

Emma McClure

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Education

PhD Philosophy, University of Toronto 2014-2021

Committee: Amy Mullin (Supervisor), Arthur Ripstein, and Andrew Franklin Hall

Dissertation: *Microaggressions, Blame, and Moral Responsibility*

Microaggressions are blameworthy, even if the speaker doesn't intend to cause harm and doesn't in fact cause harm. I offer a new model of moral responsibility to account for these counter-intuitive claims.

B.A. Highest Distinction, Indiana University–Bloomington 2007-2012

Majors: Philosophy Honors and English Honors, Minor: French

Areas

AOS: Feminist Philosophy and Ethics

AOC: Philosophy of Law, Critical Race Theory, Bioethics

Publications

Journal Articles

"Microaggression: Conceptual and Scientific Issues" (with Regina Rini)

Philosophy Compass 15.4: 1-11 (February 2020). 5000 words

"Theorizing a Spectrum of Aggression: Microaggressions, Creepiness, and Sexual Assault"

The Pluralist 14.1: 91-101 (Spring 2019). 4500 words

Book Chapters

"Escalating Linguistic Violence: From Microaggressions to Hate Speech"

in *Microaggressions and Philosophy*, eds. Lauren Freeman and Jeanine Weekes Schroer: 121-145

New York: Routledge, 2020. 10,000 words

"Do Your Exercises: Reader Participation in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*"

in *Pedagogical Investigations: A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education*

eds. Michael A. Peters and Jeff Stickney, 147-159. Singapore: Springer, 2017. 6000 words

Blog Posts

"How to Support Graduate Student Teaching in the Time of COVID-19"

(with Arianna Falbo and Heather Stewart) *Blog of the APA*, May 2020

"Supporting Graduate Students During COVID-19"

(with Heather Stewart and Arianna Falbo) *Blog of the APA*, April 2020

"Syllabus Showcase: Emma McClure, Existentialism" *Blog of the APA*, July 2019

Awards

Research

Centre for Ethics Doctoral Fellowship: 2019-20, \$2500 CAD

Douglas Greenlee Prize: 2018, \$250 USD

APA Graduate Student Travel Awards: April 2019, April 2018, April 2015

Halbert Fellowship: 2017-2019, \$3500 CAD

Ontario Trillium Scholarship: 2014-2018, \$120,000 CAD

Teaching

Faculty of Arts and Sciences Superior Teaching Award: 2020, \$1500 CAD

Martha Lile Love Award: 2019, \$250 CAD

Talks

Refereed Presentations

"Building Philosophical Reading and Writing Skills" (co-authored with Alex Koo)
American Association of Philosophy Teachers Workshop (July 2020) *Postoned due to COVID-19

"Are Microaggressions a Collective Harm Problem?"
Canadian Philosophical Association (June 2020) *Cancelled due to COVID-19

"Microaffirmations, Privilege, and a Duty to Redistribute"
Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy (October 2019)

"Microaggressions, Torts, and the Right to Apology"
Main Program at the APA Pacific (April 2019)
Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy (September 2018)

"From Hate Speech to Microaggressions: A Spectrum of Dominating Speech Acts"
Society for Analytical Feminism at the APA Pacific (April 2019)

"What's Aggressive about Microaggressions?"
Main Program at the APA Pacific (April 2018)
Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (March 2018)

"A Duty to Avoid Committing Microaggressions"
Canadian Philosophical Association (May 2017)

"In My Thoughts and In My Words: The Morality of William James and Iris Murdoch"
William James Society at the APA Pacific (April 2017)

"Beyond 'Will to Believe': A Historical Solution to the Wrong Kind of Reasons Debate"
Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (March 2016)

"How Best to Use the IAT: The Moral to Draw from the Moral Responsibility Debate"
MAP@Leeds Conference on Implicit Bias (October 2015)

"Benevolence and Its Effects in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*"
Symposium Session at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific (April 2015)

Refereed Posters.....

"Microaffirmations and Apology as Remedies for Microaggressions"

Society for Philosophy and Psychology (July 2019)

"Frankenstein's Monster as Manipulative Gaslighter"

Health Humanities Consortium (April 2018)

Invited Presentations.....

"Countering Bullying, Harassment, and Microaggressions"

MAP Panel at the APA Eastern (January 2021)

"Microaffirmations, Privilege, and a Duty to Redistribute"

Centre for Ethics, University of Toronto (October 2019)

"Microaggressions as Collective Harms but Individual Wrongs"

Halbert Fellowship Workshop (February 2018)

"A Duty to Avoid Committing Microaggressions"

Centre for Values and Social Policy, University of Colorado Boulder (April 2017)

Campus Talks.....

"Introduction to Philosophical Writing"

First-Year Undergraduate Philosophy Mentorship Program (October 2020)

"Philosophy and Mental Health" (with Alexandra Gustafson and Andriy Bilenkyy)

Philosophy Undergraduate Orientation (September 2020)

"Conferences and Networking"

Philosophy Professional Development Seminar (January 2020)

"Agency and the Ethics of Conversation"

Undergraduate Philosophy Course Union (November 2016)

"Sustaining Narratives: A Story in Defense of Stories"

Women in Philosophy Conference (November 2014)

Invited Comments.....

Comments on Rachel Achs' "The Impermissibility Criterion of Blameworthiness"

Athena in Action (June 2018)

Comments on James Lincoln's "Moral Ignorance"

Main Program at the APA Central (February 2018)

Comments on Lucia Schwarz's "First Order Practical Philosophy for Error Theorists"

Canadian Philosophical Association (May 2017)

Comments on Benjamin Wald's "Moral Worth and Right Reason"

Main Program at the APA Eastern (January 2017)

Comments on Luis Oliveira's "Deontological Evidentialism and the Principle that *Ought Implies Can*"

University of Toronto Graduate Conference (May 2016)

Teaching

Course Instructor for Philosophy Department.....

Bioethics: Caring for Vulnerable Populations **Summer 2020**

Responsible for online course design, lecture videos, and managing discussion leaders

Decolonial and Intersectional Feminisms **Winter 2019**

Responsible for course design, delivery of lectures, and grading 40 students

Feminism and the World Wide Web **Summer 2018**

Responsible for course design, delivery of lectures, and grading 25 students

Introduction to Existentialism **Summer 2017**

Responsible for course design, delivery of lectures, and grading 25 students

Tutorial Leader for Computer Science Department.....

Embedded Ethics in CS Team **Winter 2021**

Developing and delivering embedded ethics modules in Computer Science classes

Tutorial Leader for English Language Learning Program.....

ELL Reading to Write Program **2018-20**

Trained Philosophy graduate students in reading and writing pedagogy

Tutorial Assistant for Philosophy Department.....

Philosophy Essay Clinic (Winter 2021, Fall 2020), Bioethics (Winter 2020, Winter 2018, Fall 2016, Summer 2016), Law and Morality (Fall 2019), Philosophy of Human Sexuality (Summer 2019, Winter 2018), Biomedical Ethics (Fall 2017), Introduction to Ethics (Winter 2017), Medical Research Ethics (Winter 2016), Business Ethics (Fall 2015)

Service

Service to the Profession.....

Vice Chair of American Philosophical Association's Graduate Student Council (2019-20)

Crafted COVID-19 Recommendations for Departments (with Arianna Fablo and Heather Stewart)

Successfully advocated for graduate student voting rights within APA (with Sahar Joakim)

Secretary of American Philosophical Association's Graduate Student Council (2018-19)

Represented graduate students as a non-voting member of APA Board of Directors (with Blake Hereth)

Served as graduate student liaison to APA Committee on Teaching

Referee for: *Perspectives on Psychological Science, Hypatia, Social Theory and Practice*

Departmental and University Service.....

Organizer of Prisons and Policing Reading Group (2020-21)

Co-Founder of Graduate Philosophy Mental Health and Disability Caucus (2020)

Philosophy Department Graduate Executive Committee Member (2017-18; 2020-21)

Organizer of the Ethics of Pedagogy Speaker Series at the Centre for Ethics (2019-20)

President of Graduate Philosophy Student Union (2017-18)

Philosophy Graduate Conference Organizing Committee Member (2014-16) & Co-Chair (2016-17)

Graduate Student Union Representative (2014-2015)

Professional Associations

American Philosophical Association
Canadian Philosophical Association
Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy
Phi Beta Kappa (inducted December 2010 at Indiana University)

Languages

French (Advanced), Spanish (Beginner)

Graduate Course Work

20th Century Analytic and Continental Philosophy:

Continental and Analytic Theories of Truth, Lambert Zuidervaart
Controlling Attitudes, Philip Clark (Audited)
Hannah Arendt, Rebecca Comay
Metaethics, Andrew Sapielli
Philosophy of Psychology, Jennifer Nagel (independent study)
Pragmatism, Cheryl Misak
Proseminar, Jonathan Weisberg
Questions, Arguments, and Open Question Arguments, Philip Clark
Wittgenstein, Sonia Sedivy
Wittgenstein and The Philosophy of Education, Sonia Sedivy (independent study)

History of Western Philosophy:

Consciousness Then and Now, Marleen Rozemond and Bill Seager
Plato, Jennifer Whiting (Audited)
Plato and The Sophists, Rachel Barney

History of Non-Western Philosophy:

Daoism, Vincent Shen

Dissertation Abstract

Microaggressions—small, everyday slights that can accumulate into serious damage when repeated over time—capture a common experience of marginalized groups, yet skeptics raise significant worries about how best to recognize and respond to these slights. Descriptively, are microaggressions a unified type or a hodgepodge of discrete examples? Normatively, can perpetrators be blamed, especially if their microaggressions are unintentional and only become harmful when repeated by other agents? My dissertation engages with both these debates: it presents an account that unifies different types of microaggressions and demonstrates that blame is warranted.

I clarify what's aggressive and what's micro about microaggressions by positioning microaggressions and hate speech on a spectrum of linguistic aggression. In the 1980s, critical race theorists argued that hate speech is aggressive, and I show how their arguments can be applied to modern microaggression debates. Like hate speech, microaggressions threaten and constrict the autonomy of their targets; however, the two differ in that hate speech is overtly threatening, whereas microaggressions are covert, masking their aggressive content behind seemingly innocuous and reasonable meanings.

I further flesh out this spectrum of aggression by offering a new taxonomy of microaggressions. Philosophers have uncritically employed psychologist Derald Wing Sue's categories of microinsult and microinvalidation, even though his examples of microinsult also invalidate their target, and vice versa. I draw from Black, POC, and Trans Feminists to revise these categories: microinsults perpetuate constrictive stereotypes about the "natural" behavior of marginalized groups, while microinvalidations demonstrate ignorance of systemic oppression in a way that silences members of marginalized groups.

Having answered descriptive challenges, I turn to normative questions. First I engage in some ground clearing. Many moral philosophers treat microaggressions as a subset of collective harm problems, akin to climate change. While I agree that microaggressions contribute to collective harm at both the societal and individual level, I argue that a full account of moral responsibility for microaggressions must also capture their individually wrongful features: dehumanization and denial of oppression.

Microaggressive perpetrators dehumanize their targets, even if the targets are not (immediately) harmed by that dehumanization. To model this wrongful treatment, I draw from tort law—a branch of law that adjudicates private wrongs between individuals. In my Trespass Model, consent is primary. Just as I have the right to object to incursions onto my property, so too do I have the right to object to microaggressive attacks on my mental capacities. Microaggressions violate my right to control my own mind by forcing me to see myself through demeaning, constrictive stereotypes.

My Negligence Model focuses on failures of due consideration. When perpetrators deny the existence of systemic oppression, they demonstrate a lack of care for marginalized groups. Just as I can object when I am harmed because a business failed to take sufficient safety precautions, I can object when a microaggressive perpetrator failed to foresee the harm their careless words could cause. Negligent perpetrators should have taken steps to correct their dangerous ignorance.

In addition to showing why microaggressive perpetrators are blameworthy, my Tort Law Models also reveal the appropriate remedy: apology. On other accounts, apologies are mysterious—why apologize for blameless microaggressions? But I argue that apologies undo the wrong, restoring the target to their rightful position of equality. Furthermore, apologies can also mitigate the harm, helping the target avoid damaging uncertainty and self-doubt. Thus, my dissertation provides an ameliorative account of both what microaggressions are and how we should respond to them.