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Towards a Materialist Account of Derogatory Speech

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Abstract
The topic of this essay is derogatoriness of speech in the sense of its capacity to harm or offend in a way that is commonly taken to be unacceptable in a liberal society. I take the folk terms *slur* and *hate speech* to aim at capturing this aspect. The question I am interested in is: what makes speech derogatory, as opposed to merely insulting? I identify two main ways of approaching this question, both in public discourse and in philosophical theorizing: an expressivist approach (derogation consists in expression of hateful attitudes, e.g. Marques 2023, Jeshion 2013) and an identitarian one (derogation results from violating people's right to self-identification, including choice of respectable terms for the group they belong to; e.g. Anderson and Lepore 2013). I argue that both approaches face difficulties with their theoretical foundations and empirical adequacy, but more importantly they are politically problematic, as they allow for powerful social groups to label any dissent or criticism as derogation. The common problem of the expressivist and identitarian approaches is that they are essentially subjectivist, basing their construal of derogatory speech on the attitudes of either, respectively, the speaker or the target. However, not every inimical attitude is derogatory, and not everyone who feels insulted is thereby derogated – in the strongly normative sense implied by our concepts of slurs or hate speech. One can stipulate additional extra-subjective conditions under which the attitudes in question support classifying some speech as derogatory – but that makes it doubtful if relying on the attitudes is necessary at all. I propose an account of derogatory speech that does away with subjective conditions and defines derogation as property of speech that is a material part of social practices of discrimination and subordination. Instead of considering the (unavoidably opaque and often self-serving) attitudes of actors in a public sphere, we should focus on the material analysis of actual, objectively observable practices. To substantiate this approach to derogatory speech it is necessary to explain how it can materially contribute to practices of discrimination and subordination. To do this I refer primarily to theories of social practice and ideology found in the work of Sally Haslanger (2012, 2018) and Louis Althusser (1971). On the view I outline, the role of speech is not to create social situations of subordination, but to legitimize and reproduce them. Derogatory speech interpellates its targets as subordinate subjects of already existing practices of discrimination and violence. That is also why offending or insulting speech targeted at those in power cannot constitute derogation.

Keywords Derogatory speech · Slurs · Hate speech · Social practices · Interpellation · Ideology

1 Introduction

There are many things we do with words; one of them is insulting people. This activity is so important for language users that we have a specialized set of vocabulary to perform it: words that serve little or no other purpose than to insult. Let us call these words pejoratives; in English, as in many other languages, they are numerous and hugely varied. To list just a very small sample: *idiot*, *asshole*, *cunt*, *sissy*, *junkie*, *whore*, the (racist) N-word, the (homophobic) f-word. The topic of my essay is suggested already by the fact that I have not felt comfortable actually citing two of these words, and only referred to them obliquely. For it is a widely shared belief in modern liberal societies that among the panoply of pejoratives at the disposal of a speaker, the use of some, however offensive or obscene, is often allowed and sometimes even warranted. Others, however, are subjected to a moral and political taboo that makes their use

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essentially unacceptable in any circumstances (not that they aren't in fact in frequent use). Simply put, it's sometimes alright to call someone an "asshole", especially if they're being an asshole. It is never alright to call someone the N-word.[1]

By "derogatory speech" I will understand words that fall into the latter category: pejoratives that insult people in some way that is generally considered socially unacceptable in the public discourse of modern liberal societies. This should be distinguished from speech that is merely insulting, and thus can sometimes be acceptable. What makes speech derogatory in this sense is the question that I will investigate here.

Before I move on, I wish to emphasize that this is not a philosopher's distinction: the category of speech that is derogatory, and not merely insulting, although not under this name, is widely recognized by lay people and frequently deployed to tabooize specific expressions or utterances; its membership is often explicitly debated. In what follows I want to focus on this aspect of public use of a notion of derogatory speech (appearing under different names); I will not engage much with theoretical literature, but discuss mostly what I take to be easily recognizable and familiar common conceptions and beliefs. This may seem an unusual method for a philosophical analysis, but I can only hope that it will bring sufficiently interesting results.

Slur is one lay term for what I mean by derogatory speech. That the N-word is a slur is a commonplace observation. To cite an example that will be important for my argument later, *TERF* is sometimes labeled a slur by those against whom it is used[2]. *Negro* and *Oriental* were purged from the official documents of US federal government, because they have come to be understood, at least by some English users, as slurs (on *Oriental*, see more below). As the linguist Geoffrey Nunberg (2018) puts it: "To describe a word as a slur isn't just to say that it's offensive, but to assign a particular moral or political tenor both to the offense it gives and the offense one commits in uttering it. Using a slur isn't simply a breach of personal manners or a sign of coarseness." Slurs, in my preferred terminology, are derogatory and not merely insulting.

Hate speech is another term worth mentioning here; it is used in theory and law, but also in common parlance. It does not describe a category of pejoratives as such, because it is not a lexical category, although it can also be used to label specific words: in a series of statements over the last few years, Elon Musk declared that *cis* and *cisgender* are hate speech (and will therefore be banned on the social media platform previously known as Twitter)[3]. Slurs in general are often considered to be devices of hate speech (cf. Anderson and Barnes (2025), section 3.1). What is more important in the present context is that the notion of hate speech expresses the same intuition that there is a significant distinction between speech that is offensive or contentious, but should be tolerated, and speech that violates important norms of a liberal society and ought to be proscribed. Whether such proscriptions should have legal force, how to justify them and what the boundaries of the category "hate speech" should be are weighty, much-debated issues that I will have nothing to say about. I will, however, discuss some theoretical accounts, as well as lay conceptions, of hate speech as potentially shedding some light on the nature of speech-based derogation.

There are other ways the same intuition is expressed in everyday speech. Some terms are deemed offensive (although this is not very clear, as obscenities such as *son of a bitch* are also in some sense offensive, without being derogatory in the way I'm interested in), or labeled more specifically as "racist", "homophobic", "ableist" etc. In any case, there is a lot of public interest, and a lot of emotional engagement, in the question which words are acceptable, even if insulting, and which are beyond the pale. It is manifestly important for citizens of modern liberal societies to be able to circumscribe a category of speech that denigrates its targets in ways that are incompatible with the regulative principles of democratic public life. I will take it as my primary datum that a concept of derogatory speech is needed to perform this role.

Not that demarcating derogatory speech is easy in practice. There is a strong consensus, both socially and theoretically, that insulting expressions attacking someone's race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation qualify as derogatory speech, but it is sometimes debated if a given term for a demographic group is in fact insulting or should be treated as neutral. Furthermore, there are many controversies surrounding pejoratives based on other characteristics, such as gender identity, occupation, political opinions or personal traits. I will discuss examples of both kinds of controversies in the course of my argument.

My main aim here, however, is not to decide on the controversial cases and determine precisely the boundaries of derogatory speech, nor to investigate the lexical semantics of slurs, but rather to understand what it is that we intuitively grasp as distinguishing derogatory speech from mere insult. Or rather: what we should understand by it, given the purpose that the concept of derogatory speech is supposed to serve. In a sense, I aim to engineer a concept that captures

[1] Throughout this paper I ignore the issue of so-called reclaimed uses of slurs, or, for that matter, of friendly uses of pejoratives such as "asshole"; I refer only to uses that are meant and understood as insulting.

[2] https://terfisaslur.com/, accessed July 17, 2025

[3] https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/elon-musk-says-calling-someone-cisgender-in-heterophobic-4840922, accessed July 17, 2025

concretely the vague and abstract intuitions expressed by common uses of *slur* or *hate speech* - not in the form of a strict theoretical definition, but in the form of a regulative idea that can guide both our philosophical deliberation and political action.

With this aim in mind I will first discuss two general approaches to defining derogatory speech, an expressivist one, which ties derogation to expression of hateful attitudes, and an identitarian one, which construes derogation as violation of people's right to self-identification. They should be easily recognizable as present in the public discourse, and they also find articulation in philosophical theorizing. I will argue that both approaches face difficulties with their theoretical foundations and empirical adequacy, but more importantly they are politically problematic, as they allow for powerful social groups to label any dissent or criticism as derogation. The common problem of the expressivist and identitarian approaches is that they are essentially subjectivist, basing their construal of derogatory speech on the attitudes of either, respectively, the speaker or the target.

As a more promising alternative, I suggest a materialist account of derogatory speech that does away with subjective conditions and defines derogation as property of speech that is a material part of social practices of discrimination and subordination. While this cannot conclusively solve the political problem – it will always be a contested issue whether a given practice is discriminatory – it gives us a better grip on understanding derogation and allows us to distinguish between actually derogating speech targeted at subordinated groups and individuals and merely insulting speech targeted at the subordinators. Instead of considering the (unavoidably opaque and often self-serving) attitudes of actors in a public sphere, we should focus on the material analysis of actual, objectively observable practices. To substantiate this approach to derogatory speech it is necessary to explain how speech can materially contribute to practices of discrimination and subordination. A full account goes well beyond the scope of a single paper, but as a start I will present some hints taken from theories of social practice and ideology found in the work of Sally Haslanger and Louis Althusser.

Finally, a disclaimer. Throughout this paper I will assume that terms such as *fascist*, *antivaxxer*, *TERF*, *cisgender* are *not* derogatory in the strong sense I am interested in, even though some of them may be insulting, and all of them are sometimes claimed to be slurs by those who are their targets. On the other hand, I will claim that we have good reasons to consider terms such as *junkie*, *prostitute* and *migrant* (in some contexts) to be derogatory, although I would not commit to calling them *slurs* proper. These are as much political as theoretical assumptions, and obviously controversial ones. I hope that readers who do not share them will still find my arguments (which are also as much political as theoretical) interesting - and perhaps even plausible if they can substitute other examples for the ones I use.

2 Expression of Hate

In this section I will discuss a view that appears to answer to some very common pre-theoretical intuitions, although it is not, in fact, popular among theoreticians - the view that what defines hate speech (i.e. derogatory speech, in the present context) is that it expresses hate.

However, before delving into this, let me first very briefly deal with another view which may appear attractive only at a cursory glance. One could think that the difference between derogatory and merely insulting speech lies in the degree of its vulgarity, whether understood as phonetic toxicity, the degree to which a given word violates norms of linguistic decorum, or the scope of registers and contexts in which it may be accepted by interlocutors.

This cannot be a good criterion. Yes, the f-word is more vulgar than *jerk* - one could easily imagine the latter, but not the former, being used without raising any eyebrows in an informal conversation with your boss or at your grandma's birthday - but *motherfucker* surely sounds more obscene to many English users than *redskin*. And yet, we need to be able to say that the latter is a derogatory term and its use should be taboo, while *motherfucker* can at times be used without sanction (though perhaps not over tea and cake with your grandma). A narrowly linguistic criterion of this sort will not work - taking the broader social context into account is necessary to grasp the nature of derogatory speech.

The expressivist account deserves closer scrutiny. It posits that hate speech expresses hate, which isn't quite as trivial as it sounds. By "hate" we should understand a wide array of hostile attitudes, such as contempt, disgust, animosity. Hate speech is a public expression of such attitudes towards individuals or groups; it is inappropriate and harmful, because these attitudes are inappropriate and harmful.

Hopefully, this is easily recognizable as a view widely shared among lay people. Among theoreticians, Teresa Marques (2023) is one of the few that explicitly defend it. As she writes: "Hate speech is constitutively prejudicial because it is *expressive of hatred* [emphasis added]". What does it mean for speech to be expressive of an emotion? As Marques elaborates based on her earlier work with Manuel Garcia-Carpintero (Marques and García-Carpintero 2020), it is to presuppose the fittingness of this emotion towards its intentional object. Thus, acts of hate speech presuppose that an attitude of hate (or another hostile emotion) is fitting towards some persons or groups.

Why should hate speech understood in this way be proscribed? Because expressions of hate single out social groups as contemptible and worthy of discrimination, and therefore may easily lead to harmful, discriminatory or violent actions against them. There is no room in a democratic public sphere for hateful attitudes, and therefore no room for speech that expresses and promotes them.

The expressivist account is attractive in its simplicity and does seem to capture an important intuition concerning derogatory speech. As I mentioned at the beginning, it is sometimes acceptable to insult someone, e.g. by calling them an "asshole", and it may even be warranted, if they're indeed being an asshole. It is natural to think that this is because it is acceptable, or perhaps even appropriate to have, and express, a negative attitude towards assholes. The normative presupposition of fittingness of an inimical attitude is uncontroversial in this case. It is not, however, acceptable to hold a negative attitude towards someone because of, say, their sexual orientation. The f-word expresses an attitude that can never be fitting, and thus it can never be an acceptable thing to say. Moreover, the expressivist account meshes naturally with a regulative ideal, promoted by many liberals and conservatives alike, of a public discourse free of the expression of irrational emotion.

Nevertheless, as a conception of derogatory speech, the expressivist account is not satisfactory.[4] Its scope is both too broad and too narrow.

2.1 Is All Hate Wrong?

The expressivist view in its popular form is too broad insofar as it implies that what is wrong with derogatory speech is simply that it marks certain people or groups as fitting objects of hate (in the broad sense of any hostile or contemptuous attitude). The tacit assumption appears to be that no hateful attitudes can be tolerated in a democratic public sphere - in other words, no one should be stigmatized because of their identity, membership in some demographic group, their beliefs etc.

It is a noble sentiment, but I believe it is entirely mistaken. Take the word *fascist*. In many instances and by many speakers it is clearly used as a hateful pejorative. That is, its function is to express a hostile or contemptuous attitude towards someone, and to signal that the speaker believes this attitude to be fitting based on the target's political beliefs. Of course, in many cases we could debate whether a given person or group deserves the label; and if not, they would be right to feel deeply insulted - but should we treat the term as derogatory, i.e. should it be assumed that in the name of democratic principles, we are never *allowed* to call someone a fascist? That is certainly not a desired result; *fascist* is not a slur.

One could quibble and respond that this is not a good example, because in a liberal democracy either nobody admits to having fascist beliefs, or if they do, they are *ipso facto* situating themselves beyond the scope of discourse governed by liberal norms. In a sense, the expressivist view is not concerned with cases like this. Or, conversely, one could claim that insofar as the label *fascist* is uncontroversially warranted (e.g. with reference to members of an openly neo-Nazi group), it is simply a neutral description, not a pejorative, and whatever attitudes accompany its use are irrelevant. In either case, the expressivist can avoid implausibly categorizing the term *fascist* (and other similar ones) as hate speech.

There are, however, many other examples with regard to which these responses will not work. *Anti-vaxxer* is a clearly pejorative term, often used contemptuously, and targeting people who, unlike fascists, aren't typically shy to announce their beliefs, but also not inclined to renounce completely the discursive framework of liberal democracy. The expressivist view would imply that *antivaxxer* is derogatory speech. Should it be taboo to ostracize and insult people who promote dangerous, anti-social beliefs? It may not be the best political strategy to deal with them, but that is a different question.

Consider another example, both more telling and more controversial. *TERF*, originally an acronym of "trans-exclusionary radical feminist" has become in recent years a common label for people, usually women, who publicly proclaim trans-phobic beliefs or defend trans-exclusionary policies, based on professedly progressive beliefs rooted in theories of sex and gender associated with the radical feminist movement.

TERF (or *terf*) is undoubtedly a pejorative term and one that would meet the expressivist definition of derogatory speech: it expresses a hateful attitude towards some individuals based on the presumption that they deserve negative appraisal or contempt because of their political beliefs. People targeted with it often argue that it is indeed a slur, and that they should be identified rather as "gender-critical feminists", which would convey that their beliefs are an acceptable and reasonable philosophical position on the nature of gender, and not a reflection of transphobic prejudice.

The reader may not be convinced that the beliefs proclaimed by so-called terfs are indeed expressions of hateful prejudice and should be condemned, or that it is acceptable

[4] Note that my goal of engineering a concept of derogatory speech is not identical with the goal of defining hate speech for the purposes of (justifying) its legal regulation; and thus my generic criticisms of the expressivist view are not targeted against Marques' specific account. For more specific arguments against the view that hate speech expresses hate, see Brown (2017); Kindermann (2023); Waldron (2012), but note that Marques gives responses to at least some of them.

and warranted to combat them with the use of pejorative language, among other means. It is not my intention to argue for this (and I will readily admit that not every figure labeled as a "terf" is indeed a transphobe). What I do want to emphasize, is that the expressivist view would grant the gender-critical feminists their position, as it were, for free. And the same would go for any other social group or political movement. Any direct expression of hostility in the public sphere, no matter how well justified, could be proscribed as derogatory speech. Take for example Howard Schulz, the CEO of Starbucks, who argued that *billionaire* is a slur because it expresses a hostile attitude (based on the radical normative presupposition that rich people should pay more taxes), and that he would prefer to be respectfully called a "person of means"[5]. That is, of course, an extremely silly proposition, but it suggests that the expressivist approach can easily be hijacked by all sorts of anti-progressive or anti-liberal actors who are eager to use the notion of derogatory speech (in whatever lay terms it is expressed) to squash any criticism of their own position. Thus, the purpose of a concept that should be sensitive to the abuse suffered by the most vulnerable members of our society, is corrupted (cf. Boromisza-Habashi (2015) for a discussion of further cases of such corruption of the concept of hate speech, taken from the UK and Hungary).

To sum up this part of the argument, I posit that the expressivist view casts its net too wide, treating as derogatory speech many expressions of hateful attitudes which should not be disallowed from the public sphere. Hostility, contempt and ostracism should at least sometimes be allowed, and we should have the linguistic means to express them. We can debate over particular cases, but it ought not be assumed upfront that a liberal society has no room for appropriately motivated "hate".

An informed reader might object to this[6], observing that while my criticism may be decisive with regard to a "popular" form of expressivism, it does not concern the more sophisticated theoretical version proposed by Marques. Indeed, Marques' definition of hate speech is couched in terms of the presupposition of "fittingness" of hate or contempt towards some group, and in her joint paper with Garcia-Carpintero quoted above, they mention in passing that contempt may sometimes be justified. Within the framework I propose here, this suggestion could be developed into the claim that pejorative speech generally expresses negative attitudes, that is presupposes their fittingness towards someone, and what distinguishes merely insulting speech from derogation is whether or not the presupposition is correct, i.e. whether or not the negative attitude is in fact fitting. In this way expressivism can be rescued from the objection of casting its net too wide, but at the same time it becomes useless for my present purpose - for the real question I want to address here is under what conditions the expression of hate is acceptable or not. I will come back to this point later.

2.2 Derogation Without Hate

At the same time, the scope of the expressivist view is too narrow. Not all derogatory speech needs to be an expression of a hateful attitude. Let us note first that many uses of slurs or hate speech may follow from cold political calculation. The speaker might not hold any negative attitudes towards a person or group they insult and denigrate; they might simply not care.

Proponents of expressivist accounts have a ready answer to this. Marques, for instance, is careful to claim that hate speech "is expressive of hate" and not simply "expresses" it. She refers to the work of Robin Jeshion (2013), who argues that an expressivist semantics for slurs need not entail that any use of a slur must actually express a negative attitude to be derogatory. According to Jeshion, it is enough that a slur is a term that is *conventionally* used to express hateful attitudes to make any use of it justifiably interpreted as derogatory, regardless of the speaker's actual thoughts and emotions. Thus, not everyone using the f-word must feel a live contempt of gay people, but the conventional function of this word is to convey that such contempt is fitting so any use of it is derogatory.

This answer is not sufficient. It is not in fact necessary for a term to be conventionally used to express hostile attitudes for it to be counted as derogatory. Consider the case of *Oriental* in the American context. Historically, this word has been used to describe Americans of Asian descent. While largely outdated in common speech, it remained in use in some official documents of the US government until 2016, when new legislation removed it from US federal law and replaced it with the term *Asian-American*. It was determined that *Oriental* is offensive, because of its association with past racist policies against Asian-Americans, even though it was apparently not understood as such by many American English speakers. As Grace Meng, the representative who sponsored the legislation, put it: "Many Americans may not be aware that the word Oriental is derogatory. But it is an insulting term that needed to be removed from the books."[7] It seems therefore that a term may be derogatory even though it is not conventionally used to express a negative attitude of any sort. It is worth noting that Meng is herself Asian-American.

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/06/dont-call-howard-schultz-billionaire-wealth-washing, accessed July 17, 2025.

[6] Thank you to anonymous referees for pushing me on this point.

[7] https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-bill-to-remove-the-term-oriental-from-us-law-signed-by-president, accessed on July 7th, 2025.

This case is fairly well known given the global interest in American politics and culture, but it is worth mentioning a quite similar case from Poland, which concerned the word *Murzyn*, historically used as the default term for the native inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa or people of dark skin or African descent in other parts of the world. This was never a legal designation, but until the middle of the 20th century or so it was in frequent use in literature and media, and apparently connoted no particular attitude. Until this day it remains common in everyday speech, although it is now considered highly colloquial and has fallen out of use in more formal registers. Only very recently has the term become controversial, largely due to the growing number of Polish residents who are dark-skinned or of African descent. A few years ago, a wide-ranging and heated public debate concerning the acceptability of this word occurred[8]. Linguists and other interested professionals (anti-discrimination activists, journalists etc.) were initially split on the question whether *Murzyn* is a derogatory term, and most ordinary Polish speakers seemed confident that it is not (there are, as one may expect, other words in Polish that much more clearly express anti-Black racist sentiments). Many opinions were voiced, in comments on social media, newspaper op-eds, and academic papers. After some time, however, an apparent consensus emerged at least among linguists and media professionals (the common opinion seemed to shift as well, but that is much more difficult to gauge) that it is in fact a derogatory term. While it may be tolerated in older literature (it is used commonly in many beloved novels and poems from the late 19th and early 20th century), it should not be treated as acceptable anymore, because it is generally demeaning to people it refers to. Again, this conclusion can be reached despite the fact that many, if not most, speakers of Polish would not recognize the term as conventionally expressing any hostile attitude.

What is most interesting about the Polish case is that, among various arguments pointing e.g. to pejorative phraseology in which the word *Murzyn* is used, what emerged as the strongest case for deeming it derogatory - having convinced even some of the most conservative linguists and many lay people - was the opinion of dark-skinned Polish citizens themselves, who adamantly voiced their opposition to the continued use of this term, both on the internet and in the streets. For them, the word is demeaning and hostile because it connotes white people's global hegemony and the subordinate, marginalized position of dark-skinned people in Polish society. As the prominent linguist Jerzy Bralczyk (one of those who changed their mind in the course of the debate) put it: "We should not use expressions that the people in question might regard as offensive. I personally did not see anything wrong with the word "Murzyn". This word has certain traditions in Poland and has been in use for a very long time, also metaphorically, appearing in various contexts. But if dark-skinned people have something against it, I would never use this word towards them." While there wasn't a similarly public debate and controversy leading to the removal of *Oriental* from American documents, one can surmise that the main motivation was also the feeling of Asian-Americans themselves (including Grace Meng) that the term offends them, even if used unknowingly and without malice.

Examples such as these show the inadequacy of the expressivist view. At the same time, they suggest an alternative. Derogatory speech is not speech that expresses hateful attitudes, but speech that marginalizes people by referring to them or addressing them in a disrespectful way, where what is respectful is decided by those whom it concerns themselves. I will develop and criticize this view in the next section, but let me first note that it seems to be implicitly present in public conversations about many words whose derogatoriness is controversial, such as terms for sex workers or persons with disabilities. The term *prostitute*, for example, is probably not understood as *per se* expressive of hatred or contempt by ordinary English speakers, but it is often argued to be derogatory by those whom it targets, who prefer the less marked *sex worker*[9]. If that is in fact the prevalent opinion among sex workers, or if that means that we should proscribe *prostitute* as a slur are not questions I want to answer here, but it is important to note that this way of thinking about what makes a word derogatory is widespread in modern societies.

3 Derogation as Disrespect

I will call the alternative approach the identitarian view. It claims that derogatory speech is speech that demeans people belonging to marginalized or subordinated groups by showing them disrespect. Of course, in some sense any kind of insult shows disrespect, but derogatory speech is distinguished by attacking a person's or group's social identity through usage of terms that the people in question do not accept. It is the authority and sense of identity of the target, rather than the attitude of the speaker, that is the criterion of derogatoriness on this view.

[8] https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/06/12/stop-calling-me-murzyn-black-lives-matter-sparks-linguistic-debate-in-poland/, https://time.com/5874185/poland-racism-women-murzyn/, accessed on July 17th, 2025.

[9] https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/why-the-word-prostitute-has-to-go-20180913-p503hj.html, accessed on July 17, 2025.

The identitarian view is influential and well established socially, politically and theoretically[10]. It is closely connected to an idea that is fundamental to a version of liberal ideology dominant in the last half century, especially, though not exclusively, in Anglophone countries. The idea is that one of the core values in a person's life is the dignity of public presentation and recognition of their *identity*[11]. People have the right to expect that their identity, whether innate or acquired, will be respected by others. What is meant here is primarily group identities: racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual etc.

An important aspect and expression of the respect that identity demands is the right granted to social groups to determine on their own how they are supposed to be referred to and addressed, as well as who is allowed to use which terms. It is up to gay men themselves, therefore, and no one else, to tell us that it is okay to call them "gay" and not okay to use the f-word.

The case of the N-word is illustrative. Used by white Americans against Blacks, it has long been the most toxic and vicious racist slur in the English language. However, it has been appropriated by Black Americans, so that they can use it in a relatively neutral, or even friendly and familiar way - but only among themselves. The taboo on its use by non-Blacks remains very strong, so much so that many press publications refuse to print it, and even quoting it in academic contexts is controversial (and so I have decided to abstain from it).

Questioning this taboo itself may be considered an expression of racism (think of the notorious line "If they can use it, why can't we?"). This should not be surprising. If we accept the fundamental liberal idea mentioned above: that individuals have a right of self-determination through participation in group identities, and these identities should only be shaped, defined and labeled by those who participate in them - then any attempt at questioning Black Americans' sole authority regarding the use of the N-word *ipso facto* undermines their right to define their own social identity. That in turn undermines their right to take part in social life on equal standing with other racial, ethnic or cultural groups. And that is a manifestation of racism.

We should add, of course, that not every group in a liberal society deserves the right to proudly proclaim their identity and decide authoritatively which terms referring to them are acceptable and which are not. Fascists have no right to demand we respectfully call them, say, "patriots" or "concerned citizens", just because the word *fascist* demeans and marginalizes them, because there is nothing wrong in marginalizing them. Fascists can (and perhaps should) be insulted, but they cannot be derogated.

The identitarian view appears to give us a useful and plausible criterion to identify and proscribe derogatory expressions which cannot be acceptable in a democratic public sphere. Referring to the understanding and authority of the targeted group themselves and their default right to respectful recognition makes it possible to decide on many controversial cases that are difficult for the expressivist view, such as the above-discussed examples of *Oriental*, *Murzyn*, *prostitute* and many terms targeting sexual and gender minorities.

Nonetheless, the identitarian view's subjectivist character and reliance on actual responses to certain terms or utterances by the groups targeted by them leads to several important problems, which I will now discuss.

First, the identitarian view relies on a problematic and controversial social ontology. It presupposes a vision of society as composed of fairly well-defined groups. Every individual belongs to some group or, more plausibly, to several overlapping groups (someone is a white gay man, someone is a straight Jewish woman etc.) - and it is *through* their membership in such groups that they participate in social life. I do not intend to engage in a critique of multiculturalism or "identity politics" here, but I want to stress that this approach to derogatory speech treats it as primarily a phenomenon that occurs in interactions between social groups, and not between individuals, or between an individual and a larger entity such as the society as such, the state, the majority ethnic group etc. This is a non-trivial presupposition, both politically and theoretically. One of its problematic consequences is that it makes it difficult to identify derogatory speech in situations in which it does not target an already well-defined group, or in which the definition of the target group is in itself difficult or contested.

Should *refugees* have the right to respect and recognition as a marginalized social group? Certainly. But it is a matter of great political controversy in many countries who actually qualifies as a member of this group and who is just a "migrant". Is, therefore, the term *migrant*, often used with contempt and hostility, an instance of derogatory speech? If it is used in a disrespectful and demeaning way towards a group of people who deserve our respect (as well as practical recognition and assistance) as refugees, we could say so. But perhaps it should rather be understood not as an epithet

[10] For a philosophical account of the offensiveness of slurs based implicitly on the identitarian premise, see Anderson and Lepore (2013a, 2013b)

[11] Such a notion of dignity is central to Jeremy Waldron's influential theory of hate speech and its harms (Waldron 2012). Note, however, that I do not engage directly with Waldron, as his account explicitly excludes typical uses of slurs from its scope - not because they are not hateful or derogatory, but because Waldron's aim is to justify the regulation of hate speech understood as "group libel", which involves public, enduring, and primarily written utterances, and not disparate epithets hurled in passing in a one-off conversation. The latter are, however, very much in the scope of my interest.

referring to this particular group, i.e. refugees, but as a word serving to identify an individual as belonging to a *different* group, one that does not deserve this sort of respect and assistance, or at least not by default. In the latter case, the identitarian criterion would not recognize *migrant* as derogatory speech. There seems to be no clear answer here. I will return to this example later.

Second, and more importantly, even if we assume that individuals participate in society primarily through their membership in identity groups, and that the issue of derogatory speech concerns primarily a violation of the right to equal respect that these groups hold, especially those that are at risk of discrimination and marginalization - we should note that not all subordinated identities are represented by groups that have the opportunity and capacity to explicitly self-identify and thereby authoritatively decide how we should refer to and address them in order to show due respect to their equal social standing. In other words, not all identities are like the examples I have discussed of gay men, Black Americans (and Poles) or sex workers. These are groups that remain at risk of all kinds of discrimination in contemporary societies, but at the same time, they are endowed with a minimum level of self-consciousness that allows their members to explicitly articulate their identity and their claim for recognition in the public sphere (even if it does not follow that these claims are actually met).

There are, however, people, groups, or identities that cannot meet this condition, but are very much at risk of being victims to derogation. This can happen for several reasons. We can think of groups that do not constitute a community that is cohesive and well-defined enough to make any attempts at collective self-determination. Refugees may be an example, and so can people suffering from substance addictions. We should not conclude that *junkie* is not derogatory just because there is no public advocacy group proclaiming: "We, as drug users, do not wish to be called that".

A somewhat different situation occurs when there is a group of people who have no access at all to discursive resources that would allow them to articulate their group identity, as in the case of people with severe intellectual disabilities. And other groups may have a strong sense of identity, but place themselves deliberately outside of the sphere of public discourse, as the Roma people do in many European countries. It cannot mean that insulting language directed at the Roma or at people with intellectual disabilities is not in a strong sense derogatory, just because its targets cannot or will not protest it.

One could certainly debate my characterization of any and all of these examples. My aim is not to collect specific counterarguments to the identitarian view, but to point to a more general problem. There is a fundamental tension between two aspects of this view: the assumption, on the one hand, that derogatory speech targets groups that are in a somehow marginal or subordinated position in a society; and the criterion of derogatoriness based on the authority of the target group. It seems indeed that the ability to articulate in some minimally authoritative way a group's identity and to explicitly claim due recognition and respect by other members of society is conversely proportional to the group's subordination. The more groups or individuals are subordinated, marginalized, weak, invisibile and deprived of discursive and political resources, the more *difficult* it is to recognize language targeted against them as derogatory, if we rely on the identitarian criterion. Again, it seems that the proper purpose of the concept of derogatory speech is corrupted.

Moreover, the tension between these two aspects - the capacity to self-define and a subordinate social position - works both ways, so to speak. The stronger is a given group's sense of identity, and the better access it has to discursive and political resources, the easier it is for them to demand respect and recognition and to proscribe any attacks on the group as derogatory speech. We should consider again the case of "gender-critical" radical feminists. Members of this group are known to argue that they belong to an oppressed minority, both as proponents of heterodox beliefs on the nature of gender, and as biological women, whose hard-won civil rights are being attacked by trans activists. Accordingly, any verbal attacks on them should be treated as derogatory, and the pejorative *TERF* proscribed as a slur. Whatever one's position on the issues of trans rights is (and there is certainly too much vitriol and personal animosity on every side here), it is easy to see the emptiness of this rhetoric. *TERF* is not a slur anymore than *racist* is, although both are pejorative, and both can sometimes be wielded against innocent targets. But the purpose of my remarks here is not to dwell on any specific words or issues, but to underscore the main point: it is groups that need it least that often have the best opportunity to articulate their identity and demand equal respect and recognition.

I have made the same argument against the expressivist view. Similarly to what was discussed in section 2.1. regarding Marques' theory, one could argue that a sophisticated version of the identitarian view would include an additional criterion: that a pejorative is truly derogatory only if the targeted group has a *good reason* to object to its use, i.e. if the pejoration is not in any way warranted and thus unacceptable. But what would make it unacceptable? This is the real question that needs to be addressed to distinguish merely pejorative speech from derogatory one. If the identitarian criterion has to be supplemented by another - presumably one that is not based on the target's group feeling that they

are being offended - we have not yet made any progress towards answering it.[12]

Moreover, as I have remarked at the beginning, my purpose here is not so much to engage with sophisticated philosophical theories but to consider the popular, socially prevalent and politically potent versions of these views. I believe it is significant that both may be, and on occasion are, exploited by dominant social groups in order to silence criticisms of their beliefs and actions. Of course, one could argue that in this way these groups corrupt the proper meaning of these views, abusing them in a perfidious way. This is indeed what many trans rights activists do, pointing out to trans-exclusionary feminists that they are depicting themselves as victims dishonestly and without warrant. In the academic forum, this argument has been raised by Rachel McKinnon (2018).

I want to focus on another aspect here. We should consider *why* is it that both the expressivist and the identitarian view can be abused in such a perfidious way. I believe that the reason is their common *subjectivist* character. Both views define derogation with respect to the attitudes of certain social actors - either the ones who use derogatory speech, or the ones who are its targets.

The concept of derogatory speech (whether in its guise as hate speech, slur or some other lay articulation) is a strongly normative one: it tells us that certain kinds of language are unacceptable and should be subject to some form of taboo; that certain words have no place in a democratic society and should be purged from our vocabulary. But the mere fact that people hold certain attitudes or have some reactions to speech is not a normative fact. Group A expresses their contempt for Group B. Or perhaps, Group B feels disrespected by Group A. Does it entail that Group A *ought to* change their behavior and start treating Group B with greater respect? Unless we adopt an outlook which is not only quite arbitrary but plausibly destructive for any democratic society: that *every* group and identity, every belief and political position, deserves unconditional respect, there is no way to answer this normative question without first determining which group is which. "Group A insults Group B" is an abstract statement that can describe vastly different situations. To put it very simply, if we take two groups such as African Americans and the Ku Klux Klan, fascists and anti-fascists, Jews and anti-semites, it is a matter of fundamental importance which of these groups is A and which is B. "The homophobes are insulting the gays" and "Gays are insulting the homophobes" are very different situations, requiring a very different moral and political appraisal.

These are relatively obvious observations and proponents of the expressivist and identitarian views of derogatory speech - at least those who invoke them in good faith and for noble purposes - are usually aware of the issue. Hence, as I have mentioned, additional criteria are added, such as that the group targeted by derogatory speech should indeed be subordinated, marginalized, or somehow discriminated against. That, however, gives us a chimeric conception, based on two distinct criteria which, moreover, may come into conflict. On the one hand, we're referring to the subjective attitudes of users or recipients of pejorative speech, on the other hand, to the actual situation of persons and groups in subordinate positions in our society. One is easily led to wonder if a subjectivist criterion is necessary at all. If we drop it, we can try to articulate a different view, which I will call materialist. The final section of this essay will be devoted to outlining what its basic tenets should be.

4 The Materialist View: Practices of Discrimination

On the view I propose, derogatory speech is speech that is a material component of practices of discrimination and subordination.

Before I elaborate, let me emphasize that it is not my goal to define a criterion of derogatory speech that could be used for legal regulation, nor one that could be deployed practically or politically with such precision that we could unambiguously proscribe certain words or utterances in a way that would compel all sides and participants of a social conflict to agree. No such criterion can be found, of course. Every normative pronouncement about language, just like any other topic in the public sphere, is necessarily subject to contestation. Whatever principle regarding equal rights, mutual respect, non-discrimination or democratic values we could refer to, some public actors can always present a dissenting interpretation of this principle, or reject it outright. The irreducible reality of democratic politics is that some who participate in it are overtly or covertly hostile to its regulative norms.

That being said, there is undoubtedly both philosophical and political value in getting a better conceptual grasp of the nature of derogatory speech. The way to do this, I believe, is to adopt the materialist view, which foregoes merely subjectivist criteria.

4.1 Doing Away with Subjectivism

On the materialist view, to decide whether a pejorative is derogatory in the strong sense and its use should be proscribed in a democratic public discourse, we should not ask whether it is used (actually or conventionally) to express hateful attitudes, or whether its targets have declared it

[12] Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this potential objection.

to be unacceptable, but we should consider its role in the social practices of discrimination and subordination. In other words, we should deem words and utterances to be derogatory speech if they, first, target persons or groups who are victims of discrimination or subordination, and second, their use is an element of these practices.

This criterion can be used consistently and plausibly with respect to many of the examples I discussed earlier, including those that were problematic for the expressivist or the identitarian view. It applies straightforwardly and obviously to the N-word or the f-word - the manifest function of these words is to stigmatize and demean persons belonging to racial and sexual minorities which still face various forms of discrimination in modern liberal societies. What about terms such as *Murzyn* or *prostitute*? Both dark-skinned Polish residents and sex workers are certainly frequent victims of practices of discrimination and subordination - what needs to be determined, is whether these particular terms (alongside more obvious ones such as *whore* or a Polish counterpart of the N-word) are in fact elements of these practices. It does not suffice, on the materialist view, to note that the targets themselves find such words to be demeaning and disrespectful.

This is not difficult to determine. It is quite obvious that the word *prostitute* connotes a sense of moral condemnation of sex work (it suffices to think of its phraseology and metaphorical uses), which is an important element of the ideology that marginalizes and subordinates people performing such work.[13] The term *Murzyn*, as argued by Ohia-Nowak (2020), "actively reproduces anti-black stereotypes and racist meanings"; its function is to stigmatize people of dark skin or African descent by reducing their personal identity to their perceived race. It is this identification with a "foreign race" that is central to practices of discrimination and contempt targeted at Black people in Poland, as in many other Western countries.

Similar arguments can be made in more controversial cases as well. Take the word *migrant*. Many English speakers would not consider it to be pejorative at all (the same goes for its counterparts in other languages). Arguably, however, it has recently become a derogatory term. The news outlet Al Jazeera stopped using it in 2015[14]. In the words of one of the editors, Barry Malone, *migrant* "has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative". In many European countries, especially those with borders that are external borders of the EU, describing asylum seekers as "mere migrant" is an element of the ideological discourse that justifies refusing assistance and admittance to the EU of the growing number of refugees from the Middle East, Africa and other parts of the world. I suggested earlier that the identitarian view gives no clear answer regarding the derogatory status of *migrant*. The materialist view allows us to say: yes, the anti-refugee discourse, even when articulated in overtly neutral, pseudo-legal or sociological terminology, constitutes derogatory speech, because it is an important element of practices of discrimination and subordination.

We should also consider other terms from this perspective, such as pejoratives targeting people suffering from substance abuse or intellectual disabilities. *Junkie* or *retard* arguably play a role in the practices of marginalization and dehumanization of such people. (To repeat, it is not my aim to argue that such terms constitute hate speech in the sense that would justify legal sanctioning of their use. I do not believe that would be warranted; what I want to suggest is that terms such as *prostitute* or *retard* should perhaps be considered taboo slurs, unacceptable in civil discourse.)

On the other hand, the materialist view gives no support to the complaints of fascists, antivaxxers or any other persons or groups whose discrimination is merely imaginary - even if the hostility and pejoration they face in the public discourse is very real. Not everyone who feels insulted is thereby derogated.[15]

I claim, therefore, that the materialist view has two important advantages over the expressivist and the identitarian conceptions. First, it provides us with a more coherent and plausible criterion to identify derogation in problematic cases. Second, it directs our attention not to the intentions, attitudes and reactions of language users, but to the material reality of social life.

[13] An anonymous referee raised a concern that the connotation of moral condemnation mentioned here is a also a subjectivist criterion as it refers to the attitudes of speakers. My point, however, is that it is not the condemnation itself that makes the term derogatory - there are many terms we use to express moral judgments the use of which is not only acceptable, but often warranted, and perhaps even necessary for a healthy social life - but the fact that this condemnation is entangled in ideologies and practices of discrimination. More generally speaking, some reference to individual attitudes has to be made in any account of social practices, but the materialist view requires that the practice is more than *just* an expression of attitude. We customarily express moral condemnation of murderers and pedophiles, but that does not make them targets of discrimination.

[14] https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/8/20/why-al-jazeera-will-not-say-mediterranean-migrants; cf. https://www.channel4.com/news/by/lindsey-hilsum/blogs/migrants-refugees-word. Accessed July 14 2025

[15] This also entails that pejorative terms for dominant groups, e.g. *cracker* for white Americans, or terms used by citizens of one nation for citizens of another without any relation of oppression between them, do not qualify as slurs. I believe this is the right result. This is not to say that there is nothing wrong with such words - in general, we should obviously not insult people without a very good reason - but they are not derogatory in the strong sense I am interested in. *Cracker* is not subject to anything like the taboo on the N-word, and rightly so in my view. Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this concern.

For the materialist view to have any plausibility, however, it needs to be explained how language can be a *material* element of social practices of discrimination. I believe that it is sufficiently clear on an intuitive level. An expression is a material element of a practice of discrimination if its use contributes to the realization of this practice. For derogatory terms this typically means that their use to refer to or address certain individuals or groups has the effect of representing them, roughly speaking, as appropriate targets of (linguistic or extralinguistic) acts of hostility, discrimination or even violence. (Under the condition that there is an actual risk of the target suffering such acts. *Billionaire* may be often used to paint someone as an appropriate target of hostility but this brings no actual harm to billionaires.)

Developing a full theoretical account, however, is a challenging task and I cannot give it full justice here, but in the last part of this essay I will outline a way of approaching it which I find the most attractive. It is based on certain ideas that appear in a similar form in vastly different philosophical traditions.

4.2 The Material Role of Language

It will be easiest to begin with a reference to Sally Haslanger's work in social ontology. Haslanger (2007; 2010) defines social practices as structures organizing the coordination of individuals' actions, as well as their conflicts, with regard to the availability and use of certain resources. Resources should be understood in the broadest possible sense here, including both material objects and symbolic goods, such as social status. What is crucial is that the value of a given resource is defined only with respect to a concrete social practice and the conceptual schemas that individuals make use of when participating in this practice. Consider an ear of corn. It "can be viewed as something to eat, as a commodity to be sold, as a religious symbol. In other words, we can apply different schemas to the object, and the schemas frame our consciousness of the object. The different schemas not only offer modes of interpretation, but license different ways of interacting with the corn. Actions based on these different schemas have an effect on the ear of corn, e.g., it might be cooked for food, or the kernels removed to be shipped, or dried and hung in a prominent place to be worshipped." (Haslanger (2013).

The same goes for the values and functions of people's actions, and therefore also for the people themselves in their individual and group identities. Just like an ear of corn is a meal, a commodity or a religious symbol, depending on the social practice within which it becomes conceptualized - and beyond these practices it is none of those things - a person can be a worker, a mother, a student, a participant of a ritual, a voter etc. depending on the various contexts of her action and interaction with other human beings.

Being a commodity or being a mother are social properties defined within particular contexts. They are material facts, but they only gain their meaning when placed against the background of specific conceptual schemas. An important function of human language, in this perspective, is that it can shape and communicate meanings that are abstracted from a concrete context. There may not be an ear of corn at hand for me or the reader right at this moment, and yet I can easily communicate some thoughts about corn's potential role as a commodity or a religious symbol. We are not at this time participating in religious ceremony or an exchange of goods, but the hypothetical corn can be conceptualized as an element of such practices.

This may seem like a trivial observation, but it has important consequences. For the same is true of people. Calling someone a "mother" imposes the role of a mother on them, even if they are not, at this very occasion, participating in any social practice or context having to do with motherhood. This role invokes certain conceptual schemas, norms and expectations, such as are typical of mothers in a given society, and these in turn shape the behavior of other people, the values of various resources and ultimately the possibilities of action of the person in question.

Think of a 20-something woman who went out with her girlfriends on a Friday night; she's had two drinks already - should she get a third one? If she's a student, fresh after the last exam of the semester, sure, why not, she should celebrate. If she's a young mother - well, perhaps better not, she has duties at home. We may very well be thinking of the same person, but positioned within the context of different, relatively fixed social practices. The role she is assigned (by others, or by herself) has consequences in shaping the dispositions to action of herself and the people around her.

From this perspective of thinking about social practices, it should be easier to grasp the material function of derogatory speech. Demeaning epithets and contemptuous utterances serve to impose on individuals and groups subordinated roles within social practices or to exclude them from some practices entirely. These roles have concrete, material ramifications insofar as they shape the behavioral dispositions of the targets of derogatory speech, its users, and other people. Labeling (in speech or thought) a person on the street with the use of a slur, such as the N-word or the f-word, may justify hostile actions against them - forcefully bumping into them, cutting in line in front of them, hurling insults or even violently assaulting them - actions one would never even consider when dealing with a "fellow citizen" or just "a guy on the street".

Similar ideas are to be found in the poststructuralist marxist philosophy of Louis Althusser (1971), though in a form

that is both more radical and perhaps less clear. Althusser introduced the concept of "interpellation" to describe the operation of ideological apparatuses in which they summon and appoint, so to speak, individuals to be subjects playing specific roles in social contexts. Without the interpellation by ideological apparatuses individuals cannot participate in any social practice or in social life in general; they do not exist as members of society at all. Language plays a crucial part in this process: calling or addressing someone with some word or epithet is a way to interpellate them in a specific role. (For a direct application of Althusser's theory to the pragmatics of slurs, see Kukla (2018).

What is most interesting in Althusser's thought from my present perspective is not an emphasis on the function of language in the constitution of social subjects, but, on the contrary, an observation that the role of language in this process is limited and secondary. A purely conceptual interpellation is not possible - simply calling someone a slur has no force or meaning unless it is supported by an ideological apparatus. And ideological apparatuses are more than Haslanger's conceptual schemas (though they involve notional structures as well); for Althusser they are primarily the material reality of social practices and institutions which create the conditions and constraints of individual's lives and actions (including most importantly the institutions of the state and its violent powers). Language in all its forms, including derogatory speech, is merely a symbolic representation of this reality.

People fleeing from Syria or Afghanistan and trying to enter the European Union may be interpellated as "refugees", as "economic migrants", or as tools of a "Belarussian hybrid attack" on the EU. But it is not the use of one expression or another that imposes a given role on them - it is only a symbolic representation of the concrete reality of political decisions and legal statutes, as well as border crossings and interrogation rooms, passports, forms and fees, fences and barbed wires, armored patrol vehicles, rifles and batons. Similarly, the word *prostitute* would have none of its derogatory force, if sex workers weren't subjected to real ostracism and violence.

This is not to say, of course, that language has no power at all, and that derogatory speech has no harmful force. What interests Althusser the most is the *reproduction* of ideological structures. It is in this respect that the symbolic interpellation of individuals through language is crucial, because it legitizimes and normalizes certain situations and behaviors. The f-word would not harm anyone by itself if gay people were not at risk of actual discrimination and physical violence - but the practices of discrimination and violence could not endure and reproduce, they would not be constantly and repeatedly performed, if their participants did not conceptualize the targets of their hate and contempt as "faggots".

Outside of extraordinary circumstances of fits of passion or psychotic episodes, people are not generally prone to do violence to others, physical or otherwise, without some putative justification - some way to frame the victim as either deserving to be ostracized or brutalized, or posing a threat that needs to be preempted. Slurs and other kinds of derogatory speech can be understood as invoking, more or less obliquely, ideological conceptual structures that provide such justifications. Their use allows the perpetrators of violence and discrimination to make sense of their practice and treat it as something natural or even just. This helps to normalize and stabilize the practice. But without this embedding in material structures and practices, pejoratives cannot have the same harmful force (being insulted can always be psychologically hurtful, of course, but it is not harmful in the strong sense we require to proscribe something as derogatory). *Billionaire* is not a slur because, with all the hostility and distrust that a growing number of people feels towards the ultra-rich, no actual violence is being done to billionaires. The ideological apparatuses of modern liberal societies, in their material and conceptual aspects, do not interpellate billionaires in a social position that is in any way subordinated or victimized; quite the contrary.

My suggestion, therefore, is that we should understand derogatory speech primarily in its function of conceptually structuring, justifying, normalizing and, most importantly, reproducing extra-linguistic social practices of hate and discrimination. A fuller development of this notion will require much more work, but if the arguments I presented here are correct, the materialist approach is more attractive both theoretically and politically than the wide-spread expressivist and identitarian views.

Let me conclude with a very brief thought on what all this implies regarding the question how we should react to and combat derogatory speech. The materialist view suggests that this question may be misleading. There is little we can do within the sphere of discourse itself. It is only through a real transformation of social practices and practical resistance to discrimination and violence, that derogatory speech can be rid of its harmful force.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest There is no conflict of interest.

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