Social Identity, Indexicality, and the Appropriation of Slurs[1]

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Abstract: Slurs are expressions that can be used to demean and dehumanize targets based on their membership in racial, ethnic, religious, gender, or sexual orientation groups. Almost all treatments of slurs posit that they have derogatory content of some sort. Such views—which I call content-based—must explain why in cases of appropriation slurs fail to express their standard derogatory contents. A popular strategy is to take appropriated slurs to be ambiguous; they have both a derogatory content and a positive appropriated content. However, if appropriated slurs are ambiguous, why can *only* members in the target group use them to express a non-offensive/positive meaning? Here, I develop and motivate an answer that could be adopted by any content-based theorist. I argue that appropriated contents of slurs include a plural first-person pronoun. I show how the semantics of pronouns like 'we' can be put to use to explain why only some can use a slur to express its appropriated content. Moreover, I argue that the picture I develop is motivated by the process of appropriation and helps to explain how it achieves its aims of promoting group solidarity and positive group identity.

Key Words: slurs, appropriation, reclamation, indexicals, social groups

Slurs are expressions that can be used to demean and dehumanize targets based on their

membership in social groups based on, e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.[2]

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[2] Mentioning, and of course using, a slur can cause offense and other serious harms. The practice of mentioning slurs rather than using phrases like 'the N-word' or 'b----' is standard practice in the philosophical and linguistic literature on slurs and pejoratives. Camp argues in support of explicit mentions of slurs stating that "we can understand slurs' actual force only by considering examples where we ourselves experience their viscerally palpable effects" (2013, 331). Bolinger argues that the choice to mention a slur may be "associated with tamer (though not benign) attitudes, ranging from simple insensitivity to perverse pleasure at saying discomfiting words, and disregard for the risk of encouraging derogating uses of the slur" (2015, 14). I take good academic writing to require clarity and I hold that it should be sensitive to various readers' experiences, encourage inclusiveness, and avoid derogation. In an attempt to meet both I will minimize mentions of slur. I will also mention only one slur—'bitch'. I do so to provide a more concrete account with specific linguistic data, while avoiding (what might be perceived as) gratuitous mentions of multiple slurs. I use 'bitch' because it is an expression that is widely held to be in the process of appropriation and its use by individuals outside the target groups is less offensive than some other examples of appropriated slurs. I hope by limiting the number of slurs mentioned, offense and other harms can be minimized and clarity can be maintained.

Recently there has been increased interest in the semantics and pragmatics of slurs in philosophy of language and linguistics. While accounts vary significantly, almost all theorists agree that slurs have derogatory content of some sort or other.[3] Various theories have been developed to address how derogatory, demeaning, or other negative content is encoded and expressed. For instance it has been argued to be part of truth conditional content, presuppositional content, expressive content, and conventionally implicated content. I'll call all of these views and their variants content-based views.

On content-based views while slurs generally express something derogatory, there are cases of (re)appropriation or reclamation in which groups that are targeted by a slur reclaim it for positive in-group usage.[4] Content-based theorists often argue that appropriation involves meaning change, in particular, it involves an expression becoming ambiguous. On this view, slurs that are not appropriated have univocal derogatory contents while appropriated slurs are ambiguous (or polysemous) between a derogatory and a non-derogatory content.[5] For example, Richard says that "there is a case to be made that in appropriation there [is] a change in meaning" (2008, 16). Potts claims that "when lesbian and gay activists use the word 'queer', its meaning (and its expressive content) differs dramatically from when it is used on conservative talk radio" (2007, 10). Jeshion suggests that ""queer" became semantically ambiguous upon appropriation" (2013, 326). Hom states that appropriation "alters [a slur's] meaning for use with the group" (2008, 428). Whiting argues that in appropriation "the expressions bear a different meaning than they would otherwise

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[3] Although see Anderson and Lepore (2013a, 2013b), Bolinger (2015), and Nunberg (2017) for views on which the derogatory features of slurs are based on non-semantic prohibitions, on term and negative stereotype endorsement, and on conversational implicatures, respectively.

[4] The term 'appropriation' is most commonly used to denote this phenomenon. While I think 'reclamation ' is slightly better (partly due to the negative associations 'appropriation' has from discussions of cultural appropriation), I will follow standard usage and use 'appropriation' from here.

[5] There are, of course, other options for handling appropriation. For instance see Anderson (forthcoming), Bianchi (2014), and Lycan (2015). I am not arguing that positing an ambiguity is the best route to handle appropriation. It is, however, a common route and one with an apparent problem that I offer a solution to here.

bear, at least insofar as (once appropriated) they no longer conventionally implicate the relevant negative attitude" (2013, 370). And Saka ties meaning change into the very definition of appropriation. He states that appropriation is when a "victim group attempts to change the meaning of some term" (2008, 42). The strategy of positing ambiguity to account for appropriation is clearly widespread.

While positing ambiguity[6] is a natural move for a proponent of content-based view of slurs, a problem looms. The theorist positing multiple meanings needs to explain why at least in many cases of appropriation one of the meanings the term comes to have can only be expressed by the term when it is used by members of the targeted group. For instance, not just any speaker can use the N-word or 'bitch' to mean something friendly or positive. Other ambiguous and polysemous expressions do not place restrictions on who can use them to express one or the other of their contents. For instance, anyone can use 'duck' to denote an aquatic bird or a crouching action. Anyone can use 'bank' to mean financial institution or side of a river. Content-based views must handle what I will call the Appropriation Worry. Anderson and Lepore pose the problem stating "[a]mbiguity fails to explain why non-members cannot utilize a second sense. If it were *just* a matter of distinct meanings, why can't a speaker opt to use a slur non-offensively?" (2013a, 42). The worry they target is what I call the Appropriation Worry.

> **Appropriation Worry:** Content-based views that posit an ambiguity to account for appropriation cannot account for why only members in the target group (and perhaps others with "insider" status) can use an appropriated slur to express a non-offensive/positive meaning.

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[6] From here I use 'ambiguity' to mean 'ambiguity or polysemy'. One way of understanding the difference between ambiguity and polysemy is as follows: ambiguity involves separate words that are orthographically or phonologically identical. Polysemy involves a single word with multiple meanings. The ways "classic" ambiguous expressions—like 'bank'—and examples of polysemous expressions—like 'bottle'—pattern on Zwicky and Sadock's (1975) identity tests give some evidence that ambiguity and polysemy are distinct phenomena. For additional discussion and treatments of polysemy see, for example, Falkum and Vicentea (2015).

Later Anderson states that "at the very least, [an ambiguity view] must be paired with an additional explanation, one that details some kind of rule-like structure that governs access to the appropriated sense" (forthcoming, 6). That is the task I take up here. I develop a solution to the Appropriation Worry that could be adopted by any content-based theorist. The Appropriation Worry does not spell defeat for content-based views that posit ambiguity. I argue for a solution to the Appropriation Worry on which appropriated slurs are ambiguous between a derogatory content and an appropriated content that involves a plural first-person indexical. I show how the semantics of plural first-person indexicals can be put to use in the solution and account for why only target group members (and perhaps also those with "insider status") can use appropriated slurs to express their positive contents. I also argue that the solution is motivated by the process of appropriation and that it helps to explain how appropriation achieves its aims of promoting group solidarity and positive group identity.

I begin in *I* by laying out the range of content-based views. Then, in *II*, I consider the process and aims of appropriation. I also canvass data that a solution to the Appropriation Worry must capture and explain. In *III* I consider the ways that indexicals can be sensitive to a speaker's position in physical and social space. In particular, I argue that a speaker's social group memberships can constrain or determine the content of her uses of plural first-person indexicals. In *IV*, I sketch a version of an ambiguity account that includes a first-person plural pronoun in the appropriated content. I illustrate the account by considering the case of 'bitch'. I argue that the account is well motivated and can solve the Appropriation Worry. In *V*, I briefly compare the view developed to other treatments of slurs involving indexicality. I summarize the arguments and draw conclusions in *VI*.

Before continuing, three clarifications are in order. First, I am not arguing that slurs must be accounted for by a content-based view or that ambiguity should be posited to account for

appropriation. That is, my aim here is not to defend content-based views or the ambiguity solution to appropriation. Rather, I am arguing that the Appropriation Worry can be solved. It is not a reason to reject either content-based theories or an ambiguity view of appropriation.

Second, recall that the Appropriation Worry requires a content-based theorist to account for why only members in the target group can use an appropriated slur to express a non-offensive/positive content. The only cases of appropriation the worry targets are those in which an appropriated expression has both its original derogatory meaning *and* a new (likely) positive meaning. The ultimate aim of at least some cases of appropriation is plausibly to completely obliterate the derogatory meaning of a slur and supplant it was a positive or neutral meaning.[7] Some former slurs, e.g., 'tar heel' and 'Whig', are arguably no longer derogatory and can be used by any speaker to express something non-derogatory. The expression 'queer' plausibly has an appropriated meaning that is expressible by anyone tokening it (including people who are cis-gender and heterosexual). There are now Queer Studies departments and the LGBTQ movement has included 'queer' in its acronym, which can be appropriately used by any speaker.[8] Given that my aim is to provide a way for a content-based theorist to avoid the Appropriation Worry cases in which a new meaning has supplanted an old will not be considered. Here I focus only on expressions that are often treated as having two meanings—one positive meaning expressible by the appropriated slur only by in-group members and one negative meaning expressible by the slur by any users.

Third, there is ongoing disagreement about whether appropriation can lead to positive effects and, so, whether appropriation should be attempted. Some (e.g., Asim (2007) and Kleinman, et. al. (2009)) argue that so-called appropriated uses express self-hatred and reinforce racism,

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[7] In some cases of appropriation , the aim might be to reclaim a slur solely for in-group usage. I do not claim that the only aim in appropriation is to supplant derogatory meaning with a new positive or neutral meaning. Thanks to Robin Jeshion (pc) for emphasizing that appropriation projects might have different aims.

[8] Although 'Q' is also sometimes taken to stand for 'questioning'. Thanks to Matthias Jenny for bringing this point to my attention.

heteronormativity, and patriarchy. For instance, Asim argues that "[a]s long as we [Blacks] embrace the derogatory language that has long accompanied and abetted our systematic dehumanization, we shackle ourselves to those corrupt white delusions" (2007, 233). In contrast, Kennedy argues that "[s]elf-hatred … is an implausible explanation for why many assertive, politically progressive African Americans" use the N-word, rather they "in their minds at least" use the expression "not in subjection to racial subordination but in defiance of it" (2003, 37). There are complicated social, political, and moral issues surrounding appropriation that cannot be addressed here. [9] If appropriation is impossible, there is no Appropriation Worry to solve. Given the widespread view that appropriation does occur and given the aim to provide a solution to the Appropriation Worry here I adopt the following assumptions: (i) appropriation is possible and (ii) appropriation can produce lexicalized contents that are positive rather than derogatory.

I. Content-Based Views of Slurs

I categorize any view that takes slurs to include a derogatory component in their conventional lexical meaning to be a content-based view. The derogatory component could be a conventional part of truth-conditional meaning, an additional non-truth-conditional expressive content, a presupposition, or a conventional implicature. Since each of these four views takes slurs themselves to conventionally express (in some way) a derogatory content, I classify all as content-based views. There are, of course, other ways to classify views. For instance one might argue that presuppositional and conventional implicature views are pragmatic, while only views on which slurs

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[9] For instance, see also Langton, Haslanger, and Anderson (2012) and Wodak and Leslie (forthcoming) for worries that generic generalizations about racial groups essentialize (or can easily be interpreted as essentializing). One component of social justice projects showing that there are not innate racial essences that manifest in intellectual, moral, and personality traits. If a slur, even used to express its positive appropriated meaning, is used in a generic generalization their worries about essentializing apply. See Tirrell (1999) for discussion of arguments for abolishing versus reclaiming slurs.

have derogatory truth-conditional content should be considered "content views".[10] Given that (a) the views just listed all include something derogatory in the lexicalized content of slurs, and (b) the Appropriation Worry is a worry for any view that take slurs to conventionally express (in some way or other) a derogatory content and posits ambiguity to account for appropriation, this classification schema will be useful for our purposes. I will sometimes use the expressions 'semantic' and 'meaning'. I intend these expressions to be understood in ways that are neutral between the various content-based views to be discussed. In particular, in their uses here I do not take 'semantic' or 'meaning' to require more than conventional lexical content. Next, I briefly lay out versions of the four content-based views.

First, are what I call truth-conditional content views (e.g., Hom (2008, 2010) and Hom and May (2013)). On these views a slur for a group of people that can also be referred to by a neutral counterpart N means something like *N* and worthy of contempt for being so*. Hom (2008) argues that multiple stereotypes are part of the truth conditions of utterances that include slurs. On his view, a slur S with neutral counterpart N has a complex truth-conditional semantic value of the form 'ought to be subject to $p^*_1 + \ldots + p^*_n$ because of being $d^*_1 + \ldots d^*_n$ all because of being N^*' (2008, 431). The properties $p^*_1 + \ldots + p^*_n$ are deontic prescriptions about how the person should be treated given the negative properties derived from racist (or sexist, or homophobic, or …) practices given by $d^*_1 + \ldots d^*_n$ and N^* is the semantic value of N. For instance, he states that "the epithet 'chink' expresses a complex, socially constructed property like: *ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions, and …, because of being*

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[10] For instance Sennett and Copp (2015) classify *only* views like what I call the truth-conditional content views to be content views. Bianchi (2014) takes strategies that rely on conventional implicatures or presuppositions to be pragmatic, seemingly going against classifying the four strategies I take to be content-views together. However, she notes that the "(semantic or pragmatic) status" of conventional implicature and presuppositional views "is far from settled" noting that Potts (2007) and Camp (2013) classify their views as semantic. Hom (2010) argues for a six way classification.

slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, and…, all because of being Chinese" (2008, 431). On truth-conditional content views, the meaning of a slur and its neutral counterpart are not truth-conditionally equivalent as the latter includes a (perhaps complex) derogatory component.

The remaining three classes of views take slurs to be truth-conditionally equivalent to their neutral counterparts, but take the expressions to have another dimension of meaning that captures its offensive and derogatory content. According to presuppositional content views (e.g., Schlenker (2007) and Cepollaro (2015)), slurs contribute only their neutral counterparts to truth conditions and they presuppose something derogatory. The derogatory component is lexicalized or "built into" the meaning of the slur so that all utterances of slurs carry a negative presupposition.[11] According to presuppositional accounts slurs are akin to expressions like *quit.* Utterances of "Andy quit smoking" and "Andy did not quit smoking" both presuppose that at a time preceding the time of utterance Andy smoked. Similarly, presuppositional content views hold that "Anne is a bitch" and "Anne is not a bitch" both presuppose something like *Anne is despicable for being a woman* or *the speaker believes people who are women are worthy of derogation.*

Conventional implicature content views (e.g., Potts (2005), Williamson (2009), Whiting (2013), Lycan (2015)) hold that slurs contribute the equivalent of their neutral counterpart to the truth conditions (e.g., the equivalent semantic content that 'Black', 'gay', 'Jewish', or 'woman' express), and conventionally implicate something negative. The notion of conventional implicature goes back to Grice (1975). He argued that expressions like 'but' carry implicatures that are not calculated based on a specific conversational context and conversational maxims. Instead, they are

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[11] There are multiple views of the way presuppositions work. Most take presuppositions to be at least partly semantic in nature. There are, however, purely pragmatic accounts of presupposition (see, e.g., Stalnaker (1974)). On such views presuppositions are understood wholly in terms of conversational contexts. The views that take the derogatory content of slurs to be presuppositional take the presuppositions to be carried by the lexical item (i.e., the slur itself) so would be classified as (at least partially) semantic accounts of slurs. They can, therefore, legitimately be categorized as content-based views.

lexically conventionalized. For instance, "Nwando is poor but honest" truth-conditionally expresses the same content as "Nwando is poor and honest" but conventionally implicates that it is unusual to be both poor *and* honest. The implicature is not dependent on specific contextual or conversational features, but is part of the import of the word 'but' itself (albeit not a part of its truth-conditional content).[12] Applied to slurs conventional implicature content views hold that slurs conventionally implicate something derogatory. For example, Williamson (2009) argues that "A is a Boche" means that A is a German and conventionally implicates that A is cruel.

Finally, expressivist content views (e.g., Saka (2007), Richard (2008), Jeshion (2013)) hold that the truth-conditional contribution of a slur is identical to its neutral counterpart, but an additional expressive element or content is also conveyed. For example, Jeshion (2013) argues that in addition to their truth-conditional content, slurs have an expressive component that expresses "contempt for members of a socially relevant group on account of their being in that group or having a group-defining property" (2013, 316).[13]

The preceding discussion evidences that many theorists hold content-based views of slurs. Each of these theories needs to be paired with an account of appropriation. As we saw above many theorists posit ambiguity to account for appropriation. In such cases, they also need a response to the Appropriation Worry. Next, I turn to data about the process and results of appropriation.

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[12] While 'but' is a classic example used in discussions of conventional implicature, not all agree that it involves conventional implicature (see, e.g., Potts (2005)).

[13] Jeshion includes a third component in her semantics of slurs as well—what she calls an identifying component. She states that "as a matter of their semantics" slurs "are used so as to signal that being [for example] Jewish, Chinese, [B]lack, gay, a prostitute identify what its targets *are*" (2013, 318, *emphasis original*).

II. Appropriation Data

In ordinary cases, one speaker using an extant word in a non-standard way does not alter its meaning. It is only through multiple uses of the word in what was a non-standard way that a word's meaning can change or that a word can come to have an additional meaning. Appropriation is a process that takes time, multiple uses, and multiple speakers.[14] Cases of appropriation involve a slur being taken up by members of the group the slur targets for positive in-group usage—thereby undermining the derogatory content of the slur.[15] In this section I consider what is required for appropriation. Then, I turn to several data points that must be captured, and ideally explained, by any adequate treatment of appropriation.

Appropriation is social and political. It works to emphasize and construct group identity and to promote group solidarity. Tilly argues that "social movements stand out for their emphasis on identity assertion" and highlight that individuals with the identity are "worthy, unified, numerous, and committed" (2002, 121). The famous slogan from the activist group Queer Nation—"We're here! We're Queer! Get used to it!"—is a prime example. In the chant a slur is appropriated as a means of self-identification and it is demanded that being queer be normalized and respected. Croom states that a sense of solidarity can be fostered by in-group uses of a slur and that this "can

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[14] There might be exceptions to this. For instance, someone with a lot of authority might be able to appropriate a term with a single widely heard utterance. For instance, Robin Jeshion (pc) suggested that Obama using 'Obamacare' in a positive way might have been enough for it to be appropriated. In a tweet on March 23, 2012 Obama said "Happy birthday to Obamacare: two years in, the Affordable Care Act is making millions of Americans' lives better every day." While Obama's tweet likely played a large part in the appropriation effort—a campaign involving emails from top White House officials, a website, and a hashtag were also created to help reclaim the term. So, it is not clear that even when an utterer has authority and a large audience that a single use is enough to reclaim a derogatory expression.

[15] At least usually it is in-group usage that results in appropriation. Beaton and Washington (2015) discuss a case of 'favelado' a slur in Brazilian Portuguese referring to individuals who live in slums, that has been appropriated in the context only of fans of the soccer team Flamengo. The term was used by opposing teams to derogate Flamengo fans and is now used within the group of Flamengo fans as a term of solidarity. Since Flamengo fans were taken by opposing team fans to be referents of 'favelado' I take the example to be very similar to appropriation by in-group members.

help speakers signal to each other that they are not alone and that others like them share in their pains, perspectives, and history of prejudices" (2011, 350). Hom (2008) argues that target group use of a slur can serve as "a means of in-group demarcation to bring members of the targeted group closer together" (428). By self-labeling as Ns members of a target group emphasize their identity as oppressed people and reinforce that there is a shared position from which political demands can be made.

In appropriating a slur for self-identification, members in the target group might do more than emphasize their shared history; they can also *construct* identities involving in-group norms about ways to act, dress, communicate, and so on.[16] Appropriation is part of a project that emphasizes that these are strengths of *ours*; this is how *we* dress, talk, and act; *we* have persevered. Rahman states that since the N-word is "a self-selected term for naming members of the group, it is an apt subject for yielding insight into the way that at least some African Americans see themselves and their community" (2012, 139). She goes on to say that, at least in some cases, its use contributes to a person's "presentation of self within the community" (2012, 140). Appropriation of a slur can emphasize and construct identity and promote solidarity. These are key features of identity politics and social justice movements.

In addition to identity-building and solidarity-promoting, appropriation works to remedy power imbalances and remove weapons from oppressors. Hornsby states that old derogatory meanings are not "brushed away: they are subverted" (2001, 134). This is political action. In appropriation oppressed people rise up to confiscate a linguistic tool that functions to reinforce oppressive social structures. Appropriation involves pointing out oppressive social and cultural norms and working to counteract them. McConnell-Ginet argues that "to use *queer* both to affirm

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[16] I thank Rachel McKinney for stressing the point the appropriation does not just express, but constructs identity.

difference from heterosexual norms and to refuse efforts to eliminate or reduce such differences is to claim a kind of 'mastery', to refuse the conjunction of abuse and attribution of homosexuality so prominent in the … history of the word *queer*" (2011, 254). The slur being appropriated is altered to reject the combination of negativity with social group identity. Kennedy argues that in reclaiming slurs marginalized groups "have thrown the slur right back in their oppressors' faces" (2003, 38). Finally, Hom (2008) argues that appropriation involves taking back a powerful tool of discrimination in an effort to remove the offensive power of a slur. Each of these theorists stresses that appropriation is an action that aims at reconfiguring power imbalances by laying claim on a tool of the oppressors.

A recent study provides evidence that slur appropriation can have measurable effects at least on perceived power imbalances. Galinsky, et al (2013) found that self-labeling with a slur increases an individual's sense of power and increases an observer's evaluation of both the self-labeler's power and the power of the target group. Moreover, they found that self-labeling led to decreased perceptions of negativity in the slur that was used to self-label. To summarize, appropriation is a process that is social and political in at least the following four ways: (i) it emphasizes and constructs group identity (ii) it promotes solidarity (iii) it works to remedy power imbalances, and (iv) it takes tools from oppressors.

Bianchi (2014) argues that appropriation is not always social or political. She argues that while appropriation can occur in social and political contexts it can also occur in what she calls "friendship contexts" when one is joking amongst friends. Even in the context of a joke, I argue that appropriation is social and political. Slurs are part of a social-historical context of oppression and power imbalance. Even if appropriation begins as a part of a joke, it always relies on socio-political features of slurring expressions. So, it is always social and political.

To see why, consider pejoratives like 'asshole', 'dick', or 'jackass'. These expressions are frequently used in the context of jokes. If joking around using a term was sufficient for appropriation, these expressions would plausibly have appropriated positive meanings. Yet, it is clear that they do not. For instance, even though 'asshole' is often used ironically or in a joking manner, it has not gained a new positive meaning. If appropriation is always tied to the social and political as a part of a process to undermine oppressive structures and stereotypes, we can make sense of this data. Expressions like 'asshole' do not target groups of people that are socially oppressed. They are pejorative, but not in the same way that slurs are. Words like 'jerk' are not, as Tirrell states, "tied to a rich structure of other social practices" in the way that slurs are (1999, 62). Even when target group members use a slur as a joke, their use is social and political given the way slurs are tied to social practices, stereotypes, and power imbalances. Joking is not enough to appropriate pejoratives that are not tied to socio-political structures. This evidences that appropriation is social and political. Slurs' social and political nature makes them ripe for appropriation while other non-group denoting general pejoratives are not.[17] Next, I turn to examining linguistic data about appropriated slur use.

Individuals outside a racial, ethnic, gender, sexual-orientation, or other group targeted by a slur cannot use an appropriated slur to express its appropriated meaning. Or, at least, those outside the target group can use a slur to express its appropriated meaning only in very rare circumstances. For instance, someone might gain "insider" status in a target group that allows her or him to use the slur to express its appropriated content. Kennedy argues that there are relationships between a black person and a white person that are such that "the white person should properly feel authorized, at least within the confines of that relationship, to use the N-word" (2003, 42). This gives us our first datum—and one half of the Appropriation Worry.

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[17] This is not to say, of course, that other pejoratives are not subject to changes in their meanings. Meaning changes can occur in any expressions, but not all changes of meaning are cases of appropriation. Thanks to David Plunkett for useful discussion that led me to consider pejoratives that do not target groups.

> *Outsider Usage*: For an appropriated slur *S* which targets group *g*, individuals
> outside of *g* cannot (or perhaps very rarely with "insider" status) use *S*
> to express its appropriated content.

Our second datum is that individuals in the target group are able to use appropriated slurs to express their appropriated content. This and *Outsider Usage* are the data that the Appropriation Worry trades on. It should also be noted that it is possible for a member of the targeted group to use an appropriated slur to express its original derogatory meaning. For instance, a woman can use 'bitch' to express an unappropriated negative content. Being in the target group does not force someone to use a slur to express its appropriated positive content.[18] We can formulate this data as:

> *Insider Usage*: Members of group *g* targeted by an appropriated slur *S* can use
> *S* to express its appropriated content or its original derogatory content.

Next, I turn to developing a semantics of appropriated slurs that captures *Outsider* and *Insider Usage,* solves the Appropriation Worry, and which takes seriously the features and aims of appropriation discussed above.

III. Indexicals and Social Identities

We are physically located in space and time. We are also socially located in a "space" of social groups. We are members of unions, departments, boards, and clubs. We are in social kinds—like the kinds New Yorkers, Canadians, philosophers, immigrants, women, and Latinos. In order to solve the Appropriation Worry, I argue that one's position in social space—that is what groups one is a member of—can affect what one can express with certain expressions.

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[18] Anderson (forthcoming) also argues that appropriated slurs can be used to by target group members to express something negative, although he argues that with negative in-group uses of the N-word the attitude expressed is different from that expressed by bigots' uses of the N-word.

Indexicals are expressions whose contents vary from context to context depending on, for instance, a speaker's location in space and time. In this section I argue that first-person plural indexicals are sensitive to social position. That is to say, they are sensitive to what social groups a speaker is in. I argue that first-person plural indexicals' sensitivity to position in social space places restrictions on what a speaker can use 'we' and 'us' to denote.

The section proceeds as follows. I begin by considering familiar cases in which a speaker's physical location determines what is expressed by (or restricts what she can express by) indexical expressions like 'here' and 'now'. Then I consider cases of pronouns with gender features. Finally I consider cases of singular and plural first-person pronouns. I will rely on the view that a speaker's position in physical and social space can restrict or determine what she can mean by an indexical in my solution to the Appropriation Worry.

As is well known, a speaker's position in space and time can determine or constrain the content of her uses of indexical expressions like 'here' and 'now'. According to Kaplan (1989) indexicals are directly referential expressions with both a character and a content. Characters are meaning rules that can be modeled by functions from contexts to contents. Contexts are parts of the world that can be modeled as ordered tuples including at least the speaker, addressee(s), time, and location. Contents are objects (e.g., places or people). Let's work through an example. The character of 'here' can be modeled by a function from contexts (modeled as ordered tuples) to the location in the ordered tuple. A token of 'here' uttered in a context in which New York City is the contextually specified location has NYC—that object—as its content. The character is used to deliver a content, but is not part of what is expressed. 'Here' directly refers to a place on each occasion of use. Similarly, according to Kaplan an utterance of 'now' directly refers to the time of the utterance (the

time in the context), not, say a time 10 days later or 3 years earlier.[19] Even if one rejects a direct reference theory of indexicals, any account of expressions like 'here' and 'now' must account for the way the utterance context determines what is meant (or constrains what a speaker can intend) on an occasion of use.

These familiar examples show that what an expression can be used to express can depend on a speaker's location in space-time. They do not, however, appear to be sensitive to any specific features of the speaker. For instance, anyone in New York City can use 'here' to refer to it. The sort of sensitivity appropriated slurs manifest is more specific. Whether a slur can be used to express its appropriated content does not vary with movement through physical space, rather it is the speaker's social group memberships—whether he is a man, Black, heterosexual—that matters. We need evidence to show that expressions can be sensitive to social group membership in order to have the resources to solve the Appropriation Worry. I argue that gender features provide some evidence for social position sensitivity.

Gender features on expressions often require that their denotations have a particular gender. For instance, the gender features on the English pronouns 'she' and 'he' almost always restrict their denotations to feminine and masculine entities, respectively.[20] Gender features can affect interpretation and felicity. Consider the following examples:

1. Laura met Chris at noon. She likes him.

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[19] There are issues with the boundaries of locations in the case of 'here' and 'now'. For instance, is the contextual location the room in which an utterance is made? The city? State? Country? There are also issues with recordings, like an answering machine, that might require a more complicated treatment. See Kaplan (1989) for an initial presentation of the case. See Cohen and Michaelson (2013) for a range of possible responses to cases like these.

[20] Of course, grammatical gender systems do not always require a denotation to be gendered in a particular way. That is, grammatical gender is not always aligned with semantic or what is sometimes called "natural" gender. Ships are not literally women, although they are often referred to with tokens of 'she'. Gardens do not have a gender, but in Spanish 'el jardín' is masculine. However, *some* grammatical gender clearly affects interpretation and felicity.

2. Laura met Chris at noon. He likes her.

3. Laura walked into the house. ??He saw that the lights had been left on.

The gender features on the pronouns in 1 and 2 deliver different interpretations about who likes whom. In a null context 3 might be interpreted as infelicitous given the masculine feature of 'he' and that 'Laura' is stereotypically a name for a woman. Alternatively, it might provide the information that Laura identifies as a man.[21] Gender features on pronouns can be sensitive to a denotation's gender and can affect interpretation.

It has been argued since at least de Beauvoir (1949/2011) that gender is social. De Beauvoir famously argued that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (1949/2011, 330). Numerous accounts of gender as a social feature have been proposed. All share at their core the claim that gender is not wholly natural. Gender does not, for example, depend solely on physiological features like chromosomes or reproductive organs. Haslanger argues that "[g]ender categories are defined in terms of how one is socially positioned, where this is a function of, e.g., how one is viewed, how one is treated, and how one's life is structured socially, legally, and economically" (2000, 38). Butler (1990) argues for a performative conception of gender on which gender is performed through repeated actions (e.g., wearing lipstick and crossing one's legs when seated). For our purposes, a specific account of the social nature of gender is not required. Given that it is overwhelmingly held that gender is social, I will adopt that view here. We will see below several examples that show ways gender, and so, something social, influences what one can express by some particular expression.

So far I have argued that (i) gender features on pronouns restrict interpretation and affect felicity and (ii) that gender is social. Given (i) and (ii) it follows that some expressions are sensitive to social features. This data does not yet show that what a speaker can express with an expression is

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[21] Thanks to Nicole Dular for offering this alternative judgment.

constrained by her social position. For instance, men, women, and people who are gender-non-conforming can all use 'she' to denote a woman. Gender features of third-person pronouns do not restrict *who can use* an expression to express some particular content, but rather restrict *to whom the expression can denote*. We have evidence that a speaker's physical location in space-time can affect what she can express with a certain linguistic item. We have evidence that a social feature, namely gender, can affect interpretation and felicity. We do not yet, however, have evidence that what content a speaker *can express* with a certain expression is sensitive to her social features. Next I offer two arguments to show that social features can affect what a speaker can express with certain expressions. The first involves first-person gender marked Japanese pronouns. The second focuses on uses of first-person English indexicals.

Japanese includes first-person pronouns that are gender specific and that vary in degrees of femininity/masculinity and formality. The felicity of a pronoun depends on certain features of the speaker and the context (e.g., the relationship between the speaker and addressee). Even though pronouns have specific gender features, there is variation in the pronouns speakers use to refer to themselves. In a longitudinal study of middle-school children, Miyazaki (2004) found that popularity affected which pronoun a child used. For instance, she found that popular boys used the masculine pronoun 'ore' while unpopular boys used 'boku'. One unpopular boy said that he "wouldn't sound cool at all if [he] used *ore*" (reported by Miyazaki, 2004, 256). She also reports that unpopular boys who try to use 'ore' are often bullied or beat up. Girls who use 'ore' are reportedly taken to be rebellious or "crazy", while boys who use feminine first-person pronouns are reported to be homosexual or transgender. Miyazaki's data supports the view that a speaker's gender, felt masculinity or femininity, and social status affect pronoun choice and interpretation. We now have preliminary evidence that what a speaker's social position affects what she can express by some expressions.

English data, particularly involving first-person plural pronouns, provides additional evidence that what one can express with a pronoun depends on one's social position. 'We' can have uses that are sensitive to a speaker's role or group memberships. For instance, consider the following:

> 4. [Said by a woman] We are less likely to contract the disease than men are.
>
> 4'. Women are less likely to contract the disease than men are.
>
> 5. [Said by a child of civil rights activists] If my parents hadn't been born, we would be even worse off than we are now.
>
> 5'. If my parents hadn't been born, Black people would be even worse off than Black people are now.

Nunberg (1993) offers example 4 and argues that it is equivalent to 4'. If a man were to utter 4 it could not be synonymous with 4'. What a speaker can express with 'we' is constrained by the group(s) the speaker is actually in. Suppose 5 is uttered by a child of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. That speaker might use 5 to express 5'. In contrast, someone white could not use 5 to express 5'. Again, a speaker's group memberships can restrict what she can express by an utterance of 'we'.

Examples 4-5 include adverbs of quantification ('likely') and modals, but 'we' can denote a group that is not individuated merely in terms of extension in other contexts as well. For instance, consider the following:

> 6. [Said by a Muslim Congressperson] We are rare.
>
> 7. [Said by a woman] We get paid less than men for doing the same work.
>
> 8. [Said by a Transwoman] We are being murdered without prosecution or protection by hate crime laws.

9. [Said by someone Black] So many forces in American life are telling us that our lives don't matter, that our lives are expendable, that when we are killed when we're unarmed that we can't get justice for that.[22]

The tokens of 'we' in 6–9 are naturally interpreted as synonymous with 'Muslim Congresspeople', 'women', 'transwomen', and 'Blacks', respectively. In these cases 'we' is used to refer in ways that are strikingly similar to bare plural expressions in generic generalizations. The predicate in 6 ('rare') has been classified as a direct-kind predicate. Direct-kind predicates are overwhelmingly held to take kinds, rather than individuals members of a kind, as arguments.[23] For instance, while no person is rare, Muslim congresspeople and other social or natural kinds can be rare. Sentences 7-9 are examples of characterizing generics. Characterizing generics specify some characteristic that is common or striking although perhaps not universal in the group. For instance, 7 could be true even if some women are not paid less than any men for doing the same work. The speakers of 8 and 9 have not been killed. Nevertheless, 8 and 9 could be (and, unfortunately, are) true.[24]

The first-person pronouns in 6-9 are not being used to denote some purely extensionally defined set of individuals. Rather, they are used to denote social groups that share some feature(s). These examples show that an overt adverb of quantification or modal is not required to deliver an interpretation of a plural first-person indexical that is sensitive to a property.

Examples 4-9 show that 'we' can be used to refer to a group that is not just a set, sum, or plurality of members, but a group that is specified in terms of some property (or properties). 'We' does not straightforwardly fit into a Kaplanian direct reference theory of indexicals. One can be a member of many groups. One is in a member of groups based on race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, and religion. One is a member of a family, cliques, teams, clubs, and departments. In a

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[22] Quote from John Legend, April 26, 2015 CNN *State of the Union.*
[23] See, e.g., Krifka, et. al. (1995) and Leslie and Lerner (2016).
[24] There is widespread debate about the correct semantics for generic generalizations. See, e.g., Carlson (1977), Krifka, et. al. (1995), and Leslie and Lerner (2016).

conversation one is a member of a group of speakers and interlocutors. There is not just one group that any speaker's use of 'we' can denote. In modeling contexts in the way Kaplan does, there is not one element in the tuple that is *the* group that contains the speaker. Moreover, there cannot even be one group that is the contextually salient group that contains the speaker. For example in a single context the speaker might use 'we' to pick out her immediate family, the group containing herself and her interlocutor, and the group of all Americans. 'We' cannot be a pure indexical in the sense Kaplan argued 'I' was. Speaker intentions, broader conversational goals, and other features are required to fix the denotation of 'we'.

Moreover, uses of 'we' are often not rigid in the way Kaplan argues uses of indexicals are. For instance, recall 6, repeated below:

> 6. [Said by a child of civil rights activists] If my parents hadn't been born, we would be even worse off than we are now.

If one holds that a person's origins are essential, the speaker of 6 will not exist in the worlds at which 6 is evaluated. Further, 6 might be true and denote a group at those worlds. 'We' is not rigid, or is not straightforwardly rigid in the way 'I' has been argued to be.[25]

Consider one more case to emphasize the point.

> 10. We might have been liberals

Nunberg (1993) imagines 10 uttered by a Supreme Court justice in the context of a discussion of what the make up of the Supreme Court might have been given different results in some salient presidential elections. He argues that in that context 10 need not mean that the actual Supreme Court justices might have been liberals, but rather that the justices who would have been appointed

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[25] One could argue that 'we' rigidly picks out a group that can vary in members across times and worlds. Even if this is the case, it is rigid in a way that is much less straightforward than 'I'. Moreover, to avoid making rigidity trivial, the account of rigidity that allows for group variation must not entail that all terms are rigid. For instance, it should not entail that, e.g., 'the tallest people' rigidly picks out a group that varies across times and worlds. See Devitt (2005) and Besson (2010) for discussion of rigidity and natural kind terms that could inform the viability and structure of an account of rigidity for 'we'.

would have been liberals. Again, the denotation of 'we' is allowed to vary across worlds in a way that, at least prima facie, is at odds with rigidity. The data canvassed provides evidence that what a speaker can express by 'we' is restricted by her actual roles and memberships in various groups.

Tokens of 'we' denote groups. Some groups are specified in terms of properties, like *being women*, rather than merely in terms of having particular individuals as members. The data in 4-10 provides 'we' can denote a group that is not just specified in terms of extension. The semantics of 'we' can be sensitive to properties.[26]

IV. Solving the Appropriation Worry with Plural Indexicals

Recall that according to many content-based views, upon appropriation a slur becomes ambiguous. The Appropriation Worry argued that positing ambiguity failed to account for who could use a slur to express its positive appropriated content. We now have the resources to give a solution to the Appropriation Worry. In sketching the solution I will use 'bitch' as a case study. 'Bitch' and 'bitches' are plausibly forms of a slur that has a appropriated meaning and that retains its original derogatory meaning. My aim here is to argue for a solution to the Appropriation Worry that provides the resources to supplement any version of a content-based view of slurs. While the specifics of content-based views vary, all take slurs to express something derogatory through either truth-conditional content, presupposed content, a conventional implicature, or an additional

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[26] Nunberg (1993) argues against Kaplan's direct reference theory of indexicals using data like 5 and the following: [Said by a condemned prisoner] I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal. He takes the sentence express something like "an inmate on death row is traditionally allowed to order whatever he likes for his last mean". Nunberg calls there "descriptive uses" of indexicals. Moreover, he argues that they must be captured semantically. So, the direct reference theory of indexicals is false. There is widespread dispute about whether Nunberg's view that there are descriptive elements in the semantics of indexicals is correct. See, e.g., Nunberg (1993) and Elbourne (2008) for arguments in favor of semantic accounts of "descriptive uses". See, e.g., Recanati (1993), King (2006), and Hunter (2010) for arguments against semantic accounts of "descriptive uses". Whichever way one sides in the debate about other indexicals my arguments against 'we' being a pure indexical and against a simple story about the rigidity of 'we' provide evidence that its semantics is not accommodated by a Kaplanian direct reference theory.

expressive content. Here, I will present the solution within the framework of a conventional implicature content-based view. I do so not because I intend to defend a conventional implicature view (or any other content-based view). Rather, I do so in order to represent the solution to the Appropriation Worry more explicitly while avoiding gratuitous repetition. The view I offer is available to any proponent of a content-based view with suitable adjustments.

While my aim is not to argue for any precise definitions of slurs or appropriated contents, nevertheless, it will be useful to consider fairly explicit examples for the slur under consideration. The specifics could be adapted to, for instance, include specific stereotypes or other features.[27] Consider a sentence containing 'bitch' that is ambiguous between expressing a slur's original derogatory content and its appropriated positive content:

> 11. I'm going out with my bitches tonight.

On the view under consideration, 11 has two possible interpretations as in 11' and 11'' (where 'TC' stands for truth-conditional content and 'CI' stands for conventionally implicated content):

> 11'.   TC: I'm going out with my women tonight.
>   CI: They are despicable or lesser than for being women.

> 11''.   TC: I'm going out with my women tonight.
>   CI: We women are laudable for being women.[28]

The original content is a simple truth-conditional content on which 'bitch' truly applies to someone if the person is a woman. It conventionally implicates that the subject is despicable or lesser. In the

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[27] On the view I sketch here, I take the original content of 'bitch' to be non-indexical and its appropriated content be a plural first-person indexical. I should note, however, that one could take both meanings to be indexical. Perhaps the original content emphasizes that women are other by including 'they', while the appropriated meaning emphasizes us and includes 'we'. Again, my aim is not to argue for some very specific entries, but to argue that appropriation involves indexicality. Thanks to John Kulvicki for pressing me to think more about this issue. Miščević also considers whether there is an us/them element involved with pejoratives (2016, 138-139).

[28] These are possible contents for a proponent of a conventional implicature view. If one prefers one of the other content-based views, one could take the CIs to be part of the truth-conditions, presuppositions, or expressive content of 'bitch'. Minimal adaptations of the account allow the strategy I advocate to be adopted any of the content-based views.

appropriated content, the neutral element, 'woman', is retained and the conventional implicature is subverted, implicating that we are worthy for being women. 11' could be expressed by anyone uttering 11. In contrast, the Appropriation Worry traded on the fact that 11'' can only be expressed by utterances of 11 by certain speakers. That is, not just anyone who utters 11 can express 11''. To express the appropriated meaning, a speaker must be part of the targeted group—in this case the group of women. The indexical in 11'' captures why only some speakers can express the appropriated meaning of 'bitches' by uttering 11. To see how the account will go, we need to examine the semantics of 'we'. Before doing so, I want to justify the use of a plural first-person pronoun.

The use of the plural first-person is motivated by the process and aims of appropriation. In *II* I argued that appropriation is a social and political action that reinforces solidarity and constructs and emphasizes group identity. 'We' emphasizes that there is a group that is a subject rather than merely a group shaped and created by oppressors. As de Beauvoir argued in using 'we' proletarians and Black people emphasize that they are subjects and "transform the bourgeois or whites into 'others'" (1949/2011, 28). The use of 'we' in these cases emphasizes solidarity. Further, since 'we' is being used to denote a group with members beyond the immediate conversational context the professed solidarity goes beyond the participants in the utterance context.

Relying on a plural, rather than singular, first-person pronoun is also motivated by the following observation. It is possible for a speaker who uses a appropriated meaning not to think of herself as particularly laudable. That is, it possible for someone who is a woman, Black, homosexual, or in some other group targeted by a slur to use a appropriated slur to express something positive about the group while also questioning their own strengths and worth. For instance, a woman who currently evaluates her creative outputs, job performance, body, or other features negatively, might

still use 'bitches' to express something positive about women. For instance, suppose that instead of the appropriated content of 11 being 11" it was 11'":

> 11'".   TC: I'm going out with my women tonight.
> CI: I am laudable for being a woman.

If the conventional implicature (or truth conditions, or presupposition, or expressive content) required that the speaker believe of herself that she is laudable, it would be infelicitous or contradictory for a speaker to express a negative self image while using 'bitch' to express its appropriated content. Yet, in appropriation an individual member of a targeted group need not think of *herself* as especially laudable, even while expressing that a group of which she is a member is deserving and admirable. The account I offer, which relies on 'we' in the appropriated content of a slur can allow for this combination of attitudes. To see why consider the following case.

In a certain context, 12 could express a true generalization about women, but one which does not apply to the speaker.

> 12. [Said by a woman] We get paid less than men, although I am the highest paid person at my firm.

12 is felicitous and easy to interpret. The truth of generic generalizations, like in 12, does not require that every member of a kind satisfy the predicate. This provides evidence that in certain cases the speaker herself might be excepted from the extension of the predicate that takes the denotation of 'we' as argument. Although a full story is needed, it is in principle possible for a speaker to think that she is not laudable, while saying that we women are laudable. Next I argue that *Outsider Usage* and *Insider Usage* can be captured by the proposal being sketched. To fill out the account, we need to look more carefully at the semantics of 'we'.

Pronouns, including 'we', are often taken to carry presuppositions that place requirements on their satisfiers. Heim and Kratzer (1998) argue that number, gender, and person features are presuppositional. For instance, for a token of 'she' to receive an interpretation, there must be a

possible denotation that meets the constraint of being a woman/girl (i.e., satisfying that property).[29]

Otherwise, it is standardly argued that the token does not receive an interpretation and the entire

sentence is neither true nor false.

A use of 'we' denotes a group that the speaker is actually a member of. 'We' is not the mere

plural of 'I'. It does not denote a group of speakers speaking in unison. Rather, as Wechsler puts it

'we' denotes "the speaker plus associates" (2010, 377). The solution to the Appropriation Worry I

offer here requires that the following additional presuppositions are adopted. First, it requires that

tokens of 'we' presuppose that the speaker/writer is a member of a salient (or intended) group g.

Second, following Heim (1982) on descriptive content presuppositions, when 'we' occurs in phrases

of the form 'we Fs', it carries a presupposition that the members of the group, g, be Fs.[30] If a

presupposition is not satisfied the utterance is infelicitous. If the presupposition(s) are met, 'we'

denotes or refers to the group g. These provide the necessary resources for a solution to the

Appropriation Worry.

In the last section I argued that 'we' always denotes a group, that some groups are specified

in terms of properties, and so 'we' sometimes denotes a group that is intensionally specified. I

argued that the evidence in 4-10 supports this conclusion. Moreover, the evidence was used to argue

that what one can express by an expression can be sensitive to the features of a speaker. I should

note, however, that the solution to the Appropriation Worry I offer here could be adopted with

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[29] Recall above the claim that gender is social rather than biological. If gender requires being female the distinction between sex and gender is dissolved. In their analysis, Heim and Kratzer require that the property *being female* be met by any possible denotations of 'she' or other feminine pronouns. To account for gender identities that do not match biological sex, here I take the property that must be met by a possible denotation of 'she' to be *is a woman or girl*. Whether my modification will allow for non-human animals to be eligible denotations of gendered pronouns will depend on whether non-human animals are boys or girls (they are presumably not men or women).

[30] There might be an additional presupposition that g is the the largest group that meets the condition. I am not aiming to give anything like a full theory of 'we' here, so leaving out additional presuppositions is not a fault of the discussion.

weaker commitments. The conventional implicature I offered in 11" includes the noun phrase 'we women' rather than simply 'we'. By using 'we women' a descriptive content presupposition can be appealed to, thereby avoiding taking a stance on whether the semantics of 'we' is intensional.[31]

In 11", 'we women' triggers both presuppositions. The group denoted by 'we' must meet the condition of being composed of women and the speaker must be a member of the group. So, the speaker must herself be a women for 11" to be felicitous. If a man were to utter 11 attempting to express 11" it would be infelicitous. Given the presupposition failure in his attempting to express 11" one might hold that either that he actually expressed 11' or, at least, that he would plausibly be interpreted as expressing 11'. The semantics of 'we women' explains why only members of the target group can felicitously use slurs to express their appropriated contents and helps to explain why utterances of slurs by outsiders, even those who are attempting to use slur to express something positive, are taken to be derogatory or defective.

The force of the Appropriation Worry has been diffused by the account I have offered. Recall the usage data discussed in *II*.

> *Outsider Usage*: For an appropriated slur *S* which targets group *g*, individuals outside of *g* cannot (or perhaps very rarely with "insider" status) use *S* to express its appropriated content.
>
> *Insider Usage*: Members of group *g* targeted by an appropriated slur *S* can use *S* to express its appropriated content or its original derogatory content.

Outsider Usage, sans the parenthetical, has been captured by the account offered. The first disjunct of Insider Usage has also been captured. Let's consider strategies to capture the remaining portions of the usage data.

First consider the possibility that a member of a targeted group can use a slur with its original derogatory content. Here we do not need an independent explanation of how ambiguous

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[31] Thanks to Matthias Jenny for useful discussion about this point.

expressions are disambiguated. Whatever strategy for disambiguation more generally turns out to be best can be adopted here. For instance, the strategy that best accounts for why an utterance of "I went to the bank" expresses one rather than the other meaning of 'bank' can be used to explain why a target group member's token of a slur has its original or appropriated meaning. Presumably the story will include something about speaker intentions, features of an utterance (e.g., the speaker's tone), features of the conversational context (e.g., relationship between participants, topic of conversation), or other factors. The account I have developed does not force any speaker to use a slur to express its appropriated content.

Next, consider the apparent possibility that in some rare cases a speaker who is not a member of the target group, but who has "insider" status of some sort can use a slur to express its appropriated content. The account I have offered could be supplemented semantically or pragmatically to handle such cases. First, one might hold that insider status in a context allows a speaker to count as satisfying the presupposition that he is a member of the group targeted by the slur. So, at least for the purposes of certain exchanges, the speaker counts as a member of the targeted group. On this view, someone can be a woman (or member of another targeted group) in one context even if they are not in some other context. To develop this strategy a contextually dependent variable could be added to the predicate 'woman' to deliver different extensions in different contexts.

Alternatively, one could argue for a pragmatic account of the apparent ability of insiders to use slurs to express their positive meanings. On such an account the speaker is not *really* able to express the appropriated meaning with his utterance of a slur, but his utterance is not taken to be offensive given his insider status. On this alternative while the speaker literally slurs the target group—given that it was appropriated for usage only by members of targeted groups—it is clear to

all addressees that no offense was intended and that the speaker meant to convey solidarity.[32] Either a semantic or pragmatic strategy is open to a proponent of a content-based view adopting the solution to the Appropriation Worry I argued for here.

Appropriation involves members in the target group working together to subvert the derogatory element of a slur. When appropriation is successful, speakers in the target group can use the slur to express something positive which conveys group solidarity. The account I have argued for here captures *Outsider Usage* and *Insider Usage*, while fitting with the general aims and process of social and political movements to reclaim slurs. Next I briefly consider other accounts of slurs that involve indexicality and show how my account differs.

V. Other Accounts of Slurs with Indexical Elements

Other theorists have proposed that slurs have an indexical element. Here I briefly discuss three views that involve indexicals and show how they differ from the view I have argued.

Schlenker (2007) proposes that slurs and other expressives carry presuppositions that are indexical and attitudinal.[33] For instance, he takes 'honky' to carry the presupposition that the speaker (i.e., agent) of the context of utterance believes that whites are despicable (in the world of the

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[32] There is an apparent tension between adopting a semantic ambiguity strategy to handle appropriation when target-group members use appropriated slurs and a pragmatic strategy to account for "insider" status usage of appropriated slurs. One might argue that if appropriation by a target group is to be accounted for semantically (as content-based theorists for whom the Appropriation Worry is a problem hold) then "insider" status usage should be accounted for semantically as well. I do not take the apparent tension to be decisive. There are after all differences between being friends with women or people racialized as Black and actually being a woman or actually being racialized as Black that could be appealed to in order to motivate a semantic ambiguity strategy on the one hand and a pragmatic strategy on the other. However, the tension might speak in favor of a semantic treatment of "insider" status usage. Thanks to Daniel Wodak and Matthias Jenny for pressing this issue.

[33] He also argues that the presupposition can be shiftable, building off Schlenker (2003) which argues that indexicals are shiftable (i.e., that indexicals can be monstrous). I won't focus on this element of the view.

context). The presupposition is indexical and attitudinal as it requires the speaker in the context to have a particular attitude.

There are several differences between the account I have sketched and Schlenker's. First, he focuses on un-appropriated uses of slurs, while I focus on appropriated uses. Second, he take the indexical to be singular rather than plural. I argued above that a plural first-person pronoun better accounts for the Appropriation Worry while being motivated by the general aims of appropriation as solidarity building and group demarcating.

Thommen (2014) gives a brief sketch of a view on which slurs are indexicals. He argues that a slur can only be used in a context in which "the speech participants (the speaker and the hearers) share a certain negative response" to the target group (2014, 43). Thommen's view broadens the indexical element of a slur, by taking more than the speaker to be relevant. In doing so, however, he seems to rule out the possibility of a slur being uttered and expressing a derogatory content when some conversational participants do not have negative attitudes towards the target group. For instance, suppose that three people are having a conversation. If two harbor racist attitudes towards Black people and one does not, Thommen's view appears to make a derogatory utterance of a slur against Blacks impossible. I take it that this gets the facts wrong. Moreover, Thommen does not explicitly give a semantics for slurs. So it is not clear whether he wants to include the indexical 'we' or whether he wants to have separate elements that are sensitive to the speaker and hearer(s). In addition, Thommen is focused on un-appropriated uses of slurs. He does not aim to address appropriation.

Finally, Kennedy (2003) argues that the meaning of a slur can vary "depending upon, among other variables, intonation, the location of the interaction, and the relationship between the speaker and those to whom he is speaking" (2003, 43). Kennedy does not argue for a detailed theory of how a slur's meaning varies, so it is difficult to tell exactly how indexicality is meant to be built into the

content of a slur. From the factors listed it sounds like either (a) he takes slurs to have radically indexical contents or that (b) he is including the varied pragmatic effects as parts of a slurs meaning. I am inclined to interpret him as taking the meaning of a slur to include its broad linguistic import— including both conventional lexicalized effects and pragmatic conversational effects. It is certainly right that a slur might have widely varied pragmatic effects depending on, say, whether it was uttered at a basketball game, in a courtroom, or at the United State Holocaust Memorial museum. It is much more controversial, however, whether all these effects should be included in a lexicalized conventional account of the content of a slur. While indexical elements play a role in other treatments of slurs, no one has focused on indexicality as a way to solve the Appropriation Worry and no one has drawn on the semantics of 'we' as I have done here.

VI. Conclusion

Almost all theorists agree that slurs have derogatory content. We saw that a worry arises for proponents of any content-based approach. If slurs have derogatory content, it is natural to conclude that they gain an additional content when they are appropriated. Yet, the new content can only be expressed by appropriated slurs uttered by members of the target group. The Appropriation Worry stated that content-based views that posit an ambiguity to account for appropriation cannot account for why only members in the target group can use a appropriated slur to express a non-offensive/positive meaning. To deflate the Appropriation Worry I have argued that the lexical entries for appropriated slurs include a plural first-person indexical. I argued that 'we' is sensitive to one's social position—in particular it is sensitive to the speaker's social group memberships. In general 'we' requires that the speaker actually be a member of the group picked out. The requirement holds regardless of whether the group denoted is just the plurality of the speaker and addressee or a larger group that involves the sharing of gender, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation,

occupational, or other features. By considering the aims and purpose of appropriation, social positions, and the way linguistic content can be sensitive to positions in social space, the Appropriation Worry can be solved.

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