

"Dehumanizing Slurs"

Here's an abstract: Slurring terms are expressions conventionally used to express contempt for groups of persons on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, gender, occupation, and various other socially significant categories. Familiar slurring terms include “Chink”, “Kike”, “dyke”, “queer”, “Spic”, “Nigger”, and “whore”. My primary ambition is to provide a general theory of the linguistic properties of slurring words. For a full theory, a spate of questions demands answering, including three I address in this paper: (a) What are the linguistic sources of the offensiveness of slurs? (b) Can sentences containing slurs be true (or false)? (c) How should we explain slurs’ appropriation, i.e., the phenomena through which a slurring term’s offensive content is neutralized, at least in some of its uses?