such a bitch." (Contemptuous)

D. Woman to woman: "Bitch, you look so good! (Non-contemptuous)

I argue that we can efficiently map out the differences in offense between different uses of the same slur by looking at the metaphorical nature of the slur. More specifically, let's look at the ideologies that make salient certain metaphorical associations, and how the use of the slur, according to the ideological positionality of the speaker, upholds or does not uphold the ideologies themselves.

First let's try to understand the differences in offense between the contemptuous and non-contemptuous uses of the slur. (A) and (C) are more offensive than (B) and (D). This is not only because they are expressed with contempt, but also because of the correlation between the associations that are made salient by the slur, and the idea that the target can identify with at least one of the presented metaphorical domains that upholds the ideology. More specifically, the difference between (A) and (B) can be recognized in part by the fact that the salient associations that are presented by 'bitch' in (A) are of a fairly negative valence, whereas the salient associations presented by 'bitch' in (B) seem to have a more positive valence. Let's return to what we gathered about valence and see how this can help to determine a level of offense.

We know from earlier discussion that the valence of a metaphorical association presented by the slur provides some kind of aid in recognizing a metaphorical association as salient. It's often the case that associations with a positive valence are correlated with the salient associations that uphold positive and non-oppressive kinds of ideologies, and that associations with a negative valence are often correlated with the salient associations that uphold negative and oppressive kinds of ideologies. It seems that the associations that are being made salient in the case of (B) are of a positive valence, since the slur is used in a context that is complimentary towards the target. If we can recognize those associations as having both positive valence and as being salient, then it makes less sense to argue that the ideologies that make those positive associations salient are ideologies with oppressive norms. If we understand offense to be presented by a slur's salient metaphorical interpretations, where those associations are made salient based on relevant ideologies, then we can also understand that the offense presented by the slur in (A) differs from the offense presented by the slur in (B) because the ideologies that responsible for the salient associations in (B) are based on the reversed ideologies that are results of current reclamatory efforts, and not the inherently sexist-ideologies that govern the salient associations that are present in contemptuous uses of the slur as seen in (A).

Now that we have considered the differences in offense between contemptuous and non-contemptuous uses of the same slur according to our metaphorical view of variable offense, let's consider the differences between just the contemptuous uses of the slurs as seen in statements (A) and (C). As we have already identified in the case of (A), the metaphorical associations that are made salient are done so by sexist ideologies. The difference that results in varying levels of offense, between (A) and (C) is the identity of the speaker. In (A), a man is addressing a woman as a 'bitch', and in (C), a woman is addressing a woman as a bitch. Both statements are

expressed with a sense of contempt, which, as we have gathered above, indicates the negative valence of metaphorical associations presented by the slur. I argue that the offense, in this case, is not explained by looking at valence, but instead, by looking at the ideological positionality of the speaker in relation to that of the target.

Let's look at (A). The offense directed by the slur to the target is derived from the idea that the target can identify with the salient associations of the slur. By being called a 'bitch' in a contemptuous manner, the salient associations that are presented by the speaker to the target are made salient by and in order to uphold sexist ideologies, and the associations are salient in such a way that the hearer can thus identify themselves with one of the metaphorical domains at hand.

When we examine (C), we can begin to understand how my view accounts for the fact that there does exist a difference in the level of offense between a man calling a woman a 'bitch' and a woman calling a woman a 'bitch'. But importantly, my view also accounts for the function of gendered slurs specifically, like the term 'bitch', where the use of the term still remains socially accessible to out-group members, unlike Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's consideration of only racial slurs, which tend to only be accessible to in-group members. We will further highlight the distinctions that my view makes with respect to understanding the offense of gendered slurs after we finish this analysis. For the moment, let's return to statement (C).

We can see that the ideological positionality of the speaker influences the offense that is assumed by the target, insofar as the speaker uses the slur in such a way that emphasizes the presence of specific, negative, metaphorical associations, thus calling upon the hearer to recognize themselves as fitting into those associations. When a woman is calling another woman a 'bitch' with contempt, they are perpetuating the ideologies that are functioning to oppress them both. The offense is expressed as it is in (A), but here, the slur simultaneously oppresses the

speaker, insofar as the speaker shares the identity with the target social group that the slur is designed to oppress in the first place. In some ways, we can understand this as a greater level of offense than seen in (A). However, it also seems that when a target identifies with a domain that is presented contemptuously by a speaker who is a member of a social group that is positively reinforced by patriarchal norms, the sexist ideology seems more directly enforced, and the offense takes a less complicated path towards the target than when the speaker is part of the same social group. In other words, when the speaker is part of the social group that is upheld by the ideologies relevant to the presented metaphorical associations, the ideology is being reinforced in the ways that best maintain its norms. In the case where the speaker is a member of the targeted group, it seems that the ideology *is* being reinforced, but less directly, as the sexist ideologies are paradoxically encouraged by members of the social group that is harmed by those ideologies.

What I aim to highlight here, is that the level of offense does differ between contemptuous cases where the speakers are either in-group members (targeted by the slur) or out-group members (not targeted by the slur), and that this can be recognized through the difference in the ways that the oppressive ideologies that uphold the slur are reinforced depending on the position of the speaker. However, there is an important difference here that should be highlighted between the cases involving racial slurs as put forward by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt and our parallel cases involving gendered slurs. This difference highlights one of the ways in which considering the metaphorical nature of a slur can better explain its offense. As we stated, the difference between (A) and (C) seems to lie in the fact that the process of offense takes a more complicated pathway from speaker to hearer, due to the speaker's identity and ideological positionality.

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt point out in the contemptuous cases, that (1) is more offensive than (3) insofar as the speaker of the slurring utterance in (3) does not fit the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target.[92] However, this does not seem to follow as clearly in the case of (C), where the speaker, according to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, does not fit the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target. Still, as in (3), we can see that in (C), the speaker and their specific ideological positionality are *not* supported disproportionately to those meant to be targeted by the slur and corresponding sexist ideology. In other words, the speaker (a woman) does not identify with the social role (a man's social role) that is typically reinforced and supported by the sexist ideologies that are responsible for making the presented associations salient. According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, offense is avoided in cases like (3) altogether. But the story seems a little different when considering cases like (C), the parallel case involving gendered slurs. Not only am I hesitant about the idea that all offense is avoided in cases like (3), but I also think that by considering the pattern of offense from a metaphorical perspective in cases like (C), can help to highlight the fact that there does exist a kind of offense in cases where the speaker does not assume the identity of one that is typically upheld by ideologies that oppresses others. However, this difference in offense is not clearly recognized in the level of offense presented, but rather the processes in which the offense is targeted and the ways in which the relevant ideologies are reinforced.

Finally, let's consider the non-contemptuous uses of slurs that are expressed by speakers who are either in-group or out-group members, such as statements (B) and (D). In (B), a man says to a woman: "Bitch, you look so good!". In (D), a woman says to a woman: "Bitch, you look so good!". The difference in these cases, as highlighted in (A) and (C), is the identity of the

[92] Ibid., 2899.

speaker, and the ways in which one's identity functions to uphold specific ideologies. Since the uses of 'bitch' in (B) and (D) are used non-contemptuously, as we did with the contemptuous uses of the slur, we can identify that because the slurs are used in a non-contemptuous manner, that they are likely to have been assigned a fairly positive valence by the ideologies relevant to the associations that are made salient. As we have already identified in (A) and (C), the difference in offense can be drawn back to the way in which the identity of the speaker is upheld by the relevant ideologies. We can say the same for the non-contemptuous uses such as (B) and (D), where the speaker identity also differs.

The third type of variability that Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt discuss is VT3, or *audience-variation,* which refers to the different degrees in which the members within a particular audience may be offended by a slur. Considering variation of offense within an audience requires considering two different kinds of uses, which involve different contexts: second-personal and third-personal uses.

Second-personal cases to consider:

1. Case where the audience involves members who are the designated targets of the spoken slur, and where the slur is directed towards them.
2. Case where the audience involves members who are not the designated targets of a spoken slur, and where the slur is directed towards them.

Third-personal cases to consider:

1. Case in which the audience involves members who are the designated targets of the spoken slur, where the slur is not directed towards them, and is used more generally.
2. Case in which the audience involves members who are not the designated targets of the spoken slur, where the slur is not directed towards them, and is used more generally.

The difference between second-personal and third-personal cases is that in second-personal cases, the target(s) is directly addressed by the slur, whereas in third-personal cases, the target(s) is not directly addressed by the slur, but hears the slur being used more generally. According to Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, the difference in offense presented in VT3 is "due to the difference between the power imbalance they *see as appropriate* and the power imbalance they *perceive as being assigned* by the slurring act".[93] Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt do not put forth an explicit example of the way in which their view accounts for audience variation, but it seems plausible to say that they would agree with the fact that the following examples involving gendered slurs display differences in offense that they aim to highlight as well.

Second-personal cases to consider with use of gendered slurs:

1. A man passes by a group of people, which includes women, and says, "don't be such bitches, smile every once in a while!"
2. A man passes by a group of people, which doesn't include women, and says, "don't be such bitches, smile every once in a while!"

Third-personal cases to consider with the use of gendered slurs:

3. A man speaking to a group of peers, which includes women: "My mom and my sister yelled at me today, what bitches".
4. A man speaking to a group of peers, which doesn't include women: "My mom and my sister yelled at me today, what bitches".

First, let's distinguish the difference in offense between second-personal and third-personal uses of the slur. As we already know, the second-personal uses of the slur differ from the third-person uses of the slur insofar as the members of the audience are being directly addressed by the slur in

[93] Ibid., 2900.

second-personal cases and are not being directly addressed by the slur and are just hearing the slur being used more generally. The difference in the level of offense expressed between second and third personal uses of the slur, however, is recognized by looking at the process in which the metaphorical association put forward by the slur individually affects the target. More specifically, and in the terms of our original view, the difference between a case where a target is directly addressed by the slur and a case where a target is not directly addressed by the slur is recognized by looking at the process in which a target identifies themselves as fitting into one of the salient metaphorical domains put forward by the speaker and their corresponding ideologies.

So, when considering cases (1) and (3), for example, we can see that in (1), the speaker is directly addressing the targets, and in (3) the speaker is not directly addressing the targets. The presence of offense is clear in both cases, but in what ways do they differ? Again, recognizing the metaphorical nature of the slurs and its relationship to relevant ideologies can help to answer this question. In (1), the second-personal case, the targets experience offense insofar as they are directly called upon by the speaker to identify themselves with the slur uttered. More specifically, they are identifying with at least one of the domains that are included in the salient associations presented by the slur, where the salient associations are governed by ideologies that are relevant to both speaker and hearer. In (2), the third-personal case, the targets experience offense insofar as they are identifying not with the salient associations expressed unto them, but with the salient associations that are expressed unto the targets of the statement (i.e., the speaker's mother and sister), and in a sense, identifying with the directed targets themselves.

In both second and third-personal cases, the targets experience offense by recognizing themselves in the metaphorical associations made salient. The difference between the two then seems to lie in fact that because the audience in (3) is not being directly addressed by the slur,

there exists a different process of the transfer and absorption of the slur's offense. Instead of immediately being able to identify with the domains present as in (1), the offense in (3) takes a more complicated route–through the audience identifying with the speaker's specified targets–and thus experiencing offense by means of a different process.

Now, let's distinguish the difference in offense between cases in which a member of an audience is a target of the slur, versus where the member of the audience is not a target of the slur. This requires looking at cases like that of (2) and (4) in comparison to (1) and (3). In (2) and (4) a slur is used, but members of the audience do not include members of the social group toward which the slur is targeted. The difference here may seem fairly clear compared to the differences between other cases, but we shall map it out according to our view, nonetheless. Looking at (1) and (3), putting aside the differences in the fact that (1) is used second-personally and (3) is used third-personally, we can recognize the targets identifying with at least one of the domains presented within the ideologically relevant salient metaphorical associations. In the case of (2) and (4), because no one in the audience identifies with at least one of the metaphorical domains presented, the sexist ideologies that are governing those presented domains are not being directly reinforced. This is not to say, however, that men cannot identify with female-directed slurs, that they do not experience offense when being associated with a female-directed slur, and that the corresponding ideologies are not reinforced in any way.

I argue that there *is* offense present even in cases where the target does not assume the social position that the slur is intended to target, and that sexist ideologies which govern the salient associations presented by the slur are still being reinforced in these cases. Let's try and ground these claims using the examples above. I argue that there is offense in cases (2) and (4), even though the target of the slurring utterance in context is not the slurs *intended* target. I also

argue that the sexist ideologies that govern the associations presented by the slur are still reinforced, despite the fact that there is no actual target, just audience members. Let's highlight the difference in target identity by putting forward a more narrowed example that draws from (2) and (4) yet puts aside the differences between second-personal and third-personal uses, and puts aside the differences between speaker identity, and just focuses on the difference in target identity.

a. A speaker to a woman: "You are a bitch!"
b. A speaker to a man: "You are a bitch!"

Let us first explore how my view can explain the offense of–and the reinforcement of sexist ideologies associated with–the slur in case (a). The offense in (a) comes from the idea that the target can identify with one of the metaphorical domains presented by the slur.
In (b) however, the slur is targeted towards someone who does not identify with one of the metaphorical domains presented by the slur. As a result of this, the ideology that is responsible for making salient the metaphorical associations is not directly reinforced by the use of the slur. This highlights something that is not discussed by Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, and that isn't obviously recognized in cases which involve racial or ethnic slurs. Thus, by focusing on the metaphorical nature of the slur in conjunction with the processes in which a slur reinforces relevant ideologies.

If a woman is being called a bitch, we can recognize the slur's offense by looking at the salient associations that are presented by the slur and the ideologies that make and reinforce those salient associations, as well as the fact that the target of the slur is within the social group that the slur is assigned. Because the salient associations between woman and bitch are central to

upholding the sexist ideology from which they are assigned, and the target of the slur fits into one of those domains, the offense seamlessly travels unto the target.

If a man is being called a bitch, we can recognize the slur's offense by looking at the salient associations that are presented by the slur and seeing if the ideology that governs those salient associations fits in with the suggested target's ideological positionality. Because the salient associations between man and bitch are often associating a man with a woman, the target of the slur does not fit into one of the domains within a salient metaphorical association (the domains of woman and bitch) that uphold and reinforce the ideology from which they are governed. This is not to say that there does not exist any kind of offense in the case of a man being called a bitch, but just that the offense is not initially directed toward its designated target.

Thus, a focus on the ways in which ideologies pick for salient associations amidst all possible metaphorical associations encompassed by a slur account for the level of offense towards the target group that can identify with a domain within an ideologically governed salient association. It also accounts for the level of offense towards a target that may not identify with a domain within the predominantly salient association between 'woman' and 'bitch'.

From this discussion, we have gathered information from pre-existing accounts of variable offense to ground and defend a new and more expansive way of understanding the sources of a slur's oppression, and the epistemically influential effects that slurs have upon their targets, specifically with regard to the use of gendered slurs. First, I have explained this new view in relation to current literature on slurs. Specifically, I highlighted important qualities about how Anderson and Lepore's prohibitionist perspective is both similar and different from my own and discussed ways in which my view can actually account for potential problems with prohibitionism. Then we went on to a view that better resembled the defining characteristics of

my own account– Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's understanding of variability in offense according to role-power theory– and discussed the relationship between that view and the one I present.

Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt's argue that a slur's offense across contexts is explained by the "unjust power imbalance that a slur seeks to achieve" with reference to role and power theory.[94] Specifically, they argue that *word-variation* depends on the "extent to which the slur word evokes…a pair of roles from the history of oppression", and on the "extent of the unjust power imbalance present" in those external social roles. They also argue their framework accounts for cases of *use-variation*, insofar as there exists a "dual role assignment" when a slur is involved in discourse.[95] Not only does my view similarly account for these kinds of variation, but it also highlights the levels of offense that are expressed by gendered slurs throughout these contexts, which in turn, leads to more possible cases in which a slur can offend a target, that are not made as clear in the existing views. One of the examples discussed occurs under VT2. More specifically, Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt argue that a slur maintains its offense from the designated social roles assigned to the speaker. According to their view, if the speaker of the slurring utterance does not fit the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target, then the potential for oppression would be avoided. My view–that focuses specifically on gendered slurs– highlights that there does exist offense even in cases where the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target does not typically "fit" the speaker. This is recognized in the case where a woman calls another woman a "bitch", for example.

We can now confidently arrive at the conclusion that there exists more to a slur's potential for offense than is presented in current literature. By recognizing the vast metaphorical associations made up of an extremely complex web of ideological positions, across a large

[94] Ibid., 2879.
[95] Ibid., 2899.

population of people, we can accurately account for levels of offense across all contexts. The purpose of this discussion, on a gendered slur's variability in offense, alongside the more specific examples of epistemic effects of gendered slurs as a kind of linguistic sexism, is to elucidate the extensive power of gendered slurs and the problematic and unjust effects that the use of such language has upon its targets.

But it is important to go even one step further and investigate exactly how a target is affected by the slur, and how these instances of oppression should be addressed. In the following section, I will provide reasoning to defend my claim that gendered slurs constitute cases of epistemic injustice. I will do so by comparing our gathered information on the oppressive effects of slurs and how these effects are epistemologically harmful toward their targets with a discussion on epistemic injustice.

Chapter Three

We can gather from this thesis so far that gendered slurs maintain a kind of epistemic influence insofar as they resemble the epistemic effects of common uses of linguistic sexism and that they offend across extremely extensive contexts. When we say that a slur has a particular epistemic effect, or is epistemically influential, what does this mean, and how can it result in potential problems? For the use of gendered slurs to be epistemically influential, we are saying that the effects that they have upon one's knowledge are substantial. More specifically, we are referring to the ways in which gendered slurs can function to manipulate one's knowledge about themselves and their surroundings, insofar as they function to uphold sexist and oppressive stereotypes that guide social norms and the formation of social identities.

Thus, when someone's epistemology is affected or influenced by this kind of language, they are simultaneously being influenced by the oppressive ideologies that govern the application and processes of offense behind the slurs. It seems plausible to say then, that when someone is the target of a slur, they are being epistemologically influenced in such a way that places them under the guise of the oppressive ideology associated with that slur.

By looking at Iris Marion Young's paper on the '5 Faces of Oppression', we can further bolster the idea that when one is a target of a gendered slur, they are simultaneously being oppressed by the ideologies that govern the metaphorical associations presented by the slur. Young discusses the five different ways of categorizing oppression: through exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, powerlessness, and violence. While all categories can give important insight into how one can identify instances of oppression, for the sake of our discussion, let us focus on one that speaks to the oppression experienced by the target of a gendered slur: cultural imperialism.

Young explains that "to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other".[96] In other words, cultural imperialism involves the establishment of a particular social group's experience and culture as the norm, rendering the experiences and cultures of other social groups as that which is not the norm, and to be considered an "other" less established and less important collection of experiences. We can make a connection here between those affected by cultural imperialism and the experiences of those who are targets of a gendered slur. Specifically, we can try to draw the connection between the two insofar as the experiences of those negatively affected by cultural imperialism and the experiences of targets of a gendered slur are placed in a subordinate position to that of a dominant group, where the "dominant group reinforces its position by bringing other groups under the measure of its dominant norms".[97] As previously identified according to my view and as drawn from Kukla, gendered slurs are mechanisms that function simultaneously to cause subjects to recognize themselves as having a particular social identity, and to reproduce sexist ideologies. It seems then, that both the use of gendered slurs and cultural imperialism reproduce and function to uphold dominant ideologies and norms. In saying this, we can then claim that gendered slurs are contributors to instances of oppression.

Thus, we can view the use of gendered slurs as a kind of injustice involving epistemological consequences upon its targets. Something that can help make more sense of this idea is Miranda Fricker's discussion on *Epistemic Injustice.*

[96] Young, Iris Marion. "Five Faces of Oppression." *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 2011, 59.
[97] Young, Iris Marion. "Five Faces of Oppression.", 59.

What is Epistemic Injustice?

The term epistemic injustice, as coined by Miranda Fricker, is used to express instances in which someone may experience a kind of injustice through "distributive unfairness in respect of epistemic goods such as information or education".[98] In other words, someone may experience an epistemic injustice when they experience a wrong done to themselves specifically having to do with their capacity as a knower. This may involve someone being taken less seriously for how they express their knowledge, or it could be used to describe the lack of access someone may have to important ways to interpret kinds of knowledge. Fricker categorizes these kinds of injustice into two terms: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

Testimonial injustice, according to Fricker, is to be understood as an injustice that is caused by "prejudice in the economy of credibility", while hermeneutical injustice is to be understood as an injustice that is caused by "structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources".[99] These injustices, although both considered distinctively epistemic, occur in different contexts. This is not to say that they cannot occur simultaneously, however. More specifically, testimonial injustice occurs when the testimony or expression of knowledge of a particular person is problematically understood by a hearer as having a "deflated level of credibility".[100]

Consider an example posed by Fricker that is centered around a speaker with a specific accent. Someone's accent can significantly impact the way in which a hearer views the speaker (according to relevant social norms), but words spoken by this speaker, because of their accent, can undergo either an inflation or deflation of credibility deemed by the hearer and the hearer's

[98] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2011., 1.
[99] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 1.
[100] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 1.

prejudices regarding the speaker. The general idea of testimonial injustice is succinctly summarized when Fricker states that "the idea is rather that prejudice will tend surreptitiously to inflate or deflate the credibility afforded the speaker, and sometimes this will be sufficient to cross the threshold for belief or acceptance so that the hearer's prejudice causes him to miss out on a piece of knowledge".[101] Here, Fricker identifies the reasoning behind either an inflated or deflated level of credibility attributed to a speaker by a hearer as prejudice. In altering a speaker's level of credibility of knowledge, the hearer then does not have the ability to understand and internalize the pieces of knowledge that the speaker is presenting.

In cases of hermeneutical injustice, prejudice plays a similar role. Instead of altering a speaker's level of credibility, it works to limit a person's accessibility to hermeneutical resources that work to help them make sense of themselves and their realities. Someone experiences a hermeneutical injustice when their cognitive access to conceptual ideas is restricted. A target of hermeneutical injustice often cannot make sense of their own experiences because of their restricted participation in the development of language and social concepts. A hermeneutical injustice can be represented when a "gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences".[102] Consider a noteworthy example of hermeneutical injustice provided by Fricker having to do with the term 'sexual harassment'. A hermeneutical injustice may occur when someone experiences sexual harassment in a particular environment in which the culture of that environment lacks definitive and concrete conceptualizations of the term itself.

While it is important to have identified prejudice as the impetus for cases of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice to occur, it is especially important to note what this prejudice is, how

[101] Ibid., 17.
[102] Ibid., 1.

it comes to exist, and how it works to incite cases of epistemic injustice. Fricker explains that prejudice insinuates itself mainly through the use of stereotypes, which she defines as "*widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes"*.[103] Not only do stereotypes work to reflect the attitudes that one may have towards a particular person of social group, but by recognizing the use and implications of stereotypes in language, we can also understand that a person's engagement with stereotypes implies their "cognitive commitment to some empirical generalization about a given social group".[104]

On Hermeneutical Injustice

While it is extremely important to look at two different kinds of epistemic injustice—testimonial and hermeneutical injustice— and the reasons behind their existence, I will be focusing on cases of hermeneutical injustice. I will first provide background information on how hermeneutical injustice is defined, including important examples brought forth by Fricker. I will then expand upon the mechanisms behind instances of hermeneutical injustice, including prejudices that guide these injustices, their problematic consequences, who the injustices are targeted towards, and how one can work to dismantle and eliminate the opportunity for these injustices to arise.

The purpose of my discussion on hermeneutical injustice is to develop and defend an argument that the use of certain gendered slurs—those that can be analyzed according to their metaphorical nature—are to be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice. I will do so by highlighting the ways in which my view on the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs fits into central aspects of hermeneutical injustice. I also aim to underline important differences between my view and the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice as presented by Fricker. Prima facie,

[103] Ibid., 30.
[104] Ibid., 31.

there do seem to be some key differences between cases involving gendered slurs and the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice. By arguing that although these distinctions exist, and that gendered slurs should still be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice, I hope to shed light on a new way of identifying and analyzing cases of hermeneutical injustice.

The paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice, as described by Fricker, is the case of Carmita Wood, which is originally taken from a memoir by Susan Brownmiller.

> *"One afternoon a former university employee sought out Lin Farley to ask for her help. Carmita Wood, age forty-four, born and raised in the apple orchard region of Lake Cayuga, and the sole support of two of her children, had worked for eight years in Cornell's department of nuclear physics, advancing from lab assistant to a desk job handling administrative chores. Wood did not know why she had been singled out, or indeed if she had been singled out, but a distinguished professor seemed unable to keep his hands off her.*
>
> *As Wood told the story, the eminent man would jiggle his crotch when he stood near her desk and looked at his mail, or he'd deliberately brush against her breasts while reaching for some papers. One night as the lab workers were leaving their annual Christmas party, he cornered her in the elevator and planted some unwanted kisses on her mouth. After the Christmas party incident, Carmita Wood went out of her way to use the stairs in the lab building in order to avoid a repeat encounter, but the stress of the furtive molestations and her efforts to keep the scientist at a distance while maintaining cordial relations with his wife, whom she liked, brought on a host of physical symptoms. Wood developed chronic back and neck pains. Her right thumb tingled and grew numb. She requested a transfer to another department, and when it didn't come through, she quit. She walked out the door and went to Florida for some rest and recuperation. Upon her return she applied for unemployment insurance. When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. She was ashamed and embarrassed. Under prodding—the blank on the form needed to be filled in—she answered that her reasons had been personal. Her claim for unemployment benefits was denied.*
>
> *Lin's students had been talking in her seminar about the unwanted sexual advances they'd encountered on their summer jobs,' Sauvigne relates. 'And then Carmita Wood comes in and tells Lin her story. We realized that to a person, every one of us—the women on staff, Carmita, the students—had had an experience like this at some point, you know? And none of us had ever told anyone before. It was one of those click, aha! moments, a profound revelation.*

> *The women had their issue. Meyer located two feminist lawyers in Syracuse, Susan Horn and Maurie Heins, to take on Carmita Wood's unemployment insurance appeal. 'And then ... ,' Sauvigne reports, 'we decided that we also had to hold a speak-out in order to break the silence about this.'*
>
> *The 'this' they were going to break the silence about had no name. 'Eight of us were sitting in an office of Human Affairs,' Sauvigne remembers, 'brainstorming about what we were going to write on the posters for our speak-out. We were referring to it 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 came up with ''harassment.'' Sexual harassment! Instantly we agreed. That's what it was."*[105]

In this case, the target of the injustice, Carmita Wood, experiences a cognitive disadvantage that comes from a lack of hermeneutical resources that would be used to describe her experience. We can recognize two central aspects of hermeneutical injustice that are made clear in this case. We can do this by first looking at the definition of hermeneutical injustice stated by Fricker as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource".[106] Here, hermeneutical injustice seems to take on two central ideas. Firstly, a hermeneutical injustice involves the consequence of having one's own social experience obscured from collective understanding. Secondly, it is a structural identity prejudice within the collective hermeneutical resource that causes this obscurance. In other words, when one is the target of a hermeneutical injustice, they experience a lack of understanding and concepts that are necessary to describe their lived experiences. The reason why this lack of individual conceptual understanding occurs is because of a structural identity prejudice that manifests in the collective conceptual understanding.

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[105] Brownmiller, Susan, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1990), 280-281.
[106] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 155.

Correspondingly, with regards to the case of Carmita Wood, her own social experience is obscured insofar as she does not have the hermeneutical resources to make sense of her experience of being sexually harassed. Additionally, we can identify the structural identity prejudice that excludes marginalized people from being able to shape those hermeneutical resources by looking at Wood's social position in relation to those around her, including both members of Wood's social group and members outside of her social group that may be involved in the committed injustices.

In developing and defending the argument that the use of gendered slurs can and should be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice, I will first further analyze the two central aspects of hermeneutical injustice that we have identified so far:

1. Obscurance of some significant area of one's social experience.
2. Structural identity prejudice within the collective hermeneutical resource.

I will then re-consider the previously discussed epistemic effects of gendered slurs and attempt to highlight the ways in which my view on the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs can help to classify the uses of such language as a kind of hermeneutical injustice. To finish off the argument, I will draw comparisons between the ways in which hermeneutical injustices are addressed with the ways in which the use of gendered slurs ought to be addressed.

The first important characteristic of hermeneutical injustice we will discuss is how a significant area of a target's social experience is obscured from collective understanding. In order to understand the mechanisms behind this process, it is first necessary to understand what Fricker means when using the word 'obscuring'. A way in which we can understand someone's social experience as being obscured is by taking a closer look at how this happens to Carmita Wood. As quoted above, "she requested a transfer to another department, and when it didn't

come through, she quit…Upon her return she applied for unemployment insurance. When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. She was ashamed and embarrassed. Under prodding—the blank on the form needed to be filled in—she answered that her reasons had been personal. Her claim for unemployment benefits was denied".[107] Here, we can identify a specific instance in which Wood experiences this kind of injustice and experiences a moment in which part of her understanding about what happened to her is obscured, or that she experiences a "loss" in her ability to understand and communicate her experiences.

Another place in which we can identify a kind of obscurance that may make things more clear is by looking at two important ideas: how both the harasser's and Wood's cognitive disablement stems from the same hermeneutical lacuna, and yet, how only Wood is prevented from "understanding a significant path of her own experience" as a result of her cognitive disablement.[108] More specifically, in this case, "neither [the harasser nor the harassed] has a proper understanding of how he is treating her".[109] This is what is meant when it is said that they both experience the same hermeneutical lacuna. The difference between the two, and how the injustice arises, is recognized by the fact that the hermeneutical lacuna in Wood's case, obscures a significant area of Wood's social experience, whereas in the harasser's case, it can actually serve as an advantage.[110] It seems here that obscurance is not merely used to refer to the hermeneutical lacuna Wood experiences, since both Wood and the harasser have this hermeneutical lacuna, and that it is not unique to Wood, the target of the injustice. Instead, we should understand obscurance as referring to the disadvantageous cognitive disablement that is

[107] Brownmiller, Susan, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*, 280-281.
[108] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 151.
[109] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 151.
[110] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 151.

specific to Wood, insofar as it limits her from making sense of a significant area of her social experience.

But what are the reasons behind why a cognitive disablement–the fact that neither the harasser or Wood properly understands the ways in which she is being treated–is advantageous to the harasser but disadvantageous to Wood? We can answer this question by turning to the next aspect of hermeneutical injustice: the structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource.

Before delving into the technicalities of structural identity prejudice and hermeneutical resources, let's continue with the question posed above with regard to the disadvantageous effects of Wood's cognitive disablement in contrast to the effects experienced by the harasser. In this case, Fricker claims that the cognitive disablement of the harasser–that is, the lack of understanding behind his own actions towards Wood–actually serves in the harasser's favor, insofar as it suits his immediate purpose in having his "conduct unchallenged".[111] With respect to Wood however, her experienced cognitive disablement is seriously disadvantageous, in that it prevents her from understanding her lived experiences. So, there is something fundamentally different about Wood's cognitive disablement in comparison to her harasser's that distinguishes her experience as a kind of injustice and his not. It is by examining the underlying social structures and conditions relevant to the case that we can better identify the central cause of hermeneutical injustice.

On the surface, we can recognize that Wood, as a woman, is a member of a different social group than that of her harasser, and as a woman, experiences a kind of "social powerlessness in relation to men" (among other kinds of powerlessness) that has permeated

[111] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 151.

throughout history. More specifically, her social position as a woman is central to the reasons why her cognitive disablement is seriously disadvantageous to her. Taking into consideration the sexist ideologies that uphold these kinds of powerlessness, we can understand that this powerlessness often results in the prevented participation of shaping collective hermeneutical resources. Fricker explains this concept as "hermeneutical marginalization", and specifically describes that "the notion of marginalization is a moral-political one indicating subordination and exclusion from some practice that would have value for the participant".[112] Because of Wood's subordinate social position in relation to her harasser—a man—and the relevant oppressive norms that are involved in upholding that kind of social structure, she was prevented from contributing to "practices by which collective social meanings are generated". [113]

Let us try to map out what we have so far in order to understand our central focus at the moment: where and how there exists a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. When Wood experiences an obscurance of a significant area of her social experience, she is experiencing such a thing due to her cognitive disablement. This cognitive disablement is to be considered an injustice insofar as it is disadvantageous to her specifically. The cognitive disablement, or the hermeneutical lacuna experienced by Wood, is a consequence of hermeneutical marginalization. Finally, "because it is generally socially powerless groups that suffer hermeneutical marginalization", we can say that the structural prejudice within the collective hermeneutical resource is caused by hermeneutical marginalization insofar as it affects "people in virtue of their membership of a socially powerless

[112] Ibid., 152.
[113] Ibid., 152.

group, and thus in virtue of an aspect of their social identity", constituting an identity prejudice.[114]

So far, we have gathered important information about the two central aspects of hermeneutical injustice: an obscurance of social experience and the structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. To briefly summarize, someone experiences a kind of obscurance of personal social experience as a result of the structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. Someone may be prevented from making sense of their lived experiences if they are members of a social group that are hermeneutically marginalized–in that they don't have equal participation in shaping a society's collective hermeneutical resource. Having a more detailed idea of the specific characteristics and underlying functioning of hermeneutical injustices can now help us to begin to draw the connection between cases of hermeneutical injustice and cases of gendered slurs.

Gendered Slurs as Kinds of Hermeneutical Injustice

We run into a prima facie problem when trying to relate cases of hermeneutical injustice to the use of gendered slurs. Isn't the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice–the case of Carmita Wood– structurally different from cases of gendered slurs we have already examined? In order to start developing a connection between the two, let us investigate how understanding the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs can help highlight the ways in which the effects of slurs can fit into the two central parts of an instance of hermeneutical injustice. It is first necessary to discuss how the use of gendered slurs–with a focus on their metaphorical nature– can potentially result in instances where a significant area of one's social experience is obscured from their understanding. Then, we will look at how the use of gendered slurs similarly involves a

[114] Ibid., 155.

structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. I hope that by exploring the similarities and differences between these cases, we will develop a new way to understand and identify cases of hermeneutical injustice.

As recognized in the case of Carmita Wood, Wood experiences a hermeneutical injustice insofar as she experiences an obscurance of a significant area of her social experience (not having an understanding of being sexually harassed) and because Wood is part of a hermeneutically marginalized group, the obscurance occurs as a result of the structural identity prejudice that the hermeneutically marginalized group faces when trying to shape and participate in the development of a society's collective hermeneutical resources. Simply put, Wood experiences an injustice because she is prevented from participating in the development of concepts that allow her to make sense of her own lived experiences.

For the purpose of this discussion, let us focus on drawing connections between Wood's case and a case involving a gendered slur. Consider the example that was introduced briefly before:

1. Man to woman: "Calm down; don't be a bitch."

It is not obvious here that there exists a kind of hermeneutical lacuna as experienced by Wood. However, as we have already discussed, the offense directed by the slur to the target is derived from the idea that the target can identify with the salient associations of the slur. By being called a 'bitch' in a contemptuous manner, the salient associations that are presented by the speaker to the target are made salient by and in order to uphold sexist ideologies, and the associations are salient in such a way that the hearer can thus identify themselves with one of the metaphorical domains at hand. By tracing back the process in which a slur offends, we can more clearly try to

pull out particular parts of the process that resemble the central aspects of hermeneutical injustice. Let's try to investigate a kind of social obscurance experienced by the target of a slur.

When looking at (1), we can understand that a target experiences offense when the target can identify with one of the metaphorical associations that are made salient according to relevant ideologies. The speaker–a man, uses the slur in a contemptuous manner.[115] This can help us to recognize the negative valence that is assigned to the slur and its corresponding metaphorical associations. By recognizing negative valence, and that valence is assigned by ideology, we can come to the understanding that the slur is used in such a way that is designed to uphold the sexist ideologies that govern the associations presented unto the target. As the ideology itself is reinforced by the utterance of the slur, so is the speaker's social position. The target of the slur–a woman, having been presented a set of salient metaphorical associations, can make sense of the statement about herself insofar as she identifies with the presented salient association of 'woman' with 'bitch'.

One similarity that can be illustrated here is the resemblance between the disadvantageous effects of the cognitive disablement experienced by Wood in contrast to her harasser, with the differences in the self-identification processes of the target within salient metaphorical associations in contrast to the speaker. In the case of Carmita Wood, a significant area of her social experience is obscured from her understanding. Wood is being prevented from understanding her own experience because of a hermeneutical gap. Because her identity as a woman is historically excluded from shaping collective hermeneutical resources, she cannot use necessary hermeneutical tools to make sense of her own life. Thus, when we think about hermeneutical injustice, we think of the target of the injustice as experiencing an unjust

[115] As noted earlier in the discussion on variable offense, slurs still offend in non-contemptuous cases.

hermeneutical gap in understanding. But how can we identify this kind of gap in the case of gendered slurs?

When we think about the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs it seems that there isn't necessarily a gap in one's understanding of themselves, but instead, quite the opposite. Because of the numerous metaphorical associations that are encompassed by a slur, there seem to be a surplus of concepts that are readily available to people. If a hermeneutical injustice constitutes the obscurance of someone's understanding of themselves, and there are many possible metaphorical associations within a slur–and thus an abundance of available concepts– then how could the use of a gendered slur possibly be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice? The answer to this question can be found by recognizing the idea that only *certain* metaphorical associations presented to the target are made salient. Knowing that specific ideologies govern the salience of particular associations, we can gather that a sexist ideology is reinforced by and makes salient sexist and oppressive metaphorical associations that uphold the principles of the ideology itself.

Thus, it does seem we are able to identify a kind of gap in understanding experienced by the target of the slur. We can do this by recognizing that the ideologies that govern the salience of metaphorical associations in a slur function in a way that limits the potential salience and target-self-identification with any of the other various non-salient associations. As Wood experiences an obscurance in her understanding of herself as being the victim of repeated sexual harassment, the target of the slur 'bitch' experiences an obscurance in her understanding of herself since she is being socio-linguistically coerced into identifying herself in one of the domains of the presented salient sexist metaphorical associations.

The obscurance identified in the case involving a gendered slur is centered around the self-identification of the target with only presented salient associations that function to uphold an ideology whose nature is to oppress the target. In the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice, the obscurance is identified in the inexistence of proper hermeneutical tools that allow for the target to understand their own experiences. Thus, we can see here, that when a target of a gendered slur is presented only metaphorical associations that are made salient by sexist ideologies, they do not have proper hermeneutical tools (found in non-salient associations) to make sense of their experiences.

So far, we have been able to identify a kind of obscurance that is central to cases of hermeneutical injustice, in a case involving a gendered slur. The second part of the process in arguing that gendered slurs are a kind of hermeneutical injustice is to identify in the cases of gendered slurs the second central aspect of hermeneutical injustice: structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. As discussed, structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical is caused by hermeneutical marginalization insofar as it affects "people in virtue of their membership of a socially powerless group, and thus in virtue of an aspect of their social identity", constituting an identity prejudice.[116] Part of this powerlessness involves members of that social group to be prevented from contributing to "practices by which collective social meanings are generated". [117]

In the case of Carmita Wood, because of her subordinate social position and identity as a woman in relation to her harasser and the relevant oppressive norms that are involved in upholding that kind of social structure, she was prevented from contributing to the development of collective hermeneutical resources, and as a result of this structural identity prejudice, was

[116] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 155.
[117] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*., 152.

unable to make sense of her own experiences. Where can we identify this kind of structural identity prejudice in cases involving the use of gendered slurs? If we understand structural identity prejudice to be the reason behind the obscurance of one's understanding of their social experience, then when trying to identify the structural identity prejudice in cases of gendered slurs, it makes sense to look at the reasons why the target of the slur experiences such an obscurance in the first place. More specifically, we need to look at the reasons behind why the target is presented with some metaphorical associations over others, and how the specifically salient associations prevent her from understanding her own experiences.

We have already identified obscurance in the case of gendered slurs insofar the target of a gendered slur is presented only metaphorical associations that are made salient by sexist ideologies, and as a result of this, they do not have proper hermeneutical tools (found in non-salient associations) to make sense of their experiences. The next step is to identify the structural identity prejudice in this case. This is explored by looking at the reasons why only salient associations are presented to the target, and by looking at the ideologies that govern the salience of those metaphorical associations. In cases of hermeneutical injustice, structural identity prejudice is recognized in the hermeneutical resource by looking at the fact that hermeneutically marginalized groups are prevented from contributing to "practices by which collective social meanings are generated". [118] We can connect the powerlessness of the target of a hermeneutical injustice here to the powerlessness of the target in the case of a gendered slur. As the target of hermeneutical injustice is prevented from contributing to collective hermeneutical resources, the target of a gendered slur is prevented from utilizing non-salient metaphorical associations that may serve as a more representative and accurate representation of their lived experiences.

[118] Ibid., 152.

Being prevented from having access to certain metaphorical associations is due to the ideologies that are responsible for governing salience. More specifically, in our case involving a gendered slur, a woman is presented with metaphorical associations that are specific to upholding the sexist ideologies from which the salience of those associations is derived from. The ideologies that govern the salient metaphorical associations between 'bitch' and being an 'aggressive woman', are ideologies that function to maintain and promote sexist, oppressive, and misogynistic norms. The utterance of this slur, by a speaker whose social identity is directly reinforced by the sexist metaphorical associations and relevant ideologies, displays a kind of structural identity prejudice insofar as the metaphorical associations presented to the target of a slur are presented and made salient according to the structural identity prejudice (assumed inferiority of women) against the target.

Overall, we can see that although the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice and the case involving a gendered slur are structurally different cases, we can still recognize the two central aspects of hermeneutical injustice–obscurance and structural identity prejudice– in the case involving a gendered slur. From this, it seems clear that we can understand that gendered slurs are to be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice. This is not to undermine the structural differences between these cases, however. By highlighting the unique ways in which we can identify the obscurance of someone's social experience from their own understanding and the ways in which we can identify structural identity prejudice in the case of gendered slurs, we can bring light to a new kind of hermeneutical injustice.

Responding to Hermeneutical Injustice

In conclusion, I argue that the use of gendered slurs is to be understood as a kind of epistemic injustice, and by considering existing literature on hermeneutical injustice, we can achieve

insight into how these kinds of injustice can be properly identified, addressed, and eliminated. Fricker discusses the virtue of hermeneutical justice, and in doing so, explains a form the virtue of hermeneutical justice as one that involves "an alertness or sensitivity" on behalf of the listener "of the possibility that the difficulty one's interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is…due to some sort of gap in collective hermeneutical resources". [119] In other words, Fricker is explaining here that in the effort to completely mitigate injustice, the hearer is to assume a kind of responsibility to be "reflexively aware" of the relationship between their respective social identities and how those identities impact the speaker and the speaker's ability to explain themself. [120] This kind of virtue functions in a way that ensures that the instance of potential hermeneutical injustice is eliminated insofar as the hearer is to realize that the speaker is not "being a fool", but instead, is "struggling with an objective difficulty". [121]

Let us try and apply this virtue to our case involving a gendered slur:

1. Man to woman: "Calm down; don't be a bitch."

In this case, the specific virtue is not obviously translated. In a way, this can be expected since we have clearly distinguished structural differences between the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice and this case. The hearer in this case is the target of the slur, rather than someone who is merely listening to someone that is experiencing a hermeneutical injustice. This makes it especially more difficult to apply this theory of virtue. However, another ethical role for the virtue of hermeneutical justice that Fricker proposes, seems to offer a better application of virtue to cases of hermeneutical injustice involving gendered slurs that goes "above and beyond the hearer's treatment of his interlocutor on a given occasion".[122]

[119] Ibid., 169.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 174.

This concept of virtue is centered around the recognition that hermeneutical injustice is a result of unequal relations of social power. As Fricker clearly explains, "shifting the unequal relations of power that create the conditions of hermeneutical injustice takes more than virtuous individual conduct of any kind; it takes group political action for social change".[123] What Fricker is emphasizing here, is the importance of recognizing the responsibility of social and power structures in perpetuating cases of injustice. Addressing problems with social structures and collective resources requires social change. Social change is made possible by group action. Effectively addressing these kinds of social problems, rather than focusing on individual virtuous conduct is something that can be more readily applied to the use of gendered slurs, especially when considering the metaphorical and ideologically dependent nature of the slur.

Reconsider (1). We can recognize the "unequal relations of power" in the social identities of the speaker of the slur, a man, and the target of the slur, a woman. Because of their respective social identities, the target is presented with and thus forced to identify with metaphorical associations that are made salient by sexist and oppressive ideologies, that simultaneously reinforce the social position of the speaker. In being presented with and expected to identify with only sexist metaphorical associations expressed by the slur, the target experiences an injustice due to the asymmetrical level of social power respective to her identity and that of the speaker. This unequal power is reinforced by the utterance of the slur by forcing the target to identify with concepts and associations that do not accurately describe themselves or their lived experiences.

Thus, it is by "shifting the unequal relations of power that create the conditions of hermeneutical injustice", that one should properly engage in the dismantling of these kinds of injustices. By directly challenging sexist norms in conversation, maintaining awareness of the

[123] Ibid., 175.

variety of social identities and their respective levels of power, and encouraging widespread change, one can effectively confront, mitigate, and eventually eliminate cases of hermeneutical injustice that involve gendered slurs.

Conclusion

It has been my purpose, throughout this thesis, to develop, explain, and defend arguments that promote the serious consideration of gendered slurs as a highly influential and extremely important kind of expression of language. First, I argue that some gendered slurs are to be considered a kind of metaphor, as they share similar cognitive analyses. More specifically, I argue that gendered slurs are to be understood as linguistic structures that encompass all possible metaphorical interpretations. The gendered slur encompasses all metaphorical associations, yet only presents salient metaphorical associations to the listener. This is due to the relationship between gendered slurs and their corresponding ideologies. Not only does the gendered slur encompass all possible metaphorical associations, but the slur also serves as a mechanism which functions simultaneously to cause subjects to recognize themselves as having a particular social identity, and to reproduce sexist ideologies. Thus, for example, when a man calls a woman a "bitch", the woman, in trying to make sense of the statement, is called to recognize herself as have a social identity related to the sexist and ideology-reinforcing metaphorical associations that arise from the term 'bitch', such as the social identity of being an overly aggressive woman.

The second part of this thesis focuses on the ways in which my view on gendered slurs both fits into and challenges current theories on slurs with regard to a slur's variable offense. By comparing my view to that of Anderson and Lepore and Popa-Wyatt and Wyatt, I was able to highlight examples of contexts in which a gendered slur can offend that were not previously accounted for. This includes contexts where the discourse role that is meant to oppress the target does not typically fit the speaker. This is recognized in the case where a woman calls another woman a 'bitch', for example. The purpose of this section was to highlight the ways in which my

view on gendered slurs can simultaneously account for concerns in existing literature, but also put forward and reveal unrecognized contexts in which a slur can offend.

Lastly, I focused on arguing for uses of gendered slurs to be considered a kind of hermeneutical injustice. In this section, I compared the paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice to a case involving a gendered slur and explored how central aspects of hermeneutical injustice could be identified in the case of a gendered slur. The aspects of hermeneutical injustice I focused mainly on included the obscurance of one's social experience, and the existence of a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. After defending gendered slurs as a kind of hermeneutical injustice, I close the discussion with a conversation on what actions are to be taken to mitigate the effects of hermeneutical injustice involving gendered slurs.

The purpose of this thesis is to bring awareness to the oppressive nature of gendered slurs and the effects that this oppression has upon both individual members of a target social group and the group as a whole. Investigating the derivation of and processes behind a slur's offense is a productive starting point in understanding how one can best eliminate and resist further cases of injustice. One example of addressing the injustice that arises from the use of gendered slurs involves ongoing reclamatory efforts. The de-weaponizing of slurs that occurs as a result of these reclamatory projects can also be understood in terms of actions taken to prevent and mitigate the effects of hermeneutical injustice. Processes of reclamation involve the de-weaponization of language, and one way of addressing cases of hermeneutical injustice is to find ways of confronting the hermeneutical gap experienced by a target that defines the shared hermeneutical resources within a society. It is by addressing the gaps that reinforce the weaponized and offensive nature of gendered slurs that injustice is avoided.

We can gather from our discussions on how to address hermeneutical injustices, the epistemic impacts of gendered slurs, and the metaphorical nature of gendered slurs overall, that ways of mitigating the injustices do exist, and that they should be actively considered in order to minimize and eliminate the injustices and offense experienced by targets of gendered slurs.

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