

Normative Discourse and Social Negotiation

by

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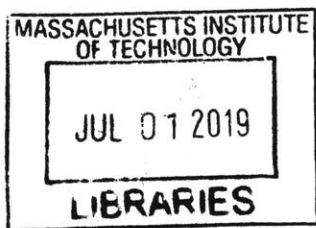
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation lies at the intersection of philosophy of language, social and political, and feminist philosophy. The first half of the dissertation is primarily about the ways language can be used to stereotype, denigrate, oppress, or otherwise harm. The second half is about how language can be used to resist and undermine those harms. In the four chapters of my dissertation, I examine the ways in which language can shape the social world. Language allows people to reinforce social norms and systems like sexism, racism, and oppression more broadly. But it also allows people to disrupt these systems. I argue that it is worth looking seriously at the linguistic mechanisms by which individuals can do both, and the social and political systems in place that enable such language use in the first place. Only by combining the two can we start to get the full story about language, oppression, and power. Within this broad research program, I am specifically interested in *implicit* discourse: language that indirectly or implicitly communicates one thing while explicitly stating another. Implicit language is extremely important to understand various mechanisms of linguistic harm and oppression.

Chapter 1 examines *normative generics* like ‘boys don’t cry,’ whose utterances often carry with them an injunction that boys not cry, or a condemnation of crying boys. When someone utters a normative generic like ‘women stay at home and raise families,’ they are reinforcing a harmful social norm *without explicitly using* any evaluative terms like ‘should, good, right.’ In Chapter 2, I problematize philosophical views on silencing, and introduce a new concept of linguistic harm, *illocutionary frustration*, that occurs when a hearer treats a speaker as though she does not have standing to say what she is saying. In Chapter 3, I give a meta-philosophical analysis of socially informed philosophy of language. In it, I argue that in the service of intellectual inquiry and social justice, we would do well to incorporate types of *social situatedness* into our methodological frameworks.. I end in Chapter 4 by reviewing the ways in which social scripts play pivotal roles in enabling interpersonal subjugation, and offer a way out.

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Introduction

My dissertation is the beginning of a two-fold project of identifying specific ways in which language can harm and how it can heal. Within this broad research program, I am specifically interested in *implicit* discourse: language that indirectly or implicitly communicates one thing while explicitly stating another. More banal examples of this are expressions like ‘there’s the door’ to indicate an invitation to leave, ‘is there any more coffee?’ as a request for coffee, or ‘you call that a sandwich?’ as a criticism of your tuna on rye. But we can easily see how such language use can escalate into less benign discourse: ‘This is America’ to indicate an invitation to leave, and ‘you call yourself a man?’ as a criticism of anyone not conforming to historically stereotypically masculine behavior or appearance. Such implicit language has historically been of philosophical interest, specifically in the field of linguistic *pragmatics*. Famously, H.P. Grice and others have given analyses of how to understand people who say ‘x’ but communicate ‘y’ as *implicating* ‘y.’ But implicit language is also extremely important to understand various mechanisms of linguistic harm and oppression. One final advantage of theorizing about implicit discourse is that it lies at the intersection of philosophical subfields, bringing them into much-needed conversation with each other. As is evident, I am particularly interested in the bridge between philosophy of language and social/political/feminist philosophy, but the other sub-disciplines that meet in my research — epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of law, philosophy of race, philosophy of mind, cognitive science, metaethics, and linguistics — help tell a more complete story about language and the social world.

In Chapter 1, I engage with the debate on *normative generics*. Generics are sentences that express generalizations about a particular group or kind. For example: *birds fly* and *ducks lay eggs* strike us as true generic sentences. Many generics strike us as true by virtue of being generally or typically true, descriptively. But there’s nothing semantically explicit about this generalization, nor is there much uniformity to the kinds of generalization that are common to

these types of sentences. More recently, philosophers have been examining the semantics and social impact of *normative generics*: expressions like *boys don't cry*, *women are kind and nurturing*, *children are seen and not heard* – that convey something over and above (and even distinct from) the descriptive reading. Rather, they seem to be saying that boys shouldn't cry, or that it is right for boys not to cry. I identify a puzzle in the normative generics literature that extant theories don't solve, and then offer a solution. Consider the sentence pair:

(1) Boys don't cry.

(2) A boy doesn't cry.

Sentence (1) is felicitous -- it expresses a general normative statement about boys crying — while (2) is not. I argue that we should look to a *metalinguistic* theory of generics to understand indefinite singular normative generics. That is, a normative indefinite singular generic is a proposal about what to include in the extension of the generic term. This theory explains why it is more often than not that felicitous indefinite singular generics are about *social kind terms*. Those terms are, in some sense, up for grabs and more apt for metalinguistic negotiation. I argue that this explains a crucial way in which language shapes the social world. When we say things like (2), we propose definitions and uses for the word 'boy.' Such proposals and their consequences actually impact the behavior of the groups they pick out (following Hacking (1995) among others), as well as the attitudes of others towards those groups.

In the second chapter of my dissertation (paper version forthcoming in *Mind*), I move to a different kind of normative speech — street harassment — and analyze it in the context of the philosophical debate on *illocutionary silencing*. According to several philosophers, illocutionary silencing occurs when a speaker tries and fails to perform an illocutionary act (roughly, to do something with her words) because the hearer fails to grasp what she is doing (or, there is no *uptake*). I argue against Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton's seminal notion of illocutionary

silencing, pointing out that it falls prey to an internal incoherence if we adopt a neo-Gricean understanding of non-literal speech. I then propose a new concept — *illocutionary frustration* — that avoids this pitfall and captures the phenomenon Hornsby & Langton set out to account for. Illocutionary frustration occurs when a hearer treats a speaker as though she does not have *standing* to say what she is saying. I apply this concept to case studies of individuals who are trying to disengage from street harassment, and in doing so show that the concept generalizes beyond cases of sexual refusal.

The third chapter of my dissertation takes a step back to investigate the methodological commitments of analytic philosophers — myself included — who work at this intersection of social philosophy and philosophy of language: or who work on socially significant language. I argue that we should think about *social situatedness* as a consideration when we rely on introspective linguistic and philosophical intuitions about such terms. This is in part because such socially significant language behaves differently than other ‘standard’ language that analytic philosophers analyze. For example, the word ‘slut’ might mean different things to someone using it in a pejorative sense (someone trying to demean and sex-shame on the basis of gender) and someone using it in a reclaiming sense (like women who participate in ‘slut walks’ to raise awareness about gender-based violence). I argue (following Pohlhaus 2012) that it’s likely that more and less-dominantly situated hearers will have different linguistic intuitions about certain kinds of terms that track the dominant/marginalized distinction. Given the methodology and representation I argue that the linguistic intuitions of less dominantly-situated hearers/theorists (philosophers and otherwise) are not being represented in analytic philosophical work on socially significant language. I conclude that in the interest of inquiry and of social justice (which are inextricably linked when it comes to inquiry *about* matters of social justice, following Du Bois (1935) and others), we should incorporate social situatedness into our methodology. That is, we should pay attention to social situatedness as a relevant and salient contextual parameter when doing philosophy of language about socially significant terms.

Social scripts, as in *when A gives a compliment, B says 'thank you,'* pervade and shape natural language discourse and social interactions. Scripts usually promote cooperation between conversational participants, but not always. For example, if A pays B a 'compliment' like '*nice legs,*' A puts B in a double-bind of either abiding by the compliment script and being further humiliated, or 'breaking' the script and risking escalation. In this chapter, I take a philosophical lens to the notion of a social script (following Appiah (1994), Oshana (2005), Stoljar (2012), Dougherty (ms), and others). I then give an analysis of what it would mean to disrupt a social script and argue that in certain circumstances, doing so is morally and practically prudential. Then I give several examples of this as it seems to be happening in the world outside of philosophy. I end with a more detailed discussion of what a disruption is: arguing that a well-executed disruption draws attention to the script in a way that makes the entire audience aware of the implicit workings of the script.

I. Background

‘Girls are tough,’ I say to my niece after she’s fallen and scraped her knee. In doing so, I’ve communicated to her that girls tend (and even ought) to be tough; she can handle the scrapes. I’ve expressed a *normative generic statement*. For some reason, ‘a girl is tough’ does not have the same effect. Why not? One observation is that ‘girls are tough’ is expressed using the bare plural (girls), and ‘a girl is tough’ uses the indefinite singular (a girl). This is one of many cases where a normative generic is felicitously expressed using the bare plural, but not with the indefinite singular. In this paper, I make trouble for existing views – notably, Sarah-Jane Leslie’s (2008) on the semantics of normative generics. I outline a view of indefinite singular normative generics and examine the effect of normative generic statements on our characterization of social terms. I argue for a *metalinguistic* understanding of indefinite singular normative generics (following Krifka 2015), and in doing so semantically distinguish indefinite singular normative generics from bare plural normative generics. According to the view I propose, utterances of *indefinite singular* normative generics propose to establish or change the way the term is used in the conversation or context, while utterances of *bare plural* normative generics express ought-claims. I end by discussing the ways in which social kind terms are especially apt for metalinguistic characterization and negotiation.

A generic statement makes a generalization about certain kinds or individuals: for example, *tigers are striped*, *ducks lay eggs*, and *mosquitos carry West Nile virus*. Among the myriad puzzling features of generics is their resistance to a straight-forward truth conditional analysis. It is difficult to say in virtue of what the above examples are true or false. Generic sentences aren’t universal quantifications: tigers are striped, but albino tigers aren’t. They’re not true in virtue of being true by majority: about 50% of ducks lay eggs (meanwhile *ducks don’t lay eggs* is

¹ For a caveat to this entire paper, please see Chapter 3.

not true, even though about 50% of ducks don't lay eggs). And they aren't even true in virtue of being true about at least half of the members of the kind: fewer than 1% of mosquitos carry West Nile virus.²

Another well-documented feature about generic statements is that they can be expressed using the bare plural– *tigers are striped* – or the indefinite singular– *a tiger is striped*.³ Although there may not be a sharp theoretical distinction between bare plural and indefinite singular generics, it is worth noting that many generic statements can be expressed using the bare plural locution, but not the indefinite singular. For example, *madrigals songs are popular* expresses that for the most part, madrigal songs are popular (Cohen 2001). *A madrigal song is popular*, on the other hand, has a non-generic existential reading: that some specific madrigal song is knocking the socks off its listeners. It is well-established that bare plural generics and indefinite singular generics pattern differently.⁴ I explore this phenomenon as it applies to *normative* generic statements.

Call a generic expression normative if an utterance of it (a) expresses some sort of norm involving the subject of the generic statement and (b) endorses that norm. It is generally held that there is a distinction between normative and descriptive generics, although the line between the two is admittedly blurry. For the purposes of this paper, I will grant that there is such a distinction and maintain that a theory of generics should be able to predict why and when indefinite singular readings of normative generics are available.⁵ Examples of normative generic statements include: *a good Christian goes to church on Sundays*, *a lady never curses*, *children*

² These are just a few of the many challenges to a straightforward truth-conditional analysis for generic statements. For more challenges, see Krifka et al. 1995, Leslie 2012, among others.

³ Less commonly, generic statements can also be expressed using the *definite* singular: “the tiger is striped” (imagine the narrative of a documentary). I won't talk about definite singular generics in this paper, but they will be an interesting sub-class to revisit given that it seems extremely difficult to think of any normative generics expressed using the definite singular.

⁴ See Burton-Roberts 1976, Lawler 1973, Carslon 1982, Cohen, 2001, Greenberg 2003, Leslie 2008, Krifka 2012, among others.

⁵ I will say more about this in section ii.

are seen but not heard, friends don't let friends drive drunk. Utterances of 'a lady never curses' seem to express a norm that a lady should not curse, and communicate the speaker's approval of this norm. But some normative generic statements, too, are expressible using the bare plural locution, but not in the indefinite singular. Consider the sentence pair:

(1) Boys don't cry.

(2) #A boy doesn't cry.

Sentence (1) expresses a general normative statement about boys crying – while (2) doesn't seem to. Why isn't the normative generic reading available for (2)? And what's more, why does it then become available when we consider a modified indefinite singular sentence? – such as:

(2*) A real boy doesn't cry.

Sarah-Jane Leslie (2015b) points to the treatment of normative generics as a long-standing puzzle in the generics literature. I maintain that the treatment of normative generics intersects with another long-standing puzzle in the generics literature: the puzzle of bare plural versus indefinite singular generics. Normative generic statements differ from non-normative (or descriptive) generic statements in terms of their force and assertability. Indefinite singular generics sometimes differ from bare plural generics in terms of their felicity.⁶ In this paper I propose a joint solution to the two puzzles: we should look to a *metalinguistic* theory of indefinite singular generics to understand the patterning of normative indefinite singular generics.

This sort of approach will help us weigh into two important debates in semantics and social philosophy of language: what is the difference between indefinite singular and bare plural generic statements; and what we are doing normatively and socially when we use normative generics. There is already a rich debate about why the indefinite singular patterns differently from the bare plural or even the definite singular. Normative generics should figure into that debate. And in any case, a good number of generics are normative generics, so we should include

⁶ A sentence of the form 'An F is G' is felicitous if it can be read or heard as a generic sentence (it is infelicitous if we get an existential reading, instead).

them in the data.⁷ Second, normative generics are a sub-genre of normative and social language: they are used to express stereotypes, biases, dismissals, among other things. It will be important to figure out how we talk and – among other things – disagree about normative generics and their underlying assumptions.

I argue that observations about the patterning of certain normative generics – such as ‘boys don’t cry’ – weigh in favor of a *metalinguistic* theory of indefinite singular generic statements. I follow Plunket and Sundell (2013) – who in turn follow Barker (2002) – in using the term *metalinguistic* to pick out what happens when the use of an expression communicates information about the usage of the expression. So, when I use the term ‘boy’ metalinguistically, I am communicating information about how to use the term ‘boy.’ I then consider some implications of this for normative language. My conclusion is twofold. First, semantically, the patterning of indefinite singular and bare plural normative generics support a metalinguistic theory. Second, down the line, such a theory can help us gain a greater understanding of the social implications of invoking and disagreeing about normative generics.

Normative generics are generics. But they differ from descriptive generic statements in important ways. In the next section, I discuss some recent characterizations of normative generics. Then I consider a series of pairs of normative generics expressed in the indefinite singular and the bare plural. I end by exploring the upshots of a metalinguistic theory of indefinite singular normative generics.

II. Normative Generics

i. Normative generics and social language

There is some sort of important difference between the generic expressions *boys are children* and *boys don’t cry*. One way to identify the difference is to call the former expression

⁷ Some have acknowledged the need to give normative generics special treatment (Burton-Roberts (1977), Cohen (2001), Leslie (2015b, forthcoming-b)), but most treat normative generics as a sub-class of descriptive generics, or as exceptions (Cohen 1999). I think a unified treatment for descriptive and normative generics is desirable, and that considering the patterning of normative generics informs this treatment.

descriptive and the latter normative. Someone may utter ‘boys don’t cry’ knowing that statement does not map on to (or represent) the world in the same way that ‘boys are children’ does. The sentence conveys more (and sometimes less) than descriptive information about the world. A variety of sentences are candidates for being called ‘normative generics.’ I will concern myself with generics of the form *Fs are Gs* or *an F is G* that are implicitly, rather than explicitly, normative. That is, there does not seem to be much in the sentences themselves that is an indicator of normative or hortatory force.⁸ I am most interested in these generics for the purpose of this paper because they most closely resemble descriptive generics, yet seem to convey something more. In the rest of the paper, I try to flesh out what this “something more” amounts to.

According to Sarah-Jane Leslie, a generic statement like *boys don’t cry* is normative by way of having a ‘hortatory force’ (Leslie, 2015b, forthcoming-a). That is, assertions of normative generic statements can serve as encouragements or admonitions of certain (relevant) behavior. When I say ‘winners never quit’ to a student, I am encouraging her not to quit, or admonishing her for quitting, or praising her for continuing not to quit in the face of adversity. Similarly, Sally McConel-Ginet (2012) says of normative generics: “speakers uttering sentences like those... are usually urging their addressees to act so as to make the actual world more like an “ideal” world of which these sentences could truly be uttered descriptively – for example, to do their part to make it descriptively accurate to say that boys don’t cry.” In these regards, normative generic sentences differ importantly from descriptive generic sentences.

Sally Haslanger (2014) discusses another feature of normative generic sentences: the way they influence and reflect (how we think about) the social world.⁹ For example, a normative

⁸ To contrast: generics like *women are kind*, *firefighters are brave* and *jerks are rude* are normative, but arguably are so because of the normativity in the thick terms. Of course, there is overlap here, but to the extent that I can, I will address those normative generics (like *girls are tough*) that seem to have an implicit ‘ought’ claim or extra hortatory force. Another class of generics that are beyond the scope of this paper are *habituals*: generics like *John smokes* or *Mary handles the mail from Antarctica*. These sentences are said to be generic because they describe how an individual usually or generally behaves (Carlson 1982, Krifka et al. 1995). We can generate normative-sounding versions of these, as well: *everybody loves a winner*, perhaps. “You don’t love her? But everybody loves a winner!”

⁹ “... in contexts where it is assumed that what’s natural or good (at least for good things) is how things should be... then the utterance of a generic enables a short inference to the normative conclusion, giving the generic a kind of normative force” (367).

generic like *women stay home with their children* can be used “to back social norms: women *ought* to stay home with their babies...” Haslanger also explains how utterances of normative generics endorse norms. When one says that Fs are Gs in the relevant generic normative sense, this implicates “that it is right and good for Fs to be G, and Fs that are not G are defective.”¹⁰

A third way in which normative generics differ from their descriptive counterparts is that normative generic sentences are not assigned truth-conditions in the same way that descriptive generic sentences are. For example, *boys don't cry* is not judged true or false in the same way that *boys are children* is. Instead, its truth conditions — if it has any — are closer to those of the sentence *boys ought not cry*.¹¹ As Leslie (2015b) tells us, these kinds of generics “do not seem to express any kind of inductive generalization about the empirical world,” and “seem to be unresponsive to the actual distribution of the property among the members of the kind.” That is, a (normative) utterance of *boys don't cry* does not seem to depend on whether, descriptively, boys actually do not cry. Rather, it expresses some sort of normative ideal or standard according to which boys do not cry.

We can take away two things from this observation: first, utterances of normative generic statements invoke something *other than* descriptive portrayals of the world (which might also include descriptive portrayals). Second, when we are determining the truth conditions of a normative generic sentence, we do something different than when we determine the truth conditions of a descriptive generic sentence. So, it's important to distinguish between the truth-conditions and the felicity of a normative generic sentence. *Boys don't cry*, for example, is felicitous but false. In this paper, rather than dealing with the truth conditions of normative generics, I

¹⁰ Haslanger 2014, 380.

¹¹ This assumption is not uncontroversial. My argument hinges on a more general and commonly held assumption: that there is some important difference between normative and non-normative generic sentences.

will be focusing on the *felicity* or assertability of normative generics: whether or not an utterance of *Fs are Gs* or *an F is G* conveys a normative generic statement.¹²

Leslie (2015b) proposes that normative generic statements be understood in a way that draws upon the *dual character concepts* of the subject terms in them (drawing on Knobe and Prasada, 2013). A word like ‘boy,’ for example, has two readings: a normative and a descriptive one. When we utter a generic statement like ‘boys don’t cry,’ we invoke the normative reading of ‘boy.’ Importantly, this distinction is a semantic one. ‘Boy’ (and other terms that can be read normatively) is two-way polysemous: there is the normative ‘boy’ (what a boy ought to be or do), and the descriptive ‘boy’ (what a boy is like). Leslie also gives a theory of descriptive generics on which indefinite singular generics are felicitous if they involve ‘characteristic properties’ (Leslie 2007, 2008) of the term being explained. Her view has been recently challenged (Asher, 2012, Sterken 2014, Liebesman 2011, among others). At the end of the next section, I will show that the patterning of normative indefinite singular generics makes trouble for Leslie’s theory.

ii. Normative patterning

Some utterances of indefinite singular generics permit normative readings while some do not. Utterances of bare plural generics seem to more readily permit normative readings. Here are some data points.

1. Boys don’t cry.
2. #A boy doesn’t cry.

3. Girls are tough.
4. #A girl is tough.

5. Children are seen but not heard.
6. #A child is seen but not heard.

¹² See Leslie 2008 for further discussion of the truth-conditions of generic sentences versus “the effects of generic language on social cognition.”

7. Friends don't let friends drive drunk.
8. A friend doesn't let friends drive drunk.

9. Waiters don't smoke on the job.
10. A waiter doesn't smoke on the job.

11. Gentlemen hold doors open.
12. A gentleman holds doors open.

13. Winners never quit.
14. A winner never quits.

Sentences (2), (4), and (6) do not seem to express normative generic statements – or at least, if they do, they sound strange, and the normative generic reading is a bit contrived (I will address this in section V). But things change when we enhance sentences (2), (6), and (8) with normatively-flavored adjectives:

15. Strong boys don't cry.
16. A strong boy doesn't cry.

17. Real girls are tough.
18. A real girl is tough.

19. Good children are seen but not heard.
20. A good child is seen but not heard.

With the added adjectives, sentences (16), (18), and (20) felicitously express generic sentences

(which is, again, to say nothing of the sentences' truth-conditions – just that, when asserted, they express generic claims).¹³

iii. Against the Essences View

Sentences 15-20 are problematic for theories that hold that indefinite singular generics are about *essence*.¹⁴ It has been held that the reason *a tiger is striped* is a felicitous indefinite singular generic while *a tiger is from Africa* is not is that being striped is essential to being a tiger. On this kind of view, the reason that (2) – *a boy doesn't cry* – is infelicitous is because it's not the case that not crying is essential to boyhood. By contrast, *a lady doesn't curse* is felicitous because the speaker does hold that not cursing is essential to ladyhood.

There's another problem with the essences view. It should predict that sentences (16), (18), and (20) are just as infelicitous as sentences (2), (4), and (6). If toughness is not essential to being a girl, then, intuitively, it is not essential to being a real girl (and aren't all girls real girls?). Similarly with the other sentences. An essentialist view cannot make sense of the observation that merely adding an adjective to the subject term of an infelicitous indefinite singular generic generates a felicitous indefinite singular generic. The essentialist might respond here that there *is* in fact a significant difference between positing the essence of *girl* and the essence of *real girl*. In section IV, I give another argument against the essentialist view that is neutral about this.

Insofar as Leslie's view lines up with essentialist theories of indefinite singular generics, this data is problematic for her, too. Leslie distinguishes between *characteristic* generics, *majority* generics, and *striking property* generics (Leslie 2007, 2008, 2015b). A characteristic property generic, according to Leslie, is a generic like 'ducks lay eggs.' Such a generic of the form

¹³ Cohen (2001) points this out with the felicity of "a good king is kind" as contrasted with the infelicitous "a king is kind." Also eschewing a view of indefinite singular generics as reflecting essence, he proposes a "rules and regulations" reading of indefinite singular generics, where an IS generic signals that a rule is in effect. The rule can be any number of flavors: "physical, biological, moral, legal, or linguistic." My proposal differs from his in that I posit that the 'rule' is always linguistic: normativity comes in at the pragmatic level.

¹⁴ Such theories are held by Lawlor 1973, Burton-Roberts 1977, among others.

'Ks are F' is true if it is the case that: "if F lies along a characteristic dimension for the Ks, then some Ks are F" (Leslie 2007, 386). According to Leslie, 'boys don't cry' is a normative characteristic property generic, where "*not crying* is a characteristic property of [the] ideal notion of a boy" (Leslie 2015b).

iv. Against the Dual Character Concepts View

The full picture of Leslie's account of normative generics can be found in Leslie 2015b. She proposes (following Knobe and Prasada 2011) that certain terms — like *woman* and *scientist*, and unlike *bartender* and *banana* — have two readings: a descriptive reading and a normative, ideal reading. According to Leslie, a statement like 'Hilary Clinton is the only man in the Obama administration' invokes the normative reading of 'man.' Such normative expressions, including normative generics, reveal the underlying polysemy of these kinds of terms. So, a normative generic like 'boys don't cry' just says something characteristic of the ideal notion of *boy*.

Other types of generic sentences are about *majority* properties: accordingly to Leslie, 'boys cry' is an example of this kind of generic. It is true because most boys cry (other examples are 'barns are red' and 'cars have radios') (Leslie 2007, 2015b). Leslie writes that while generics involving characteristic properties can occur with the bare plural or the indefinite singular, "generics that involve non-characteristic majority properties can only be formulated with bare plural subjects" (Leslie 2015b). This is why "'a car has a radio" or "a boy cries" are decidedly strange (or else take on a different meaning altogether)" (Leslie 2015b). But here is one worry for Leslie: her view doesn't accommodate the infelicity of 'a boy doesn't cry' or the felicity of 'a real boy cries.' If 'boys don't cry' is a normative characteristic property generic and characteristic property generics can be expressed using the indefinite singular, then why isn't the normative generic reading of 'a boy doesn't cry' available? And if a normative generic reading of 'a boy cries' is unavailable, then why is the normative generic reading of 'a real boy cries' available? If I'm not mistaken, Leslie's theory predicts that if we have a characteristic property generic reading expressed using the bare plural, then it should be available in the indefinite singular (where-

as the *majority* property generic readings are the ones that are available using the bare plural but backfire with the indefinite singular).

Perhaps Leslie's response would be to deny that the normative readings of characteristic property generics like *a boy doesn't cry* are unavailable, and to say that modifications like 'real' or 'good' in fact trigger the ideal normative meaning of 'boy'. A friend of the dual character concept understanding of normative generics may even point out that normative readings of indefinite singular generics are available when focus is added to the subject term; if we emphasize the word 'boy,' as in 'a *boy* doesn't cry,' the normative reading sounds more felicitous than a monotone reading of the generic.^{15, 16}

This line of response runs into two more problems, as we'll see more clearly in the next section. First, we can generate felicitous normative indefinite singular generics using modifiers *other* than 'real' and 'good,' and it is more difficult to make the case that these modifiers are triggering the normative reading of the subject term in question. If we deem 'a girl is tough' and 'a boy shares his toys' infelicitous, but find that 'a brave girl is tough' and 'a friendly boy shares his toys' have normative force, then we need a more intricate story about how those adjectives give rise to the normative reading of 'girl' and 'boy.' Second, this line of response will over-generate predictions of which terms have dual characters. Leslie hypothesizes that pairs of normative and non-normative generic readings "can arise only if the concept in question has a dual character," so that we get a normative reading of 'boys don't cry' in case *boy* has a dual character (Leslie 2015b). But it seems like we can get normative readings of generics like *a real bicycle has multiple gears* or *a good bartender doesn't get drunk on the job*, and that we might want to resist positing dual characters for terms like 'bicycle' and 'bartender.'¹⁷

¹⁵ See Cohen 2003, Krifka 1995, for discussions of generics and focus.

¹⁶ Another response in defense of Leslie's view might be to say that 'a boy doesn't cry' or 'a girl is tough' misfires as a normative generic because we hear it as a majority property generic, which, unlike an essential property generic, is not expressible using the indefinite singular. But we can construct contexts in which it is salient that we are discussing essential properties of boys, and still have difficulty hearing 'a boy doesn't cry' as a generic.

¹⁷ Knobe and Prasada 2011 find that only a certain subset of words display a "dual character concept." But as we will see in the next section, the set of terms that become available for a normative reading extend far beyond the ones they indicate.

III. Bare Plurals and Indefinite Singulars

In light of the patterning data and arguments in the previous section, I would like to offer for consideration a metalinguistic theory of indefinite singular normative generics. First, I explicate one example of such a theory as it applies to generics in general. Then, I propose a theory in a similar spirit.

Manfred Krifka's *definitional theory* of generics is one among several theories that endorse a definitional or analytic reading of indefinite singular generics (such as Lawler's 1973 idea that indefinite singular generics are definitional, and Burton-Roberts' 1976 notion of *analytic* indefinite singular generics). I choose to explicate his as a useful example of a metalinguistic theory, but my claim that the data from normative generics support a metalinguistic theory of indefinite singular generics is not restricted to this particular one. Krifka's definitional theory of indefinite singular generics is roughly the following: indefinite singular generic expressions are definitional statements about the subject of the generic statement. Bare plural generic sentences, on the other hand, are (for the most part) descriptive. The salient difference between definitional and descriptive generics is that descriptive generics are about the world (or the way the world is), whereas definitional generics say something about language use.¹⁸ So, when we use a descriptive generic, we hold the interpretation (the language) of the generic term fixed. When we use a definitional generic, on the other hand, we propose a shift in the language (and hold world fixed).

So, 'a tiger is striped' says that being striped is part of the definition of being a tiger, whereas 'tigers are striped' says that in general, or for the most part, tigers are striped. The indefinite singular locutions says something different than the bare plural locution. This explains why generics of the form *Fs are Gs* can have a felicitous generic reading, while *an F is G* might not. Compare: 'Tigers live in Africa' with 'a tiger lives in Africa.' The bare plural reading is felici-

¹⁸ Krifka, 2012, 3. "Descriptions presuppose that the language is fixed... definitions communicate about the language that is being used... descriptive generics make generalizations about patterns that appear in the world; definitional generics restrict the language used to describe the world."

tous, because it makes sense to say that for the most part, tigers live in Africa. The indefinite singular reading fails, because it is not appropriate to propose that living in Africa is part of the definition of ‘tiger.’

Krifka proposes a modified notion of common ground to help model the difference between definitional and descriptive generics. We evaluate a generic sentence at an indexed pair: a set of *admissible interpretations* i , and a set of possible worlds w . So, for any expression α , we can give its extension at $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{i,w}$ where i is how the expression is interpreted, and w is the world at which we evaluate it. To take an example, consider the expression ‘a duck is feathered.’ The interpretation parameter consists of a set of admissible interpretations for ‘duck,’ and a set of possible worlds in which we evaluate that sentence. Roughly, the interpretation parameter tells us how we interpret “duck,” and the world parameter tells us whether ducks are feathered in a given world. Krifka uses this model to explain the difference between definitional and descriptive generics:

DEFINITIONAL

if for any i, i', w and expression α , $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{i,w} \neq \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{i',w}$, then $\langle i, w \rangle$ and $\langle i', w \rangle$ differ in how expressions are interpreted, but not primarily in the how the worlds are like.

DESCRIPTIVE

if for any i, w, w' and expression α , $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{i,w} \neq \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{i,w'}$, then there must be some factual differences between the indices $\langle i, w \rangle$ and $\langle i, w' \rangle$.

So, on any given extension of a generic expression, if the interpretation parameters differ, then there is *definitional* disagreement about the expression: the expressions are interpreted differently. The disagreement is about what it is to be a duck: specifically, about whether or not to be a duck is to be feathered – whether or not “being feathered” is part of the definition of duck, so to speak. If, on the other hand, the worlds differ, then there is some disagreement about the facts or truth of “ducks are feathered. The disagreement is about whether or not ducks – where the interpretation of ducks is constant – are feathered.

What happens in a conversation when a generic expression is uttered depends on whether it is being used definitionally or descriptively: “If a proposition $[\Phi]$ is accepted definitionally at a common ground $\langle I, W \rangle$... then the set of possible worlds stays the same, but only such interpretations i remain admissible for which the proposition $[\Phi]$ is true in all possible worlds of the common ground.”

According to Krifka’s proposal, an indefinite singular generic usually corresponds to a definitional generic, while a bare plural locution usually corresponds to a descriptive generic (but can also be definitional). So, what we’re doing when we use an indefinite singular is proposing a definition or interpretation of the subject of the expression. When we use the bare plural, we are describing a way that the world is. This explains why indefinite singular and bare plural generics pattern differently. Consider some mis-matched (non-normative) pairs.

- 21.a Barns are red.
- 21.b #A barn is red.
- 22.a Ducks are monogamous.
- 22.b #A duck is monogamous.
- 23.a Parties are fun.
- 23.b #A party is fun.
- 24.a Berries are delicious.
- 24.b #A berry is delicious.

The intuition is that the ‘a’ sentences are all felicitous, and the ‘b’ sentences are strange. Krifka’s metalinguistic theory gives us a nice way of accommodating this data. All the ‘a’ sentences, expressed using the bare plural, are descriptive generic sentences: they say that for the most part, barns tend to be red, ducks monogamous, parties fun, and berries delicious. The reason that the ‘b’ sentences do not read felicitously is that they purport to say something *definitional* about the subject terms in them, and intuitively, we reject these characterizations as definitions. For example, it is not part of our definitional interpretation of a barn that it be red, or that a duck be monogamous, etc. In contrast, we might explain the felicity of ‘a duck is feathered’ because we *would* affirm that part of what it is to be a duck is to be feathered. Compare:

‘that’s not a duck – it’s not even feathered!’ with ‘that’s not a duck – it’s not even monogamous!’ The former statement seems rightly assertible, while the latter seems confused.¹⁹

So far, we have dealt with how Krifka’s account applies to non-normative generics.²⁰ I would like to extend a metalinguistic account to normative indefinite singular generics. We began this paper with a question. Why does a sentence like *boys don’t cry* straightforwardly communicate something, whereas *a boy doesn’t cry* gives us pause? We want to maintain that both sentences have some sort of normative force, but that they also differ. Krifka’s account explains the different patterning of indefinite singular and bare plural generic statements. I propose the following metalinguistic theory about the patterning of normative indefinite singular and bare plural generics.

IV. Normative Indefinite Singular Generics

i. Metalinguistic Indefinite Singular

Following Sarah-Jane Leslie and Sally Haslanger, I maintain that a normative generic statement is an expression of a norm.²¹ When I say that ‘girls are tough,’ I am saying that girls *should* be tough, or that it is “right and good” for girls to be tough (Haslanger 2014).²² Granting that normative generics contain an implicit *ought*, I propose the following to explain the difference between indefinite singular and bare plural normative generics:

¹⁹ There’s a complication about making a claim about species versus making a claim about the members of the species. Here, I am doing the latter.

²⁰ There is room in a definitional account to explain the patterning of indefinite singular and bare plural normative generics. On a definitional account, we mean something *different* when we say ‘boys don’t cry’ than when we say ‘a boy doesn’t cry.’ Here is Krifka’s gloss on the descriptive normative generic usage of ‘boys don’t cry’: “In the descriptive use, the speaker assumes a shared interpretation of *boys*, and wants to communicate to the addressee that under this shared interpretation, the generalization that the entities fall under *boys* do not cry when in situations that could lead to crying.” That is the descriptive use that corresponds to the bare plural reading. The indefinite singular locution corresponds to the definitional reading of the generic expression: ‘In the definitional use, the speaker *propose to the addressee* to restrict the interpretations such that it holds that the entities that fall under *boys* do not cry...’ Krifka 2012, 4.

²¹ See footnote 7 for the scope of ‘normative generic’ for the purposes of this paper.

²² For Haslanger, the context determines whether a generic statement is normative. When a generic is deemed normative, however, it expresses an underlying norm.

Normative Indefinite Singular (IS): A normative generic assertion of ‘*An F is G*’ conveys/communicates ‘*If x is not G, then x should not be called F.*’

Crucially, this does not say that *x* is *not* a boy if *x* cries; it says that *x* should not be *called* a boy if *x* cries. On this view, IS normative generics express how we ought to use language, where BP normative generics express how the world ought to be. I suggest that terms that work felicitously in IS normative generics tend to be more normatively loaded social terms: like *gentleman*, *lady*, *friend* (in contrast with terms like *boy*, *girl*, and *child*). By contrast, bare plural normative generics have the following interpretation:

Normative Bare Plural (BP): *S* is a normative generic assertion of ‘*Fs are Gs*’ iff *S* is an assertion of ‘*Fs ought to be Gs.*’

To be clear, this proposal holds that both indefinite singular and bare plural generics can be normative. But I maintain that there is a *different* kind of normativity that comes in at the indefinite singular level: that of metalinguistic negotiation or usage. The normativity of indefinite singular normative generics, according to this view, is that of people telling each other how certain expressions should be used. Bare plurals are normative in the way that Haslanger and Leslie suggest, with respect to the world and how individuals in it should behave (according to the speaker). And because the indefinite singular entails the bare plural, utterances of ‘a boy doesn’t cry’ will be twofold normative: there will be the initial normativity of the hortatory force that accompanies the bare plural, but also a second kind: that of dictating or negotiating how we should use the expression in question. And this is why some indefinite singular generics fail to strike us as normative: when it’s inappropriate for the speaker to propose or negotiate how we use a certain term, especially if that term is more or less fixed in the public lexicon. I will say more about this in the next section.

The idea is that normative indefinite singular generics propose a revision to the usage about the characterization of the term in question. A normative indefinite singular generic proposes a modification of our existing usage of ‘boy’: that the speakers modify their usage to ex-

clude the crying things from falling under the term 'boy.' We might, then, expect the behavior of indefinite singular generics to accord with the above theory in other ways. For example: if what it is to say that *an F is G* is to say that *G* is characteristic of *F*, then we should be able to deny that *x* is an *F* if *x* lacks *G*. We can come up with a simple way to test this: we should be able to say 'x isn't an *F*; x isn't *G*' of felicitous indefinite singular normative generics. We try it out on the following sentences:

- (25) ? He's not a boy – he cries!
(26) ? She's not a girl – she isn't tough!

- (27) She's not a friend – she lets her friends drive drunk!
(28) He's not a gentleman – he doesn't hold doors open!

Sentences (27) and (28) sounds more felicitous than (25) and (26). That is, we can imagine coherent utterances of (27) and (28) more easily than we can (25) and (26), even though we may disagree with all of the statements. Our next question is why. Here is a hypothesis: It is more natural to say 'a friend doesn't let a friend drive drunk' than 'a boy doesn't cry' because it is more appropriate to propose a normative interpretation of 'friend' than of 'boy.' Perhaps that is because our idea of how 'boy' should be characterized is fixed, while 'friend' leaves more room for interpretation. One suggestion for why this is, to be explored at a later date, is that it might be more natural to use the indefinite singular construction when the subject of the generic is more of a social term and less of a natural term. This seems intuitive: more natural to propose modifications to the definitions and usages of terms that don't have widely agreed upon extensions.

Some more data support this suggestion. Observe that we can incorporate almost any predicate *G* to 'an *N F* is *G*,' where *N* is some normatively flavored adjective, and the resulting sentence is a felicitous normative generic.²³ Consider some of the following:

²³ Cohen 2001 and Greenberg 2003 observe this with descriptive (non-normative) generics (and some normative ones).

29. A good duck is monogamous.
30. A real man rides a moped.
31. A brave girl doesn't eat peanuts.
32. A committed doctor washes her hands.

Contrast them with:

33. ? A duck is monogamous.
34. ? A man rides a moped.
35. ? A girl doesn't eat peanuts.
36. ? A doctor washes her hands.

Sentences 29-32 read felicitously, unlike their adjective-less counterparts in 33-36. What we're doing when we utter these sentences is proposing that monogamy, sobriety, peanut-abstinence, and hand-washing ought to be definitional properties of the terms in question. We might deny the proposals, and so refrain from judging the normative generics as true, but the point is: they are still *generics*. A metalinguistic understanding of indefinite singular generics accommodates this data well: it is more appropriate to propose definitions of terms like 'good duck,' 'real man,' 'brave girl,' and 'committed doctor.' Our notions (or concepts or characterizations) of these terms are not well-established. They are, in a sense, up for grabs.

There are a few ways in which this proposal view differs (philosophically, but not technically) from Krifka's. First, Krifka holds that indefinite singular generics are metalinguistic insofar as they are *definitional*. Instead, I treat a generic of the form 'An F is G' as giving a criterion or condition – G – that needs to be met in order for something to count as F. This distinction is subtle, but present. To illustrate: 'A pig has lungs' seems like a true indefinite singular generic. But having lungs does not seem like part of the definition of 'pig.' Rather, having lungs is a condition that needs to be met for something to be a pig.

Second, I disagree with Krifka about the characterization of kind terms and definitions. Like many others, Krifka holds that in a generic sentence of the form 'An F is G,' F is a natural kind term, and that for such terms, G is a defining property. Even if we were to grant the earlier point that G be a characteristic, rather than a defining property, it is not the case that F is a natural kind term (or a kind term at all, though this is another story for another time). Krifka writes

that “as we have seen, the predicate must count as one that is plausibly related to being a member of a kind... it must be plausible that it runs in a kind. If this fails, this leads to the known reduction in acceptability, as in #*A madrigal is popular* or #*A barn is red*.”

The problem with this interpretation of generic sentences is that it does not accommodate generics that involve modifications of the subject term. ‘A standard barn is red’ and ‘a catchy madrigal is popular’ are felicitous indefinite singular generics, but Krifka’s view predicts that ‘standard barn’ and ‘catchy madrigal’ are natural kinds. Given the plethora of modified generics we have seen, and the potential to generate indefinite singular generics with any number of uncommon modifier-subject combinations, I think it is prudent to shy away from identifying a generic sentence as consisting in a definitional predication of a natural kind term. One more way in which my view differs from Krifka is that he holds that bare plural generics are equally capable of expressing metalinguistic claims as are indefinite singular generics. I disagree; one example of this is the generic pair ‘liars are jerks’ and ‘a liar is a jerk.’ Uttered in the same context, these generics have different normative forces, and that only the latter is a metalinguistic claim (while the former is descriptive).

ii. Embeddings and Disagreement

A metalinguistic proposal for indefinite singular generics explains the patterning of felicity of indefinite singular normative generics. But it also explains the *normativity* of indefinite singular normative generics. Just as in some contexts, it makes sense for a speaker to propose something about the usage or meaning of a term, in some contexts a speaker’s doing so carries normative force.

A metalinguistic theory of indefinite singular generics gives us a nice way of dealing with the linguistic data about normative generics, *and* it has helpful consequences from a normative and social standpoint. We can understand an indefinite singular generic expression as a statement about how the *term* in the generic statement is or should be interpreted.

This jibes with – among other things – Haslanger’s view of normative language and the social world: ‘in saying “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk,” one usually implicates that there is something *about what it is to be a friend* that entails that one stops friends from drunk driving.’²⁴ And presumably, when one denies that friends don’t let friends drive drunk, one denies the above implication. On an account like the one I propose, we can understand bare plural generics as following from indefinite singular ones. And we get a nice explanation for why there are bare plural normative generics counterparts available for every indefinite singular normative generic, but not vice versa. If we say ‘An F is G’ and mean that ‘we ought to call x F only if x is G,’ then it follows that ‘Fs ought to be G.’²⁵

Another advantage of the metalinguistic theory is that it explains why certain normative generics sound (and are) more pernicious than others. If in the midst of a discussion about my philosophical career, my mother sits me down and says “women stay home and raise families,” the force of the utterance seems different than an utterance of “a woman stays home and raises a family.” Intuitions may vary on this, but my reading is that the latter is more cutting. The bare plural utterance says something like: here’s what women should do (or, here is what women do and thereby ought to do). The latter says: in order to call yourself a woman – in order to count as a woman – you need to stay home and raise a family. And when the latter content is conveyed to someone who self-identifies as a woman, in defiance of that self-identification, the normative force is more directed (although perhaps no less bad) than “women stay home and raise families.”

A third common social phenomenon we can shed light on with this account of normative indefinite singular generics is the use of indefinite singular normative generics in parental and otherwise pedagogical speech. Some indefinite singular generics are more readily normative in certain scenarios: ‘a boy doesn’t cry,’ for example, may not immediately permit a normative reading, but we can imagine a parent saying this to a younger child in a scenario where she is

²⁴ Haslanger 2014, 367 (original emphasis). Also see Leslie 2014.

²⁵ This is because in uttering ‘An F is G’ with normative force, we’ve established that G is a condition for F-hood.

(albeit misguidedly) teaching her son what it is to be a boy.²⁶ It is interesting to note the structural similarity of expressions like ‘a table has four legs,’ ‘a dog barks,’ ‘a child is an immature adult,’ ‘a woman is kind and nurturing.’ All uttered in the same pedagogical context, it would be no wonder if claims made by indefinite singular generics about the social world became entrenched in our cognition much like the way we conceptualize tables and chairs (and deceptively so).²⁷

Adopting a metalinguistic view of normative indefinite singular generics allows us to account for the embedding behavior of generics. Consider the difference between:

(37) If boys don’t cry, then Jimmy shouldn’t.

(38) ? If a boy doesn’t cry, then Jimmy shouldn’t.

-- and between

(39) Do women stay home and raise families?

(40) ? Does a woman stay home and raise a family?

Finally, bare plural and indefinite singular generics behave differently under different scopes of negation – which is further evidence for a metalinguistic view. Although indefinite singular sentences like (2*) (‘a real boy doesn’t cry’) are negated, they don’t allow for wide-scope negation in the way that bare plurals do. Consider:

(41) It’s not the case that boys cry.

(42) ? It’s not the case that a boy cries.

-- or more colloquially:

(43) You’re wrong that boys cry.

(44) ? You’re wrong that a boy cries.

²⁶ Thanks to Sofia Ortiz Hinojosa for pointing out that many indefinite singular generics permit normative readings in “stern governess” contexts. See Sterken 2012 for a similar suggestion.

²⁷ See Leslie 2008, 2013, 2014 among others for much more sophisticated discussions of this kind of phenomenon.

I find it difficult to give (42) or (44) anything other than an existential interpretation, while (41) and (43) sound fine as generics. This data makes sense if we understand indefinite singular generics to be making a metalinguistic claim; the patterning is in line with other metalinguistic sentences. Consider similar embeddings of Horn's metalinguistic sentence (with or without focus):

(45) ? It's not the case that around here we like coffee; we love it.

(46) ? You're wrong that around here we like coffee; we love it.

(47) ? It's not the case that she's a woman; she's my wife!

It seems that metalinguistic discourse is not fully apt for embedding in the way that standard linguistic discourse is, and indefinite singular generics behave the way that other metalinguistic discourse does in embedded scenarios.

Adopting a metalinguistic view of normative indefinite singular generics also allows us to accommodate relevant data about disagreement. When we disagree about normative generics, we disagree differently than we might about descriptive ones. Specifically, we disagree about how we ought to characterize the generic term. For example, in the following dialogue:

A: A real boy doesn't cry.

B: No, a real boy can cry whenever he wants to.

A and B seem to disagree about the meaning of *real boy*. If 'real boy' is a socially constructed term, then the acceptance or rejection of generic statements involving that term reflect the characterization of those terms. This is nice, because it would allow disagreement about the truth-conditions of such a generic to determine what we mean by 'real boy,' and so influence the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of uttering such a statement.

iii. Two kinds of felicity

There are two general kinds of purported counter-example to the metalinguistic view. The first has to do with the data: there are many indefinite singular generics that *do* sound felici-

tous (that I have claimed do not). The second notes that certain indefinite singular generics do not come across as making a metalinguistic claim at all.

First, the purported counterexamples. Someone might say there is nothing infelicitous about sentences like ‘a boy doesn’t cry’ or ‘a girl is tough.’ We just need to get ourselves into the right mindset and the right context. I have two things to say here. First, I think the observation that there is nothing infelicitous about sentences like ‘a *boy* doesn’t cry’ and ‘a *girl* is tough,’ and other indefinite singular generics where focus is placed on the term in question, is right.²⁸ But this is completely consistent with (and supports) a metalinguistic view of indefinite singular generics. Focus, as Horn (1985) made famous, is an indicator of metalinguistic discourse. In his paradigmatic examples – “Around here we don’t LIKE coffee – we LOVE it” – metalinguistic negation is signaled by focus. Because the words “like” and “love” are pronounced with more emphasis, we can understand that these are metalinguistic usages of the words; the speaker is indicating that “love” – not “like” – is the more appropriate word to use to describe their feelings for coffee. So, the fact that we can get felicitous readings of indefinite singular generics when we add focus is, according to some, further evidence for a metalinguistic view.

Second, the observation that certain normative indefinite singular generics are felicitous in the right context is also consistent with a metalinguistic view. This is because we are more clear on what it is we are doing when we utter an indefinite singular generic. The question of felicity is can be addressed with recourse to metalinguistic discourse: ‘when does it make sense to make a generic claim using the indefinite singular’ is answered by the [answer to the] question, ‘when does it make sense to make a metalinguistic claim about Fs?’ – or even ‘when does it make sense to state the meaning of F?’²⁹ So, there are contexts where making such a statement or claim will make more sense than others. And the contexts where making such a claim makes sense tend to be those contexts where indefinite singular generics are felicitous. For example (as

²⁸ Or, ‘A [boy]_F doesn’t cry’ and ‘a [girl]_F is tough,’ to follow the terminology of Cohen 2003.

²⁹ I frame this question in terms of “making sense” because the phenomena of felicity and infelicity track sense and nonsense. When I say “a girl is tough” and this falls flat, it is not because I have said something ungrammatical; it is because I have said something that is hard to make sense of.

is noted by Sterken 2012 and Krifka 2015, among others), contexts of parental and pedagogical speech are rife with indefinite singular generics. As we've seen, contexts where people are insulting or shaming each other into not being part of the category (or calling themselves such).³⁰ Out of context (drinking coffee with a friend), saying 'a lady doesn't curse' or even 'a table has four legs' sounds out of place, or even a bit senseless. But there are many times where it is coherent to utter such a generic. For example, if my friend starts cursing like a sailor (about the three-legged table), what's conveyed when I say 'a lady doesn't curse' is something like 'you don't get to call yourself a lady unless you stop cursing.'³¹ One of the things that the above patterning data brings out is that certain normative indefinite singular generics are more frequently felicitous than others. I think this is explained by the fact that certain terms in our language are more well-defined than others. Social kind terms tend to be less well-defined (or, at least, we agree less about their definitions and extensions), and so there will be more contexts in which it's appropriate to make metalinguistic claims about them.

But there is a third kind of context that seems *not* to be explained by the metalinguistic proposal about indefinite singular generics. This brings me to the second kind of counterexample. This objection holds that an utterance of certain indefinite singular generics, like 'a real girl is tough,' says nothing metalinguistic: it just says that girls should be tough. The force of saying 'a real girl is tough' to my niece just is to get her to act tough.

The above kind of example can be explained by appealing to the entailment relations between indefinite singular and bare plural generics. As we mentioned at the beginning of the paper, indefinite singular generics entail their bare plural counterparts, but not vice versa. That is, an utterance of 'a real girl is tough' will entail that 'real girls are tough.' And on my view, an utterance of 'real girls are tough' does have the kinds of effects described in the objection above. So, what is going on here is that the stronger claim, — 'a real girl is tough' — entails the weaker

³⁰ Contexts where the addressee is being instructed on how to obtain category membership also tend to allow for felicitous indefinite singular generics — for example, if I say to Pinnochio, "a real boy doesn't lie."

³¹ — to which an appropriate response on her end is: "I'm not a lady."

claim — ‘real girls are tough’ — and the entailment makes salient the pragmatic and semantic effects of the entailed sentence. A rough paraphrased entailment of the indefinite singular (but not the bare plural) can be put this way: “if you want to be a real girl, then you need to be tough.” It does sound like that is part of what we are saying in the case described. That being said, there just may be cases where an indefinite singular generic doesn’t have the metalinguistic effect (although I will predict that these are rare) — just as there are cases where declaratives don’t come across as assertions, questions don’t come across as questions, etc. The paradigmatic cases of indefinite singular generics, however, will be metalinguistic.

We need a way of understanding the inconsistent patterning of indefinite singular and bare plural normative generics. And we should be pursuing a theory that allows us to question assumptions latent in generic normative statements. A metalinguistic theory of indefinite singular generics does just that: it both accommodates the data, and gives us a framework to address the social implications of normative generic statements.

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Chapter 2: Illocutionary Frustration

This paper proposes a new category of linguistic harm: that of *illocutionary frustration*. I argue against Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton's notion of illocutionary silencing by challenging their claim that silencing occurs when there is a lack of uptake of the speaker's illocutionary act. I look at two scenarios that their view treats differently, and argue that these scenarios warrant the same kind of analysis; Hornsby and Langton's notion of silencing can't capture the purported difference they want it to capture. I propose that we should look instead to *standing* to explain the phenomenon that illocutionary silencing intends to explain. I explicate the role of standing in terms of illocutionary frustration, then consider street harassment as an example of a linguistic interaction that is best explained by my proposed view.

1. Silencing

As many have noted, J.L. Austin's *speech act* analysis is a helpful way to talk about language that degrades and harms. Specifically, following Rae Langton (1993, 2009), Jennifer Hornsby (1998), and others, it is a helpful way to talk about language that *silences*.

We can think of silencing in many ways. Many colloquial descriptions of silencing involve one person cutting another off, or otherwise not letting them speak. Of recent notoriety, we can think of United States Senator Elizabeth Warren being cut off by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on the senate floor in February 2016. During the confirmation hearings for (then) attorney general nominee Jeff Sessions, McConnell sent Warren to her seat for attempting to read the testimony of Coretta Scott King. As the media put it, Warren was silenced by McConnell. But, as Langton points out, there are more subtle ways of silencing that require more nuanced analyses. *Illocutionary* silencing, for Langton, is what happens when a speaker is able to utter certain words, but for those words not to constitute action in the relevant sense: 'although the appropriate words can be uttered, those utterances fail to count as the actions they were intended to be' (Langton 1993, p. 299). Less informally, illocutionary silencing occurs when there is failed *uptake* by the hearer of the speaker's illocutionary intentions; the hearer does not recognize what the speaker is trying to do with her words, so the speech act fails.

Let's go back to the Warren-McConnell exchange. There is *locutionary* silencing in this exchange, as described above: Warren is literally made unable to speak. But there is *illocutionary silencing* as well:

Warren: And this is what it said: 'They are mothers, daughters, sisters, fathers, sons, and brothers. They are —'

McConnell: — Mr. President... Mr. President.

Senate President: The Majority Leader.

McConnell: The Senator impugns the motive and conduct of our colleague from Alabama. As warned by the chair... I call the senator to order under the provisions of rule 19.

Warren: Mr President, I am surprised that the words of Coretta Scott King are not suitable for debate in the United States Senate. I ask leave of the senate to continue my remarks.

Pres: Is there an objection?

Floor: Objection

Warren: I appeal the ruling —

Pres: — Obj, Objection is heard. The Senator will take her seat.³²

As was well-documented by the media, the Senate President silenced Warren: he sent her to her seat and rendered her unable to continue speaking. But we can make a case that there was *illocutionary silencing* here, too. Recall that the last thing Warren said before being cut off was: 'I appeal the ruling.' According to Austin, uttering such words in the right circumstances should result in performing the speech act of appealing. But Warren was not able to appeal the ruling. She uttered the words and so performed the locutionary act, yet because there was no uptake by the Senate President, she did not perform the act of appealing. So she was also *illocutionarily* silenced. As summed up in the words of Langton: 'Let them speak. Let them say whatever they like to whomever they like, but stop that speech from counting as an *action*. More specifically, stop it from counting as the action it was intended to be' (1993, p. 299).

In this paper, I present a new way of framing linguistic harms: one more general than illocutionary silencing and that avoids many of the disadvantages of the notion of illocutionary silencing. I call this harm *illocutionary frustration*, and characterize it as the phenomenon of a hearer treating a speaker as though she does not have standing to perform the speech act she intends to perform. This paper makes three main claims. First, Langton's (1993) and Hornsby and Langton's (1998, 2009) notion of illocutionary silencing falls prey to an internal incoher-

³² 'Mitch McConnell Cuts Off Elizabeth Warren's Speech & Has Her Silenced. *YouTube*. 8 February, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3IL7oL5oWY>. I follow the general sociolinguistics convention to use the spaces and markings to show where two speakers were speaking at the same time and where interruptions occurred (cf. Tannen 1983, for example).

ence, on a common neo-Gricean view of non-literal speech. Second, a better concept for understanding the distinct linguistic and communicative harm in the cases that motivate the silencing literature is that of *illocutionary frustration*. Third, we can further understand the pervasiveness of illocutionary frustration by looking at instances of *failed leave-taking*: when a speaker tries and fails to disengage from a linguistic interaction. A classic case of this, which I analyze in the final section of this paper, is that of a targeted individual responding to an instance of street harassment.³³

2. Pornography and Refusal

Langton and Hornsby's central case of illocutionary silencing is that of a woman trying and failing to refuse a sexual advance, as enabled and encouraged by the social influence of pornography. Their claim is that pornography silences — or at least is complicit in silencing — women by perpetuating the myth that 'no' does not constitute a refusal in the context of sexual interactions. In this section, I will present two problems for their analysis of illocutionary silencing: one primarily moral, and one primarily conceptual. In each case, I will begin by addressing Langton's (1993) proposal, and then explain how my claims extend to Hornsby and Langton's (1998, 2009) proposals. My primary aim in this section is to show that Hornsby & Langton's notion of illocutionary silencing runs into internal difficulties. On their view, an exchange where this is *no* uptake of a speaker's refusal counts as illocutionary silencing, whereas an otherwise identical exchange that involves uptake followed by the hearer ignoring or disavowing the refusal does not count as illocutionary silencing. So, if an individual does not consent to sex but is interpreted by her interlocutor as consenting, this counts as an instance of illocutionary silencing. But if an individual does not consent to sex, is interpreted by her interlocu-

³³ One way to think about failed leave-taking is to think about instances of failed conversation ending: when one person tries to end a conversation, but the other person doesn't let her. I choose to talk about 'leave-taking' rather than 'conversation ending,' because there are some interpretations on which conversation ending (and initiating) is a mutual endeavor. Like others who theorize speech acts and the kinds of silencing associated with them, I am particularly interested in what happens when a speaker is hindered from performing a certain speech act on her own.

tor as refusing, and then ignored, then this does not count as an instance of illocutionary silencing (although it does constitute a wrong).

My claim in this section rests on a discussion of two kinds of failed refusal. There are at least two different failure-of-‘no’-as-a-refusal scenarios that Hornsby and Langton distinguish between: one, where there is no uptake of the intended refusal (illocutionary silencing); and one where there is uptake and the offender ‘fails to obey’ the refusal (perlocutionary silencing). Hornsby and Langton think we have good reason to distinguish between these two scenarios; while they are both instances of silencing, only the former counts as genuine *illocutionary* silencing — where the speaker fails to perform the speech act of refusal at all.³⁴ In what follows, I make two claims about this distinction. The first is that this distinction is harmful; it matters for many victims of rape and sexual assault that they *did* refuse, even if their refusal was not acknowledged as such. Treating the fact of the refusal as out of the victim’s control deprives her of agency and legal standing. My second and more central claim is that once we spell out what constitutes uptake of a refusal, the two kinds of scenarios wind up similar in important and relevant respects — so important and relevant that we should rethink the significance of the distinction. The conclusion of both claims is that we have reason to think that we should not be giving the two scenarios differential treatment.

2.1 On harms to the victim

Here is a more concrete way of spelling out the two scenarios. Recall that according to Hornsby & Langton, Scenario 1 is an instance of illocutionary silencing and Scenario 2 is not.³⁵ Specifically, A is illocutionarily silenced in Scenario 1 but not in Scenario 2. According to Langton (1993), this means that A has refused in Scenario 2, but not in Scenario 1.

³⁴ This is the view in Langton (1993) and, as I understand it, Langton (2009). Hornsby & Langton (1998) allow for a *partial* refusal to have occurred in the former scenario. I will say more about this in § 2.1.

³⁵ We can say, however, that Scenario 2 is an instance of *sincerity silencing*, following McGowan (2014). Scenario 2 is similar to West’s (2003) Case 2.

Scenario 1: A and B are in B's room. B wants to have sex. A doesn't. B initiates sex. A says 'no.' In doing so, A takes herself to be refusing. B thinks that A means 'yes,' she wants to have sex with B. B does not recognize that A is trying to refuse. A intends that B believe that she is refusing. B does not believe that A intends that B believe that she is refusing. B does not recognize A's intention to refuse. There is no uptake of the refusal.

Scenario 2: A and B are in B's room. B wants to have sex. A doesn't. B initiates sex. A says 'no.' In doing so, A takes herself to be refusing. B recognizes that A is trying and intending to refuse, but thinks that deep down she wants to have sex with him. A intends that B believe that she is refusing. B does not believe that A intends that B believe that she is refusing, although B recognizes A's intention to refuse. After all, she is in his room. B decides to ignore A's refusal. There is uptake of the refusal followed by a decision to act as though A hasn't refused.

First, a brief motivating point on the claim that it is harmful to the victim to treat these two scenarios differently. There are many iterations of Scenarios 1 and 2 where there isn't much, if any, difference between the two scenarios on the part of A. That is, for many instances of these scenarios, A cannot tell whether she is in Scenario 1 or Scenario 2.³⁶ In both cases, she is harmed. In both cases, she is raped. In both cases, saying 'no' fails to make B withdraw his sexual advances. On these three points, Langton and I are in agreement.

Here's where we differ: I maintain that it would be wrong to then say to A that she refused in Scenario 2 but not in Scenario 1, given that in many cases the scenarios are indistinguishable to her. The baseline intuition is that the hearer's uptake (or failure thereof) should not determine whether or not A refused. That should be up to A. The intuition, as Daniel Jacobson puts it, is that 'to deny this would be to hold the performance of an illocutionary act hostage to the perversity of one's audience' (1995, p. 74). Others (including Bauer 2015, Bird 2002) have argued similar points in depth, so I will not belabor it here.

In response to Jacobson and others, Hornsby and Langton (1998) clarify this issue, suggesting instead that the speaker might not have 'fully successfully' refused in Scenario 1, given that she tried to refuse and performed the appropriate locutionary act.³⁷ This is an improve-

³⁶ Lois Pineau (1989) discusses the (still in effect) *mens rea* requirement on rape and sexual assault and the harms such a requirement imposes on victims of sexual violence. Pineau details the ways in which sexual offenders are acquitted so long as they can convince a jury they thought their victims were consenting. This points to the harm of treating Cases 1 and 2 as having differing moral significance.

³⁷ It is worth noting that the terminology of 'fully successfully' refusing is absent in Langton's (2009) (co-authored with Hornsby) updated version of the paper.

ment, but it still entails that different linguistic harms are committed against the speaker in Scenarios 1 and 2. As I hope to show in the next section, there's something distinctly linguistic (or communicative) going on in Scenario 2, and it's sufficiently similar to what's going on in Scenario 1 that the two should be categorized as the same kind of linguistic harm. In both scenarios, the speaker's words aren't being taken to mean what she is entitled to expect them to mean because of some failure on the part of the interlocutor. Something about the interlocutor's behavior is preventing the speaker's words from doing what she intends them to do.

2.2 On the incoherence of 'uptake'

My central argument against Hornsby and Langton's notion of silencing is that once we spell out what it is for someone to interpret 'no' as a consent move (following Langton 1993) or a lack of refusal (following Hornsby & Langton 1998, 2009), their view doesn't sufficiently distinguish between Scenarios 1 and 2. So, not only do we have moral reasons to reject this distinction, it is also untenable. Above, I claimed that Scenarios 1 and 2 should be treated the same way because they are indistinguishable to the speaker, and the downstream effects of that indistinguishability warrant that we should allow the speaker to truly say she has refused in both scenarios. Now, I will argue that Scenarios 1 and 2 should be given the same treatment because they are similar with respect to the *hearer*. The alleged failure of uptake case is not sufficiently different from the case in which the hearer understands that the speaker is refusing, but thinks the speaker is interested in him and so decides not to treat the refusal as such. I argue this by appealing to one way in which a hearer can interpret indirect speech — specifically, by looking at the mechanism by which B comes to interpret 'no' as meaning something other than a refusal.

One of the ways in which pornography subordinates and silences, according to Langton, is by depicting women who consent by saying 'no'; uttering 'no' in the context of pornography is a 'consent move' (Langton 1993, p. 324). This trickles down from pornography into society, so

that men are then encouraged to take this ‘no’ utterance out of context so that they interpret ‘no’ as indicating consent in their own sexual encounters.

But Langton doesn’t give us the details of how B hears ‘no’ and understands ‘yes.’ We need to fill that in to figure out the difference that she is committed to between Scenarios 1 and 2. More explicitly, we need a theory of how ‘no’ comes to mean ‘yes’ for B in Scenario 1. When we flesh that out in detail, we will find that Scenarios 1 and 2 are really not very different at all. So the illocutionary silencing by failure of uptake case is not that different from the uptake-and-override case.

I should note here that Langton does not deny that what happens in Scenario 2 is a form of silencing. She would label this type of case *perlocutionary silencing* — A’s words don’t have their intended effect, although unlike in Scenario 1, her words do count as a refusal. So, I am not making the weaker claim that silencing occurs in Scenarios 1 and 2. I am making the stronger claim that the same kind of silencing occurs in both.³⁸

The no-means-yes phenomenon that Langton is interested in can be explicated using a model of *non-literal speech*.³⁹ Moreover, it should be understood using a model of non-literal speech. This is because although there may not be standard analyses available for what happens when someone says ‘no,’ and is interpreted to mean yes, there *are* analyses available for what happens when someone says ‘p’ and is interpreted as saying something *other* than p. And Langton’s example is an instance of that.

³⁸ Others (Bauer 2015) have argued that the victim *did* refuse in scenarios like Scenario 1. I am sympathetic towards this view, though I am agnostic about whether the presence of refusal means there was no illocutionary silencing; or whether there is an understanding of illocutionary silencing to be developed that is consistent with the victim having refused (see Maitra 2004, 2009 and McGowan 2009, among others) for views of silencing that are consistent with the speaker having refused). My preferred conclusion is that this points to internal difficulties with the notion of illocutionary silencing, and there are better notions out there that capture the phenomenon in question.

³⁹ Maitra and McGowan (2010) argue convincingly that Langton is *not* advocating a view on which there illocutionary silencing is constituted by a ‘meaning switch’ (where pornography makes it the case that ‘no’ means ‘yes’). This meaning switch view is not what I have in mind when I discuss the ‘no-means-yes’ phenomenon. By ‘no-means-yes,’ I mean the process by which a speaker who hears an utterance of ‘no’ comes to interpret that utterance to mean ‘yes.’

Here is a general framework for interpreting non-literal speech that is found in Bach & Harnish 1979 (on indirect speech) and Egan 2008 (on idioms), among others.⁴⁰

Non-literal speech: S says 'p.' H hears 'p.' H first interprets S to mean p. For some reason or other, that doesn't make sense. H goes through some other options for what S could have meant, based on pragmatic/cultural/social rules and norms and S's behavior. H locates q as a meaning for p. H concludes that S means q.^{41 42}

According to **non-literal speech**, if I ask 'can I use your bathroom?' you would first interpret me as asking you if I had the capacity to use your bathroom. You quickly realize that such a question doesn't make sense; I know how to use a bathroom, and if I didn't, you would not be the one to tell me. So, you go through your mental database of cultural and social and linguistic norms about what I could mean when I say 'can I use the bathroom?'; you locate the idiomatic usage of 'can' that tends to mean may, and you conclude that what I meant was 'may I use the bathroom?' So too, cases of understanding sarcasm and metaphor can be understood this way.

To recap, neo-Gricean accounts of non-literal speech agree about the following: in order to interpret non-literal speech, the hearer first considers the meaning of the utterance S literally,

⁴⁰ This view is represented by most Gricean and neo-Gricean accounts of nonliteral meaning in philosophy, but also in psychology and linguistics (see also Lyons 1977, Horn 1984, Janus & Bever 1985, Huang 2010). Competing views like conventionalism or relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, e.g.) are those that hold that there is no reasoning process when it comes to nonliteral speech. Instead of reasoning through alternatives, the hearer immediately finds the most relevant interpretation of the speaker's utterance. Others (Camp 2006) point to psycholinguistic evidence that shows that different kinds of nonliteral meaning involve different cognitive interpretive processes. More finessing will have to be done to make my argument go through if one holds a relevance theory or conventionalist view of nonliteral speech; that is currently beyond the scope of this paper. Wieland (2007) gives us reason to believe that a conventionalist view of nonliteral speech is not relevant to the goals, purposes, and framework of Hornsby and Langton, which would make that task easier.

⁴¹ Another framework for this kind of interpretation of non-literal speech — called the 'three stage model' — is summarized by Glucksberg and McGlone (2001) as follows:

1. Derive the literal meaning of an utterance.
2. Test the derived literal meaning against the context of the utterance.
3. If the literal meaning makes sense, accept that meaning as the utterance meaning, that is, the speaker's intended meaning. If it does not make sense, then seek an alternative, nonliteral meaning that does make sense in the context.

⁴² We can flesh out this notion in terms of 'meaning' or 'content,' depending on one's theoretical commitments. I choose 'meaning' here to explicate the idea that 'no means yes' is the silencing-inducing myth perpetuated by pornography. We can do it in terms of content to stay truer to a neo-Gricean pragmatics, and then draw out the link between content and meaning; or keep it as is and say that in this case, meaning is [semantic] content.

then deliberates about whether it makes sense for S to mean p. If it doesn't make sense, the speaker goes through some reasoning process to figure out what S actually means. Now, let's go through what is happening in Scenario 1 on this view of non-literal speech.

Let's accept that Langton's claim that in Scenario 1, B interprets A to mean 'yes' when A says 'no.' Let's assume that this is an instance of B acting as though A is speaking non-literally. I think this is a safe assumption to make. All we are assuming is that: when B hears A say 'no,' B does not believe that A is speaking literally.⁴³

Then, the hearer in Scenario 1 hears 'no,' knows the ordinary meaning of 'no' in ordinary everyday contexts. Or, B knows that normally 'no' constitutes a refusal. So the hearer first considers an interpretation on which the speaker means 'no' — or, the hearer first interprets 'no' as a refusal. Then (perhaps thinking something like 'Could A really be meaning to say 'no' in saying 'no'?' or, 'could A be meaning to refuse?') the hearer concludes (from pornography consumption, cultural indoctrination, or any other number of related things) that it wouldn't make sense for the speaker to say or mean 'no' or to be refusing. The hearer searches for an alternate meaning of 'no.' He remembers that pornography represents women in sexual contexts to say 'no' and mean 'yes.' The hearer concludes that the speaker's utterance of 'no' means 'yes'.⁴⁴ And therein lies the failure of uptake.

⁴³ If we need to spell this out, we can. Langton says that B hears 'no' and thinks that 'no' means 'yes.' Then 'no' could not mean 'no.' If B thinks that A is speaking literally, then B would think that A's utterance of 'no' means 'no.' But B does not think that A's utterance of 'no' means 'no'. So B thinks A is not speaking literally.

⁴⁴ Of course, this is a tedious way of spelling out what, according to Hornsby and Langton and others, is a split-second process. I agree that most circumstances of people interpreting 'no' to mean 'yes' do not involve this explicit, articulated, step-by-step calculation of what the speaker could mean and what she must mean. But so do proponents of **Non-literal speech**. The way we understand 'can I use the bathroom?' ; metaphors, sarcasm, and other non-literal speech is similarly split-second. The point is just that similar processes are underlying the split-second interpretation — and they are specific to this kind of non-literal speech interpretation. Although the interpretive act takes mere seconds (or milliseconds), there is some empirical evidence to suggest that processing of nonliteral speech takes *longer* than processing of literal speech, which is evidence in favor of this kind of neo-Gricean framework. Elisabeth Camp summarizes some of these: 'Various studies (...) have found that unfamiliar and novel metaphors do take significantly longer to process than either literal sentences or familiar metaphors. Bowdle and Gentler (2005) also found that novel similes are processed significantly faster than novel metaphors, suggesting that it's not merely the unfamiliar juxtaposition of terms, but the literal sentence meaning itself, that increases processing time' (Camp, 2006 p. 157).

Hopefully now we can see that this isn't very different from what's going on in Scenario 2. At the very least, we can pinpoint what the difference is. In both of these scenarios, the first step on the part of the hearer is to consider construing the speaker's 'no' as a refusal. Then, there is some cognitive override because it doesn't make sense to the hearer that the speaker would be refusing. Finally, the hearer behaves as though the speaker hasn't refused. In the first case, it is because pornography teaches the hearer that women say 'no' when they want to have sex. In the second case, it is because the hearer believes (because of socially pervasive sexist norms) that the speaker's refusal doesn't entail that she doesn't want to have sex — although he doesn't doubt that she is refusing.⁴⁵

So, the first similarity is that the hearer in both scenarios first considers 'no' to be a refusal. The second similarity is that the hearer undergoes a cognitive process whereby it does not make sense to him that the speaker refused. The third similarity is that the hearer behaves in a way that he would have had the speaker not refused. The *reasons* for this behavior are different in the two scenarios. But that is the crux of the difference. And — given that illocutionary silencing is primarily a linguistic phenomenon, and that our motivations for delineating such a phenomenon are ethical and political — it should be unsatisfying that whether or not an act is an act of illocutionary silencing hangs on the hearer's motivations for interpreting the speaker in a certain way.

More should be said about what it means for the hearer in Scenario 1 to first interpret or recognize 'no' as a refusal. There are various forms this could take. One option is that the hearer could fully internalize the refusal, come to believe that the speaker has refused, and then have that belief generate some internal contradiction such that the hearer then stops believing that she refused.⁴⁶ A second, similar option is that the hearer first comes to believe that the speaker *intends* to refuse, and then that belief generates some internal contradiction such that the hearer

⁴⁵ This is not (conceptually) incoherent. I could refuse a job offer even though I really want the job; I have still refused.

⁴⁶ Although this is not the standard neo-Gricean view of the initial step, something like this is espoused by Mandelbaum (2014) and explored in Hasson & Glucksberg (2006), among others. Thanks to EJ Green for the latter point.

then stops believing that she intends to refuse. A third option involves the hearer taking on for purposes of the process of reasoning — or, supposing for the process of reasoning — that the speaker is refusing or intending to refuse — and then following that supposition to see if it leads to a coherent state of affairs or not. The relevant difference-maker between Scenarios 1 and 2 will depend on the option we take. On the first two options, we can say that there *was* uptake of A's utterance by B in Scenario 1, which gives us a reductio of the claim that Scenario 1 does not involve uptake, while Scenario 2 does. This is the strongest version of the argument, on which the notion of uptake is conceptually incoherent. But even on the third option, the relevant difference-maker will be an unsatisfying way of adjudicating whether A has been illocutionary silenced or not. So even on the weak version of the argument, the difference between Scenarios 1 and 2 would be that in Scenario 1 B reasons: 'Could she be refusing? No, that doesn't make sense. She must mean something else.' and in Scenario 2 he reasons: 'She's refusing. That doesn't make sense. She must mean something else.' I hope I have shown that the lack of uptake process in Scenario 1 is sufficiently similar to the hearer's thought process in Scenario 2 so as to warrant giving both scenarios the same diagnosis. So, we would do well to think of Scenarios 1 and 2 as involving the same kind of linguistic harm.

On this neo-Gricean way of fleshing out what it is for a hearer to interpret 'no' as 'yes,' there is a sense in which my argument risks resting on an empirical assumption about the hearer's psychological states. But there are independent theoretical reasons for adopting **Non-literal speech**. It is not only a thesis about psychology, but a claim about the distinction between literal and non-literal meaning — a claim that holds that the default way we interpret speech is according to its literal meaning (and then, if that fails, we reinterpret as necessary). There are considerations supporting this claim that don't depend on a hearer's mind or on what she is thinking, including theses about language meaning (Lewis 1969, Horn 1984), communication (Grice 1975, Harnish & Bach 1979), and sociolinguistics (Acton 2016).

The argument above targets the definition of illocutionary silencing given in Langton (1993), but applies to the modifications set forth in Hornsby & Langton (1998, 2009). Hornsby

& Langton (1998, 2009) update their account to say the hearer fails to interpret the speaker's 'no' as a refusal -- rather than interpreting the speaker as giving consent. It is not crucial for my argument that the hearer interprets the hearer's 'no' as a 'yes,' nor is it crucial for Hornsby & Langton's argument to go through.⁴⁷ What is crucial, however, is that the hearer hears the speaker's 'no' and interprets it as meaning *something other than 'no'*.⁴⁸ So, as long as there is some sort of recognition by the hearer of the communicative intention of the speaker, we can run a version of the above argument. According to **non-literal speech**, then, there is a kind of minimal uptake that occurs when the speaker says 'no,' interprets her to mean such, and then fails to believe or recognize that she means to refuse.

There is an interpretation of Hornsby & Langton's notion of silencing that would not be apt for analysis on the neo-Gricean view of non-literal speech discussed above. This would be an interpretation where the hearer's lack of recognition of the speaker's communicative intentions takes the form of the hearer not recognizing that the speaker is trying to do *anything at all* with her words — or at least, anything communicative.⁴⁹ Then, Step 1 of the neo-Gricean reasoning process — the hearer first recognizes the literal meaning of the word 'no' — doesn't occur, because there is a kind of radical *lack* of interpretation going on on the part of the hearer. While this alternative reading is compatible with Hornsby & Langton's account, that kind of scenario can be described in a multitude of ways. In what follows, I propose another view about what this kind of drastic failure of interpretation could look like. For now, I take myself to have engaged with a widely accepted notion of illocutionary silencing: one where the hearer interprets the speaker as doing *something other than* what she intended. And I hope I have given reasons to problematize it.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to Ishani Maitra and an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

⁴⁸ I take this to be consistent with Hornsby & Langton's notion of uptake, which 'consists in the speaker's being taken to be performing the very illocutionary act which, in being so taken, she (the speaker) is performing' (2009, p. 78).

⁴⁹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this reading of Hornsby & Langton (1998).

3. Illocutionary Frustration

3.1 Characterizing illocutionary frustration

We can propose an alternative concept to capture, among other things, the similarity between Scenarios 1 and 2. In what follows, I claim that what's going on in these cases has to do with *standing*. Specifically, in both cases, B is acting as though A does not have standing to refuse. In Austinian terms, we might say he is treating her as though she does not meet the felicity conditions to perform such an act.⁵⁰ Thinking about standing gives us a way in to thinking about what I call *illocutionary frustration*. To explicate this, let's consider two ways of characterizing illocutionary frustration:

Option 1: The hearer is denying the speaker the standing to perform the speech act.

This option goes something like this: the hearer behaves in such a way as to deny the speaker the standing to perform a speech act. In Scenarios 1 and 2, the hearer might behave as though by virtue of something or other — being in his room, leaving with him, being a woman

⁵⁰ Kukla (2014) gives us one example of such an account.

— A doesn't meet the preconditions, or felicity conditions, for refusing. This is different from saying that A *in fact* does not have the standing to refuse.⁵¹ This is to say that the hearer believes this, and acts as though it is the case.⁵²

There is something like a lack of uptake by the hearer here, but the reason for it is different. It's not that the lack of uptake has anything to do with the specific contours of 'no' meaning 'yes' — instead, it's about the way B treats A, and how he views her as a speaker and an agent; it's that A wouldn't have been able to successfully refuse regardless of the words she chose. This is one way in which understanding the linguistic harm of failed sexual refusal in terms of *illocutionary frustration* is consistent with Langton's view. But there will also be instances of illocutionary frustration that *don't* involve uptake — instances like Scenario 2.

This brings us to Option 2 — a second way of fleshing out illocutionary frustration

Option 2: The hearer deems the speaker not to have the authority to perform the speech act (and behaves accordingly).

⁵¹ One similar way to put this is in terms of Maitra's (2004) *role-based* conversational rules, according to which a hearer may (mistakenly) believe that a role-based conversational rule is in play. So, in this example, B would have the false belief that 'when a woman refuses, take her to be consenting' in mind as a role-based conversational rule in the context of his bedroom.

⁵² This might go something like the following (Langton 1995): 'For the crucial feature of verdictive and execrative illocutions is their sensitivity to the speaker's authority, and we can accordingly group them together under the label *authoritative* illocutions: actions whose felicity conditions require that the speaker occupy a position of authority in a relevant domain.' The suggestion that there be an authority condition is taken up in McGowan (2009), who offers a notion of *authority silencing*: the kind of silencing that occurs when 'a woman says 'No' in response to sexual advances intending to refuse; the man recognizes her intention to refuse, but he falsely believes that she does not have the authority to do so' (492). If we understand standing to be synonymous with (or dependent on) some kind of speaker authority, then my proposal and McGowan's have much in common. However, I take authority and standing to come apart. For example, a speaker who has the authority to φ may not have standing to do so if she is not in the right circumstances. For example, an ordained minister may not have the standing to officiate a wedding ceremony if she is the guest, despite having the authority to marry two individuals. More importantly, hearer *perceptions* of authority and hearer perceptions of standing can come apart. As a result, illocutionary frustration can occur without authority silencing.

Here, the hearer just refuses to acknowledge the speech act even though he recognizes the intention of the speaker to perform the illocutionary act.⁵³ This may sound strange, but it is not too uncommon. Most instances of one person ignoring another fit this description. For example, imagine a parent ignoring a child who demands dessert before dinner (where we might say the child is performing the speech act of demanding). There's recognition of the intention of the child's demand, but there is also a refusal to take it seriously or act in accordance with it. And while, in this case, the child does in fact perform the speech act of demanding, the effect is as though she hasn't. Option 2 describes Scenarios 1 and 2 in this way: the hearer recognizes that the speaker intends to perform the speech act of refusal, but refuses to acknowledge the refusal. This is a way to capture the similarity between Scenarios 1 and 2 while allowing that whether or not an individual refused a sexual advance is up to her.

Does Option 2 just reduce to perlocutionary silencing? I'm optimistic that it doesn't. I think we can truly say there is some unaccounted for middle territory between cases of perlocutionary frustration case and cases of Langtonian illocutionary silencing. For one, illocutionary frustration allows the speaker to have performed the speech act, but unsuccessfully (where, contra Hornsby & Langton (1998), success isn't constitutive of performing the act, but is constitutive of the act having its intended effects). This still captures the harm of silencing; the no-means-yes myth makes it such that a woman can never refuse *successfully*. But it also goes beyond capturing the harm of silencing: not just the no-means-yes myth, but other cultural and social scripts and myths about women and sex.⁵⁴

It would do better for us to think more broadly of the harm involved in illocutionary silencing in terms of illocutionary frustration because the latter avoids certain moral and concep-

⁵³ This might be ruled out by Gricean analyses of uptake like Harnish & Bach's (1979) or Maitra's (2009) that have recognition of the speaker's intention be a condition for uptake.

⁵⁴ See Marcus (2002) and Tannen (1996) for more on scripts.

tual pitfalls around the notion of uptake.⁵⁵ I hope I have shown that if we actually spell out what it is for a hearer to understand ‘no’ as ‘yes,’ the hearer *does* go through a stage where there is uptake of the refusal (at least on a common interpretation of nonliteral speech). Thinking about illocutionary frustration helps us avoid this incoherence. We can also account for the problem of justice to the victim. Even though she has not been heard, she has still refused. This distinguishes our notion of illocutionary frustration from Hornsby & Langton’s view of silencing. When Langton describes illocutionary silencing in terms of felicity conditions, she holds that the felicity conditions stop the refusal from counting as a refusal at all — whereas I maintain that the hearer’s beliefs and behavior merely make it such that he doesn’t take the refusal seriously.⁵⁶

3.2 Testimonial and Discursive Injustices

The phenomenon we’ve been describing — a hearer refusing to acknowledge the speaker’s standing to perform the speech act she is by all objective or reasonable metrics licensed to perform — shares similarities with Kristie Dotson (2011), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and Miranda Fricker’s (2003, 2011) documentations of *testimonial injustice*, as well as Rebecca Kukla’s (2014) notion of *discursive injustice*. In instances of testimonial injustice, hearers fail to take speakers to be relevant epistemic authorities — or to trust the speaker’s testimony on the topic of their assertions (see also McGowan 2009 on *authority silencing*). Such failures occur when, for example, a man does not believe a woman who reports an instance of sexism or sexual harassment, and are tied to ‘existing habits of response concerning what sorts of people are trust-

⁵⁵ For taxonomical purposes, I would be happy to consider illocutionary frustration as a kind of silencing — I choose to use the word ‘frustration’ rather than ‘silencing’ to avoid connotations that the speaker has not spoken or performed the speech act she intended to perform (although see Maitra (2009) among others for accounts of silencing that do not have this connotation).

⁵⁶ This is another reason to think of illocutionary frustration in terms of standing instead of felicity conditions. Future work involves saying more about ‘uptake’ and what is required for it. The literature on silencing and pornography since Langton involves many different takes and modifications on ‘uptake.’ Maitra (2009), for example, proposes a Gricean model of silencing on which uptake involves the hearer’s recognition of the speaker’s intention to perform a certain speech act (and not a recognition of the speech act itself). On her view, there is still uptake in cases where the hearer doesn’t believe that the speaker has or can perform the speech act. On other views (Harnish & Bach 1979, e.g.) uptake involves even less: the hearer’s recognition that the speaker intends for the hearer to recognize the hearer’s intention.

worthy in what sorts of situations.⁵⁷ There is a natural way of understanding these cases of sexual refusal silencing as instances of testimonial injustice, but there is also more going on.

One way to apply the concept of testimonial injustice to the case of sexual refusal is to say that men — thanks to pornography, heteropatriarchal norms, or any other number of societal features — are habituated to treat women as though they are not authorities about their own sexual desire. This is a slightly different from Langton's case — where 'no' is seen as a 'consent move', but it does give us a framework to understand cases like Scenario 2. Another way to understand how to apply the above theorists' work to this kind of case is to say that (in both cases, but especially in scenario 2), the *credibility* of the speaker is impugned. Her credibility is impugned insofar as she is thought not to be an expert about her own desires; or about her own ability to say no; or she's thought not to be an expert on the felicity conditions of refusing (e.g., she's not hip to the cultural myth that she can't say no if she's already in his bedroom). We can also interpret Scenario 2 as different from Scenario 1 *solely* on the basis of impoverished interpretive resources of the hearer — his inability to understand that when women say 'no,' they in fact mean no. This would be understanding the exchange in terms of Dotson's notion of *contributory injustice*: 'an epistemic agent's situated ignorance, in the form of willful hermeneutical ignorance, in maintaining and utilizing structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that result in epistemic harm to the epistemic agency of a knower' (Dotson, 2012, p. 31).

Kukla's notion of *discursive injustice* is directly relevant insofar as it deals with speech acts and felicity conditions. Kukla is interested in the phenomenon of failed speech when a speaker meets all of standards that under ordinary conditions would suffice for them to perform the speech act they intend to perform — for example, when a boss on a factory floor gives an order to her employees and goes unheeded. According to Kukla, the effect of such a failure is that a speaker performs a *different* speech act than the one she intended. In our example, instead of ordering her employees, she winds up *requesting* that they do what she orders. This happens,

⁵⁷ See Dotson (2011) among others for a discussion of the relationship between epistemic injustice and silencing. See MacKinnon's (1987) 'Desire and Power' for a discussion of the narrative that women are not authorities over their own desire.

for Kukla, based on the uptake of the employees (they treat her utterance as a request instead of an order, and behave accordingly), but also because of the incongruence, in their view, of a woman in a position of authority over them. It is this latter feature that I think we can talk about in terms of standing. Because of previously held views about women and power (and factories), we can say that the employees act as though their boss doesn't have standing to perform the speech act of ordering them to do something.

Kukla's framework is a nice step towards moving away from uptake towards felicity conditions. But her account still gives us the unsatisfying result that the speaker in our Scenarios 1 and 2 did not in fact refuse. On Kukla's framework, we might say something like: she instead performed the speech act of trying to refuse; or of mimicking a refusal; or of feigning a refusal. The trouble is the speech act she in fact winds up performing still depends on the hearer's interpretation of her words and behavior.

In this way my suggestion differs from Kukla's and others'. I think than an ideal framework holds on to what Kukla says about the systematic ways in which a speaker is (and is perceived to be) disadvantaged, and treated as though she has not met the felicity conditions she does meet by any objective measure. On top of that, it should find a way to make it the case that the speech act the speaker intends to perform is in fact the one she performs. One way to do this is to make a distinction between the *actual* speech act and the *felt* speech act (where 'felt speech act' is just going to sound more perlocutionary). Another way is to revisit Hornsby & Langton's (1998) distinction between performing a speech act and performing a speech act *successfully*, where the speech act itself relies mostly on felicity conditions, and the success can incorporate things like uptake and hearers' intentions and interpretations. A third way to do this — and the one I endorse — is to understand these harms in a new way: the speaker is being illocutionarily frustrated by the hearer. Not only does this satisfy the above criteria; it also (as we shall see) gives us a way of describing other similar cases that illocutionary silencing says nothing about.

4. Leave-Taking

I'd like to end by discussing a phenomenon that could be understood as a kind of linguistic harm akin to silencing: that of attempting and failing to end a conversation. Specifically, I'd like to suggest that such a failure is difficult to understand on Hornsby & Langton's view of illocutionary silencing, but easy to make sense of on a view that places standing at the center of the silencing exchange.

It can be difficult to end conversations. The act of ending a conversation, or, *leave-taking*, falls under the broad category of a speech act.⁵⁸ When someone says 'goodbye' (usually preceded by something like 'I have to go,' 'I should go now,' 'well, it's time to get to my next appointment,' she usually performs the speech act of ending the interaction (and conversation) she is engaged with, just as when someone says 'hello,' she is initiating an interaction.⁵⁹ When done correctly, both greetings and leave-takings are a consensual, mutual endeavors. If I leave you hanging or keep walking when you say 'hi,' there's a sense in which I haven't let you successfully initiate an interaction between us (rather, you've tried to). Similarly, if I say 'goodbye' and you keep talking, or follow me, I haven't successfully ended our interaction. In neither case has it become *impossible* to initiate or end the conversation — you could follow up your 'hello' with a 'hey — I need to talk to you' and after saying 'goodbye,' I could walk out of the room while you keep talking, or try to get you to stop following me. But in both of these cases, the 'hello' and 'goodbye' alone did not succeed in initiating or ending the conversation, respectively. And in the leave-taking cases, the cost (social, psychological, and in some cases, physical safety) of continuing to try to leave-take after the initial speech act attempt has failed is high, burdensome, and sometimes dangerous.

Here are some real-life examples of failed attempts at leave-taking:

⁵⁸ See footnote 2. Bach and Harnish (1979) call leave-taking a kind of *salutation*. Schegloff & Sacks (1973) discuss similar phenomena they call *closings of conversation*.

⁵⁹ These are not perfect parallels. Among the asymmetries between the two is the way people may say 'hello' in passing without initiating much, and without having to formally end whatever passing interaction they had.

Street harassment

Ali is reading a book on a park bench. An older man sits down next to her and asks her what she is reading. She shows him the cover of her book. He proceeds to tell her what she thinks of the book. She says, 'I'm sorry, I have to go; I came out here to read my book and would just like to read in silence.' He says 'It's not like that; I have a wife. I just want to talk to you about the book.'

Bus stop

It's nighttime in the middle of winter, and Cee is waiting for the bus. There is a bus shelter with no lights and a bench, to shield passengers from the cold while they wait for the bus. A man inside says, 'Hey sweetheart, are you waiting for the bus?' She says 'yes.' He says 'Do you wanna wait in here with me?' She says 'No thank you.' He says 'Well you're not going anywhere; we're getting on the same bus.'

Solo hiker

Jo is hiking alone in the mountains. A man in hiking gear approaches her and asks her if she is lost. She says no. He says, 'You must really love nature, huh?' She says 'Yes, I like being out here alone. I should be going now.' He asks, 'Which way are you going?' She is getting a bit worried and says 'I haven't decided yet. Goodbye.' He asks, 'Can I come with you?' She says 'I don't mean any offense, but I came out here to be alone, so I'm going to hike alone.' He gets angry and says 'Okay, I see how it is,' and storms off. Jo worries for her safety for the rest of the duration of her hike.

Traffic stop

Michigan state police sergeant Jonathan Frost pulls over 17-year old Deven Guilford and asks for driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance, and says: '[I] pulled you over today 'cause you flashed me, I didn't even have my brights on.' Guilford responds 'yes you did, Sir... I couldn't see. I could not see.' Frost proceeds to argue with Guilford about whether his lights are on. Guilford asks three times if he is being detained. Frost ignores the first two times and then says 'yes, you are.' Guilford asks 'for what crime?' Frost responds 'you flashed me with your high beams.' Guilford says 'I have not committed a crime.' Frost responds 'Refusing to give me your ID in a traffic stop is a misdemeanor, right now, you are committing a misdemeanor, you have two choices, you can get with the program and start complying with the traffic stop, or you're going to be taken to jail, those are your two choices...'⁶⁰

⁶⁰ "Transcript of Traffic Stop that Led to Fatal Shooting." *Lansing State Journal*. 16 June 2015. A better example than being pulled over might be one where someone is stopped on the street and they don't realize they can go, so the police exploits the speaker's ignorance of the law. Thanks to Philip Yaure for this point. One point that can be made using this example is that Guilford was initiating steps to end the conversation, and that he could not have ended the interaction if he had tried.

Examples of failed conversation-ending (or, failed disengaging) include (as we've seen) street harassment and police brutality. They also include other exchanges featuring people in different power relations to each other: like professor/student, or parent/child. Next steps of this research would include seeing whether and how this is a systematic phenomenon, and what kinds of features (if any) it tracks (e.g. gender, race, class, authority, etc.). For now, I will rely on anecdotal accounts of disengaging and the research of others. For my current purposes, it suffices to show that this kind of thing *happens* and that it shares important features with other modes of silencing.

Very broadly, I'll define a generalization of the phenomenon as follows:

Failed leave-taking: S says something that should end the interaction. H doesn't act as though the conversation is ending.⁶¹

My two main claims here are that (1) the phenomenon of failed disengaging intuitively counts as silencing, and (2) the silencing is better explained by a story about standing or felicity conditions than one about uptake. Here's why I think the phenomenon of failed leave-taking intuitively counts as silencing. In each of these instances, and in the generalized formulation, the speaker utters words that under ordinary circumstances would enable them to end the conversation (see Kukla 2014 for more on ordinary circumstances). So, more generally, their speech act falls flat because of someone else's actions.

We should understand failed leave-taking as a harm that centers standing for familiar reasons: (i) H can recognize exactly what 'I have to go' means in ordinary circumstances and (ii) there is arguably less of a systematic story to be told in these other kinds of cases. We don't have a pervasive social or cultural narrative that says 'goodbye' means 'hello' — or anything sufficiently similar. These cases don't depend on 'conventional' disruptions of ordinary meaning. So there is less of a case to be made that the hearer actually does not realize the speaker's intentions — or

⁶¹Alternatively: S communicates their intention to end the conversation. H behaves in such a way as to continue the conversation.

that the hearer fails to uptake. Nevertheless, the speaker is prevented (by the hearer) from successfully performing the act of ending the conversation.

4.1 Street Harassment

In our above examples, Jo, Cee, and Ali all experienced instances of what has now come to be understood as *street harassment*. The phenomenon of street harassment has been given much careful treatment in legal, feminist, and sociolinguistic scholarship. In this section, I will explicate certain types of street harassment as case studies of failed leave-taking. Specifically, I will focus on the phenomenon of *disengagement* from street harassment: what happens when a person is accosted, catcalled, or otherwise verbally intruded upon in a public space, and then tries to end the interaction. For various reasons, not much attention has been devoted to disengagement in the street harassment literature.⁶² I will argue that many cases of failed disengagement from street harassment incidents are instances of illocutionary frustration.

Definitions for street harassment are myriad and evolving. One of the first sociologists to write on the topic, Micaela di Leonardo, describes the phenomenon as occurring 'when one or more strange men accost one or more women... in a public place which is not the woman's / women's worksite. Through looks, words, or gestures the man asserts his right to intrude on the woman's attention, defining her as a sexual object, and forcing her to interact with him' (di Leonardo, 1981, pp. 51-52). Though gendered and a bit outdated, this definition picks up on some key features of street harassment, among which I'd like to focus on the offender 'asserting

⁶² One notable exception is Mills (2007).

his right to intrude' and 'forcing' interaction.⁶³ Carol Brooks Gardner characterizes street harassment as 'that group of abuses, harrings, and annoyances characteristic of public places and uniquely facilitated by communication in public... [which] includes pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insults, sly innuendo, ogling, and stalking...' (Gardner, 1995, p. 4). The advocacy group Stop Street Harassment defines it as 'unwanted whistling, leering, sexist, homophobic or transphobic slurs, persistent requests for someone's name, number or destination after they've said no, sexual names, comments and demands, following, flashing, public masturbation, groping, sexual assault, and rape.'⁶⁴ What these definitions have in common is that (a) the exchange is unwelcome (b) the exchange is not voluntary for the victim (c) it occurs in a public place. For the purposes of this paper, I will mostly focus on the linguistic elements of street harassment.

As mentioned, I want to focus on attempts at *disengagement* from of street harassment: where, after the interaction is initiated by the harasser, the recipient tries to disengage. Benjamin Bailey, presenting a case study of street 'remarks' in five countries, notes the dearth of theorizing about disengagement: 'the lack of verbal response to street remarks creates an interpretive difficulty for their analysis' (Bailey, 2016, p. 592). Olatokunbo Olukemi Laniya, in discussing the legal power dynamics of street harassments, tells of the double bind that women on the receiving end of street harassment are in: 'Whatever the content of the woman's response,

⁶³ A note on the gendering in the definition: more contemporary research still finds that 'irrespective of the sex of their victims, those who harass others in public spaces are male' (Logan 2013). It is important to note the pervasiveness of harassment of gay men, 90% of whom in a 2012 study reported being 'harassed or made to feel unwelcome in public spaces because of their perceived sexual orientation' (McNeil 2012, cited in Logan 2013), and the differences between the street harassment experiences of LGBTQ people. Other dynamics along which the experience of harassment is amplified are race and class, with women of color being particularly vulnerable (also see Crenshaw 1991). In one study, researchers found that 68% of women of color experienced daily harassment, compared to 55% of white women (Neilsen 2004). Gendering the definition in the above way also leaves out differences of risks related to specific groups, for example the harassment-related violence suffered by trans women and trans* and genderqueer individuals. A full account of street harassment should reflect this. For these reasons, we should prefer a non-gendered or at least an otherwise more inclusive account of street harassment. Also see further sources for the particular vulnerability to violence of trans* women of color (Townes 2017, Logan 2013, Meyer 2012, Lombardi 2009).

⁶⁴ 'What Is Street Harassment?' *Stop Street Harassment*, 1 March 2015, www.stopstreetharassment.org/about/what-is-street-harassment/

any affirmative action she takes disrupts the harasser's goal of objectifying her, which may lead to a heightened level of abuse...' (Laniya, 2005, p. 102). If she says nothing, she opens herself up to further abuses, or appears to condone the harassment. If she does stand up for herself, she is likely to escalate the situation.

There is a dearth of non-anecdotal accounts of typical ways to respond to or disengage from street harassment. In a study of 134 encounters of street harassment, Bailey found that only a few women responded to their harassers. In one documented response to street harassment, journalist Andrea Kannapell, writing in a 1989 *Village Voice* article (cited in Bowman) recounts one woman's experience of attempted disengagement:

'So I tell them, "Look. You look like nice guys. But it's not nice to comment on me like I'm just part of the scenery. I'm here for my own purposes. Okay?" One answers, "You know you're just a piece of meat to me, bitch.'" (Bowman, 1993, p. 523)

In another anecdotal account from a meeting of the Street Harassment Project in New York in December 2003 (reprinted in Laniya (2005)), a woman relays her experience of attempted disengagement:

'I stepped on the bus cheerily anticipating the experiences of the day, unaware of the encounter that was about to take place. The bus driver spoke, "Hey cutie." I explained to him that I was not his "cutie" and did not desire his unsolicited comments. He snatched my MTA pass, and taunted, "Now, you have to say 'please' to get it back." I made several attempts to grab the card but could not. Feeling as if I had no other options, I was forced to do as he said. He gave me back my card and grabbed my backside as I walked towards the back of the bus. No one on the bus said a word.' (Laniya, 2005, p. 91)

Note that in both of these anecdotal examples, the response to the woman's attempt to take leave is demeaning, punishing, and treats the women as though their responses were out of line: demeaning because (among other things) she is called a piece of meat in the first instance, and her backside is grabbed in the second; punishing because her card is taken away and she is forced to acquiesce to a humiliating demand to get it back; and treated as though her response is out of line because of the escalation to name-calling and physical sexual harassment. Another thing to note about the second example is that the response from the bus driver is infantilizing: he says 'Now, you have to say 'please' to get it back' in the way that a parent might remind a

child of her manners. These observations will all play into my claim that in these two cases (which I take as more or less paradigmatic), as in other cases of attempted disengagement from street harassment, the speaker is being illocutionarily frustrated. That is, she is not being treated as though she has the standing to end the interaction.

I say this based on the responses of the two men in the above examples, but also drawing on sociological literature about the status of women in public places — points which are also mirrored in activist literature about street harassment. Kelly Bowman (1993), drawing on work by Carol Gardner, frames street harassment of women in terms of *civil inattention* and *open categories*.⁶⁵ Civil inattention refers to the tacit agreement among adults in public that they will, to put it bluntly, leave each other alone in public — save for maybe a nod of acknowledgment or a courteous ‘hello’ in some societies (Goffman 1963). Street harassment, then, would count as a breach of civil inattention. Bowman observes that:

‘Breaches of civil inattention that include a spoken component typically occur when one encounters a person who is either very unusual (such as an individual carrying a couch, hopping on one foot, or wearing a costume) or unusually similar to oneself in some respect... or who is accompanied by someone or something in an **‘open’ category**, such as dogs or children. Men seem to regard women generally as such ‘open persons’ [my emphasis].’ (Bowman, 1993, p. 526)

So, if we understand women as being treated as though they are ‘open’ categories, this could explain why they are treated as lacking the standing to disengage from these harassing exchanges. By definition, open categories are those that are apt for comment. Just as a child or a dog would not have the standing to disengage from such an interaction — or so the story goes, according to Bowman — so too a woman would be treated as though she didn’t have such a standing.

Some linguistic harm is occurring in these cases of street harassment. On Hornsby and Langton’s view of illocutionary silencing, what is happening in all of these cases can’t be illocutionary silencing unless the hearer is truly oblivious about the speaker’s intended illocutionary act. If we reframe the harm in terms of illocutionary frustration, then we can give accounts of more kinds of linguistic phenomena and harms.

⁶⁵ Bettcher (2018, 2014, 2012) discusses her concept of *interpersonal spaciality* — which characterizes encounters between people more broadly. In doing so, she gives us frameworks to understand interpersonal boundaries and their transgressions. One could also, following Bettcher, think about public spaces and harassment in these terms.

5. Conclusion

I have argued for three interrelated theses. First, the notion of uptake in illocutionary silencing is problematic when it comes to central cases like that of sexual refusal. As others have argued, it further harms victims of sexual assault to tell them that they have not (fully) refused or that their refusal is out of their control when they have said and done everything in their power that constitutes a refusal. As I have argued, the notion of uptake runs into considerable internal difficulties if we adopt a neo-Gricean view of non-literal speech. Second, I have proposed a new way of describing the kinds of phenomena that motivate discussions of illocutionary silencing. I call this *illocutionary frustration* and argue that it better captures the linguistic harms of sexual refusal cases. It can explain the case that is traditionally used as a silencing case, but it can also explain the wrong of cases that are almost identical (save for the interpretive resources of the hearer). Third, I have shown that illocutionary frustration generalizes, and can account for other kinds of harms that a notion of illocutionary silencing cannot. I have used street harassment as a case study to begin talking about what happens when one person cannot disengage themselves from an interaction or a conversation.

Illocutionary frustration is a distinct phenomenon from illocutionary silencing. It captures many of the harms that illocutionary silencing does, but there may be cases of illocutionary silencing that can't be explained in terms of illocutionary frustration (for example, the radical lack of interpretation case discussed at the end of § 2). I think there are important cases — certain iterations of Scenarios 1 and 2 — that are better explained by illocutionary frustration than by illocutionary silencing. I have argued that cases of street harassment are included among these. And I hope the reader now has a sense of how this might generalize: to other kinds of harassment, conversational shut downs, and varieties of interruptions and conversational hijackings.

As we've seen in the second section of the paper, there isn't much in the way of uptake that distinguishes the cases that Hornsby and Langton want to distinguish. That is to say, sce-

narios that they are committed to being different have similar architectures. But if this is the case, then we need a new explanation for why and how illocutionary silencing occurs. And I suggest that without deviating too far from their account, we can look at perceived relations of *standing* between speakers, and not uptake. This further accounts for the intuition that there is a power play happening in many of these cases of silencing. Hornsby and Langton's theory tells less of a story about why silencing can be so devastating in some cases rather than others (harmless misunderstandings, e.g.). It also doesn't account for the relentless, oppressive and willful targeting nature of a lot of the things that we could should, and want to think of as instances of silencing. Thinking about these cases in terms of illocutionary frustration instead — in terms of a hearer denying the speaker standing to successfully say something in the first place — might start to capture it.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ I am grateful to Emma Atherton, David Balcarras, Nancy Bauer, Herman Cappelen, Vera Flocke, Carolina Flores, Sally Haslanger, Kathleen Hintikka, Justin Khoo, Ishani Maitra, Rachel McKinney, Alex Prescott-Couch, Robert Stalnaker, Rachel Katherine Sterken, and Philip Yaure for valuable feedback on this project. I would also like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal, and audiences at MIT, the Northern New England Philosophical Association, and the University of Oslo ConceptLab series for comments on this paper or related talks.

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Chapter 3: Philosophical Intuitions about Socially Significant Language

The landscape of contemporary analytic philosophy of language is expanding, and this is a good thing. More and more analytic philosophers of language are concerned with the semantics and pragmatics of social and political terms. The longtime realization that we are social creatures and that language is a central feature of our sociality is making its way into conversation with analytic feminism and social philosophy (Chomsky 1986, 2005, Bar-on 2009, Hornsby 2000). Different subfields with similar commitments and presuppositions are coming into dialogue. This is not to say that this hasn't been done before. In fact, that this has been done before is one of the central points that motivate this paper. As Lynne Tirrell writes in 1998, "it is not news that language is an instrument of oppression." An incomplete list of thinkers who have tackled issues about socially significant speech illustrates her point: Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, Penelope Eckert, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Donna Haraway, bell hooks, Robin Lakoff, Charles Lawrence, Audre Lorde, Maria Lugones, Mary Matsuda, Sally McConnell-Ginet, Catherine McKinnon, Toni Morrison, Deborah Tannen — are among a number of thinkers outside of mainstream analytic philosophy who have written about language and social phenomena in the past half century.

This paper aims to provide some suggestions for the analytic philosopher who takes herself to be a champion of social justice, minority rights, and the aim of increased inclusivity of the discipline. This is a work of metaphilosophy and methodology, whose aim is to continue and amplify the work of many others who are bridging social theory and analytic philosophy of language.

Progress is often made in baby steps. The fact that so many analytic philosophers have turned and are turning their attention to this kind of socially and politically significant language constitutes real progress for the discipline. I don't want to detract from that by drawing attention to certain shortcomings or pitfalls of such work. This is a positive paper with a positive pro-

positional: there are things we can do and things we can stop doing that will help us achieve our aims of identifying, understanding, and eradicating language-based oppression. Here, I hope to set out a few.

The broad aim of this paper is to zero in on analytic philosophers' use of linguistic intuitions when it comes to socially and politically significant terms (such as but not limited to: slurs, normative generics, racialized language, code words, and others). In section one, I engage with the philosophical literature on *linguistic intuitions* and give a brief background of contemporary philosophical debates around methodology and the use of intuitions — focusing specifically on linguistic intuitions. I then review the feminist epistemology literature on the importance of situatedness in accessing different types of knowledge (section two). I bring these two bodies of literature together in section three to make a parallel argument: social situatedness makes a difference when it comes to linguistic intuitions about certain kinds of socially significant language. And I argue that this matters methodologically when analytic philosophers theorize about this kind of language. I conclude with some methodological suggestions that involve (i) asking the philosopher of language to recognize her own situatedness in language,⁶⁷ (ii) taking into consideration the linguistic intuitions of others who are members of groups that are more or less in direct contact with the language that is being analyzed, and (iii) making sure the conclusions that we draw are appropriately constrained by the methodologies we use.

I. Intuitions

I.1 Overview

Analytic philosophers famously mean different things by “intuition.” (see Cappelen 2012, Nado 2012, Stich & Tobia 2016, Bealer 1998 for some recent overviews of the various uses of ‘intuition’ in philosophy). I am interested in its use as meta-philosophical term that denotes, roughly, the pre-theoretic judgments or background beliefs that philosophers rely on — or pur-

⁶⁷ This is now generally common practice in most other humanities.

port to rely on — to garner support for a given conclusion. Examples include the judgment that something isn't knowledge, even though it is justified true belief (Gettier 1963); you don't know the bank is open if your savings depends on it (DeRose 1992); it's permissible to divert the trolley to save five people, but not to harvest the organs of one healthy human to save five others (Foot 1967). Philosophers use their intuitions, or, intuitive judgments, about these cases to draw conclusions about a given philosophical theory: for example, knowledge is not solely constituted by justified true belief; knowledge is context-dependent; there is a moral difference between intentional and foreseeable killings; etc... Such examples pervade analytic philosophy.

To narrow it down, I am interested in the methodology of philosophers' and linguists' *linguistic* intuitions. Linguistic intuitions are, roughly, judgments of truth, felicity, grammaticality, sense or nonsense (Chomsky 1986 cited in Stich & Tobia 2016). Unlike the broad class of philosophical intuitions, linguistic intuitions have the convenience of being formally demarcated for us in roughly standardized ways throughout the discipline(s). Fairly long-standing tradition in linguistics allows us to categorize our linguistic intuitions about sentences with marks like '#' for semantic infelicity (i.e., the sentence doesn't seem to have a straightforward meaning), '?' for confusion, and '*' for grammatical infelicity.

For example, in sentence:

(1) # A student generously offered to car me home after the dinner. (Armstrong 2016)

— Armstrong expresses (and takes his readers to share) the judgment that sentence (1) is not semantically appropriate. He says of sentences like (1): “Even if audience members can figure out what a speaker would be trying to express... the denominal verbs occurring in these sentences are considerably more marked.”

Question marks are used to indicate a similar kind of confusion.

(2) ? John, too, will never go to Paris (Chemla 2007).

Chemla uses the question marks to show that in sentence (2), it is difficult to accommodate the presupposition triggered by the word 'too.' This sentence is a confusing (and infelicitous) way to presuppose that John and someone else will never go to Paris.

Finally, the asterisk is used to indicate lack of grammaticality. For example:

(3) * How sick were there the children? (McNally 1997, cited in Azzouni forthcoming)

In sentence (3), McNally illustrates that the word 'there' can't be used as an island; 'there' can't be placed in that part of the sentence and continue to make grammatical sense. She notes that sentence (3) is ungrammatical and uses this observation to draw syntactical conclusions about the word 'there'.

Linguistic judgments like those above are typical and commonplace in linguistic philosophy and analytic philosophy of language. The rough formula is: (i) authors will note a feature of language they are interested in, (ii) express their intuition about this feature, with the expectation that others (will) share it, and then (iii) draw some kind of broader conclusion about language use using those intuitions. We will call whatever is allegedly indicated by these kinds of markings *linguistic intuition*.

Here are some more features of linguistic intuition, as I am understanding them: (a) They are not exclusively held by philosophers. Any speaker of a language can have linguistic intuitions. Philosophers are interested in the linguistic intuitions of competent speakers of the language they are analyzing. A linguistic intuition is the kind of thing experimental philosophers of language test when they present non-philosopher subjects with sentences and ask them questions like "does this seem true?" "does this sentence mean X?" "does this sentence sound like a

generalization?” and “if X is true, then is this sentence false?” We take it to be the case that when philosophers of language rely on their intuitions about a certain sentence or class of sentences, they rely on the implicit premise that other people share those intuitions.⁶⁸ (b) They are more or less synonymous with ‘we would say that’ (following Cappelen (2012)’s exegesis of Wittgenstein). For example, if I have the intuition that sentence (3) is ungrammatical, I could express it by saying ‘we would say that sentence (3) is ungrammatical.’ (c) They are purportedly pre-theoretic. Linguistic intuitions are meant to capture the speaker’s “natural” or “immediate” sense about the terms in question.⁶⁹ (d) They are a kind of judgment. Despite being pre-theoretical, they are still evaluative. The primary intuitions we are focusing on are *judgments* of sense or nonsense, grammaticality, and truth or falsity.⁷⁰

So far, I have given a rough delineation of what sorts of things linguistic intuitions are. Next, I will distinguish two ways in which linguistic intuitions can be harnessed in philosophical methodology. I take these to be two of the primary ways in which linguistic intuitions are operant in contemporary analytic philosophy of language (insofar as they are the most relevant and common). I will call these (i) *introspective intuitions*, where the speaker reflects on her own usage of the term in question, and (ii) *predictive intuitions*, where the speaker does her best to predict what the intuitions of the general linguistic community will be. I will show that on either

⁶⁸ This can be seen when, for example, objections in talks are made on the basis of audience members not sharing a philosopher’s intuition about the truth, falsity, felicity, or grammaticality (e.g.) of the philosopher’s data. Not uncommonly, such disagreements are resolved by the philosopher in question taking a straw poll of their audience to see how many people agree with them. Increasingly, philosophers are asking non-philosophers to see where their judgments fall. The point is, not only are these sorts of intuitions the same kind; it’s important that they be the same kind. When philosophers of language draw on their own linguistic intuitions about given terms, they take it that those intuitions to match the intuitions of most speakers in the relevant linguistic community. More on this in the following section.

⁶⁹ I acknowledge that there is a correlation/causation problem with the distinction between theoretic and pre-theoretic, and that we are all to some degree or other products of our theories.

⁷⁰ Note that contra certain philosophers (Cappelen 2012), I’m not concerning myself with whether philosophers do or do not use linguistic intuitions. In this paper, I am engaging with those who take it granted that they do. In *Philosophy Without Intuitions*, Cappelen argues that philosophers do not rely on intuitions in the way that much of the literature on methodology assumes that they do. My response to the line of argumentation posed by Cappelen is that I am addressing whatever it is philosophers are doing that he claims are not intuitions (like snap-judgments, hedges, or pre-theoretic judgments about language usage). As will become clear, those methodological strategies need to be subject to the same kinds of care and self-reflection as intuitions.

construal of linguistic intuition, extra measures of care need to be taken when an author chooses to rely on methods of intuition to theorize about socially and politically significant language.

I.2 Intuitions: worries

Unsurprisingly, with the rise of philosophical discussions about intuitions as methodology come philosophical worries about intuitions as methodology. Here is a brief overview of some such worries in the literature.

Recall that the two kinds of linguistic intuition we are focusing on are *introspective intuitions* and *predictive intuitions*.⁷¹ Introspective intuitions are invoked when a theorist notes her own usage of a term (or how a given sentence sounds to her ear) and then subsequently draws conclusions about the term in question. That is, she uses herself as a data point from which to draw significant conclusions about the language. Azzouni (forthcoming) calls this kind of methodology the *narcissistic model of intuition-mongering*. Here are some worries he raises:

“I’d expect rather a lot of variation in people’s intuitions about what words mean... precisely because of personality type, cultural factors, perhaps gender, etc...” (21).

Roughly, this is the kind of intuition use that is typified by disagreements in a philosophy talk that go: “well that sounds good to me,” and “well, that doesn’t sound good to me.” Azzouni argues that it is no surprise that intuitions differ along these individual lines — citing personal histories, idiosyncrasies of language use, and certain kinds of cultural and social factors that impact the way an individual uses and interprets language.

⁷¹ There is a third kind of theorists’ use of linguistic intuitions: that of explaining other people’s intuitions — or matching one’s theory to the intuitions of others’ (as collected through fieldwork, perhaps). This kind of intuition work is not introspective or predictive (because the data has already been gathered). I am not concerned with this kind of methodology in this paper, but it will be relevant for future work if my suggestions are taken up. Thanks to Ishani Maitra for pointing this out.

“What’s only been shown by x-philosophical results is the (not unexpected) fact that truth-condition intuitions vary according to rather tame causal factors such as demographic factors, and (of course) the various ways our competence can be weakened by environmental factors...” (Azzouni, pg. 22)

He does argue, however, that philosophers’ use of linguistic intuitions can be vindicated. While we have reasons to cast doubt on the practice of using one’s own linguistic intuitions as the full story, much can be gained by the kind of intuition use that *accurately predicts* the usage of most speakers of the language we are analyzing. Citing the distinction between relying on one’s own intuition and developing a skill for predicting the intuitions of others’, he plugs for the latter as helpful methodology.

Azzouni calls the latter skill *language-usage expertise*: defining this as not only expertise about how to use the language (what most people call *linguistic expertise*), but also expertise with respect to how *others* use the language.⁷² And it is not impossible for philosophers (and others) to have this skill:

“... there are good reasons to think language-usage expertise is already exhibited among language users (and some philosophers)... Some — but not all — writers of fiction are very good at depicting how members of various demographic groups speak” (footnote 31).

There is a skill to be found in predicting how others use language. This dovetails with the *philosophical expertise* response to skeptical concerns about philosophical intuitions in general (intuitions construed more broadly than linguistic intuitions) (see Nado 2012, Machery et al 2004, among others). Proponents of the *philosophical expertise* view hold that philosophers, as experts with respect to philosophical domains, are licensed in prioritizing their philosophical intuitions — just as mathematicians may prioritize their mathematical intuitions. Azzouni is not saying that philosophers get to prioritize their linguistic intuitions because they are experts; rather he is saying that philosophers *might* be able to prioritize their linguistic intuitions be-

⁷² As we shall see, the question of who these ‘others’ are is not uncomplicated.

cause they have the capacity to be the kind of expert on others' speech (much like successful writers of fiction and film have this capacity).

There are reasons to worry about the *predictive* model of linguistic intuitions.⁷³ Certain philosophers may succeed in relying on the kinds of intuitions that their readers will agree to — but with no guarantee that this will match the intuitions of language users who are non—philosophers (or members of groups that are statistically underrepresented in academic analytic philosophy).⁷⁴ They might be thinking (and intending) that their intuitions will match those of all (competent) speakers of English, when in fact it applies just to men, or North Americans, or non-marginalized speakers. I will say more about this in the next section.

Another worry about the *predictive model* of intuitions is that even at its best, it may be no match for running experimental studies that would actually corroborate whether or not the philosopher's linguistic intuition successfully predicts those of general speakers. And if this is so, accompanying worries will include those regarding the methodologies of experimental philosophy.

None of these points are conclusive, and the debate is ongoing. Many experimental philosophers use this kind of data to motivate the need for philosophers to poll the intuitions of other native speakers using experiments.⁷⁵ This avenue is promising, but is mostly beyond the scope of this paper. My aim in this section is to illustrate the kinds of concerns raised about

⁷³ Recent work in experimental philosophy has found that the intuitions of individuals (philosophers and non-philosophers alike) differ to a significant level based on certain demographic features of the experimentees. Buckwalter and Stich (2010) found that gender impacted respondents' intuitions about ethical cases. Weinberg et al. (2001) found that intuitions about Gettier cases differed depending on the nationality of the person being questioned. Experimental philosophers have even found that philosophers' linguistic intuitions differ depending on their sub-specialization (Machery 2012). What these authors claim is that even when predictive intuitions seem to succeed — that is, even when philosophers of language write with the aim of predicting what *groups* of thinkers will agree to — they still might be getting the thinkers wrong.

⁷⁴ This matters for the kind of back-and-forth that happens at conference talks when the speaker resolves the debate by polling the room for their linguistic intuitions. If the room consists mainly of a certain demographic, this can then have the effect of whitewashing the results.

⁷⁵ See footnote 7.

philosophers' use of linguistic intuitions, before raising some of my own concerns about intuitions regarding socially significant language.

II. Situatedness

The rest of this paper will focus on how social situatedness influences how we use and understand language. One way to do this is to first turn our attention to ways in which social situatedness influences how we *know*.

2.1 Situatedness and knowing

The feminist epistemology literature tells us that who we are matters to how we know. And not just that, but who we are matters to how we are *situated* as knowers; and it influences the kinds of input, information and evidence we get, how others treat us, and the degrees to which we are able to abstract away from our individual perspectives (Haraway 1991, Harding 1987, Collins 2015, Pohlhaus 2002, Kukla & Ruetsche 2002 — to name just a few). One baseline commitment of these thinkers is that situatedness positions individuals differently as knowers. Certain individuals will know about certain things because of their familiarity with them as a result of their position in the world. For example, as a general trend, tall people will know more about the phenomenology of bumping their foreheads on doorways, people living in colder climates will know more about how to walk on icy sidewalks. Analogously, individuals on food stamps will know which stores accept them and which don't; survivors of sexual violence will know the telltales signs and patterns of harassment and abuse.

Others (Harding 1991, McKinnon 2015, Pohlhaus 2002, Collins 2015, DuBois 1903, Anderson 2000, Toole ms) argue that situatedness *better* positions certain — marginalized — individuals as knowers. That is, those individuals on food stamps won't just know which stores accept food stamps, but they will be better positioned to know this than individuals who are not on

food stamps. Similarly, survivors of sexual violence are better positioned than others to recognize instances of harassment and violence as such. This is a commitment of *standpoint epistemology*, which holds that:

“... social location systematically shapes and limits what we know, including tacit, experiential knowledge as well as explicit understanding, what we take knowledge to be as well as specific epistemic content. What counts as “social location” is structurally defined... by [individuals’] location in a hierarchically structured system of power relations: by the material conditions of their lives, by the relations of production and reproduction that structure their social interactions, and by the conceptual resources they have to represent and interpret these relations” (Wylie, 2003, p. 31).

Following Wylie, I understand social situatedness as resulting from the interplay of social and material factors. There are different kinds of social locations and different kinds of situatedness. Louise Antony talks about *embodiment* as one such kind of situatedness. Following the phenomenological tradition, embodiment for Antony relates to the experiences one has from living and being in their physical body. One way it affects knowing is by affecting the way theorists acquire and disseminate knowledge: “embodiment matters to the way in which one *theorizes about* knowledge, so that, in particular, Cartesian epistemology reflects contingent and non-universal features of the embodiment of the theorists who espouse it” (Antony 2002, p. 3).⁷⁶

2.2 Situatedness and linguistic intuitions

Social situatedness matters for knowing. I want to extend this claim to *linguistic intuitions*: social situatedness matters when it comes to relying on one’s linguistic intuitions.⁷⁷ I first argue for the weaker thesis that an individual’s social situatedness has *some* effect on the way they generate linguistic intuitions. Later I will consider the stronger thesis that marginally positioned listeners and speakers have *better* linguistic intuitions about certain socially significant language. While arguing for the latter is beyond the scope of this paper, it is a position worth considering seriously.

⁷⁶ Other kinds of situatedness are determined by geography, gender, class and as we shall discuss later — even non-physical considerations like background information or knowledge about a certain topic.

⁷⁷ For similar recent work, see Polhaus (2015) on linguistic intuitions and feminist philosophy.

There are two ways to tie linguistic intuitions into the broader discussion of standpoint epistemology and situatedness. One way to do this is to frame an individual's linguistic intuitions in terms of some epistemic feature of language. This could be *knowledge* of linguistic practices, norms, meanings, etc. It could also be access to evidence. Going this route would mean treating intuitions as a kind of epistemic phenomenon. A related way to go is to extend the analogy more broadly: situatedness matters to the way in which one *theorizes* about X, so that theories of X reflect contingent and non-universal features of the embodiment of the theorists who espouse it (Antony 2002). And since relying on linguistic intuitions is part of theorizing about language, intuitions are implicated in our epistemic practices of theorizing. We see such arguments outside of philosophy: as pointed out by Fausto-Sterling (1995), Cordelia Fine (2011), Sharon Crasnow (2013), Nancy Tuana (1989), and Helen Longino (1987, 1994) among others, scientific theory is shaped by and reflects the social position and biases of its theorizers.⁷⁸

In short, we are situated speakers in addition to being situated knowers, and our experience with and relationship to language reflects that situatedness. I will argue that this is especially so when dealing with *socially significant language*: or, language that particularly targets, denigrates, or stereotypes a given social group. The communicative force, the harms done and conveyed, and the interpretive significance of a term “lands” differently depending on whether the hearer is targeted by such language, for instance.⁷⁹

Situatedness matters when it comes to socially significant language. But it's also the case with language more generally: think of dialects, slang, words meaning different things in different parts of one country with the same official language (like ‘pop’ and ‘soda’), and syntactical differences across different sub-communities of speakers of the same language. All of this matters when we use linguistic intuitions as evidence.

One way this matters is with respect to judgments of linguistic *felicity*. The sentence:

⁷⁸ See also anthropology in the early 20th century, as well as law and legal studies (Matsuda 1989)

⁷⁹ See Gay (2014) among others.

(4) Now I eat it with a spoon anymore.

will sound grammatical to someone from Pennsylvania or Kentucky, but not to someone from Rhode Island or Washington state.⁸⁰ That is, some people have the linguistic intuition that (4) is grammatical, and some do not. We can say that speakers who endorse positive ‘anymore’ belong to a different *linguistic community* than those who do not (following Burge 1988, Brandom 1998, Muhlebach ms, and others). So, when we draw conclusions about the semantics and syntax of ‘anymore,’ the conclusions will be constrained by the linguistic communities whose judgments we are considering. If linguists did not consider (or discounted) the linguistic intuitions of speakers from rural Pennsylvania and Kentucky, they would not have the full picture about positive ‘anymore.’ This first way of linking up situatedness to intuitions involves different individuals using and interpreting the same language in different ways.

There’s a second way of linking up situatedness to linguistic intuitions: *who* is speaking — and to whom — matters when we are determining the communicated content of what is said.⁸¹ Sally McConnell-Ginet, following Paul Grice, tells us that “meaning depends not just on the speaker but on a kind of relation between the speaker and the hearer” (McConnell-Ginet 1998, p. 200). Jennifer Hornsby, in a similar spirit, proposes a supplement to traditional semantics that gives an account of “*saying something to someone*” (Hornsby 2000, p. 2, original emphasis). Hornsby criticizes the analytic tradition of analyzing meanings and sentences in a vacuum.⁸² In doing so, analytic philosophy of language *underemphasizes* the relationship between speaker and hearer. In particular, it underemphasizes the context-dependency of meaning on the speaker, the hearer, and the relationship between them (when the expressions in question aren’t already indexicals or other standard context-sensitive language). Here is one way she puts it, contrasting the traditions of feminist theory and analytic philosophy of language:

⁸⁰ See Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2015) and Flores (2017).

⁸¹ Here, communicated content is restricted to meaning. But it could also include implication, insinuation, and other forms of indirect discourse.

⁸² Note that in doing so she does not speak for all feminists. See Antony (2016) for pushback.

“[In] feminist work, the use of language is treated always in a social context, in which the presence of gendered beings is taken for granted. In philosophy of language, by contrast, when modality, say, or relative identity, or reference is the topic, the subject matter is apparently far removed from any social setting... focus on semantic theories has actually helped to sustain the appearance of a gulf between philosophical treatment of language and the treatment of social phenomena.” (Hornsby, 2000, p. 4).

Lynne Tirrell agrees:

“The interweaving of philosophy with linguistics and literary theory makes feminist philosophy of language significantly different from traditional philosophy of language, although they share some methods and concerns” (Tirrell 1998, p. 140).

I think these are good diagnoses of the differences between the two fields and their methodologies. And one way to put my concern is that increasingly, certain philosophy of language that investigates social terms still does so in the paradigm of philosophy of language that is “far removed from any social setting” (Hornsby, above). This is problematic because, among other things, such language is deeply enmeshed in the social world.⁸³ The practice of analyzing language removed from social context can be a valuable part of the analytic tradition. But it shouldn’t (at least not exclusively) and needn’t with this kind of subject matter. As we shall see in section 2.4, semanticists and philosophers of language have already adapted their methodologies to investigations of different kinds of language.⁸⁴ I argue here that socially significant language is one kind of such language and the methodology surrounding it should reflect that.

Hornsby refers to a gulf between analytic philosophy and feminist theory. But there needn’t be one. Philosophy of language has much to gain and much to contribute by engaging with the kinds of social phenomena that appear to be highly linguistic (such as slurs, generics, code words, fig leaves, slang, insults, epithets, etc.). However, in bridging the gulf we may need to

⁸³ See Haslanger (2007) among others for an account of this critique. Other related worries include Tirrell’s (1998): “A narrow focus on sexist semantics is of limited use to feminist philosophers, for at best such studies yield lists of past and present harms, with little more to add than “stop it, *now*”” (139).

⁸⁴ For one early example, see Labov (1972, 1975) in his foundational text that went on to become the basis for methodology in sociolinguistics. In the time since, methodologies have diverged such that while such practices of surveying a vast array of intuitions is commonplace in sociolinguistics, it is less standard in semantics and philosophy of language. Thanks to Lucas Champollion for this point.

deal with some methodological hiccups. Here, I focus on just one: that of relying on linguistic intuitions.

2.3. Linguistic Communities

In section 2.2, we used positive ‘anymore’ to show that linguistic intuitions of *felicity* of the same sentence can differ depending on the speaker’s background (specifically, regional or geographic background). Linguists who study positive ‘anymore’ invoke a notion of *linguistic community*.⁸⁵ The very rough idea is that certain terms will be used differently depending on their speakers, or the linguistic communities of the speakers. This can be extended to syntax, pragmatics, and semantics. Hornsby gives us a way of thinking about linguistic communities and semantic theory:

“... if the idea of a semantic theory is to cast light on the general concept of linguistic meaning, then something general has to be said about the relations between languages (thought of now as the objects of semantic theories) and **groups of speakers**. We might say that a semantic theory for a language is correct only if it belongs inside an overall account of the lives and minds of the people who use the language ...” (Hornsby, 2000, 4-5) (my emphasis)

Whether we want to call them linguistic communities or groups of speakers, the point is that language use and language meaning differs from community to community, and sometimes from speaker to speaker. Certain individuals (qua group members but also qua individuals with a certain standpoint) have more access and familiarity with certain terms. This access and familiarity can be gained by virtue of their lived experiences as members of certain social groups or familiarity with those groups.⁸⁶ Sometimes this increased access and familiarity leads to greater competence and epistemic privilege with respect to the meanings and usage of those terms. This

⁸⁵ See Hoeksema (2000), among others.

⁸⁶ Here, familiarity can be social or intellectual or experiential. There is lengthy debate among standpoint epistemologists about what it takes for a given individual to occupy a standpoint. There is consensus — with which I agree — that membership in a given social group is neither sufficient nor necessary for a standpoint to be occupied. As Wiley (2015) puts it: “First, standpoint theory must not presuppose an essentialist definition of the social categories... it must not be aligned with a thesis of automatic epistemic privilege, standpoint theorists cannot claim that those who occupy particular standpoints (usually subdominant, oppressed, marginal standpoints) automatically know more, or know better, by virtue of their social, political location” (p. 28).

matters for certain methods of inquiry about the semantics and pragmatics of those terms. In the next section, I will discuss some such language.⁸⁷

2.4. The ways in which philosophers and linguists are already attuned to situatedness

Linguists and analytic philosophers of language are already methodologically attuned to situatedness in many circumstances. So, my suggestion that we pay attention to social situatedness should not be viewed as a radical divergence from the standard methodologies of analytic philosophy and linguistics. Rather, it's on a continuum with the kinds of situatedness that are standardly taken into account. Here are some other examples, hopefully familiar, where it's standard to take a speaker, hearer, or evaluator's situatedness into account:

i. epistemic modals

On some leading views of the semantics of epistemic modals — words like *might* as in “I checked the forecast and it might be raining” and *should* as in “the coffee should still be hot since it was just brewed” — the truth-conditions of sentences containing these terms depends on the speaker's or hearer's evidence or knowledge base (see von Fintel & Gillies 2011, among others). When I say “it might be raining,” according to these views, I am saying that it is consistent with my evidence — or with the things I know — that it is raining. So, what I know matters to the truth and meaning of this sentence. If you are in a windowless room and I am outside in the hot sun, our intuitions about the truth of “it might be raining” will differ.

ii. indexicals

Indexicality is now taken to be a standard feature of language (following Kaplan 1985). Indexical terms like ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘this,’ and ‘there’ need to be interpreted within a given *context* in order to have a coherent meaning. Contextual parameters are usually taken to encompass at

⁸⁷ This is not to say that any arbitrary member of a given social group will automatically by virtue of her membership have a privileged knowledge or access. We must be sure not to fall into the easy trap of treating any individual as a token member of her social group (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2015, Wiley 2015, among others). Also see Pohlhaus (2002) and Harding (1995) for a debate about whether knowers must be of a given social position in order to develop a critical standpoint.

least the speaker, time, and world, but often include more (Lewis 1980, Kaplan 1985, Mount 2012). So here too, the situatedness of the speaker or the evaluator of the sentence matters. If I am evaluating the sentence “we’ve had a mild winter” in Ann Arbor in 2016, my judgment will differ from someone who is evaluating the sentence in Boston in 2015.⁸⁸

Although these are examples of different *kinds* of situatedness from the discussions of social situatedness and oppositional perspectives, the point here is just to show that analytic philosophy of language and linguistics can handle accommodating individual differences that bear on semantic, pragmatic, and other judgments about terms.⁸⁹ In the next section, I will claim that analogously, situatedness matters for certain socially significant terms.

III. Intuitions about socially significant terms

3.1 Group-sensitive language

Most of us are aware that a word like ‘slut’ means different things to different people.⁹⁰ It is not my place to teach philosophers that such a word will evoke different reactions from different people in different contexts, nor am I claiming that they do not know so. My claim is the more modest one: that individuals’ *pre-theoretical philosophical intuitions* about the word ‘slut’ will differ depending on their social situatedness, and that matters to how we as philosophers theorize about words like ‘slut.’ Other terms are like this, too.

Here are some examples of language whose interpretations can be sensitive to speaker or linguistic community.

⁸⁸ See Hornsby (2000), McConnell-Ginet (1998), and Diaz-Leon (2016) for arguments that extend indexical contextualism to race, gender, and other social terms.

⁸⁹ There are many other examples where things like context and the speaker’s position matters to what is said and communicated. See Anderson (2015) for a fairly exhaustive list of the kinds of situations where situatedness relates to claims of knowledge

⁹⁰ For one survey of such views, see Carr (2015).

- 1. *Normative generics*, sometimes called social generics (Cella 2016), are an example of language whose meaning (or communicated content) can change depending on who is speaking and who is listening. A historian teaching about the 19th century, for example, may say “women stay at home and raise families” and convey a descriptive general fact about gender and division of labor in the 19th century. A disapproving grandparent saying the same sentence to his university-bound granddaughter, on the other hand, conveys something else: something like ‘women should stay home and raise families,’ or, ‘it is good and normal for women to stay home and raise families.’ (Leslie 2015b, Haslanger 2014)
- 2. Certain swear words, curse words, slurs, or insults can have different meanings or communicate different things depending on the speaker/hearer relationship. The reclaimed usage of ‘slut’ or ‘slutty,’ for example, was primarily shaped by individuals who were members of the group targeted by the derogatory use of ‘slut’ (Butler 1997). So too for reclamations of words like ‘queer.’ So-called ‘neutral terms’ are also susceptible to meaning shifts depending on who is using them (and in what context) (Jeshion 2013b, Herbert 2015, Nunberg 2017, Bolinger 2015). Some racial slurs have very different communicated contents depending on whether the user and recipient are members of the targeted group (Camp 2013, among others).⁹¹
- 3. *Code words* and *dogwhistles* are by definition terms whose meaning (or communicated content) varies depending on hearer or speaker. A phrase like ‘family values’ is meant to sound innocuous enough to those who aren’t part of the target audience of it: something like valuing positive relationships with family members. But to its target audience, it means something like “adheres to the same kinds of right-wing Christian ideology that you do” (Khoo 2017, Mendelberg 2001, among others).

3.2 Examples

⁹¹ As Liz Camp (2013) points out: “we should acknowledge that many of ‘us’—philosophers; academics more generally—have only limited experience with slurs” (331). Note that Camp does not take this to mean or imply that philosophers should not be in the business of analyzing slurs — nor do I.

Given the observations above, we might think that in certain philosophical settings, linguistic intuitions about the meaning and pragmatic force of socially significant terms will not reflect everybody's intuitions. Rather, they will reflect the intuitions about those who are using or assessing the examples at the time. Here are some examples of such sentences. What I aim to show is that the conclusions drawn from relying on hearer intuitions in these cases is controversial. This is because they are derived from intuitions that are not widely agreed upon or necessarily shared — importantly, not shared by the relevant groups — while their conclusions purport to apply universally.

Example 1: Code Words / Neutral Terms

An author makes a judgment from linguistic intuition that the sentence below is ungrammatical because it is analytically false, and uses this judgment to illustrate an example of non-cancelable content.

(5) #African Americans are not Americans. (seminar handout)

In this example, the author assumes that sentence (5) misfires. It's either false, or nonsense, because it is just analytically true that African Americans are Americans.

But pausing a moment to figure out whose perspective is informative, we might find that our own (hopefully) non-racist intuitions are less useful when it comes to judging derogatory language. A google search of the above phrase yields 9,480 tasteless hits. This should make us ask on what basis and according to whom is (5) infelicitous. This matters for philosophical reasons, as well as sociopolitical ones. If the point of example (5) is to show that neutral counterparts don't co-pattern in a way that derogatory terms do, its failure to do so shows that neutral counterparts behave more similarly to code words than we thought. In fact, it may even give us reason to be skeptical about the notion of neutral counterparts at all (see Ashwell (2016) on this for slurs about women and Gates Jr. et al. (1996) about the evolving notion of neutral terms in general.).

Just as analytic philosophers may be over-sensitive or over-charitable about some kinds of intuitions, we may be under-sensitive about others.⁹² This brings us to our next example.

Example 2: Slurs

In a public lecture, a philosopher claims that sentence (6) below entails sentences (7) and (7'). The philosopher is arguing against a view of expressivism about slurring terms, using their intuition about the entailment from (6) to (7) to show that there seems to be something truth-apt about (6).:

(6) There are three sluts in the building.

(7) There are three women in the building.

(7') There are three people in the building.

My sense is whether or not the entailment between these sentences holds depends on who you ask. There are those who deny that sentence (6) would entail (7) or (7') because of the dehumanizing nature of the word 'slut.'⁹³ And there are those who would deny the intuition that (6) entails (7) because often gay men are the recipient of this epithet, too. What I hope to show is that denial or endorsement of the intuition can, in some instances, arise from the social situatedness of the person evaluating the sentences. So there is a divergence of intuitions about whether the entailment holds. Yet, the intuition that there is an entailment is being used as data to support a conclusion about the semantics of slurring terms. What reliance on such an intuition misses is that the semantic conclusion only takes into account some of the intuitions data.

Example 3: Generics

In a talk on *normative generics*, the following sentence pair was contrasted to show that cognitive bias influences the way people interpret generic sentences.

(8) Muslims are terrorists.

⁹² Nunberg (2017) is a good example of someone who explicitly analyzes the way racists use speech.

⁹³ See Jeshion (2013b) for an example of a view on which slurring terms "function to signal that their targets are unworthy of equal standing or full respect as persons, that they are inferior as persons" (p. 308).

— is judged as felicitous and contrasted with

(9) # White men are terrorists.

— where sentence (9) is taken to be infelicitous (i.e., not heard as a generic claim, but rather an existential one). The context of such a discussion is that it is noteworthy that (8) is judged to be felicitous while (9) is infelicitous, despite the fact that more acts of domestic terrorism in the United States have been committed by white men than by Muslims.⁹⁴

As with Examples 1 and 2, I think judgments of the felicity of (8) and the infelicity of (9) will vary greatly depending on who is judging the sentence. Leave white America, and (9) is both a commonplace and felicitous normative generic statement.

Social situatedness matters when it comes to the kind of familiarity and competence with language that underlies linguistic intuitions.⁹⁵ Briefly, here's why.

First, group membership (or, members of an in-group) often plays a role in constructing or determining the meaning of a socially/politically significant term. Here, take instances of reclamation that come from members who self-identify with the extension of the term (Haslanger 2012, Hacking 2003, Tirrell 1999, Jeshion 2013). Susan Stryker, writing about the history of the term 'transgender,' gives us an example of this:

“Transgender itself was a term then undergoing a significant shift in meaning... By the early 1990s, primarily through the influence of Leslie Feinberg’s 1992 pamphlet Transgender Liberation..., transgender was beginning to refer to something else — an imagined political alliance of all possible forms of gender antinormativity. It was in this latter sense that transgender became articulated with queer.” (Stryker, 2008)

In cases like these, one's *introspective* intuitions about the meaning of the term will differ depending on whether one is a member of the impacted/reclaiming group or not.⁹⁶ And one's

⁹⁴ Note that authors in this example don't claim that sentences like (8) are *true* and (9) *false*; rather, that we easily hear (8) as a generic, and less so (9).

⁹⁵ I use social situatedness broadly, to encompass not members of a specific group (which is neither sufficient nor necessary, see footnote 12), but individuals with the relevant social positioning and access to knowledge.

⁹⁶ Or has the relevant kind of oppositional consciousness.

predictive intuitions will be more or less accurate depending on how much one knows about the term's use by members of the impacted group.⁹⁷

Second, membership within an antagonistic out-group can play a constructive role in determining the semantics of a socially/politically significant term. Here think of oppressive language, racist terminology, and code words (Butler 1996, Waldron 2012, Moody-Adams 1997, among others). Members of dominantly situated and non-antagonistic out-groups can also play a role in constructing the meaning of social terms (see Hacking 2003 on the category of *woman refugee*, for example).

Third, group membership or proximity can facilitate gaining explicit and implicit instructions and knowledge about how to interpret certain terms: this includes processes of immersion, interpreting in-group humor, and being proficient in slang (Cohn 1987, Herbert & Kukla 2016, Anderson 2017).⁹⁸

If we accept the above — that certain kinds of terms that are deeply philosophically interesting are also terms whose communicated content differs depending on who is speaking and who is listening — then there are (at least) three important questions that philosophers who engage in theorizing about such language need to ask. First, do we (philosophers of language theorizing about such terms) take ourselves, as we are currently situated, to have the appropriate kind of insight into these terms, such that our linguistic intuitions about them are instructive and informative? Second, are others better situated to have the appropriate kind of insight into these terms? If so, are we consulting those people and their intuitions and reading and citing their work on these topics? The answers to these questions matter when it comes to the methodologies we endorse and the scope of the conclusions we draw.

⁹⁷ See footnote 12 for an important caveat.

⁹⁸ All these cases may involve terms that have multiple meanings. We could interpret this polysemy as having differing evaluative or descriptive flavors (see Leslie 2015b, Knobe et al. 2013). Or we could think about it in terms of a term *meaning* different things to different people: for example, having dominant and secondary meanings (Bettcher 2014) or ameliorative meanings (Haslanger 2012). Talia Bettcher writes about recognizing ways in which “terms such as “woman” have different, resistant meanings” that “involve radical departures from dominant practices of gender and hence an alteration in the meaning of terms such as “woman” and “man”” (Bettcher 2014, p. 403).

Being a member of a marginalized social group (and having the relevant oppositional consciousness) involves having certain experiences that are not had by members of dominant groups. That experience matters for our intuitions and informs them.⁹⁹ Roxane Gay gives us a powerful example of this:

“To be fair, I hate the N-word and avoid using it because the N-word has always been a pejorative, a word designed to remind black people of their place, a word to reinforce a perception of inferiority. I have no interest in using the word to describe myself or any person of color, under any circumstances... The N-word is certainly not a word that has, as many suggest, been kept alive solely by hip-hop and rap artists. White people have been keeping the word alive and well too. Any movie about slavery or black history could reasonably include the word a few times just to remind us of how terrible we all used to be, to remind us of the work we have yet to do. And still, the televised version of *Roots* manages to depict the realities of slavery without the N-word and the miniseries is nearly ten hours long.” (2014, 221)

There are a few points to be made here, none of which I can fully delve into in this paper. First, different members of the same in-group may feel different ways about the use and mentioning of slurs that affect them. Second, well-meaning members of out-groups are complicit in perpetuating the harms of racist terms. Third, terms may be treated as superfluous by one group when they in fact mean quite a lot to another. What I hope is that theorists keep such complexities in mind when engaging with their own and others’ intuitions about socially significant language.

3.3 On standpoint and intuitions (the stronger thesis)

So far we’ve given reasons to pay attention to others’ linguistic intuitions. A stronger thesis would hold that we also have reason to pay *less* attention to those of dominantly situated analytic philosophers. One way to argue for the stronger claim would be to observe the downfalls of theorizing about language when one is *not* a member of the group affected by such language

⁹⁹ See Gay 2014 on offensiveness and how it feels viscerally to hear slurs (whether used or mentioned), McKinnon 2015 on transphobia and feminist awakenings, Jaggar 1989 on emotional understanding, among many others.

(and when one does not consult members of those groups). Nancy Bauer (2015) points out one such downfall:

“In failing to attend carefully to how real people actually speak or what phenomena in the world (pornography, say) are actually like, what we [philosophers] say is, at worst, wrong and, at best, hollow” (105).

Anderson & Lepore (2011) point out another.

“In academic discussions and in the quiet of a study, it's easy to convince oneself (we confess on occasions we have) that particular uses of slurs are inoffensive. We couldn't have written this paper had we not. As a safeguard against such inurement, we strongly urge you always to ask yourself how a targeted member, perhaps accidentally overhearing you, would react to your usage. You'll find, as we have, that much of what seems suitable is definitely not.” (7-8)

This piece of advice from Anderson and Lepore is not only prudentially and morally important, but illustrates a further positive upshot: it's not that certain things are completely *inaccessible* to dominantly situated theorists, but that it takes more work than a priori theorizing for a dominantly situated theorist to internalize what certain experiences are like for others. I follow those feminist scholars (Gilligan, Code, Alcoff, Young, Jaggar, as cited in Pohlhaus (2015)) who argue that “differences in social location might make some things appear more obvious to [marginally situated individuals], but that these things can be made obvious to [dominantly situated individuals], and they *ought to be* made more obvious to *all* philosophers” (Pohlhaus, 2015, p. 15).

Bauer, Anderson & Lepore, and Pohlhaus give us another important takeaway. It is not that dominantly situated philosophers and theorists *cannot* theorize responsibly about socially significant terms and language. It's that, in most cases, it requires more than relying on one's default judgments. I do not claim here that the linguistic intuitions of dominantly situated analytic philosophers should be dismissed or devalued, but I do maintain that the linguistic intuitions of dominantly situated analytic philosophers are not going to tell us the whole story. So it will take further reflection and will require methodology other than introspecting on intu-

itions to glean information and arrive at conclusions that will be relevant to the population as a whole (or to the affected populations).

IV. Methodological Upshots

If one of the important questions we're seeking to answer when we do social and political philosophy of language is "what is the *social role* or the *political role* of a given expression?" then our answer must extend beyond the answer to the question: "what is the role of this expression for dominantly situated analytic philosophers?"

I suggest the dominantly situated analytic philosopher can better answer the former question by recognizing her own situatedness and how this affects her relationship to language. This means taking her own linguistic intuitions with a grain of salt, especially if she is not a member of a group that is in frequent contact with this kind of language.¹⁰⁰ This also means realizing that other individuals may have different intuitions about the same term. This brings me to my second suggestion: the dominantly situated analytic philosopher should take into account the linguistic intuitions of others who *are* more directly impacted with (or more in contact with) the terms under consideration. This could mean experimental work, but it definitely means engaging with scholarship and literature produced by members of those groups.¹⁰¹ The final suggestion is for those who *don't* have broadly feminist persuasions: to those philosophers for whom terms like slurs are just semantically interesting in and of themselves. The suggestion is to make it explicit that — if we are only relying on and concerned with the intuitions of domi-

¹⁰⁰ Again, see Camp (2013).

¹⁰¹ See Pohlhaus (2015) and Schwartzman (2012) on some worries about integrating feminist philosophy with experimental philosophy. Pohlhaus argues that instead of turning towards empirical testing, "one might conclude that it is absolutely imperative to diversify philosophical communities so as to widen the scope of what philosophers find obvious" (14). This seems right to me. But diversifying the community does not ensure that everyone in the community will have a voice, so we should be especially attuned to the latter consideration.

nantly situated analytic philosophers — the conclusion applies to the community of dominantly situated analytic philosophers.¹⁰²

But let me plug briefly against the latter option. Despite the fact that analytic philosophy has a certain (predominantly white, middle-upper class, cisgender, heterosexual, male) demographic, we shouldn't assume that it will remain that way.¹⁰³ As Gaile Polhaus Jr. writes:

“The homogeneity of the “we” who make judgments deemed to be “obvious” in philosophy and elsewhere has been of great concern to feminist philosophy... those who are non-dominantly situated are no strangers to the experience of finding obvious what others do not ... it is reason to investigate whose interests are being served by some things appearing more obvious than others, to diversify the “we” of philosophers so as to expand philosophical attention to the world, and to engage in orienting knowledge work, finding ways of making what is obvious (*particularly* to those non-dominantly situated in the world) more obvious to others (*particularly* those dominantly situated in the world).” (2015, 11-12).

If analytic philosophy as a discipline wants to stop alienating those with minority backgrounds from the discipline, then analytic philosophers should avoid writing things that alienate and exclude them. When linguistic intuitions are appealed to in *non*-social philosophy of language, it is generally taken for granted that not everyone will agree with them. And this is not damning. If the people who disagree are enough of a minority — if the room is polled and only a few of people disagree with the speaker's intuitions — then the speaker is generally licensed to continue relying on that intuition. But when it comes to intuitions about social philosophy of language, we need to pay attention to who that minority is.¹⁰⁴ It matters if the people in the room who agree that (6) entails (7) all look the same and come from the same background. And

¹⁰² And, of course, the broader spirit of this suggestion applies to those with broadly feminist persuasions as well: if the conclusion about these terms and their social and political implications is to have a domain broader than that of the community of dominantly situated analytic philosophers, then we should make sure to consider the viewpoints and work of those outside of dominantly situated analytic philosophy.

¹⁰³ Thanks to Cassie Herbert for pointing this out.

¹⁰⁴ For more on randomness and exclusion, see Fine (2012) on the way in which evidence-based practices are “whiting out the non-random cumulative landscape of injustice, resilience and resistance.”

analytic philosophers must realize that we are already predisposed to ignore non-dominant intuitions. As Luvell Anderson (2017) tells us:

“Being dubbed “the standard” [language or dialect] already confers a kind of super-legitimacy on this particular language variety, and by extension, its associated identity... Being in such a position disincentives its adherents from exhibiting the sort of humility necessary to learn from and possibly embrace alternative values” (15).

So if we are hoping to make the discipline more inclusive, we need to think more carefully about our methodologies. It’s not just a matter of increasing bodies and representation. It’s a matter of respecting and engaging seriously with non-dominantly situated work, viewpoints, and intuitions.

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Chapter 4: How to Disrupt a Social Script

This paper aims to further philosophical conversations around *social scripts* (following Appiah (1994), Oshana (2005), Stoljar (2015), Dougherty (ms), and others). I give a theoretical overview of what it would mean to disrupt a social script and explain why and when it is prudent to do so. Then I give several examples of disruptions of social scripts. I provide an analysis of what it is to *cooperatively* disrupt a social script, and in doing so challenge the notion that cooperation and disruption are conceptually at odds with one another. I end with a discussion of how micro-level (or *interpersonal*) disruptions are a means to large scale social change.

There are two main classifications of *social scripts* in the vast interdisciplinary literature that invokes them. I will call these two classifications *structural scripts* and *interpersonal scripts*. Structural scripts, as we will see below, encompass the norms, stereotypes, and expectations that pervade a dominant ideology. Interpersonal scripts, on the other hand, most closely resemble a screenplay: they are tied to patterns of dialogue and model the ways in which one individual responds to another over the course of a given conversation. This paper will focus primarily on the latter kind of script. The motivation for this is twofold: first, interpersonal scripts have received less philosophical attention than social scripts.¹⁰⁵ Second, my focus on interpersonal scripts aims to create resources to connect the two: to understand how individual and interpersonal social relations contribute to social norms, relations, and stereotypes at the structural level and in the public sphere. In this paper, I do this by focusing on *disruptions* of interpersonal scripts. I focus on disruptions for two reasons: firstly, it is worth noting and explicating their significance as a survival strategy. Second, disruptions as a theoretical concept can shed light on the relationship between the structural and the interpersonal. Finally, a focus on interpersonal scripts teaches us how disruption can play a productive role in civil society.

¹⁰⁵ See Appiah (1994), Oshana (2005), Stoljar (2015), for examples of philosophical literature on the latter kind of social script.

One feature of some social scripts is that they can be taken advantage of to put a person who is (wittingly or not) participating in the script in a double bind: either go along with the script or reject it at the risk of some social cost. I argue that disruptions of social scripts are sometimes the safest and most effective ‘third way’ out of these binds. I’m interested in pursuing a notion of what it means to disrupt a social script and how it can be a tool for those who otherwise seem trapped in one. I am specifically interested in the way social scripts can be *disrupted* as a route towards individual liberation and as a way of also dismantling oppressive systems. While I am interested in broader more systematic changes, one thing I aim to do in this paper is look at social scripts on an *interpersonal* level.

Section one of the paper gives a short overview of the concept of social scripts in academic discourse, further explicating the difference between interpersonal and structural scripts. In section two, I motivate the need for script disruption, arguing that we should be interested in disruptions for reasons of social justice. Section three gives an analysis of script disruption, followed by examples of interpersonal and structural disruptions, both verbal and non-verbal. In section four, I interrogate the notion of a ‘cooperative’ disruption, considering the objection that disruptions are inherently disobedient and uncooperative. I argue instead that cooperatively disrupting can be a way of reconciling critical oppositional activity with deliberative democracy, and of expressing autonomy under oppressive conditions.

1. Social Scripts

The notion of a social script is invoked in psychology, cognitive science, disability studies sociology, feminism, and queer studies, to name a few. Philosophers are coming to understand its significance too. There are many reasons for this. For one, the motivations that these other fields have for investigating and developing the notion of a social script are intrinsically philosophical: in psychology and cognitive science, social scripts are explicated as a tool that humans use for making sense of and engaging with the world around them (Frith 2007). In disability

studies, social scripts are being investigated as a way for children and adults with social and neural atypicalities to cope and function in a society that is not structured around their learning style (Rao et al. 2008). In sociology, feminist, and queer studies, scholars investigate the ways in which social scripts are used to create and reinforce systems of domination and inequality, specifically (but not exclusively) around sexual conduct and misconduct (Feigenbaum 2007, Popovich et al. 1995, Kurth et al. 2000, Marcus 2013).

I think there is a role for all of these concepts (and more) in philosophy. In this paper, I am specifically interested in the way social scripts can be *disrupted* as a route towards liberation and a means of dismantling oppressive systems. In this way, I most closely follow the sociological, feminist, and queer studies approach towards social scripts.

There are at least two ways that theorists outside of philosophy invoke the notion of a “script” (where I’m limiting the scope of my inquiry to ‘social scripts,’ ‘sexual scripts’ and ‘cultural scripts’). The first, call this *a structural script*, is a more cognitive notion of norms, stereotypes, and perceptual expectations (Edwards 1994, Feigenbaum 2007). The other, call it an *interpersonal script*, is more closely related to something like a scripted scene in a movie or play (Gagnon & Simon 1986, among others): one person says something, the other person says something else, and what the first person says partly scripts what the next person says. It’s this latter kind of script that I’m interested in, although I hope to show that the two are closely related.

1.1 Interpersonal scripts

Early characterizations of scripts designate them as perceptual tools to help individuals structure interactions in the world. Cognitive psychologists Shank & Abelson (1944) describe a script as:

“ [a] structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context... a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation” (Shank & Abelson 1944, p. 41, cited in Popovich et al. 1994, p. 317).

The script in question is interpersonal; its scope is restricted to actions and events (including speech) in a given situation or context. A classic example of this is a 'greeting script': A says 'Hi, how are you?' to their acquaintance B. B says, 'fine, thanks, how are you?' in a predetermined, stereotyped, and scripted way. This leaves us with the 'well-known situation' of a casual greeting. According to *social script theory*, such interactions pervade a given society. And this is generally a good thing. Scripts allow people to function and interact in a predictable way without exerting an undue amount of cognitive strain.

But, as later feminist theorists pointed out, the scripted nature of interpersonal interaction is not always a good thing. Rape and harassment can also be highly scripted, and in ways that intentionally make it hard for the victim to escape the script and the situation (see Marcus 2013, Kurth et al. 2000, Popovich et al. 1995). Some examples of social scripts that are well-documented in the psychology and social sciences literature are often demeaning and oppressive. For example, many have written about the 'sexual script' that women say 'no' in order to consent to sex, resulting in their inability to successfully communicate a refusal (Frith 2009, Langton 1993, Marcus 2013, to name just a few).

As is also well-documented, there are racialized and gendered scripts around harassment where the woman is supposed to just 'play along.' These are so normatively enshrined that when she doesn't, she is chastised for not doing the 'right' (or expected) thing.¹⁰⁶ For example, in an ethnography on black women's experiences with street harassment from men, Melinda Mills notes:

"When one black male harasser found that Susie, a 20-something, middle class, heterosexual black woman, failed to respond in the way he anticipated or hoped for, he informed her, "You just ain't acting right." Because Susie failed to reciprocate the man's interest in her, and instead fell silent in surprised at what she felt were sexually charged and inappropriate remarks, she found herself facing evaluation from this male stranger." (Mills 2007, p. 61)

¹⁰⁶ As this shows us, scripts need not track what is morally right. In fact, they often do not. See section 1.2.

The first way to respond to the threat of these kinds of scripts is to *understand* them as scripted:

“... the central notion of script theory, and the one that makes it attractive to many feminists, is the idea that sexuality is *learned* from **culturally available messages** that define what ‘counts’ as sex, **how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do** in sexual encounters... these culturally available scripts are adapted by individuals to particular **interpersonal** contexts, and are also modified and **internalized as ‘intrapsychic’** scripts” (Frith & Kitzinger 2001, p. 210).

Frith & Kitzinger teach us that it is not just words, but also behaviors that are scripted: for the various features of sexuality, for example dress, gait, posture, etc. (see Bartky 1997 for many excellent examples of this).

1.2 Structural Scripts

The last quote gives us one model on which to understand how structural scripts inform interpersonal scripts. ‘Culturally available messages’ are internalized by individuals, who then (somewhat sub-consciously) act out interpersonal scripts in accordance with the cultural messaging.¹⁰⁷

Queer theory gives us resources to talk about the ‘heterosexual script’ that pervades most contemporary societies: cis-gendered heterosexual men partner monogamously with cis-gendered heterosexual women, marry, cohabit, have 2.5 children, co-own property, merge finances, co-parent, etc (see Feigenbaum 2007 among others). Deviations from this script are socially, financially, and professionally costly. Adhering to the script is rewarded, albeit disproportionately so for the men involved.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This is one among many theories of linking the interpersonal and the cultural. For now, I will remain agnostic about the link, and give further examples of cultural scripts.

¹⁰⁸ See (Miller 2014, Budig & England 2001, Correll & Benard 2007) on the “motherhood penalty” and the “fatherhood bonus,” among other inequities: “... Budig found that on average, men’s earnings increased more than 6 percent when they had children (if they lived with them), while women’s decreased 4 percent for each child they had...” (Miller 2014).

Another example of a structural script comes from Natalia Molina (2014), who in *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, describes the ways in which different ethnic and cultural groups (with a focus on Mexican Americans) in the United States historically were expected to act and behave in certain negatively stereotyped ways,¹⁰⁹ which then became self-fulfilling (see also Appiah 1994, Stoljar 2015, and Hacking 1991).

Let's take stock and delineate what interpersonal and structural scripts have in common, given the above characterizations and examples:

First, social scripts are meant to be *predictable*:

“At the individual level, social scripts reduce anxiety by decreasing uncertainty lending [a] sense of predictability as to how the individual should feel and behave as well as what the individual should expect from a partner ...” (Wiederman 2005)

Second, social scripts are *normative*:

“Social scripts can dictate the acceptable perimeters of exchanges...” (Feigenbaum, 2007)

There's something normative about scripts insofar as they are: predictable (Wiederman 2005); and you're supposed to act a certain way in accordance to them (Edwards 1994, others); and there is even a moral dimension according to some (Edwards 1994, 232). This will play a key role in what makes certain scripts difficult to escape.

Finally, social scripts are *cooperative*:

¹⁰⁹ Thanks to Eric Swanson for this recommendation

Social scripts presuppose an aim of cooperation. Humans engage in them to facilitate communication and coordination, in service of the joint project of living together.¹¹⁰ As with many things with such aims and features, they can be coopted and manipulated in the service of subjugation and oppression.

2. Why to Disrupt a Social Script

Why would we be interested in disrupting social scripts? To answer this question, we'll have to answer the broader question: why would we be interested in rejecting a social script? Once I've shown that there are cases where we would want to do such a thing, I'll show that disruption can sometimes be the best option. In arguing for this, I don't mean to suggest that social scripts are inherently or necessarily pernicious, and I do not maintain that we ought to do away with them entirely. I am more interested in how to successfully dismantle the ones that harm.

With many scripts, there is no recourse to leave the script from within the script. That is, there are no words conforming with the script that allow a hearer to exit the script — nothing like a pause button or escape hatch. So, to counter or reject the script in these cases, it's better to go outside of the script entirely. I call this act *disrupting* because in addition to rejecting the script, the disruption also dismantles the script (see section 3 for a more full explication of disruptions).

Let us call *pernicious scripts* those that harm or disadvantage one of the people in the scripts. *Neutral scripts* are those where, at least in principle, both people come out the other end unscathed (and in some cases, better off for having avoided overthinking the interaction).¹¹¹ I will argue that individuals sometimes have reason to disrupt both kinds of scripts. For example,

¹¹⁰ As I will discuss in Section 4, this aim of cooperation will be relevant when it comes to democratic participation and civic engagement. (See Anderson 1999; Fraser 1990, 1998; Young 2001, 2002)

¹¹¹ As Sally Haslanger has pointed out, this might not be a helpful distinction. What I want to show is that even scripts that appear harmless can be coopted for purposes of oppression and manipulation.

we have obvious reason to reject the pernicious 'sexual script' that women say 'no' in order to consent to sex. But, as I will show, we sometimes have reason to disrupt a neutral script like a 'compliment script' (A pays B a compliment; B says 'thank you.')

Such a neutral script can be manipulated for oppressive purposes, as when someone harasses someone giving a sexualized 'compliment.'

As alluded to above, neutral scripts can be marshaled in ways that are disadvantageous to one of the participants in a conversation. For example, a 'compliment script' like the one below has norms that can be taken advantage of by either participant.

A: I like your _____.

B: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

I will now argue that it is in the very nature of certain social scripts to make it almost impossible to reject from 'within' the script. That is, individuals can (and do) use harmful social scripts to put others in a double-bind. Because of the normative feature of these scripts, conversational participants must either act in accordance with the script, and so adhere to it, or diverge from the script and face some sort of negative social consequence, such as escalation, shame, awkwardness, or embarrassment (see Pinker 2007, Tannen 1995, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, among others).

Consider an example that combines the above compliment script with harassment. As we've seen above, a compliment is followed by an expression of gratitude for the compliment. For example, where A and B are colleagues:

A: I like your pants.

B: Thank you.

But consider what happens when instead A says:

A: I like your butt.

B is in a bind. According to the compliment script, B should say something like ‘thank you,’ or ‘oh it’s nothing,’ or ‘thanks, yours too.’ But there is something offensive and violating about A calling unwanted attention to B’s body. We know this. We now know to interpret it as harassment. But it is still very difficult for B to respond in the moment. Her options are to (a) play along with the script, (b) reject it explicitly, or (c) ignore it in an effort to opt out of it.¹¹² In addition to the negative social consequences delineated above from deviating from a neutral script, participants on the receiving end of this coopted compliment script also face harms and threats to their physical safety and psychological well-being (see Logan 2013, Nielsen 2004, Mills 2007, Laniya 2005, among many others who describe the threats to safety resulting from this kind of verbal harassment.)

None of these options are ideal, to say the least. To play along with the script would be for B to condone or signal appreciation of A’s remark. To reject it explicitly, B risks escalation or harm to herself (see Mills 2007 among others), and to ignore the script could signal tacit consent, and at the least fails to call out A’s inappropriate behavior (see Bailey 2016). Furthermore, there are tactical difficulties associated with (b) (rejecting the script explicitly). As with the ‘no-means-yes’ version of the consent case, there is a way in which the more B tries to explicitly reject the script, the deeper she finds herself in it. “Leave me alone” is met with: “you’re too beautiful to be left alone” ; “I’m not interested in talking” is met with: “But I’m not like other guys,” ; “I have to go” is responded to with the questions: “where?” or “can I come?” (see Mills 2007, Bailey 2016 for documentations of this kind of response). Merely responding at all is a way of engaging with the script.

¹¹² I have used a more extreme example to get the point across. But the general structure of the example holds for more subtle scripts. For example, take the ever-familiar injunction:

A: You have a great smile. You should smile more.
In an example like this one, B has less recourse to “hey, that’s harassment,” and as with the above case, cannot opt out of the script just by ignoring it.

So, with certain scripts, there is no recourse to leave the script from within the script. And explicitly calling out the script can be unsafe. In order to counter or reject the script in these cases, it's better to go outside of the script entirely. I call this act *disrupting* a script.¹¹³

3. How to Disrupt Some Social Scripts

I hope that by now I've shown that both pernicious *and* neutral scripts can be harmful to individuals. In this section, I give an analysis of script disruption, followed by examples. I consider four types of disruptions: interpersonal verbal; interpersonal non-verbal, structural verbal, and structural non-verbal. One thing I hope to show by the end of the section is that all of these kinds of disruptions are deeply intertwined, in ways that may lead us to blur the distinctions in the first place. In the following section, I motivate the further claim that many of these examples are of *cooperative disruptions*, and give theoretical and practical reasons in favor of disrupting cooperatively.

Script Disruption:

A successful *disruption of a social script* does or aims to:

- (i) call attention to the script;
- (ii) do so subliminally or implicitly;
- (iii) in doing so reveal the script's workings or assumptions;
- (iv) result in voiding, subverting, or making the speaker rethink the script.

3.1 Interpersonal Disruptions

Woman

¹¹³ Future work will include more discussion on the distinction between *disrupting* a script and merely *leaving* a script. Both disruptions and leavings can be a way of ending the script, but disruption involves a further step. This step can be characterized as laying the groundwork to unravel the script, by way of calling attention to the script. Another reason I focus on disruptions rather than 'leaving' is that often, according to scripts that I am interested in (like harassment and rape scripts), leaving is not an option. Walking away or attempting to resist is met with further escalation and continuation of the script. In fact, thwarted efforts to resist are often baked in to harassment and rape scripts (see Marcus 2013, among others).

A cis-gendered woman Nora says to her transgender friend Crystal, “Wow! You can really pass for a woman!” — intending to give a compliment. Crystal is in a double bind. She knows her friend did not mean to be insulting and transphobic, but she also knows (and wants to communicate) that it is not a compliment to draw attention to the fact that she looks like who she in fact is. This is a case where the compliment script is at play and contributing to Crystal’s double bind. According to the script, the complimented party says “thank you” or responds with some combination of gratitude and modesty. So if Crystal were to say “actually, you’ve just said something deeply offensive,” there would be a social cost.¹¹⁴ She would be in the right to say such a thing, but it would come with a risk to her wellbeing, to say the least.¹¹⁵ So, responding in the way she wants to would not be good for her. But accepting the ‘compliment’ would come at a cost, too; it would be degrading, would allow the behavior to slide (and maybe even perpetuate her friend’s misconception that she was saying something ‘nice’). Crystal’s decision, in this case, is to disrupt the script. She responds “Thanks, you too!” — showing that it is equally inappropriate for Nora to ‘compliment’ Crystal on passing for a woman as it is for Crystal to ‘compliment’ Nora.¹¹⁶

Part of what makes Crystal’s response a successful disruption was that it was *unexpected*. In adding “you too!” to her response to Nora, knowing that Nora would not expect such a response, she calls attention to the way in which Nora assumed she was paying Crystal a compliment that would not apply to cisgendered women (condition i). She does not explicitly say “hey, do you think that there’s something special about transgendered woman ‘passing’ for women?” or “why do you think I care about ‘passing’ for what I really am?” (condition ii) — and yet still conveys that Nora is relying on a double standard (condition iii). In this case, Nora does rethink the script, and so condition (iv) is met. If she doesn’t — if she thinks Crystal has misunderstood

¹¹⁴ See Pinker (2007) among others for more on face-saving and social cost.

¹¹⁵ This is well-documented in trans* and other marginalized communities; significant social and emotional energy (and vulnerability) accompanies having to correct or ‘police’ the harm done by well-intentioned but ignorant members of the dominant community. See McKinnon 2017 among others.

¹¹⁶ This scenario is taken from “Women” by Tikva Wolf (2013). <http://kimchicuddles.com/post/57702478654/women>

her or made a mistake — then the disruption is not completely successful, but has still gone a long way in extricating Crystal from the script.¹¹⁷

We can also see this as an instance of ‘flipping the script’ (also see Camp 2017 on responses to insults and innuendos), since Crystal turns the compliment script back onto Nora. In responding the way she does, she draws attention to the initial script that Nora was using, and allows Nora to see why that script was inappropriate, insulting, and harmful.

There are various ways of doing the unexpected. And there are many kinds of scripts that put people in double binds that can be dissolved by disruption. In **Woman**, we saw disruption as a response to a coopted neutral script. But there are scripts around bullying and threats (see Hong & Espelage 2012, Craig et al. 2000, and Harris & McKinney ms). These too can be disrupted by violating the script initiator’s expectations.

Directions

Walking alone at night and lost, Ali passes a man who calls out to her, “hey beautiful!” She nods and keeps walking, hoping to find someone to ask for directions. It becomes clear that no one else is around and she decides to return to the initial passerby. He says, “you came back! You came back for me!” She says, “yes, I came back so you could give me directions. Can you point me to Washington Street?” He gives her directions to Washington Street and tells her to have a beautiful day.

In this example, Ali (i) draws attention to the script by repeating it back to her cat-caller: “yes, I came back!” In adding, “so you could give me directions,” she implies that she is not going along with the harassment script. She does not say “I did not come back for you to ogle me, I just wanted directions,” and so there is something implicit about her disruption (ii). Yet, the way in which she surprises her cat-caller by saying “so you could give me directions” reveals that the

¹¹⁷ I also hope we can see disruptions on a scale, as might be natural if we were thinking of a protest disrupting the flow of traffic, or a rally disrupting a speech. Some traffic might get through, and the speaker might be able to give five or ten minutes of their speech, but there was still some disruption. This is reason to maybe shift my thinking to “full and partial” disruptions rather than “successful or unsuccessful” disruptions. I had initially been thinking of “successful vs partial” disruptions, but I see now you can have successful partial disruptions. Thanks to Ishani Maitra for helping me think this through!

assumption of the script would be for the conversation to continue to center on her objectification (iii). The script is voided (iv), and the exchange becomes one about directions. Many people have said many things about the power of humor as a disruption and survival strategy, especially for people in marginalized positions (see Leyton 2013, among others). In this case, Ali's humor serves to jolt the cat-caller out of his script.¹¹⁸

Another way to disrupt an interpersonal script is to 'break the fourth wall' of the script. In the following example, doing so calls attention to the script itself.

Outing Foreigners

In Saray Ayala-Lopez's paper "Outing Foreigners" (ms), they give an account of the dialogue that non-native English speakers in the United States constantly find themselves in whenever they try to have any conversation whatsoever with an Anglo-American stranger. One anecdote in the paper centers a non-native speaker's experience at a food truck in the United States. When they try to buy a sandwich, the vendor asks them where their accent is from. This is a familiar script: S says something, and H responds immediately by asking where S is from. In Ayala-Lopez's example, the speaker finally responds by saying "What does that have to do with my sandwich?"

This disruption functions by calling attention to the way the script has hijacked the speaker's initial conversational goal.

As with a play or film script, social scripts can also be non-verbal. Think of stage directions, emotional cues, etc. On an interpersonal level, this can take the form of behaviors, actions, mannerisms, and tones. For example, in the following example, the harassment script is disrupted by Em when she asks her interlocutor to hold a watermelon:

¹¹⁸ Of course, this disruption could be very dangerous and draws on other pernicious gendered scripts. See section 3.2 for a discussion of disruptions that invoke ideological scripts. I do not advocate that people who find themselves in such scenarios 'follow' these examples. Rather, I use them to illustrate instances of disruption, all of which are highly context-sensitive.

Watermelon

Em is walking home from the grocery store carrying two bags and a watermelon, Jay is standing in the street in her path home.

Jay: Hey, where are you going? Do you live in this neighborhood?

Em: ... home. Yes, somewhere around here.

Jay: How long have you been living here? Do you like it?

Em: A few years. It's fine. *[continues to walk home]*

Jay: *[following Em home]* What part of the city do you live in?

Em: *[stops walking. Turns to Jay, hands him her watermelon]* Can you hold my watermelon for a moment?

Jay: *[holds Em's watermelon]...*

Em: Is there anything else I can do for you?

Jay: No...

Em: Well, thank you for holding my watermelon. Have a nice day.

Jay: ...

Em: *[walks away with her watermelon]*

Other accounts of non-verbal disruptions can be found in formalized and informal advice.

Nose Picking

One manual for women traveling alone advises them to pick their noses if confronted by a man who will not leave them alone (also see Infante 2016). This strategy is offered in advice to similar double-binds as the ones we've seen above. In the former, as per the harassment scripts described in sections 1 and 2, both responding to and ignoring harassment can constitute tacit acceptance of the interaction, or risk escalation. Picking one's nose is a way of doing neither, and certainly an unexpected deviation from the script.

On an interpersonal level, social scripts can be both non-verbal and verbal. The two sub-types of scripts share important structural similarities, especially insofar as they can be exploited to put one of the parties in a double-bind. In many of the above examples, part of what made the dis-

ruptions effective was the way in which they violated the script-initiator's expectations. No part of Jay's plan involved him standing there holding a watermelon. I hope this shows that those moments of expectation-violations facilitate conditions (i) and (iv) of the script analysis: they call attention to the script and they result in voiding, subverting, or making the speaker rethink the appropriateness of the script. The examples also illustrate condition (iii): Crystal's response revealed Nora's (false) assumption that the 'compliment' she gave was appropriate for transgender but not cisgendered women, and Ayala-Lopez's disruption shed light on the vendor's assumption that a foreigner wouldn't mind being interrupted to be asked where they are from. In section 4, I will return to condition (ii). For now, we will say that (ii) is met by virtue of none of the disrupters explicitly referencing the script.

3.2 Structural Disruptions

While this paper focuses on disruptions of interpersonal scripts, it is my hope that getting the phenomenon of interpersonal script disruption on the table will help shed light on the nature of social scripts more generally, and lay the groundwork for future work that on the relationship between interpersonal and structural scripts. In order to start to do this, let's turn to some contemporary example of disruptions (and attempted disruptions) of structural scripts.

Disruptions need not be exclusively interpersonal. So far, we've been talking about disruption strategies in one-on-one interactions. But it's important to realize that more pervasive social scripts can be disrupted by engaging with them less directly.¹¹⁹ Slogans, chants, protest discourse, and even decals or T-shirt slogans that riff off dominant scripts are examples of how to disrupt structural scripts.

I love my mommies

¹¹⁹ Or, less synchronically, as it may be.

The increasingly popular baby gear slogan “I love my mommies” is one recent example of a disruption of a structural script. Recall the characterization of heterosexual scripts from Section 1. Previously, it was commonplace to see babies decked out in gear that announced “I <3 my mommy.” The ‘mommies’ version of the shirt takes advantage of the dominant script and then tweaks it every so slightly so that it still takes advantage of the positive associations with the initial script, but is also disrupting because it is not what many people, conditioned by the dominant script, expect to see on a onesie.

The above is an example of a social script disruption being used in the service of ameliorative language (i.e., removing from the general conception of ‘mommy’ that there be only one of them per child).¹²⁰ Social script disruptions can overlap with ameliorative speech in this way (as we’ll see in the next example), but need not (as we’ll see in the third example).

Climb like a girl

At gyms and in sports advertisements across the United States, the formerly pejorative phrase ‘you throw like a girl’ is being rebranded, reclaimed, and re-scripted (Wachs 2006). Climbing gyms offer lessons to ‘climb like a girl;’ companies adopting the hashtag#likeagirl sponsor advertisements centering women performing feats of athleticism.

So this is disrupting the ‘girls can’t play sports’ or the ‘boys are more athletic than girls’ narrative, trope, or script. We might also think that something ameliorative is going on with respect to a renegotiation of the term or concept of ‘girl,’ but the disruption does not depend on such a renegotiation.

Talk Pittie to Me

In her 2019 article, ‘The Pit Bull Gets a Rebrand,’ Marisa Meltzer notes the rising trend of monikers and euphemisms that have been applied and spread by pit bull enthusiasts over the last few years. In an effort to undo decades of negative stereotyping and mistreatment, ‘pibble’ rescuers and advocates have introduced innocuous-sounding nicknames for the breed to create counter-narratives to the ‘vicious pit bull’ myth.

¹²⁰ (Haslanger 2005, Sterken ms, among others)

“ ‘Pibble’ sounds like ‘pit bull’ but also sounds like ‘nibble’.... ‘You also see them called ‘pit-tie,’ ‘pittopotamous,’ ‘hippo,’ or ‘potato.’ It’s part of a bigger effort to show them as silly and sweet and gentle... It shows you there’s nothing to be afraid of.” (Meltzer, 2019)

These lexical innovations (the creation of new terms and using preexisting terms in new ways) are attempts to disrupt structural and cultural scripts around pit bulls being aggressive.

All of the above movements have non-verbal counterparts. Queer visibility has and continues to play a huge role in the disruption of heterosexual and heteropatriarchal scripts (see Butler 1991, Gamson 1995, Kurth et al. 2000, Dembroff 2018 among others for discussions of non-verbal and embodied disruption). Sports advertisements feature women with athletic builds performing physical feats. One crowd-sourced movement that parallels the ‘pibble’ intervention circulates images of pit bulls adorned with flowers (Gamand 2018).¹²¹

Some caveats are necessary here. These disruptions to structural scripts constitute progress, but they are by no means perfect solutions. Often, they wind up adhering to stereotypes that are part of the scripts they are trying to disrupt: most lesbian couples (fictional and actual) in mainstream media and culture are white, able-bodied, butch/femme, certainly not non-monogamous, etc. (McDonald 2018). And we might worry that the onesie disruption suggests that lesbians have to be mommies if society is going to accept their sexuality. So too, the #likeagirl movement plays up the athleticism of women at the cost of reinforcing scripts about athleticism and masculinity; climbing like a girl does not entail focusing on balance over strength, or the advantages of having smaller hands for gripping smaller holds. Dressing up pit

¹²¹ I have focused on contemporary examples in this section. Recent work by Jose Medina and Meena Krishnamurthy examines historical ways in which images and pictorial propaganda have served to disrupt and subvert the cultural imaginary. See Medina (ms) on images and pamphlets in the anti-lynching movement in the U.S. and Krishnamurthy (ms) on photography in the civil rights movement. Also see Tirrell (2015) on the work of images to counter dehumanization narratives. Also importantly, we can think of numerous historical examples of disruptions: sit-ins at lunch counters, strikes, salt marches, to name a few.

bulls in flowers and calling them cute names reinforces scripts and stereotypes around what is ‘innocuous.’

There are a few ways that we can imagine disruptions of scripts effecting social change, but it is not a given and requires much future work (and engagement with current work out there). As Ishani Maitra points out (pc), one thing about scripts is that they’re robust; they can continue to persist in the face of disruption. So here are a few non-exclusive ways in which disrupting a script might contribute to social change.

1. *Spotlighting*. Rae Langton (2017), in “Blocking as Counterspeech,” writes about how blocking a presupposition can be a way of calling that presupposition to light. While presuppositions are often “smuggled” in under the radar: “if the problem is a smuggler, a spotlight could help” (p. 9). Scripts can have a similar “smuggling” feature. When invoked, they are often not invoked explicitly, unless something has already gone off-script (as in, “hey, I’m paying you a compliment, you should say thank you”). As with the covert expectation in the presupposition case that the hearer accommodate what is presupposed, there is a covert expectation with social scripts that the hearer continue in line with the script. So, a disruption of a script, like the blocking of a presupposition, can help call attention to the script. This is not in and of itself an instance of large-scale social change, but it may be something of a necessary condition for non-accidental social change. If the problem is to be addressed, one thing we need to do is recognize and allow others to recognize the problem.

2. *Aggregation*. Carol Hay (2005) suggests that individual-scale confrontations with one’s harasser (in cases where it is safe to do so) can contribute to large-scale change:

“It’s true that for any individual case of confrontation, the effect on overarching social oppressions will probably be negligible. But on a larger scale, such pessimism is unwarranted. For if all, or even most, cases of harassment were confronted, harassers would soon get the message that such behavior was inappropriate. To those who would object that harassers already know that this behav-

ior is inappropriate, but simply don't care, it can be responded that perpetual confrontation might give them reason to care. If harassers found that when they harassed women they were subject to acerbic retorts, belittlement, embarrassment, or other undesired consequences, such as negative implications for their career, they would quickly begin to think twice about whether their behavior was worth it." (105).¹²²

So *without* endorsing the thesis that women have an obligation to stand up to their harassers / resist their own instances of being harassed, I invite us to take this empirical point seriously. If the scripts just *stop working* on a regular enough basis (and this is a great reason to broaden the sphere of disrupters and disruptions to include bystanders), for any number of reasons, then people may just stop using them. It will be interesting to look at the history of scripts (see Molina 2014 for one example) and the forces that contributed to the perpetuation of some and the dissolution of others. One trend seems to be that the less 'appropriate' scripts live on, but in much smaller sociolinguistic communities. If this is right, then maybe we can help ourselves here to the metaphor of containment being one step towards eradication.

3. *Empowerment*. For disrupters, and for those who have been in similar positions and witness disruptions, recognizing scripts for what they are can allow people who are victimized by them to see that there are other options than abiding by the script. We can see this in some of the empirical and anecdotal work on rape scripts. For a long time, victims of rape just thought there was no other option, nothing they could have done, a certain inevitability to things, which was exactly what the script intended them to feel and believe (Littleton & Axsom 2003). So, scripts can actually have this deeper impact where they affect the cognitive world of people they impact (and also the rapist, but let's set that aside for now). The awareness that disruption is possible, either by engaging in it (see, for example, self-defense manuals and bystander trainings) or seeing instances of others engage in it can actually have this empowering effect, which is a feature of and precursor to more social change (see Haslanger 2007 for a discussion of concepts and ideology).

¹²² "... if we were on the side of caution in every case and never require women to confront their harassers, then the prospects for social change will be very dim. Patriarchy is not likely ever to be eradicated if it is never resisted" (104).

If we are feeling optimistic, I think we can conceive of these disruptions as steps towards kicking away an ideological ladder. They are making inroads into a dominant narrative, disrupting one oppressive social script at a time for the sake of progress, with the aim of ultimately subverting them all. I recognize that this not an uncontroversial theoretical commitment, but my hope is that it is consistent with more radical strategies. I say more about this in the next section.¹²³

4. On Cooperation

We might worry at this point that many of these examples of ‘disruptions’ are relatively tame. Further, we might think that it is a necessary condition of a disruption that it be more of an overhaul or an obstruction: something more like *disobedient disruption*. One way to put this distinction is in terms of Young’s (2001) dialogue between the deliberative democrat and the activist: deliberation is cooperative and rational, while direct action is disruptive and confrontational. So what exactly am I after by focusing on these quieter, subtler cases? If an agent is being cooperative, how can she be disruptive? — What exactly is disruptive about these disruptions?

I focus on these cases to show the possibility and the efficacy of *cooperative* disruption. Recall condition (ii) from the analysis of disruptions in section 2: a disruption calls attention to a script subliminally or implicitly. Part of what implicit or subliminal speech can do is give its

¹²³ Do the examples we have discussed so far in this paper suggest that we need counter-scripts to disrupt extant scripts? One consideration points to ‘yes’: As I hope I’ve shown, it can be extremely difficult, while in the grip of an interpersonal script, to think of a way to respond or behave in a way that does not conform to the script. And this is to be expected, if I’m right that it’s in the nature of scripts to be automatic and a kind of second nature. In this case, it can behoove us to have readily available scripted responses in scenarios that are oppressive, demeaning, or otherwise threatening (and indeed, there is some evidence that shows that it is. See Craig et al. 2000, for data on the efficacy of scripted responses to bullying among schoolchildren.) Similarly, theoretically, we might think that if scripts are second nature, then we need something equivalently second-nature to disrupt them (see, for example, Saul 2017 on the efficacy of using generics to counter generics). But one thing that the Watermelon and RAF examples teach us is that disruptions are often *improvised*. If it’s right that one of the mechanisms by which scripts are disrupted are doing the unexpected, and we can’t have scripted responses readily available for every kind of scenario, then something like improvisation is an important and effective means of disrupting a script. So counter-scripts are not a necessary condition of script disruption.

users plausible deniability, or a safe ‘out’ for expressing controversial content.¹²⁴ Another thing that calling implicit attention to a script allows the disrupter to appear cooperative.¹²⁵ With the notable exception of the example from RAF, the cases in Section 3 allow the script to end relatively peacefully. I will give three considerations for why we should seriously consider the category of *cooperative disruptions*: (a) they can be safer, or less risky for the disrupters; (b) there are situations in which they can be more effective than uncooperative disruptions; and (c) they can be manifestations of autonomy.

The first two considerations are mostly descriptive, and may be overridden by empirical considerations, but it is worth reviewing some of the evidence in their favor. For one, there are situations where, due to social position, authority dynamics, or any number of other contextually-determined factors, it is unsafe to do anything but disrupt cooperatively. In fact, there are similar such situations where it is unsafe to do anything but *cooperate*, and disruption is not even an option.

The second consideration involves seeing cooperative disruption as a strategic alternative to uncooperative disruption, which will also depend on extrinsic factors. This is consistent with a strategy that calls for *both* cooperative and confrontational disruptions. And often, successful social movements do call for both. Think, for example, of Black Lives Matter protests that shut down traffic working in tandem with people putting up Black Lives Matter yard signs and wearing pins.¹²⁶

Finally, cooperative disruption, like non-cooperation and disobedience, is a manifestation of autonomy. Individuals sometimes operate within constraints and nevertheless contribute

¹²⁴ Of course, this can also be abused, and often is. See Lakoff 1975, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2015, Saul 2017b, Khoo 2017, Camp 2018 among many others. I also engage with this notion in other work.

¹²⁵ I take it that appearing to be cooperative is consistent with both being cooperative and not being cooperative. Many contextual factors will determine which of the two options are most appropriate. For example, in **Woman**, Crystal may actually want to be cooperative to maintain her friendship with Nora. In **Watermelon**, this may be less of a concern to Em, whose primary aim is to safely disengage from the exchange.

¹²⁶ Again, with the important caveat that there is no accompanying negative argument against uncooperative disruptions; just that there is work to be done here that arguably cannot be done by uncooperative or standard disruptions.

to the goal of ultimately extricating themselves from such constraints (see Oshana 2015, Khader 2016 among many others). So while, on one reading, Crystal's response of 'thanks, you too!' to Nora's transphobic 'compliment' comes across as passive, we can also understand it as a kind of empowerment. She is protecting her needs and well-being by avoiding confrontation, while at the same time successfully communicating what was wrong about Nora's remark. Another thing Crystal does in her disruption is 'fight fire with fire,' so to speak. If the mechanism by which Nora puts Crystal into a double bind is by willfully misapplying (or coopting) a neutral script, then politely disrupting the script by coopting another script is a way of playing a similar game. Choosing this strategy is itself a form of subversively conforming to the norms around the script.¹²⁷ So, there are a few ways in which such cooperative disruption is consistent with exercising autonomy: first, the agent involved is protecting her own interests. Second, she is intentionally and effectively communicating something in her own self-defense. Third, she is choosing a particular strategy of extrication from the original script. Finally, if I'm right about the structural/interpersonal interplay, she is contributing to upheavals of larger systems of oppression by disrupting micro-level instances of it.

If cooperative disruption is coherent, effective, and consistent with individual autonomy, then that gives us reason to take it seriously as both a strategy to dismantle oppression and a phenomenon that can teach us about it. One lesson we *can* draw is that its existence challenges the apparent dichotomy between cooperation and disruption. Future work will involve expanding on how such a strategy can bridge activist and deliberative models of civic engagement and participation; and investigating instances of cooperative disruption in social and political movements more broadly.

5. Questions and Takeaways

¹²⁷ More specifically: Nora applies a *difference*-version of the compliment script: there is something about you that is different from me and that thing is laudable. Crystal proceeded in response to the *same-ness*-version of the compliment script: one that is more analogous to the "Nice shoes! Thanks, you too!" So, Crystal was conforming to a script that was not in play, and in doing so she drew attention to the script that Nora was assuming, and the ways in which it was wrong for Nora to have been assuming that script.

The notion of a cooperative disruption raises two more questions that I will briefly address here. First, is there something inherently whitewashing or oppressive about focusing on cooperative disruptions when many individuals are not in a position to do so in the first place? Second, is framing disruption as prudential advice putting its intended recipients in a kind of ‘triple bind,’ whereby they are normatively expected to participate in their own liberation, and blameworthy if they do not?¹²⁸

Here are some brief considerations in response. To the first question: maybe. What I hope to have emphasized throughout the paper is that the kind of disruption I am interested in is consistent, theoretically and practically, with other forms of disruptions. I do not argue that cooperative disruptions are *better* than non-cooperative disruptions, rather, that they are useful and overlooked. In addition, they interplay with structural scripts in a striking way, and one that can lay the groundwork for future work analyzing the interplay of interpersonal and social scripts.

Further, it’s not the case that any given individual will be capable of disrupting an interpersonal script, and this is why the answer to the second question is ‘no.’ It is important to cancel any implication that engaging in such disruptions is mandatory, or even normatively more laudable, than not doing so. Myriad factors outside of an individual’s control will determine whether or not disruptions are available in the first place. One aim of this paper is to shed light on a potential survival strategy, much in the way that a self-defense class are helpful tools for self-protection. It is not mandatory, and an individual is not blameworthy for finding herself in situations where such tools are inapplicable or inaccessible.¹²⁹ But it is a resource, and can be appealed to in certain situations by certain individuals.

¹²⁸ Thanks to Susanne Sreedhar for this phrasing.

¹²⁹ Nor should she be blameworthy for not using such a tool in situations where it may be applicable or accessible, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. See Randall (2010) for more on victim blaming.

We might think of disruptions as things that that only happen on large scales, but I hope to have shown that on closer inspection, there are daily acts of cooperative disruption that work in tandem with (and maybe even facilitate) large scale change. In its strongest form, this conclusion allows us to see interpersonal cooperative disruptions as necessary parts of a larger project of dismantling oppressive scripts and ideologies. In its weakest, it allows us to affirm that individuals who do not flagrantly defy stereotypes or scripts, either by circumstance, temperament, or choice, can still contribute to social change. And finally, I hope to have given us reason to think that cooperation and disruption are consistent with civic life and participation, even (and maybe especially) under conditions of inequality and oppression.

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Conclusion

An underlying thread running through this dissertation, but (fittingly) not explicitly stated, is that there's something socially interesting and important about implicit discourse. Language that flies under the radar can lodge in pernicious and stubborn ways. When it comes to language that harms, it is often what is unstated that goes unchallenged. Negative stereotypes, implications about who gets to speak and how much uptake their words get, and other notions that reinforce oppressive ideologies are snuck in through what Rae Langton (2017) calls "back-door" language use. And the more entrenched these notions are, the harder they are to dislodge. Once we realize this, we are better positioned to strategize routes to liberation. The chapters in this dissertation have focused on contemporary issues and examples, but history tells us even more. Future research will involve drawing on more analyses and case studies of language use throughout history.

History also teaches us that the ways we *negotiate* terms and their different meanings, impacts, etc., plays a huge role in shaping the way language is used. Looking at case studies from queer liberation to reclamation of slurring terms, to calling in, calling out, and calling attention to hate speech and imposing taboos and bans on certain terms, is all part of the social structure around language use and meaning negotiation. We can do things with words, and we can also do things *to* words that in turn shape the meanings and impacts of those words, and what we can do with them. A long philosophical tradition has focused on this, and I have tried to engage with it while bringing it into closer communication with other traditions, sub-disciplines, and disciplines.