

New Words for Old Wrongs

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Discussion to follow at 4pm.

This paper begins with the idea, defended by Miranda Fricker and others, that the absence of terms like ‘sexual harassment’ can constitute a significant lacuna in our interpretive resources; this lacuna is sometimes an injustice, and filling it in a major cognitive achievement. I start by diagnosing the nature of this achievement. I argue that it consists in seeing the phenomenon at issue as a novel instance of another normatively familiar one. I then argue that this assimilation brings with it cognitive costs. Using terms like ‘statutory rape’, I show that these costs include distorting our understanding of the phenomenon in question. I argue that these results have consequences for how the underlying injustices should be understood, and what it takes to overcome them.