

Hermeneutical Weakening

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Abstract: Hermeneutical injustice is an epistemic injustice that happens when a person's experience cannot be well understood or articulated because of the problem with the collective hermeneutical resource -- a collection of concepts and words that we use to understand one's experience and to communicate with one another about it. Previously, Miranda Fricker and Rebecca Mason have suggested two types of hermeneutical injustice: Hermeneutical Gap and Hermeneutical Distortion. Fricker believes that hermeneutical injustice is a gap between hermeneutical resources, whereas Mason suggests the collective hermeneutical resource can also be distorted when the words and concepts that comprise it are inferentially related in ways that are invalid or inductively weak. However, in this paper, I identify a novel type of hermeneutical injustice that I call Hermeneutical Weakening. In a case of HW, hermeneutical injustice is neither caused by the collective hermeneutical resource being deficient nor it being distorted, but due to it being weakened. I define Hermeneutical Weakening as the loss of word significance when the lexical effect of the word is weakened due to overuse. I then differentiate hermeneutical weakening from both hermeneutical gap and distortion. In particular, I analyze the subtle differences between weakening and distortion and argue the lexical effect can also be weakened through non-literal uses of words when the literal standard meaning of words to which distortion tied is suspended. Finally, I explain the generation of hermeneutical weakening and how it is also a form of oppression of the marginalized group generated systematically under the social system.

Keywords: hermeneutical injustice, lexical effect, overuse

1. Introduction

‘I don’t want to study math again! I already have PTSD!’ ‘I cannot start a new relationship because I got PTSD after my ex-boyfriend dumped me.’ Since I learned what PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) is, I have heard numerous people who do not actually have PTSD saying something similar. They use the term ‘PTSD’ because it makes it easier to express fear caused by a certain past event. Indeed, casual use of PTSD brings convenience to their conversations. However, as an actual PTSD patient who has suffered from it for six years, when I try to articulate my pains under PTSD to my friends and hope they understand, they barely take my expression seriously.

This is an example of *hermeneutical weakening*. I argue, in this paper, that hermeneutical weakening is a novel type of *hermeneutical injustice*. In recent literature, hermeneutical injustice is understood as an epistemic injustice that happens when a person's experience cannot be well

understood or articulated. Previously, it has been suggested that there are two main types of hermeneutical injustice: *Hermeneutical Gap* (abbreviated as *HG* henceforth) as introduced by Miranda Fricker, and *Hermeneutical Distortion* (abbreviated as *HD* henceforth) by Rebecca Mason. However, as I shall show in this paper, *HG* and *HD* do not exhaust all the possible circumstances in which hermeneutical injustice, as defined above, could occur. There is still another type of hermeneutical injustice that is neither covered by Fricker nor Mason, which I shall label as 'hermeneutical weakening' (and occasionally abbreviated as *HW* henceforth).

In this paper, I dissect this third type of hermeneutical injustice by first explaining what hermeneutical weakening is. In doing so, I appeal to two concepts: *word significance* and *lexical effects*. I use specific examples to demonstrate how they are related and weakened. Then, I differentiate hermeneutical weakening from both hermeneutical gap and hermeneutical distortion. In particular, I analyze the subtle difference between weakening and distortion and respond to several potential counterarguments that Mason might make. Next, I explain the normativity problem in the cases of hermeneutical weakening. Finally, based on Fricker's theory of systematic hermeneutical injustice, I discuss how hermeneutical weakening is generated under the social structure, and I use Sukaina Hirji's model of Oppressive double binds to show the oppression of the marginalized group under hermeneutical weakening at the end of the paper.

1.1. Previous Definitions of Hermeneutical Injustice

Let's start with a reminder of Fricker's definition of hermeneutical injustice as 'the injustice of having some significant areas of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resources' [1]. Fricker believes that hermeneutical resources are a collection of concepts and words that we use to understand one's experience and to communicate with one another about it. In order to understand this definition, let us look at an example of what Fricker calls a hermeneutical gap: before the 1970s, there was not a clear concept of "sexual harassment." So, those women who were sexually harassed could hardly find words to accurately describe their experiences and make the audience understand what we now know as being sexually harassed. In this example, those women's experience was blocked out because the collective hermeneutical resources were deficient. Namely, there was no concept available for them to describe their experience. This is what Fricker calls a gap or a 'hermeneutical lacuna' between hermeneutical resources [1]. Then, in some cases, including this 'sexual harassment' example, the hermeneutical gap is unjust, so it is also a case of hermeneutical injustice.

However, Mason defines hermeneutical injustice in a different way. First, Mason clarifies several phrases in Fricker's definition: she believes 'obscured from collective understanding' is better explained as when most people do not understand the nature or normative significance of that experience, and for 'collective hermeneutical resource', Mason suggests a concept is in the collective hermeneutical resource if and only if the majority of people possess the concept and are competent with the terms that are used to express them [2]. Then, Mason's definition of hermeneutical injustice is as follows:

A subject, *S*, suffers from hermeneutical injustice if and only if

(i) *S* is unable to understand the nature or normative significance of their social experience, *e*, or

(ii) *S* is unable to describe the nature or normative significance of *e* in a way that most people can understand, and

(iii) Conditions (i) or (ii) are satisfied because the collective hermeneutical resource is deficient or distorted, and

(iv) The satisfaction of conditions (i) or (ii), and (iii) is unjust [2].

Other than the deficit in hermeneutical resources, Mason suggests that hermeneutical resources can also be distorted because the collective hermeneutical resource is 'not merely a jumble of words

and concepts but also instantiates a structure' [2]. This structure is the inferential relations between words and concepts. For example, 'koala' is inferentially related to 'animal,' 'marsupial, and 'cute.' Therefore, in Mason's definition, she raises another type of hermeneutical injustice as supplementary to Fricker's definition called 'hermeneutical distortion: the collective hermeneutical resource is distorted when the words and concepts that comprise it are inferentially related in ways that are invalid or inductively weak.

In order to see what Mason means by this definition, let us look at Mason's example: in 1950's America, many people were disposed to infer 'illness,' 'unnatural,' or 'deviant' from the concept of 'homosexuality.' As a result, homosexual people were reluctant to apply such shared concepts of 'homosexuality to themselves, and they were unable to figure out their homosexual desires [2]. In this case, the subjects were unable to understand the nature or normative significance of their homosexual experience, so condition (i) is satisfied. Then, their failure to understand their experience was not caused by the conceptual deficiency but by the distorted inferential structure of 'homosexuality,' which satisfies condition (iii). Finally, condition (iv) is also satisfied because this is obviously unjust for 50's American homos, so it is a case of hermeneutical injustice according to Mason's definition.

Mason's hermeneutical distortion is different from Fricker's hermeneutical gap because there are no concepts that can be used with a deficiency in hermeneutical resource, but with a distortion in hermeneutical resource, the concepts are there, but there is a failure in how they are applied.

However, in this paper, I will identify another type of hermeneutical injustice: hermeneutical weakening. Since there are also cases of hermeneutical injustice that is neither caused by deficiency nor distortion but by weakening, Manson's definition still needs to be revised to include this third category. To be specific, the third condition should be revised as follow: (i) or (ii) are satisfied because the collective hermeneutical resource is deficient, distorted, or weakened.

2. Defining Hermeneutical Weakening

Hermeneutical weakening happens when the collective hermeneutical resource loses its significance, so the expression used to describe and capture their experience is weakened. Now, there are two key questions that have to be answered: what exactly is 'word significance'? How is the word significance weakened?

2.1. Significance of Words & Lexical Effects

While "word significance" can mean many things, in this paper, I use the term to refer to the level of intensity regarding the psychological responses (e.g., attention, emotions) the word induces in the audience. Roughly, the more intense a response a word triggers, the more significant it is, and vice versa. To explain this more fully, let us use the lexical effect theory offered by Cappelen and Dever.

According to Cappelen and Dever, *lexical effects* are the non-cognitive effects of words that trigger people's feelings, associations, or mental images without the informational content. Unlike the cognitive effect of words, which focuses on the content and information conveyed by words in communication, the non-cognitive effect of a word influences your mood and behavioral dispositions [3]. Here is an example of the lexical effect of the word 'sunset' influences people's mood: the cognitive effect of the word 'sunset' could be an actual image of a sunset or a physical phenomenon of the descent of the sun, whereas the non-cognitive effect of the word 'sunset' could trigger a pleasant image and influence people's moods in a good way [3]. Cappelen and Dever also offer examples that the lexical effect can influence our dispositions to behave, like 'a name like Coca-Cola' can make you more likely to spend money on a bottle of liquid' [3].

If a word were to be significant, it has to be attached with a lexical effect of a matching level of significance that triggers the listener's high level of non-cognitive reaction, such as respect and attention to that word. For example, the lexical effect of the word 'God' for Christians tends to non-cognitively trigger a feeling of sacredness. To sum up, word significance is the intensity of non-cognitive reactions depending on its lexical effect.

2.2. Weakening of Word Significance: Overuse

Next, let me move to answer the question of how a word's significance is weakened. Crucially, I shall show that the significance of words can be weakened because their lexical effect can be modified when they are abused through overuse.

Let us start with an example. The expression 'bro,' which is abbreviated from the word 'brother,' was originally used to describe the relationship between two male offspring of the same parents. However, nowadays, a large proportion of the people who are familiar with American pop culture use 'bro' to address their friends, acquaintances, and even strangers from time to time just to be friendly. In such a process, people gradually added an ordinary collocation to 'bro,' which in turn modified its lexical effect. When 'bro' is used in a usual way, it no longer triggers the feeling of a special family relationship. Instead, it became a normal greeting. Most people do not take 'bro' seriously in most contexts after it loses its significance through overuse because 'bro' could be applied to anyone, just like the word 'dude.' Although some people might still recall the original lexical effect of 'bro,' it will still be difficult for them to feel anything special when someone calls them 'bro.'

Here I'd like to emphasize that what I mean by "overuse" is not simply an increase in the frequency of the use of a word but an expansion in the scope of the occasions in which we are allowed by the linguistic community to which we belong. In the case presented just now, the initial applicable scope of 'bro' might be brothers in the family, while ultimately, 'bro' can be applied to acquaintances and strangers. Therefore, 'bro' is overused not merely because it has been used so frequently but also because we expanded the occasions in which the word 'bro' is applicable.

We can see that the weakening of 'bro' might not be a case of hermeneutical injustice because it does not seem to cause any unjust outcome, so it does not meet the fourth condition in Mason's definition. Similar to HG and HD, HW is not always bad and does not always lead to injustice. Sometimes, HW can even be beneficial. For example, it might be good to weaken the aggressiveness in the lexical effect of slurs. However, there are many cases in which the weakening clearly meets the condition of being unjust. One of them is the case of 'PTSD' that I mentioned at the beginning of the paper. When 'PTSD' is overused by people who do not actually have it, its lexical effect is weakened. A person might feel bad when he knows his friend has PTSD. But after hearing many people applying PTSD to themselves simply to express fears, this term might become ordinary and no longer trigger any intense non-cognitive reaction for him. Although the weakening of 'PTSD' might not affect people like psychiatrists and therapists, this term is not as significant as the original in collective understanding. As a result, most people cannot understand the nature or normative significance of their painful experience with PTSD. It is certainly unjust that those PTSD patients suffer from not being understood because other people use the term that is only applicable to them casually and frequently. Therefore, the weakening of 'PTSD' satisfy Mason's fourth condition, so it is also a case of hermeneutical injustice.

Moreover, the hermeneutical injustice on 'PTSD' also results in additional injustice. Fricker suggests that there is additional non-epistemic injustice as a consequence of the hermeneutical injustice of sexual harassment. For example, a woman quits her job because of sexual harassment, and she goes to the unemployment office to explain why she does not have a choice, but it turns out that she is unable to communicate because of the hermeneutical gap. The fact that this woman does not get unemployment benefits is not an epistemic injustice but the additional injustice caused by the

hermeneutical gap of 'sexual harassment' [1]. Back to the case of PTSD. As a consequence of not being understood, PTSD patients might also face additional injustice, such as losing the mental and social support they need— their family members and friends do not appropriately heal their trauma in daily life because they are unable to understand the pain with PTSD [4].

To sum up, hermeneutical weakening is the loss of word significance referring to the weakening of the original lexical effect of words due to overuse. The overuse of a word includes not only using the word frequently but also expanding the original scope in which that word is applicable. HW is not always bad such as the case of 'bro,' which perhaps does not embody injustice, but there are many cases, including the weakening of 'PTSD,' that is clearly unjust. Now, let me clarify exactly how hermeneutical weakening is different from hermeneutical gap and distortion.

3. Differentiation Between HW and HG, HD

The way in which a type of hermeneutical injustice can be different from one another is that they have different problems with the collective hermeneutical resources ---- hermeneutical gap occurs when hermeneutical resources are deficient, whereas hermeneutical distortion happens when the collective hermeneutical resources are distorted so they fail to be well associated and applied. Then, in the case of hermeneutical weakening, the collective hermeneutical resource lost some of its significance. In this section of the paper, I will present how this problem that HW has differs from what HG and HD have by comparing HW to HG and HD, respectively. In doing so, I illustrate how their problems with hermeneutical resources lead to different outcomes of injustice.

3.1. Hermeneutical Weakening vs. Hermeneutical Gap

The distinction between these two is quite obvious. Take the example of 'sexual harassment' again. Those women suffered from injustice because there was an unfulfilled gap in our available hermeneutical resources. Since the term 'sexual harassment' was not incorporated in the collective hermeneutical resource, they lack the proper expressions to describe or label a significant and traumatic aspect of certain marginalized social groups, and that is what a hermeneutical gap amounts to.

However, what happened to the hermeneutical resource in HW is almost the opposite. Consider how the term *sexual harassment* is hermeneutically weakened through overuse (even though it is probably also underused in some other important sense as well). For instance, many people use the term 'sexual harassment' when they are kidding or telling jokes. You hear teenage boys complaining to their friends that they are "sexually harassing" him when all his friends did was bother him by sitting on his leg. (We may stipulate the case to show that there are absolutely no sexual intentions among them one way or another.) As a result, when someone who has actually been sexually harassed talks about his/her experience by using this term, the listeners would not be able to fully understand the pain of being sexually harassed even if they realize the speaker is not joking. The non-cognitive effect that 'sexual harassment' triggers are no longer serious or hazardous. Instead, it triggers funny, hilarious feelings. So, the listeners are in a position where they couldn't help themselves but associate the term "sexual harassment" with their previously experienced joking scenes. Consequently, this term will lose its significance, or we can call its seriousness in this case. Therefore, hermeneutical weakening is essentially not a deficit in the hermeneutical resources but a dropping in the significance of the hermeneutical resource.

In addition, HW seems to help HG illuminate the fact that the victims of hermeneutical injustice are not only speakers but a whole targeted community. With Fricker, it is not exactly clear whether the victims in the case of HG are only those speakers, whereas, in cases of HW, speakers are apparently not the only type of victims. In the case of HG, the subjects who suffer from the injustice

mentioned by Fricker are the speakers who can hardly find any words suitable for communicating their experience, whereas the subject in the case of HW, other than the speakers, also includes those to whom the weakened words apply. For example, OCD patients are already under injustice when the term 'OCD' is weakened before they say anything about their disease. The term 'OCD' (standing for *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*) clinically labels a mental disorder that involves recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced, at some time during the disturbance, as intrusive and unwanted and that in most individuals cause marked anxiety or distress (DSM2.5 table.32). However, similar as the example of PTSD discussed before, many mentally healthy people nowadays who are not clinically qualified for OCD but often use this term to describe themselves to exaggerate their uncomfortable feeling when, for example, seeing people's hair is not neatly combed, chairs not arranged neatly, etc. As those people overuse the term 'OCD,' it lost its significance. As a result, the victims of 'OCD' being weakened are not only those OCD patients who try to express their pains but also all the actual OCD patients. Even if they never express how they suffer from OCD, their mental issue will not be taken seriously because people might overlook their pains and think that it is an ordinary feeling like other people. Back to the sexual harassment example in the case of HG, we can now see that other than those women who are trying to describe their experience as speakers, those who are not trying to describe are also victims because their experience of being sexually harassed will not be well understood no matter they are speakers or not. Therefore, my theory of HW also helps Fricker's definition of HG illuminate the fact that hermeneutical injustice does harm not only the speakers but also a community as a whole.

In sum, the difference between HW and HG is relatively obvious because it is quite clear to see their different problems with the collective hermeneutical resources. However, the problem with the hermeneutical resource in hermeneutical distortion is similar to what weakening has. In the next section, I will reveal the difference between HW and HD and address a series of potential counterarguments that Mason might post.

3.2. Hermeneutical Weakening vs. Hermeneutical Distortion

The distinction between hermeneutical weakening and hermeneutical distortion is much more subtle. Manson might even argue that the hermeneutical weakening is just an instance of hermeneutical distortion because it seems like the problem with the hermeneutical resources in cases of HW and HD are not fundamentally different ---- they both happen when there is a failure to apply a word.

However, the failure of the word application in cases of HW and HD are different: under HD, the inferential structure of a word is distorted, while under HW, the significance (the lexical effect) of that word is weakened, and such a difference leads to different outcomes of injustice. Take 'OCD' for another example. The feeling triggered by 'OCD' is supposed to be uneasy----one might feel sorry and believe someone with OCD must be undergoing a tremendous amount of pain that he could not imagine. However, when the significance of 'OCD' is weakened after it is overused, it no longer triggers the lexical effect it originally had as a serious mental disease. Instead, 'OCD' is attached to an ordinary collocation, which makes people take this term much less seriously. Now, when 'OCD' is distorted, it can be inferred to other false associations such as low IQ or ugly looking that are originally irrelevant to this term. It might be helpful to understand the distinction in this case by using an analogy: if there is a cup of sugar water on the table, HD is like to mix that with other materials such as salt or beer. As a result, when someone drinks that water, he tastes something other than sugar. But HW would be like adding pure water to the cup that dilutes the sugar, so it will not be as sweet as before.

Therefore, distortion and weakening are essentially two different failures in applying hermeneutical resources. The object being distorted in HD is the inferential structure of the collective hermeneutical resource, but in HW, it is the word significance of the hermeneutical resource being

weakened and its threshold being lowered. Because HW and HD have different effects on the collective hermeneutical resources, they lead to different outcomes of injustice. We might see in some cases that weakening gives rise to distortion, or distortion somehow causes the weakening. For example, after 'OCD' loses its significance, it might be in a more vulnerable position to be distorted because when 'OCD' can be applied to anyone, it is possible that more false inferential associations will be created according to the features of those people who overuse the term and apply it to themselves. It only means they might have interactions in certain cases, but HW and HD are still different types of hermeneutical injustice based on their different problems with the collective hermeneutical resource.

However, one might still question why can't Mason just expand her definition of inferential structure to incorporate the lexical effect? If so, HW can be regarded as the lexical effect as a part of the inferential structure of a word that is distorted. Still, there are some cases of HW that do not quite fit into Mason's model.

3.3. Literal Use vs. Non-literal Use

According to Mason, each word has a standard meaning. Although that standard meaning does not change, the inferential structure related to that meaning, in which other concepts associated with the word, might change throughout time. Then, when the word has inferences that are invalid or inductively weak according to the standard meaning of the word, it is hermeneutically distorted because even though its standard meaning does not change, people would infer it to other distorted associated concepts. In Mason's example of 'homosexuality,' although the word itself still means a sexual attraction between members of the same gender, it is inferred to other concepts associated with it, such as illness and unnatural after hermeneutical distortion.

However, Mason's model of the inferential structure seems to only cover the literal meanings of words, whereas the lexical effect is also tied to the non-literal use of words because the lexical effect can still be weakened even when the speaker does not intend to use the word by its literal meaning. For example, suppose Jack is mentally healthy but is currently feeling highly stressed about an upcoming exam. When Jack chats with his friend, he says 'I have PTSD for exams!'. Then, his friend asks 'do you really think you have PTSD?' And Jack replies that "No! I am not being literal. I am just telling you how scared I am for my upcoming exams!" In this case, Jack does not use the term 'PTSD' literally with its standard meaning because he does not intend to say he really has PTSD or he has been diagnosed with PTSD. Instead, Jack is trying to express something else about his fear of the exam. Since the term 'PTSD' has a relatively high level of word significance because, as a horrible mental disease, its lexical effect triggers an intense or unpleasant non-cognitive reaction, Jack reinforces the power in his expression by using this term. As a result, the non-literal use of 'PTSD' helps Jack exaggerate his fear, which makes it easier for his listener to understand his situation. Yet, that will still, to some extent, weaken the lexical effect of 'PTSD' because Jack is actually a mentally healthy person.

Although there might be some cases in which HW happens through the literal use of words, more importantly, there are many cases where weakening happens when the expression is used non-literally, including the example of Jack's PTSD above. Then, this Mason's potential objection cannot be correct because distortion has to do with the inferential structure associated with the word and concept, and that is tied to the literal use of words. However, when you are using an expression non-literally, the inferential structure associated with the word or concept in that expression is suspended — it seems to be irrelevant to the weakening of the lexical effect. What really matters in the case of HW is the expressive power rather than the standard meaning of a word. Therefore, the lexical effect cannot be well incorporated as a part of the inferential structure. In other words, not all lexical effects

can be understood in terms of the standard meaning of the inferential structure. Since distortion only works for this model by Mason, we need something more to account for HW.

In sum, HW is relatively more similar to HD than HG, but they are still two different types of hermeneutical injustice. In order to explain that, I first distinguish a weakening of the lexical effect of a word from a distortion of the inferential structure. Then, in order to respond to a potential pushback questioning whether the lexical effect can be part of the inferential structure, I argue that the lexical effect of a word cannot be a part of the inferential structure because the lexical effect can also be weakened through non-literal uses of words when the inferential structure tied to the literal meaning of words is suspended. Therefore, the weakening of the lexical effect does not quite fit into Mason's model.

Now, we have already differentiated HW from HG and HD, but we might still be curious about how HW is generated and reinforced in society. In the next section, I analyze unjust cases of hermeneutical weakening under the whole social system by reflecting on Fricker's theory of *systematic hermeneutical injustice*.

4. Systematic Hermeneutical Weakening

According to Fricker, hermeneutical injustice can occur systematically, resulting from inequality in the social power between the dominant group and the marginalized group in society. For example, in the case of "sexual harassment", women suffered from hermeneutical lacuna because they had much less social power than men:

Women's position at the time of second-wave feminism was still one of marked social powerlessness in relation to men; and, specifically, the unequal relations of power prevented women from participating on equal terms with men in those practices by which collective social meanings are generated [1].

Because women were in a marginalized social group, they were also marginalized in hermeneutical participation. This is what Fricker called *hermeneutical marginalization* [1]. Likewise, that also happens in most unjust cases of HW. In this section, I explain how unjust cases of HW are generated systematically as oppression of the marginalized group.

4.1. Unequal Hermeneutical Participation

In addition to the general difference in social power, dominant groups also take much more control of hermeneutical resources and collective social understandings than the marginalized group [5]. Since the dominant group leads most social activities, they dominate the social discourse in law, politics, social media, etc., which in turn, makes them dominate the hermeneutical participation simultaneously. On the contrary, people in marginalized groups are comparatively powerless in social discourse, so they are hermeneutically marginalized or even excluded from hermeneutical participation. We could now apply Fricker's explanation to the case of hermeneutical weakening. As a result of the inequality explained above, when people in the dominant social group start to overuse a word, they more easily weaken the significance of that word than the marginalized group. Therefore, an unjust case of HW is essentially oppression against the marginalized group generated by unequal hermeneutical participation. That explains why the case of "bro" and "OCD" both undergo HW but have different outcomes in the realm of social justice. In the case of "OCD," the actual OCD patients are certainly one marginalized social group, similar to women being sexually harassed, so they are oppressed easily for their disadvantageous hermeneutical participation, which finally leads to injustice.

However, in the case of "bro," those actual brothers who are potential victims of HW are not collectively marginalized in the relevant sense, so oppression does not occur when "bro" is weakened because there seems to be no marginalized group in this case.

Now, under such oppression, what choice can people in the marginalized group make? In fact, the situation that the marginalized group faces can be viewed as oppressive double binds raised by Sukaina Hirji.

4.2. Oppressive Double Binds: Reinforcement of Hermeneutical Oppression

According to Hirji, people in oppressed groups can find themselves in *oppressive double binds*, which can be characterized as a system in which they are forced to choose between either cooperating with an oppressive system or resisting that system. However, no matter what they choose, they will end up reinforcing their own oppression because their personal success and ability to resist oppression are not clearly separated. Here is an example that Hirji gives. As a colored female professor, Hirji used to offer mentorship and emotional help to many students from underrepresented groups. Although she found this work highly rewarding and valuable, she also felt it was really emotionally draining and time-consuming, so she felt trapped. If she keeps doing the mentorship work, she will contribute to the diversification of the field in a way that benefits both her and other members of underrepresented groups, but she loses a great amount of time for her own research while supporting a system that disproportionately burdens women and people of color, decreasing their chances of success in the field. But if she chooses to quit this mentorship work, she helps to maintain the status quo in which underrepresented groups, including herself, are harmed. Therefore, no matter what choice Hirji makes, she will end up, to some degree, reinforcing the oppression [6]. In the oppressive double binds, your own success or survival under oppression is itself a kind of resistance, even when you get it by cooperating with the oppressive system. Likewise, your failure to succeed in the system undermines your ability to resist oppression, even when it comes as a result of you resisting oppression.

Back to the marginalized group in the case of unjust HW, they also have two options of "cooperating" or "resisting" under hermeneutical oppression. However, both options lead to a reinforcement of unjust HW. If the marginalized group chooses to cooperate with unjust HW, they cooperate with the dominant group to overuse words, which certainly reinforces their own oppression. Suppose when "OCD" is overused, but the actual OCD patients allow other mentally healthy people to apply "OCD" to themselves, they reinforce the weakening of "OCD." Consequently, OCD patients will find it even more difficult to articulate their pain caused by OCD, and their listeners will also find it more difficult to understand their pain as well. Therefore, the cooperation by the marginalized group reinforces their own oppression. Then, if the marginalized group chooses to resist the oppression of unjust HW, it will be both emotionally draining and time-consuming, which undermines their long-term ability to resist unjust HW. If the actual OCD patients never allow "OCD" to be overused and correct mentally healthy people overusing "OCD" all the time, they will waste so much time explaining their own pains, debating, or even quarreling. By doing so, their mental status would become worse, and they lose time that could be used to get rid of OCD by receiving medical treatment and therapy. According to Hirji's theory, they receive immediate harm by resisting oppression. In addition, their resistance undermines their own success and long-term ability to resist oppression. Therefore, OCD patients are in oppressive double binds. They will end up reinforcing their own oppression by either choosing to cooperate with the weakening of "OCD" or resisting it.

In sum, the generation of unjust HW is systematic oppression between socially dominant and marginalized groups. In that process, the dominant group uses their advantaged hermeneutical participation to oppress the marginalized group. However, since the marginalized group faces

oppressive double binds, they would reinforce this oppression no matter if they choose to cooperate with the oppression or resist it.

5. Conclusion

To recap: in the first section, I define HW as a loss in word significance. A word can lose its significance when its lexical effect is overused by frequently using that word in an expanded applicable scope. Then, in the second section, I argue that HW is different from both Fricker's hermeneutical gap and Mason's hermeneutical distortion by proving that HW has a distinct problem with the collective hermeneutical resource. Finally, I analyze the generation of those cases of unjust HW under the social system. In doing so, I found that unjust HW is a form of oppression not only generated by people in the dominant group controlling the hermeneutical participation but also reinforced by people in the marginalized group who are in oppressive double binds, no matter whether they resist or cooperate with oppression, they end up reinforcing it.

We know from Fricker that hermeneutical injustice is hard to detect by theorists, but HW is even more difficult to detect than other types of HI, including HG and HD. Sometimes, even if you have noticed the occurrence of HW, you still cannot do anything about it, just like my inability to cope with HW happened on 'PTSD' mentioned at the beginning of the paper. Therefore, I hope this paper can offer a comprehensive understanding of this invisible and irresistible oppression happening around us. Afterward, when people in the dominant group genuinely realize HW itself and the fact that it can cause injustice to the marginalized group, they will be aware of that when they are overusing words and understand what is going on with the marginalized group.

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