Resources, Rules, and Oppression

Abstract: There is a large and growing literature on communal *interpretive resources*, the concepts, theories, narratives, etc. a community draws on in interpreting its members and their world. (They’re also called “hermeneutical resources” in some places and “epistemic resources” in others.) Several recent contributions to this literature have concerned *dominant* and *resistant* interpretive resources and how they affect concrete lived interactions. In this paper, I note that ‘using’ interpretive resources—applying them to parts of the world in conversation with others—is ‘a rule-governed activity’; and, I propose that in oppressive systems, these rules are influenced by the rules of oppression. §1 clarifies some rules governing the use of resources. §2 draws on work by Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. and others to suggest that according to the present rules of our oppressive system, it is permissible for dominantly-situated speakers to dismiss interpretive resources developed in marginalized communities. §3 appeals to Charles Mills’s work on white ignorance to propose, further, that our system’s rules make it impermissible and deserving of punishment to use resistant resources. The conclusion enumerates several further points about such rules governing the use of interpretive resources, their social effects, and some philosophical literatures.

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0. Introduction

There is a large and growing literature on communal interpretive resources—the concepts, theories, narratives, etc. a community draws on in interpreting its members and their world, also called “hermeneutical resources” or “epistemic resources”. In this paper, I propose that we can advance this literature by considering the rules that govern social uses of interpretive resources.[[1]](#endnote-1) I develop the idea that there are rules governing uses of interpretive resources in §1. §2 and §3 draw from the recent literature on *dominant* and *resistant interpretive resources* to suggest that some such rules in our community are shaped by the oppressive systems under which we live.[[2]](#endnote-2) §2 considers how the rankings of persons in oppression enable dominant group members to determine rules. §3 appeals to Charles Mills’s ‘Racial Contract’ to derive rules that make it impermissible under oppression to use resistant resources. The conclusion enumerates several further points about the rules specific to dominant and resistant resources.

1. Resources and Rules

I follow Mary Kate McGowan in taking it that an activity is rule-governed if “at least some behaviors (as contributions to the activity in question) would count as out of bounds or otherwise inappropriate (as contributions to the activity in question).” (McGowan 2009, 395) If we’re playing simultaneous solitaire and you put a nine of clubs on a four of clubs in a foundation pile, you’ve made a contribution to the activity that is out of bounds. Why is some contribution to the activity ‘out of bounds’? Because it breaks the rules—it’s against the rules of solitaire to put anything other than a five of clubs on a four of clubs in a foundation pile. If there are moves in the activity that are out of bounds, then there are rules governing the activity.

Interpretive resources are near ubiquitous for us, and there are many ways we may be said to use them. I’m here concerned with those interpretive resources that we express with language; I’m concerned only with our linguistic expressions of them in the presence of others; and, I’m concerned with such expressions that serve to interpret the world. Paradigmatically, we use these resources this way in conversation. In conversation with Lin, Carmita uses the term “sexual harassment” to describe what she experienced at work. The term expresses an interpretive resource—presumably, the concept sexual harassment. I’m concerned here only with the resources that can be expressed with terms or strings of terms. Carmita’s expression of the resource communicates to Lin a particular interpretation of a particular part of the world, namely, it interprets what Carmita experienced at work as an instance of sexual harassment. I’m concerned here only with such sincere and literal (rather than ironic or metaphorical) uses (rather than mentions) of terms and strings of terms that communicate to others a particular interpretation of a particular part of the world.

I’m concerned with individual concepts like sexual harassment as well as ‘more complex’ interpretive resources like theories or narratives. Take, for example, Jennifer J. Freyd’s ‘theoretical construct’ expressed by the acronym “DARVO”—Deny, Accuse, Reverse Victim and Offender. The resource “refers to a reaction perpetrators of wrong doing, particularly sexual offenders, may display in response to being held accountable for their behavior.”[[3]](#endnote-3) In an Opinion published in the Boston Globe, Freyd and Louise F. Fitzgerald use language that expresses the interpretive resource to communicate an interpretation of the behaviors of Donald Trump.[[4]](#endnote-4) Since the theoretical construct is used to interpret parts of the world, it is, *prima facie*, an interpretive resource. Since the resource is expressed in language to communicate an interpretation of the world, it’s the sort of use of a resource that is the focus of this paper.

In using resources this way, some ‘moves’ are out of bounds by virtue of rules governing uses of terms. It’s out of bounds to use the term “fruit” to refer to a graham cracker. It’s out of bounds to use “sexual harassment” to refer to a graham cracker. It’s out of bounds to use DARVO to interpret the behaviors of the moon. If McGowan is right, then, and an activity is rule-governed if some moves in the activity are out of bounds, then using terms to communicate to others an interpretation of part of the world is a rule-governed activity.[[5]](#endnote-5) [[6]](#endnote-6)

Where do these rules come from? I don’t hope to give a complete answer here. I’ll suggest, much more modestly, that in an oppressive system, these rules can be influenced by the system’s rules. In order to see how, we’ll need several clarifications about rules, rule-governed activities, and the rule-governed interpretation of the world.

(1) Not every behavior one performs while engaged in a rule-governed activity is a ‘move’ in that activity. If you commit a malapropism while we’re playing simultaneous solitaire, your behavior may be impermissible, but it isn’t impermissible according to the rules of solitaire. It isn’t a move in solitaire at all. Many of the behaviors we perform while socially interpreting the world aren’t moves in that activity: sneezing, sipping tea, walking, etc.

(2) When interpreting the world with others, one is often also engaged in many other rule-governed activities: spelling, using grammar, having a conversation, etc. It doesn’t follow that the rules governing these coincident activities also govern the application of terms (any more than the rules of English govern play in solitaire).[[7]](#endnote-7) Nonetheless, it may happen that when rule-governed activities overlap, their rules influence one another, as when the institutional rules governing relations between dissertators and dissertation chairs influence rules governing conversations between a dissertator and her chair, making some conversational moves impermissible, for instance.

(3) What is permissible in many (if not all) rule-governed activities is a matter of the activity’s rules and the ‘state of play’. When the foundation pile was showing a four of clubs, it was impermissible to put a nine on top; but, eventually, when the eight of clubs was played, that made it permissible for me to play my nine. As the activity evolves, what was permissible may become impermissible and *vice versa* by virtue of moves that change the state of play—or, as David Lewis calls it, the activity’s “score”. (Lewis 1979, 342-6) As McGowan puts it, “moves in rule-governed activities enact changes in what is subsequently permissible in that activity.”[[8]](#endnote-8) (McGowan 2009, 396) For our purposes, a loose and intuitive understanding of “score” in general should suffice. In baseball, the components of score include not only runs for each team but also the inning, the half of the inning, balls, strikes, and outs. Different moves are permissible when there are four balls (a runner can walk to first) than when there are three. In conversation, components of score include “sets of presupposed propositions, boundaries between permissible and impermissible courses of action,” etc. (Lewis 1979, 345) What’s important for us is that moves in a rule-governed activity change what is subsequently permissible. In socially interpreting the world with language, moves that change what is subsequently permissible include coining terms, refining definitions of extant terms, appropriating extant terms for different uses, etc.

(4) There are ‘rules of accommodation’ that govern conversation and, I propose, social interpretation. Lewis proposes that “conversational score does tend to evolve in such a way as is required in order to make whatever occurs count as correct play.” (Lewis 1979, 347) If I say, “let’s talk quietly, my kids are asleep in the next room,” I’ve entered into the conversation the presupposition that I have children. The conversation hadn’t presupposed it before, but it enters the score to accommodate my utterance. “Presupposition,” Lewis says, “evolves according to a rule of accommodation specifying that any presuppositions that are required by what is said straightaway come into existence, provided that nobody objects.” (Ibid 347) After my utterance, it is permissible to speak as though I have children, and it is impermissible to speak as though I don’t or as though it is unknown whether I do. It is impermissible, for instance, to ask whether I have any kids.

When socially interpreting the world, the score also tends to evolve in such a way as is required to make linguistic usage count as correct play, provided nobody objects. My friend Amir once presented two boxes of pasta, one farfalle and one linguine, to a group and asked, “which kind of spaghetti do you prefer?” In context, in order for Amir’s move to count as correct play in socially interpreting the world, it had to be either that the boxes had spaghetti in them (which all knew to be false) or that “spaghetti” has in its extension both farfalle and linguine, contrary to the usual rules for applying the term. Nobody objected or even remarked on it, and in the ensuing conversation, “spaghetti” was applied to pasta of all kinds. *Prima facie*, Amir’s move triggered rules of accommodation, and once his use was accommodated, it became permissible in the conversation to apply “spaghetti” to pasta generally.[[9]](#endnote-9) Such accommodations of nonstandard usage are common, suggesting that there are rules of accommodation governing social interpretation using language.

When a move in a rule-governed activity changes what it subsequently permissible in that specific instance of the activity but not in instances of the activity generally, McGowan says that the move enacts an “s-rule”. Rules that govern instances of the activity generally, by contrast, are “g-rules”. (McGowan 2009, 396) Accommodating Amir’s use of “spaghetti” enacted an s-rule, a rule that governed that one instance of social interpretation among friends. It did not enact a g-rule making it permissible in English generally to use “spaghetti” as Amir did.

Of course, however, nonstandard uses do sometimes become standard, as with “literally”, “disinterested”, “Madagascar”, etc. As McGowan notes, the distinction between s-rules and g-rules is “probably not sharp” and there is probably “a complex feedback system between the two.” (Ibid 396) We don’t need to articulate the workings of this feedback system here, but it will be helpful to have a criterion to appeal to in claiming that there is some g-rule corresponding to an observed s-rule. I submit that if some s-rule is enacted *systematically*, then there is a corresponding g-rule. (This is meant to be a sufficient but not necessary condition.) If some move in social interpretation is systematically permitted, then there is a g-rule making the move permissible.[[10]](#endnote-10)

(5) To charge that a move is out of bounds is itself a move in social interpretation. If I object to Amir’s use of “spaghetti”, then his move doesn’t straightaway enact the s-rule. Moreover, in the usual case, I make it impermissible for Amir to ignore or dismiss my challenge without comment: he must either withdraw his move or give reasons to think it is correct play. These are both moves as well. If he withdraws his use, then my move—my objection—enacts an s-rule making such use of “spaghetti” impermissible. If he adduces reasons to accept his usage, then, in the usual case, I must either withdraw my initial objection or give reasons for rejecting Amir’s defense. And so on.

(6) In socially interpreting the world, participants sometimes have relative ‘rankings’, such that what is permissible for a participant with one rank may be impermissible for a participant with a different rank. Suppose Amir is in his first year studying English and I’m a fluent speaker tutoring him. In this case, it is permissible for me to *correct* Amir’s usage, not just object to them. When I merely object, it is Amir’s prerogative to withdraw his move or defend it; when I correct his use, the presumption is that his move is thereby withdrawn, though he may query my correction, protest, and, with enough evidence, have his move reinstated. On the other hand, it is impermissible for Amir to correct my usage. He may request explanation, express confusion, etc., and, with effort, he may get me to withdraw a move I’ve made, but it is my prerogative to withdraw the move or not. This difference in our permissions is due to our difference in ‘rank’ (at the time) when it comes to social interpretation using English. Differences in rank can confer a wide variety of differences in permissions; I explore only a few possibilities below.

There’s much about these ranks that could fruitfully be clarified, but given space constraints, it’s better for our purposes here to make just a few suggestive examples and notes. (i) Rankings are sensitive to the vocabulary in use and the parts of the world being interpreted in a context. If Amir is an expert chemist, and I’m not, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is permissible for him to correct my use of “alkaline” and not vice versa; in this context, he outranks me. *Prima facie*, if X ought to give semantic deference to Y for term T, then Y outranks X with respect to term T; and, if X ought to give semantic deference to Y when it comes to interpreting parts of the world p1-pn, then Y outranks X with respect to interpreting p1-pn. (ii) Rankings can be indeterminate. When it comes to interpreting our friendship, some considerations might suggest that you outrank me and others might suggest that I outrank you. There are some clear cases of rankings in social interpretation, but in many cases, things will be more complicated and perhaps there will be no fact of the matter about interpreters’ relative rankings. I don’t see that this undermines the usefulness of appealing to rankings in cases where they are relatively clear. (iii) Rankings may be negotiated in context. I may try to correct Amir and then have my attempt corrected by him. I thought I outranked him and was thus permitted to correct him, but he adduced reasons showing that I wasn’t so permitted, and I withdrew my correction, revealing to us that he outranks me in this context. The rankings tend to evolve in such a way as is required in order to make whatever occurs count as correct play.

Finally, note that (iv) although the examples given so far suggest that rankings track epistemic positions, so that one with a better epistemic position will be ranked higher, this isn’t always the case. (See Frances 2014 for discussion of what determines one’s epistemic position.) Institutional structures, for instance, can determine relative rankings as well. Literal military rankings make it impermissible in many contexts for a private to make a move in socially interpreting the world without first requesting permission from a sergeant, even if the private is in an epistemically better position. In the next section, I consider how the rankings of oppressive systems influence the rules governing social interpretation under those systems.

2. Resources, Rules, and Ranks

McGowan points out that oppression is a rule-governed activity:

Since a system of oppression ranks people according to their membership in socially marked groups and since this ranking involves treating persons in some categories differently than persons in other categories, this system is clearly norm-governed. (McGowan 2009, 397)

In this section, I take the rankings of oppressive systems to determine rankings in social interpretation ‘under’ oppressive systems, i.e. in instances of social interpretation where the rules of an oppressive system are in force. A fruitful question in this context is, What are the differences in social-interpretive permissions afforded to different ranks? Answering this question can detail various ways by which some group is hermeneutically marginalized. Drawing on work by Gaille Pohlhaus, Jr. I claim that dominant group members are permitted to ignore or dismiss interpretive resources developed by non-dominant group members but not vice-versa. Given that a move that’s been ignored—and thus doesn’t change at all the state of play—is no move at all, it is the prerogative of dominant group members under oppression to admit the resources of non-dominant groups or not.

First, a few disclaimers. I follow McGowan in saying that people are ranked under oppression; I’ll follow Pohlhaus and Mason in broadly referring to dominant and non-dominant group members; following Mills and DiAngelo, I’ll talk about a racial system that ranks persons according to race, and I’ll refer to a gender system that ranks persons by gender. The actual rankings of our oppressive system are much more complicated. The references to independent oppressive systems and to dominant and non-dominant persons are abstractions that are useful at this early stage of analysis. White supremacy and patriarchy support and reinforce one another, and both interact further with other systems: our system is, as bell hooks says, “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. (See, e.g., hooks 2004, 17) And persons aren’t just dominant or non-dominant; not all relatively non-dominant ranks have the same prohibitions, not all relatively dominant ranks have the same permissions, and each of us occupies many social positions that trigger different permissions and prohibitions in different contexts. What I’ll say here is in these ways too general and abstract to be accurate, but it is nonetheless helpful, I propose, insofar as it gives us a broad and sketchy ‘map of the terrain’ of social-interpretive rules under oppression. From here, we can add further refinements, fill in gaps, correct oversights, etc.

What are the differences in social-interpretive permissions afforded to different ranks under oppression? This is an empirical question, with details about which ranks there are, which people are grouped together under a rank, which permissions and prohibitions are available, and how these are allotted all varying over time and place. Plausibly, many answers have been developed already to some degree in descriptions of silencing practices and practices of barring marginalized speakers from participating in social interpretation and punishing them if they do participate by stereotypes and slurs characterizing them as ‘unladylike’, ‘uppity’, ‘shrill’, etc.

Recent philosophical literature has also provided some resources for characterizing different social-interpretive permissions under oppression. Miranda Fricker’s discussions of hermeneutical injustice and hermeneutical marginalization are perhaps the most salient. Hermeneutical injustice is “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to persistent and wide-ranging hermeneutical marginalization.” (Fricker 2007, 154) A group is hermeneutically marginalized when they are disadvantaged in making contributions to the resources available for interpreting some significant area of social experience. (Ibid 153) Her well-known primary example is a case of sexual harassment in the US in the 1970s—before the term “sexual harassment” had been coined. The US work force then, as now, was dominated by men. One aspect of this dominance was that the resources widely available for interpreting social interactions and agents at work were determined mostly by men and for the purposes of interpreting experiences typical of men. That is, women were hermeneutically marginalized with respect to the resources for interpreting workplace social interactions. As a result of this marginalization, women at the time suffered the injustice of having their experiences of sexual harassment obscured from collective understanding.

Fricker draws our attention to links between hermeneutical marginalization, hermeneutical injustice, and the concrete harms of being unable to communicate to others an injustice one has suffered. Our focus here is, in the first place, on hermeneutical marginalization and its link with hermeneutical injustice. When we have in hand the resources for talking about social interpretation as a rule-governed activity, it’s clear that there are many sets of rules that can ‘realize’ hermeneutical marginalization.[[11]](#endnote-11) The social-interpretive move that is most immediately pertinent to hermeneutical injustice is, presumably, introducing a new resource; any set of rules and rankings that limits a group’s ability to perform that move would achieve that group’s hermeneutical marginalization. The rules and a group’s subordinate ranking might make it always impermissible for group members to make *any* moves in social interpretation; or, the rules and rankings might make it always permissible for other groups to reject the subordinate group’s moves, so that any new resource group members might propose must be ‘certified’ by superordinate group members; etc. In addition, in order for a new resource to be usable, it must be not only introduced but widely accepted. There are many interpretive moves that might be involved in a resource’s acceptance, but presumably one that’s necessary is its use *at all*. Rules and rankings might make it always impermissible to use resources developed by subordinate ranked groups; or they might make it always permissible to correct such uses; and so on.I don’t think it would be productive to try to articulate all possible ways that rules and rankings could disable a group’s members in social interpretation and eventuate in hermeneutical injustice. It would be productive, however, to articulate some of the *actual* ways it goes.

The literature responding to Fricker suggests some such ways. Here, I focus on the way that has been developed most thoroughly in the literature: by targeting the resources subordinate groups develop, not subordinate group members themselves, making it so that dominant group members are simply ignorant of the interpretive resources that non-dominant groups develop and use.

The context for this idea is a critique of Fricker’s conception of hermeneutical injustice alleging that she conflates (a) a resource’s being entirely unavailable in a community and (b) a resource’s being unavailable in a community’s *dominant* discourses or ideologies. (Mason 2011, Dotson 2012) Rebecca Mason charges that Fricker “glosses over […] distinctions between dominant and non-dominant hermeneutical resources.” (Mason 2011, 300) As a consequence, Mason alleges, Fricker takes it that if there is no resource adequate for interpreting some experience in a community’s dominant discourses, then there is no resource for interpreting those experiences in the community at all. Similarly, on Kristie Dotson’s reading, “Fricker seems to assume that there is but one set of collective hermeneutical resources.” (Dotson 2012, 31) This fails to recognize the possibility (and often, the actuality) that marginalized communities do indeed develop resources that are adequate to their experiences, but dominant discourses fail to recognize these resources. In turn, this oversight obscures an injustice that ought not be overlooked: that resources developed in marginalized communities are often ignored or suppressed in dominant discourses.

Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. makes a similar criticism, arguing that Fricker’s account of hermeneutical injustice fails to make it clear that dominant knowers are culpable in many cases of hermeneutical injustice: culpable for being ignorant of resources developed in marginalized communities. (Pohlhaus 2012) Pohlhaus gives an account of how knowers who participate in dominant discourses and occupy dominant social positions may refuse to acknowledge interpretive resources developed in marginalized communities, thereby effecting the injustice to which Mason and Dotson point. Pohlhaus says members of dominant groups may be presented with interpretive resources developed in and for non-dominant communities and preemptively dismiss them. She appeals to the resources expressed by “white privilege”, “date rape”, and “heteronormativity” as examples.

These epistemic resources, which could (and sometimes do) help dominantly situated knowers to know the world in light of marginalized situatedness, can be preemptively dismissed, because, attuned to what is not immediately present within the experienced world of the dominantly situated knower, such resources can appear to the dominantly situated knower to attend to nothing at all, or to make something out of nothing.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Pohlhaus suggests that interactions like this are common. The hermeneutical injustice they instantiate is “much more ubiquitous in a world where marginally situated knowers do in fact know a great deal about their experienced world and have more venues for transmitting that knowledge to others.” (Ibid 732) She points to public receptions of then-President Barack Obama’s remarks on the arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s claim that “she would hope a wise Latina would make better judgments than a white male without her life experiences,” and quotations from Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s sermons during the 2008 presidential campaign. “In all three cases, large numbers of epistemic agents drew the same distorted inferences from what was said by persons who were in some aspect of their social position marginally situated.” (Ibid 732-3) If interactions like this occur systematically in our community at present, and if systematically no one objects, then there is presently a g-rule governing social interpretation that makes it permissible to dismiss or ignore interpretive resources developed by and for non-dominant communities. Let me elaborate.

First, I take it that in a system without differences in rank, it would be impermissible in social interpretation for some participants to preemptively dismiss the interpretive moves of another. It’s against the rules for you to just dismiss my play in solitaire, my chess move, my baseball pitch, etc., Baseball games would go quite differently if one team could preemptively dismiss the other’s home runs. In social interpretation, if we’re colleagues from different departments and you deploy in discussion a term unfamiliar to me and developed by and for your field of study, I’m in violation of the rules governing social interpretation if I just dismiss the resource you used as though as it has *no* permissible applications (it applies to nothing at all) or no applications worthy of discussion (it makes something out of nothing). It’s impermissible for me to carry on as though you’ve made either a trivial move or no interpretive move at all; rather, I ought to take it that I don’t know which move you’ve made, and I should pursue avenues for finding it out—by asking you to explain the resource to me, for instance.

But in rule-governed activities that have rules of accommodation, if a move is made and no one objects, then the move is subsequently permissible (unless or until someone objects). The move triggers the rules of accommodation and, if no one objects, it enacts an s-rule making such moves permissible. Since social interpretation has rules of accommodation, then when a dominantly-situated knower dismisses a non-dominant resource[[13]](#endnote-13), if no one objects, then the dismissal move enacts an s-rule that makes such dismissals permissible.

If such s-rules are enacted systematically, then by the criterion offered in §1, (point 4), there is a corresponding g-rule. If dominant knowers are systematically permitted to dismiss resources developed by marginalized knowers at present, then there is presently some general rule governing social interpretation that makes it permissible for dominant knowers to preemptively dismiss non-dominant resources, contrary to what the rules would be in a system without oppression. The rule seems to target *the resources* for dismissal by dominant knowers, no matter the position of the knower who deployed the resource.

Moreover, the reverse—that non-dominant knowers are generally permitted to dismiss dominant resources—is dubious, at least in contexts where the rules of oppression are in force. For one thing, the default rule for rule-governed activities is, as suggested above, that participants can’t just ignore one another’s moves. In order to establish an exception to the default, those who want the exception or benefit from it have to wield considerable social power over those who don’t want the exception established or who are disempowered by it. They must be able to do such degrading things as dismiss another person’s conversational moves without suffering social, economic, or institutional sanctions. Dominantly-situated knowers in our community have this power; marginalized knowers don’t. (In the next section, we’ll see an additional reason for this asymmetry: it’s constitutive of some kinds of oppression that dominant resources be accepted and resistant resources be rejected.)

Is this asymmetric disabling of interpretive moves a kind of silencing? It would certainly be silencing if each case were like this: a language user attempts a move in social interpretation but fails, and she fails because her success is *prevented* by rules governing social interpretation under oppression. (Cf. Langton 1998, 274) Compare one of Rae Langton’s examples of silencing: “An actor has a role in which he shouts, “Fire! I mean it! Look at the smoke!”; but then a real fire breaks out in the theater, and he shouts, “Fire! I mean it! Look at the smoke!” (Ibid 274) In our terms, the actor’s second utterance is an attempted move in social interpretation, but his attempt fails because the audience dismisses his utterance as no move in social interpretation at all. In the actor’s case, the rules governing his speech at the time prevent his utterances from being taken as interpreting the actual world rather than ‘the world of the play’. But with the cases I’ve given, it’s not that attempts at social interpretation with marginalized resources are *prevented* from success by the rules; it’s that the rules make it so that their failure is permitted. But what raises the possibility that the rule makes for systematic silencing is that it put it in the hands of dominant knowers to determine whether such moves are or are not in fact moves of social interpretation. The rule makes it so that dominant knowers are systematically empowered to silence interpretive moves that use resources developed in non-dominant communities.

Three comments before moving on. First, in the foregoing development from individual encounters like Pohlhaus describes to the g-rule, I seem to assume without discussion that, systematically, when a dominant knower dismisses a non-dominant resource, no one will object. I give no reasons to believe it. A number of considerations in a variety of contexts may, of course, make it unsafe or imprudent to object to a dominant knower’s interpretive moves, but this doesn’t suffice to show that *systematically*, no one objects to such dismissals. Presumably, some dismissals of some resources are called out, and if we want to know whether they’re systematically permitted to pass for a certain term, we need to do the empirical legwork. I’m not going to attempt it here. I take it to be plausible that for many non-dominant resources, objections to dismissals are systematically absent, so the g-rule *is* in force. Perhaps a smaller point here is that objecting to such dismissals in specific cases is important for the sake of preventing the g-rule from taking hold.

A second related point is that I don’t give sufficient reason for thinking that encounters like Pohlhaus describes occur systematically. I concede this point, and I won’t try here to establish that they do. Again, whether they do or not is an empirical matter, and deciding it is beyond this paper’s purview. In the next section, I’ll consider rules that more plausibly derive from systematic features of oppression.

Third, note that what I’ve considered in this section is just one way that the rules governing social interpretation might evolve to accommodate moves commonly made by dominant knowers. Collectively, dominantly situated participants in social interpretation have available to them a vast array of social, economic, and state resources for ensuring that the moves they want made are permissible and moves they don’t want to be made are impermissible. If their collective will is to make a social interpretive move permissible or impermissible, it is likely to be done.

This can affect both rules of interpretation and interpretive resources themselves. Consider Lin Farley’s comments about “sexual harassment” in her October 18th, 2017 editorial in *The New York Times*: “the term, which once held so much promise, has been co-opted, sanitized, stripped of its power to shock, disturb and galvanize.” In dealing with this example, one would want to attend to the term’s legal and bureaucratic history and much other empirical detail, but let me suggest an hypothesis: as the term came to be codified in law and corporate policies, the rules governing its use evolved to accommodate uses and other interpretive moves from the perspective of dominant ‘genderblind’ and individualistic ideologies; consequently, the rules making the term appropriately explicated as referring to structural, gendered dominance were replaced with rules calling for its applications to individual, ungendered infringements against law or corporate policy.

3. Rules, Resources, White Fragility, and DARVO

In this section, I draw on Charles Mills’s work on white ignorance to suggest that in addition to making it permissible to dismiss non-dominant resources, oppression makes it *impermissible to use resistant resources* because their use indicates a speaker’s impermissible rejection of dominant resources. It is thus permissible to punish those who use resistant resources, with differential punishments for dominant and non-dominant knowers.

There are several conceptions of dominant resources to be found in the literature on hermeneutical resources. Pohlhaus, for instance, seems to conceive of dominant resources as those that are attuned to “the experienced world of the dominantly situated knower.” (Pohlhaus 2012, 722) Mason draws on Charles Mills’s conception of white ignorance, according to which dominant White knowers tacitly agree to accept epistemic resources (among other things) that misrepresent the world in ways that obscure the viciousness of their domination and/or make it appear justified. (Mason 2012, 302) Dominant resources on this conception are, in the first place, those that conceal, justify, or otherwise help maintain an oppressive social system. In responding to Mason’s and Dotson’s charges against Fricker, Trystan S. Goetze proposes that the resources relevant to hermeneutical injustice are *collective* resources, and these are “interpretive tools that are shared by all.” (Goetze 2018, 74)

Each of these conceptions can be useful depending on what one is concerned to articulate; for our focus on rules governing social interpretation in an oppressive system, I prefer the Mason/Mills conception. It situates dominant resources with respect to the rules of oppression directly: as we’ll see shortly, it’s essential to certain kinds of oppressive system that dominant resources be accepted. Something like this may also be true on Pohlhaus’s or Goetze’s conception, but they don’t make it explicit.

Mills’s remarks in *The Racial Contract* (1997) and “White Ignorance” (2007) suggest two rules governing the use of interpretive resources in a system of racial oppression; I’ll sketch these rules and give reasons to think there are similar rules governing the use of interpretive resources in a system of gender-based oppression. I suggest—but do not otherwise defend—the broader hypothesis that there are similar rules governing the application of resources in other systems of oppression. I don’t assume that the rules for every oppressive system—racial, sexual, colonial, etc.—are the same, and I don’t assume that the rules of each system influence the rules governing the application of interpretive resources the same way. And, I don’t want to ignore that oppressive systems are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. All I want to suggest about oppressive systems (other than those I discuss explicitly) is that it’s worth asking of each whether it has rules similar to those discussed here.

First, on Mills’s view, the epistemic resources that conceal or justify White domination aren’t just available in the system, they’re *required* for Whiteness*.*

[…] the Racial Contract[[14]](#endnote-14) prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. Part of what it means to be constructed as “white” […] part of what it requires to achieve Whiteness, successfully to become a white person […], is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities. (Mills 1997, 18; emphases removed from original)

The rules of white supremacy, according to Mills, make it so that one can’t be White unless one adopts the system of dominant epistemic resources.

Second, it is necessary for political systems established by the Racial Contract to “bring about conformity to the terms of the Racial Contract among the subperson population.” (Ibid 83) I take this conformity to include acceptance of the dominant resources, at least when engaged in social interpretation with dominant group members. While the Contract makes Whites into persons, it relegates nonWhites to a subordinate status Mills calls “subpersonhood”; since subpersons have no reason to accept the Racial Contract that subordinates them or the epistemic resources that justify and conceal their domination, their conformity to the Racial Contract must be achieved by “the two traditional weapons of coercion: physical violence and ideological conditioning.” (Ibid 83)

How might rules like these affect rules governing the application of terms? There are, of course, many ways; there will be different effects under different incarnations of white dominance (colonial, Jim Crow, color blind, etc.); and, the rules are plausibly sensitive to other social positions like gender and class. But, speaking generally, we should expect that there are rules in place making it impermissible for knowers to reject the system of dominant resources. When a knower racialized as White makes an interpretive move that seems to reject the dominant resources in a context where the rules of white supremacy are in force, then, we should expect that knower to be treated as though their move was out of bounds. The rules of white supremacy call for such interpretive moves to be *punished*, to be treated as violations of the rules. When a knower racialized as a subperson makes a move that violates the rules, we should expect harsher punishment.

Which sorts of interpretive moves might seem to reject the dominant resources? The answer will depend a great deal on context and the extent to which dominantly-positioned knowers are vigilant about detecting and punishing a speaker’s violations of white supremacist rules. But I suggest that we can see such interpretive moves being punished when (i) knowers apply the interpretive resource expressed by “racism” in certain cases and (ii) this is met with exhibitions of ‘White fragility’.

(i) In *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo points out that “the dominant conceptualization of racism” is of “individual acts of cruelty”, so that “only terrible people who consciously don’t like people of color can enact racism.” (DiAngelo 2018, 124) In our terms, say that in the system of dominant resources, the rules make it permissible to apply “racism” only to individual acts of cruelty by terrible people who consciously don’t like people of color. Following this rule makes it “nearly impossible to engage in the necessary dialogue and self-reflection that can lead to change [in the white supremacist system].” (Ibid 124) I take this resource to be among the dominant resources because it obscures structural racism, institutional racism, and individual acts that reinforce them but don’t always seem cruel.

I propose that a knower can seem to reject the system of dominant resources, then, by breaking the rule for applying “racism” in accordance with the dominant resource; one can apply it to persons who aren’t obviously terrible or who don’t consciously dislike people of color, for example, or to behaviors or attitudes that aren’t (obviously) cruel. I want us to focus on cases in which knowers use “racism” this way.

(ii) DiAngelo points out that in these cases, one is often met with responses—from those, if any, accused of racism but also other Whites in the audience—characteristic of *White fragility*. DiAngelo spells out a variety of emotions and (verbal and non-verbal) behaviors associated with white fragility (Ibid 122-3); she characterizes it as a form of bullying and as doling out punishment:

White fragility functions as a form of bullying; I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me—no matter how diplomatically you try to do so—that you will simply back off, give up, and never raise the issue again. (Ibid 112)

White fragility punishes the person giving feedback and presses them back into silence. It also maintains white solidarity—the tacit agreement that we will protect white privilege and not hold each other accountable for our racism. When the individual giving the feedback is a person of color, the charge is “playing the race card,” and the consequences of white fragility are much more penalizing. (Ibid 125-6)

The punishments and bullying of white fragility are responses to moves that are out of bounds in white supremacy. When these moves are interpretive moves, white fragility is punishment for a violation of white supremacist rules governing the interpretation of the world. This suggests that there is a rule in the oppressive system making it impermissible—out of bounds and deserving of punishment—to reject the system of dominant resources. Indeed, DiAngelo tells us that these responses aren’t just common defensiveness; they result from social forces that hold racial hierarchy in place. (Ibid 8, 114)

DiAngelo also gives support to the supposition that Whites and persons of color will receive differential punishments for rejecting dominant resources. She claims that when a knower racialized as White is punished with white fragility, it is, in part, punishment for violating ‘white solidarity’. One fails to do what Whites require of one another in the system, namely, to obscure or justify the system’s injustices. That is, white fragility is also punishment for violating the necessary condition on Whiteness of which Mills spoke: accepting the dominant resources. Alternatively, when a person of color is punished with white fragility, the punishment is even harsher.

Call resources that challenge a dominant system of resources “resistant resources”.[[15]](#endnote-15) If there are rules governing the social interpretation of the world under patriarchy that resemble the rules under White supremacy, then we should expect that (i) there are dominant and resistant resources in the gender system, (ii) some interpretive moves using the resistant resources seem to indicate a rejection of the system of dominant resources, (iii) there are practices of punishing those who make such interpretive moves, and (iv) there are differential punishments for dominant and marginalized gender groups. I’ll make points i and ii together, and then turn to iii and iv.

(i, ii) Fricker and Farley suggest that “sexual harassment” expresses a resource that challenges the dominant gender system; Pohlhaus offers “date rape”. Where “sexual harassment” applies, the dominant resources provide “flirting” to obscure how power is leveraged in sexual harassment and what is demeaning, disempowering, intrusive, and violating about it. (Fricker 2007, 153) Similarly, the dominant resources supply “seduction” as the appropriate term for interpreting date rape. (Mills 1998, 28) In addition, just as the dominant resources supply a conception of racism that permissibly applies only to terrible, hateful people, and this obscures much other racism, it may be that the dominant resources supply a conception of rape that is permissibly applied only to violent *‘stranger rape*’, and this obscures date rape and much sexual harassment as well as other sexual abuses. In most applications, the resistant terms challenge the overarching dominant interpretation according to which men are entitled to access women’s bodies for their own purposes.

(iii) Are speakers punished for using these terms in social interpretation? The costs of interpreting parts of the world with the resources these terms express should be well-known. As noted above, applications of such resistant resources are often met with what Jennifer Freyd describes as DARVO: deny, accuse, reverse victim and offender. This response, like White fragility, makes it miserable—often emotionally, economically, and physically threatening—to make an accusation of sexual offense, and it punishes those who do. It treats applications of “sexual assault” and “date rape” as interpretive moves that break the rules of social interpretation and deserve punishment.

Freyd’s description of DARVO limits it to perpetrators of sexual offenses, but it’s not only those accused of sexual offenses that punish those who use resistant resources. In the practices of victim blaming and shaming, those who follow the rules of gender-based oppression mobilize to treat those who apply resistant resources as rule-breakers. In a recent high-profile case, Professor Christine Blasey Ford faced death threats after accusing a Supreme Court nominee of sexual assault, and the same happened to Professor Anita Hill after she accused a Supreme Court nominee of sexual harassment.[[16]](#endnote-16)[[17]](#endnote-17) Other examples are sadly easy to find.

Indeed, by the interpretive rules of oppression we’re considering, the DARVO reversal of victim and offender is no reversal at all when the offender is a man and the victim is a woman. In the dominant system, applying the resistant resource to such a case *is* an offense, and the victim of this offense *is* the actual sexual offender. The resistant interpretive move accuses him of doing something he wasn’t entitled to do, but according to the dominant system, a man *is* entitled to a woman’s body (unless she is another man’s ‘property’, e.g. his daughter or wife). Those who live under patriarchy are rule-bound to treat the accuser as a rule-breaker and the accused as a victim of cheating.

One might push an analogy with white fragility and the dominant rules for “racism”: the dominant conception of racism is to white fragility as the dominant conception of sexual offenses is to DARVO. Applications of “racism” to structures or institutions or to individuals who don’t consciously hate people of color violate the dominant rules for applying the term, and they are punished with White fragility. Applications of “date rape” and “sexual harassment” violate the dominant rules governing the application of terms referring to sexual offenses—terms taken in the dominant system to refer to violent stranger rape or to property crimes against men—and they are punished with DARVO. I think this analogy is helpful for seeing the parallel between the social interpretive rules of White supremacy and patriarchy, but there isn’t space here to fully defend or clarify it. I provide it, however, as a tidy way to express the point at hand: in both oppressive systems, there are practices of punishing social interpretive moves that seem to reject the system of dominant resources.

(iv) Are there differential punishments for dominant and non-dominant group members in the oppressive gender system? As is painfully evident, and as the examples above suggest, those read as women receive harsh punishment for using the resistant resources. The same is plausibly true for members of other non-dominant gender groups—trans persons, gender non-conforming and non-binary persons—but in the gender system, the very existence of these positions challenges the dominant resources, and, accordingly, persons who occupy these positions are punished as rule-breakers for their mere existence. (See, e.g., Grant, Mottet, et al 2011) When a member of one of these marginalized groups is punished after applying resistant resources, then, it isn’t obvious what the punishment is for.

It’s not clear, however, that men face punishment at all for applying resistant resources. The situation is complicated, but I think they do. I’ll discuss some of the complications below, but note, first, that this very non-obviousness supports at least the claim that dominant and non-dominant gender group members receive differential treatment when they use resistant resources. It remains to be shown that they both receive differential punishments, though.

In the straightforward case, a man who resists patriarchal interpretations in a context where the rules of gendered domination are in force has his dominant position in the gender system questioned. In Anglophone communities over the past few decades, this questioning commonly takes the form of an accusation that the resistant man is gay. As George Yancy notes in his *New York Times* opinion “#IAmSexist”, when a man refuses—or even *hesitates*—to participate in the objectification of women, his peers often charge that he is gay.[[18]](#endnote-18) Under the rules of the gender system in force in such situations, male homosexuality is incompatible with hegemonic masculinity, the masculinity that grants a man entitlement to dominance. (See, e.g., Donaldson 1993, 648) Resisting the dominant interpretation of women’s bodies, then, immediately calls a man’s masculinity into question, imperiling his position as a member of the dominant group. Applications of “sexual harassment” and “date rape” to cases in which a woman is the victim, then, should be straightforward challenges to dominant interpretive resources, and when men challenge the resources of gender dominance, they’re ‘punished’ with the threat of losing their dominant position. As with White supremacy, accepting the dominant resources of patriarchy seems to be prerequisite for membership in the dominant gender group.

But things are seldom straightforward when it comes to men’s applications of terms like “sexual harassment” and “date rape”. I suggest that this isn’t because it’s permissible for men to challenge the dominant resources under the rules of gender oppression; rather, it’s because the systems of patriarchy and white supremacy provide ways for men to apply these terms *without* challenging the oppressive systems. First, note that if the terms are applied to cases in which a man is the victim, it’s not obvious that such applications challenge the patriarchal system of dominant resources; or, if such applications are challenging dominant resources, they don’t seem to be challenging the resources that interpret women’s bodies as objects for men’s uses. In order to challenge these resources, rather, one must apply the resistant resources to cases in which a woman is the victim.

In many contexts, however, when men apply terms referring to sexual offenses to such cases, these applications reinforce dominance rather than challenge it. Some applications enact benevolent sexism, reinforcing the rules of the gender system that position women as to-be-saved by men. And some reinforce patriarchy and White supremacy, as when White men use such interpretive moves to justify racial violence. (See, e.g., Lindquist Dorr 2004)

But again, I don’t think we should take these cases as showing that men under patriarchy aren’t punished for their uses of resistant resources. We should take them, rather, as showing that patriarchy supplies men with a number of ways to apply resources referring to sexual offenses without rejecting the system of dominant patriarchal resources. When women are interpreted as property and when it’s needful to justify violence against Black men, there are patriarchy- and White supremacy-approved applications of such resources. When a man *does* (mange to) seem to reject patriarchy’s dominant resources, though, he is regarded as a rule-breaker and his membership in the dominant gender group is thrown into question by other dominant group members.

If it’s right that dominant knowers punish language users for seeming to reject dominant resources in social interpretation, then while Pohlhaus might be right that dominant knowers sometimes dismiss resources developed by marginalized communities because these resources seem to the dominant knower to refer to nothing at all or nothing important, there is an additional reason why a dominant knower might dismiss such resources: the dominant knower is following the rules that govern social interpretation in a system of oppression. Under the Racial Contract, a dominant White knower must be careful not to seem like she rejects the dominant resources or else she may forfeit her Whiteness and all (or at least some of) the privileges and safeties that come with it. If the point holds for systems of dominance generally, then the rules make it so that dominant knowers mustn’t accept resources that challenge the dominant resources or else they might forfeit their dominance and (some of) its attendant privileges.

4. Conclusion

Interpreting the world is often (if not always) a social activity. Using terms to express interpretive resources in this social activity is rule-governed. The rules make some social uses of interpretive resources permissible, and they rule other uses out of bounds; they determine which interpretations are and aren’t socially acceptable. In this paper, I’ve given reasons to think that when interpreting the world under systems of oppression, these rules are influenced by the rules of the oppressive systems. In particular, I proposed in §2 that it’s permissible in oppressive systems for dominantly-situated knowers to dismiss interpretive resources developed by and for marginalized communities, but not vice-versa; and, I proposed in §3 that when oppressive systems produce interpretive resources that obscure or justify the injustices of the system, the rules of social interpretation in that system make it impermissible to reject these resources. I suggest that these resources (but perhaps not only these) are aptly called “dominant resources”. The rules of the oppressive system make it impermissible to reject the entire system of the dominant resources. There are presumably many ways that one might seem to reject the system of dominant resources. Here, I’ve suggested one way that is also a move in social interpretation, namely, applying a resource that seems to challenge the dominant system. These (but perhaps not only these) are aptly called “resistant resources”.

Following Charles Mills, I suggest that those who are dominant in an oppressive system will enforce these rules when they participant in socially interpreting the world; they will make moves to punish and eventually revoke dominant-group membership from dominant group members who apply resistant resources; and, they will mete out even harsher punishments to subordinate group members who use resistant resources. I’ve given evidence that under patriarchy and white supremacy, such rules do govern our use of terms in socially interpreting the world. In conclusion, let me briefly suggest several further developments and applications of these points.

(1) These rules and the costs of violating them suggest one way that dominant groups can *impose* their interpretations of the world on subordinate groups. Iris Marion Young describes the injustice of cultural imperialism as follows: the dominant group “imposes on the oppressed group its experiences and interpretation of social life.” (Young 1990, 60) If a member of an oppressed group resists the dominant interpretations of social life, the rules of the system call for the weapons of coercion. The system punishes uses of resistant resources, and it can thus make the activity of interpreting the world so inhospitable to a subordinate group member that it can be in her best interest to apply dominant resources, even if she knows they’re inaccurate, even if those resources obscure experiences important to her, even if they do damage to her sense of bodily autonomy, demean her, etc. As Mills notes, the line in the Black American folk poem, then, is plausibly a matter of survival: “Got one mind for white folks to see/Another for what I know is me.” (Mills 2007, 18)

(2) I’ve focused on cases in which speakers seem to resist the system of dominant resources by applying resistant resources. But note that there may be—and plausibly are—contexts in which one will face punishment or threats of exclusion just for failing to apply a dominant resource. In these contexts, one will seem to reject the system of dominant resources just because, for instance, one didn’t join in using sexist slurs in the locker room, because one didn’t use racist or classist terms at the country club, because one self-identifies as genderqueer, and so on. In these contexts, dominant knowers are ever more vigilant about whether the dominant resources are being rejected.

(3) The costs of using resistant resources or even of failing to use dominant resources presumably make it so that dominant resources are more often used and less often challenged. This can lend to them a purport of legitimacy and accuracy, especially for those who engage in socially interpreting the world almost exclusively with dominant group members. It may thus come to seem as though *everyone agrees* that the world is as the dominant resources interprets it to be. The world as interpreted by dominant resources will seem to be *the world*. If this is how it seems to a dominant knower, then it’s no surprise that they will respond to resistant resources as Pohlhaus says: as if such resources “attend to nothing at all, or to make something out of nothing.” (Pohlhaus 2012, 722)

But we should keep in mind that when this is a knower’s position with respect to dominant resources, he is also likely to carry on as though those presenting him with resistant resources are breaking the rules and ought to be punished. For such a knower, the dominant resources will determine what various parts of the world *are*, just as the rules of solitaire make it that certain cards *are* nines of clubs, given how they look. If you treat a nine of clubs like a six, you’re ignorant of the rules or dissembling.[[19]](#endnote-19) From the perspective of such a knower, if you apply resistant resources, then if you’ve made a move at all, you’ve misinterpreted the world. Perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps because you’re dissembling, perhaps because you’re ‘hysterical’. At minimum, you’re to be regarded as having broken the rules governing the social interpretation of the world, but you may also be in for the consequences of seeming ignorant, dissembling, unhinged, or in the extension of any of the dominant resources reserved for subordinate group members who break the rules of oppression.

(4) The social-interpretive rules of oppression will often be in force when communicating resistant resources, as was suggested by Lin Farley’s remarks on “sexual harassment” at the end of §2. This suggests the epistemic importance for resistance movements of (i) cultivating and maintaining contexts in which the dominant rules governing social interpretation aren’t in force and (ii) ‘protecting’ resistant resources deployed in contexts where the dominant rules are in force. Having contexts where the dominant rules aren’t in force, resistant contexts, will facilitate the development of resistant resources. Protecting resistant resources—i.e. objecting to their misuse, refusing to let them be preemptively dismissed, calling out those who punish their applications—will help prevent oppressive systems from stripping them of their resistant power.

(5) Just as there are different rules governing dominant and resistant applications of “racism” as described by DiAngelo, there are plausibly different rules governing dominant and resistant applications of some or all race and gender terms. For instance, Talia Mae Bettcher describes different rules for applying “woman” in dominant communities as compared to trans subcommunities, concluding that “woman” expresses different concepts in the two communities. (Bettcher 2012, 238-244) Mostly, however, philosophical discussions of race and gender terms and concepts pay little attention to the possibility that one ‘word form’ may play a role in both dominance and resistance, expressing a dominant resource here and a resistant resource there. But given that one of the goals of investigating race and gender terms/concepts is to understand the social world and how such terms/concepts might shape it, and given that dominant and resistant resources shape the social world in different (plausibly opposing) ways, the literature must take this possibility seriously. Moreover, if it’s seldom recognized (even by theorists) that a word form sometimes expresses a dominant resource and sometimes a resistant resource, then this confusion itself plausibly plays a role in shaping our social world, and it too deserves further study.

**NOTES**

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1. I use “norms” and “rules” interchangeably in this context, and I take it that when a rule holds in some context, it makes some moves permissible and others impermissible. (Cf. McGowan 2009, 396) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Note, briefly, that this is different from the claim that systems of dominance and oppression affect our *resources*, as many have noted. (See, e.g., Mills 1998 and 2007; Fricker 2007; Pohlhaus 2011) It’s not just that systematic oppression influences which resources are available but the rules for applying those resources *and others*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For an overview, see <https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/defineDARVO.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Freyd, Jennifer J. and Fitzgerald, Louise F. (2017) Trump’s DARVO defense of harassment accusations. *Boston Globe*, December 20. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/12/20/trump-darvo-defense-harassment-accusations/bTCR8QDrjLaYAwsQHCtpsM/story.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. I don’t claim here that the rules governing the application of a term determine the term’s meaning or reference. (But see Engelhardt (2018) and “conventional linguistic meaning” in Burge 1986) I don’t see why the points developed in this paper couldn’t be adopted by advocates of any theory of meaning or reference. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For ease of expression and to avoid tedious repetitions, rather than always say that the rule-governed activity is “using terms to communicate to others an interpretation of part of the world”, I’ll also refer to the activity as “applying terms to the world”, “interpreting the world”, “using interpretive resources”, “applying interpretive resources to the world”, “socially interpreting the world”, and others. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. It may be that if you break the rules of spelling or grammar so badly that no one can tell which terms you’ve tried to deploy, then you’ve failed to make a move in the activity of interpreting the world, or it may be that you’ve made a move and the rest of just can’t tell which move you’ve made; perhaps one could work these points into an argument that the rules of spelling or grammar are rules governing interpretation of the world. I’ll leave considerations like this aside and just focus on cases in which participants can tell which interpretive moves are being made. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. It’s on the basis of this insight that McGowan says that all moves in a rule-governed activity are *exercitives*. “An exercitive speech act,” McGowan tells us, “‘confers or takes away rights or privileges’.” (McGowan 2004, 95, quoting Austin 1962, 12) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. We might say that this is a special case of the rule for presuppositions—we accommodate the presupposition that “spaghetti” applies to pasta generally—or that there is an additional rule of accommodation for aberrant applications of a term. I don’t see that we need make a decision here for our purposes. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Note that such a g-rule needn’t make the move *unconditionally* permissible, just systematically permissible. For instance, the Merriam-Webster-sanctioned g-rule for slang use of “sick” as *impressive* makes it permissible in contexts where slang is permissible but impermissible otherwise. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. I take it that hermeneutical participation overlaps substantially with what I’ve been calling “social interpretation”, “social interpretation with language”, etc., but I don’t want to assume that they’re exactly the same. Perhaps there are non-social aspects of hermeneutical participation. So I’ll continue to use my terms rather than Fricker’s. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Pohlhaus 2012, p. 722 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I use the phrase “non-dominant resources” as a shorthand for “resources developed in non-dominant communities”, not as the complement to the set of dominant resources. Note, for instance, that resources developed in non-dominant communities may, like dominant resources, obscure or justify oppression. It’s bothersome that, thus, it seems there can be dominant non-dominant resources, but I take it that in the present context, since I don’t discuss any such resources, it’s preferable to follow the usage in Mason and suggested by Pohlhaus. Moreover, when a non-dominant resource obscures or justifies dominant-group oppression, this presumably doesn’t exempt it from dismissals by dominantly-situated knowers. It may still have all the features that lead dominantly-situated knowers to dismiss it. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Not the book, but an imagined contract analogous to ‘the social contract’ in political theories; the Racial Contract is a ‘contract’ among Whites that illuminates white supremacy. (Mills 1997, 7) I’ll italicize references to the book and leave references to the contract in plain text. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. As we can see with the case of “racism” above, resistant resources aren’t always obviously distinct from dominant resources. *Prima facie*, though, the dominant resource expressed by “racism” has a different extension from the resistant resource expressed by “racism”, suggesting that there are two different terms. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-anita-hill-clarence-thomas-20180927-story.html [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/21/politics/christine-blasey-ford-kavanaugh-fbi-threats/index.html [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/24/opinion/men-sexism-me-too.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. In order to enforce and maintain the Racial Contract, it was “necessary to keep an eternally vigilant eye on [subpersons] for possible signs of dissembling.” (Mills 1997, 84) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)