

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

Philosophy Faculty Research and Publications

Philosophy, Department of

12-2021

Moral Encroachment and the Epistemic Impermissibility of (some) Microaggressions

Javiera Perez Gomez

Marquette University, javiera.perezgomez@marquette.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil_fac



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gomez, Javiera Perez, "Moral Encroachment and the Epistemic Impermissibility of (some) Microaggressions" (2021). *Philosophy Faculty Research and Publications*. 875.
https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil_fac/875

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

Philosophy Faculty Research and Publications/College of Arts and Sciences

This paper is NOT THE PUBLISHED VERSION.

Access the published version via the link in the citation below.

Synthese, Vol. 199, No. 3-4 (December 2021): 9237-9256. [DOI](#). This article is © Springer and permission has been granted for this version to appear in [e-Publications@Marquette](#). Springer does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Springer.

Moral Encroachment and the Epistemic Impermissibility of (some) Microaggressions

Javiera Perez Gomez

Department of Philosophy, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

Abstract

A recent flurry of philosophical research on microaggression suggests that there are various practical and moral reasons why microaggression may be objectionable, including that it can be offensive, cause epistemic harms, express demeaning messages about certain members of our society, and help to reproduce an oppressive social order. Yet little attention has been given to the question of whether microaggression is also *epistemically* objectionable. This paper aims to further our understanding of microaggression by appealing to recent work on moral encroachment—the idea that knowledge is sensitive to the moral stakes of believing—to argue that microaggression can be irrational in a distinctively epistemic sense, as it can involve relying on an epistemically unwarranted belief. This view suggests that the notion of epistemic justification may come apart from the notion of epistemic blame.

Keywords

Microaggression; Moral encroachment; Epistemic blame; Microaggression pedagogy

Intro

'Microaggression' refers to the subtle but commonplace verbal or nonverbal slights or insults that send harmful messages to and about members of certain groups. Standard examples of microaggression include asking an Asian-American where she is *really* from and 'complimenting' a Black American for being articulate. In each case, a questionable, group-based message is expressed: that Asian-Americans are not (truly) American, and that Blacks are not (normally) articulate. Importantly, while a single such incident may seem innocuous, microaggression is rarely isolated; it occurs repeatedly and in various spheres of life. This suggests that each additional microaggressive incident can be quite harmful. Indeed, psychological studies on microaggression suggest that repeated exposure to microaggression is linked to various psychological and physical effects: from mere annoyance or confusion, to anxiety, depression, trauma, self-doubt, lower self-esteem, and even fatigue (Auguste et al., [2]; Sue, [52], p. 6, p. 149). Furthermore, a recent flurry of philosophical research on microaggression has identified some of the various reasons why microaggression may be practically and morally objectionable, including that it can induce negative psychological and phenomenological states (Fatima, [19]; Perez Gomez, [42]), cause certain epistemic harms (Fatima, [19], [20]), express demeaning messages about certain members of our society (Perez Gomez, [42]), and help to reproduce an oppressive social order (Freeman & Stewart, [22]; Friedlaender, [23]; McTernan, [38]). This research has gone a long way in helping us understand the moral impermissibility of microaggression, but the question of whether microaggression is also epistemically objectionable—for example, because it involves acting on an epistemically unwarranted belief—has received little attention.

To be sure, there are several ways of devising an answer to this question. Appealing to the traditional view in epistemology, according to which only truth-relevant factors can affect the epistemic status (e.g., justification) of an epistemic state (e.g., a belief), one could grant that microaggression is sometimes impermissible for practical or moral reasons yet hold that it need not also be *epistemically* impermissible. For example, one might argue that, given the right kind of evidence, it could be rationally permissible for an agent to believe that 'Blacks are not articulate,' but practically or morally impermissible to act on such a belief (e.g., by 'complimenting' a Black person for being articulate) if doing so would offend, harm, or demean. But while this view may seem plausible to some, it is particularly counterintuitive to others, in part because it suggests that it can be epistemically unproblematic to believe, for example, that 'Blacks are not articulate'. Fortunately, there is an alternative way of conceiving of the relation between moral permissibility and epistemic permissibility. One could argue, as an increasing number of epistemologists have recently done, in favor of the 'moral encroachment' thesis: the idea that the moral features of a case—and not just truth-relevant factors—can affect the epistemic status of an epistemic state.^[1] On this view, the moral reasons against committing a microaggression could offer epistemic (albeit nonevidential) reasons for withholding belief, such that microaggression could at least sometimes be irrational: for example, it could involve acting on an epistemically unwarranted belief.^[2]

My aim in this paper is to advance our philosophical understanding of the epistemic (im)permissibility of some microaggressions by examining the emerging literature on the *moral* impermissibility of microaggression in relation to recent work on moral encroachment.^[3] In Sect. 2, I survey the recent philosophical literature on microaggression, emphasizing some of the various practical and moral reasons why microaggression can be objectionable. Section 3 then offers an overview of the moral encroachment thesis: in particular, the idea that the moral risks of error can raise the level of evidential support required for an agent to justifiably rely on her belief. With these concepts in hand, I argue, in Sect. 4, that microaggressions are sometimes epistemically impermissible. Section 5 then considers an objection that reveals that the notion of epistemic justification can come apart from the notion of epistemic blame. I conclude with a note about the practical value of the more

general project of identifying the ways in which microaggression may be epistemically objectionable for microaggression pedagogy.

Microaggression

The examples of microaggression I mentioned above—of asking an Asian-American where she is really from, and of 'complimenting' a Black American for being articulate—are quite straightforward. Each seems to involve a questionable group-based message or attitude: that Asian-Americans are not (truly) American, and that Blacks are not (or tend not to be) articulate. Other cases of microaggression can be much more subtle, however. Consider the following example:

Francisca. Francisca, an American of Chilean descent, and her friend, Ethan, an American (of irrelevant descent), go to a potluck together, where Ethan notices that there is 'rice and beans'. Ethan enthusiastically exclaims to Francisca "There's rice and beans!", successfully implying that he believes Francisca likes rice and beans because she is Hispanic. Francisca wonders whether Ethan really believes that she likes rice and beans because she is Hispanic, and considers simply replying "Sorry, I'm of Chilean descent, and that's not something Chileans eat."^[4]

At first glance, this case may not clearly constitute a microaggression; indeed, calling it a microaggression may seem forced. However, the emerging philosophical literature on microaggression suggests that we can appeal to various features of this action that might make it count as a practically or morally objectionable microaggression. In what follows, I offer a brief overview of the main trends for identifying microaggression in the current literature, highlighting the various practical or moral reasons why microaggression can be objectionable. My goal is to begin to disentangle the idea that microaggression may, in light of the moral facts surrounding it, at least sometimes be epistemically impermissible.

There are several accounts of microaggression in the emerging philosophical literature. On one set of views, a central feature of microaggression is that the microaggressor is motivated by an implicit bias.^[5] Ethan's exclamation is a microaggression, on this kind of view, if it is causally motivated by a prejudicial attitude about Hispanics (e.g., that 'Hispanic' is a homogenous culture). Being motivated by implicit bias is also why microaggression is morally objectionable on this kind of view. The idea seems to be that when an agent commits a microaggression, thereby acting on an implicit bias, she treats the other person in a wrongful (e.g., unfair) manner. Thus, a moral reason against committing microaggression, on this kind of view, is that doing so involves the wrongful treatment of another person.

Another set of views holds that a central feature of microaggression is that it expresses a certain kind of message to and about members of certain groups.^[6] Ethan's exclamation is a microaggression, on this set of views, if it expresses a certain kind of group-based message: for example, that 'Hispanics eat rice and beans' or that 'Hispanics are a homogenous culture'. These messages, the idea is, can be false or culturally insensitive, and can thereby cause Francisca negative psychological or phenomenological states (e.g., feeling alienated or like she does not belong). In my own defense of this view, I have argued that some messages can be worse than others: for instance, a microaggression that expresses a message such as 'Blacks are inarticulate' would seem to be very different from one that expresses a message that 'Hispanics eat rice and beans' (Perez Gomez, [42]). Whereas the latter "involves a description of what Hispanics do, without making an evaluative judgment about Hispanics," the former "does involve an evaluative judgment about Blacks" (Perez Gomez, [42], p. 20). The thought is that only when expressing the former does the microaggression *demean* its recipient. On this view, then, there may be practical reasons against committing microaggressions that express messages that are culturally insensitive or offensive: that doing so would be impolite. But there are also *moral* reasons against

committing microaggressions that demean: doing so would involve treating another person disrespectfully (see also O'Dowd, [40]).

Another set of views has it that a central feature of microaggression is that it causes certain kinds of phenomenological states: for example, anxiety, lower self-esteem, or self-doubt.[7] On this set of views, Ethan's comment counts as a microaggression because, as a causal result of his comment, Francisca experiences a harmful phenomenological state: for instance, a state of *attributional ambiguity*—that is, a state of self-doubt regarding whether or not a microaggressor was motivated by prejudice (Fatima, [19]; Friedlaender, [23]; Rini, [45], [45]; Sue, [53]).[8] This view suggests that if microaggression causes, for example, annoyance or offense, then one has a practical reason against committing it, whereas if it causes harm, one has a moral reason against committing it.

Lastly, some views hold that a central feature of microaggression is that it perpetuates an oppressive social order.[9] On this kind of view, Ethan's comment is an example of a microaggression if it stems from, or helps perpetuate, oppressive social conditions (e.g., conditions in which there is a pervasive stereotype that Hispanics are a homogenous group). This suggests that on this kind of view, there are moral reasons against committing microaggression: if the relevant action would causally contribute, or risk contributing, to perpetuating the oppression of certain members of our society.

As the preceding suggests, 'Francisca' would seem to count as a microaggression on any of these sets of views. Moreover, it may be objectionable for a variety of practical and moral reasons. It's important to note, however, that the strength of these reasons may vary depending on the details of the case. As mentioned earlier, a widely agreed upon characteristic of microaggression is that while a single microaggression may seem innocuous, a pattern of such slights or insults can be quite harmful.[10] Yet there may be cases in which the practical or moral reasons against committing a microaggression are not strong enough, or are too cumbersome, to outweigh the reasons one has *in favor of* engaging in an action (see Perez Gomez, [42]). Some versions of 'Francisca' may offer support for this point. Suppose, for instance, that Ethan's comment is an isolated incident in a context in which generic generalizations such as 'Hispanics eat rice and beans' tend to be accurate. In this case, if Francisca were briefly annoyed or confused by Ethan's comment, this annoyance or confusion would not seem to generate a strong enough moral reason for Ethan not to tell her that there's rice and beans. Indeed, many of us might even agree that in such a case it would not be unreasonable to expect Francisca to be charitable toward her microaggressor, and, perhaps, to explain to him why his comment is odd.

Nevertheless, Ethan's reason against telling Francisca about the rice and beans would presumably become much stronger on other versions of 'Francisca'. Suppose that Francisca is subject to similar kinds of treatment on a regular basis and in various spheres of life. Imagine, for instance, that, because she is Hispanic, her coworkers often assume that she is a salsa dancer, her neighbors often mistake her for a maintenance person, and her colleagues at professional events often mistake her for a janitor or another kind of service worker. Many of us would agree that in this case, it would *not* be reasonable to expect Francisca to react nonchalantly at every single additional incident of the same kind (see Perez Gomez, [42]). Rather, it seems like there may be a point at which one single such incident would be particularly painful, as it could cause a variety of harmful psychological or physical states—from feeling alienated or even denigrated, to experiencing anxiety, headaches, or fatigue. In such cases, then, a potential microaggressor would seem to have a rather strong corresponding reason against committing a microaggression. In 'Francisca,' if Ethan acts on his belief that 'Francisca eats rice and beans because she is Hispanic' when she is subject to this kind of treatment repeatedly and over an extended period of time, Ethan seems to participate in a pattern of slights that can intensify in harm, which would thereby strengthen his reason against doing so. This suggests that the worse the harm an agent risks by committing a microaggression, and the higher the risk of that harm, the stronger the reason she has against committing it.[11]

In short, there are various ways of conceiving of what makes an action a microaggression as well as of why microaggression may be practically and morally objectionable. Moreover, the reasons why microaggression may be objectionable can be strengthened in light of the intensity of the (risk of) harm of committing a microaggression. As I mentioned above, I believe that there may also be *epistemic* reasons against committing microaggressions: for instance, if doing so involves acting on an epistemically unwarranted belief. In what follows, I argue that the moral features of microaggression discussed here might impact the justification of the belief on which a microaggression is based. To see how this might work, it will be useful to understand the moral encroachment thesis. The next section offers an overview of this thesis.

Moral encroachment

Epistemologists have traditionally agreed that whether a belief is justified or counts as knowledge depends only on truth-conducive (e.g., evidential) factors. Consider an example from Basu ([4]): both (a) that a few minutes have passed since you turned on the kettle, and (b) the sound of the kettle whistling give you evidential reasons for believing that the water has boiled. That is, both of these reasons are relevant for the truth of whether the water has boiled. Moreover, of these reasons, only one is *sufficient* for believing that the kettle has boiled: as Basu puts it, "only the sound of the whistling raises the probability to a degree that is sufficient for being justified in believing that the kettle has boiled" (Basu, [4], p. 11). Moral encroachment departs from traditional views that hold that only truth-relevant factors can affect whether a belief is sufficiently justified or counts as knowledge by holding that whether or not you have sufficient evidence for your belief to be justified or to count as knowledge may depend not only on truth-relevant factors, but also on *moral* ones.[12] Specifically, the idea is that the moral stakes of error (e.g., of harming or wronging someone) can offer epistemic reasons for withholding belief by raising the level of evidential support required for a belief to be justified and thereby to count as knowledge, such that believing anyway would be epistemically impermissible. In this section, I explain this idea in greater detail in order to examine, in Sect. 4, whether moral encroachment can, in light of the moral facts surrounding microaggression discussed in Sect. 2, elucidate some epistemic reasons why microaggression may be objectionable.

Moral encroachment is usually motivated by cases in which an agent has substantial evidential support for some epistemic attitude (e.g., a belief), yet seems to do something wrong, or at least blameworthy, in having the relevant belief. Consider the following example (adapted from Basu, [5]):

Dinner. The conference participants gather at a restaurant for a post-conference dinner. Gloria, a conference presenter who is the only nonwhite person in the party, and who is wearing a black blouse that resembles the staff's uniform, steps to the bathroom. As she returns to the dinner table, Harry, another conference participant, asks her "Can I have some water, please?"[13]

It's worth noting straightaway that 'Dinner' is awfully representative of current social conditions—at least in the U.S., where the difficulty of attaining ends involving, for example, education, certain occupations, and earnings seems to vary depending on characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, ability, among others.[14] Indeed, the most recent American Philosophical Association (APA) report on "Demographic Statistics on the APA Membership," only 5% (229/4,581) of APA members who reported a race or ethnicity identified as Hispanic/Latinx.[15] This number is quite low if we consider that Hispanics currently make up 18.5% of the current U.S. population.[16] Moreover, this number may be in part the result of injustice—at least if we consider that the reason that Hispanics and other minorities have been excluded from certain professions stems from a history of unjust legal and social treatment of them.

Assuming these background conditions, 'Dinner' represents a case in which Harry seems to have substantial evidential (statistical) support for believing that Gloria is a server: in this particular scenario, that a person is

Hispanic is a good indicator that she is not a conference participant.[17] Moreover, Gloria is also wearing a black blouse, which is similar in color to the staff's uniform. On a traditional view of epistemology, one might think that if Harry does something wrong, it's on a moral level—not on an epistemic one. Appealing to this view, one might say that while Harry may have a moral reason against acting on his belief that Gloria is a server (e.g., he might demean her), his belief may nonetheless be justified in light of the evidence. By contrast, supporters of moral encroachment believe that, given the moral features of the case (i.e., that Harry demeans Gloria if he acts on his belief and it is false), there is something wrong with Harry's *belief*, such that when he acts on it, he acts irrationally in a distinctively epistemic sense: he relies on a belief that, given the moral features of the case, is not epistemically warranted for him.[18] On this view, Harry does something wrong (or at least blameworthy) when he relies on his belief that Gloria is a server for distinctively epistemic reasons—not for practical or moral ones.

This thought is an extension of what is known as the 'pragmatic encroachment' thesis: the view that the *practical* features of a case can affect the epistemic status of a belief.[19] According to pragmatic encroachment, an agent can fail to know some proposition as a result of the practical features of the situation he finds himself in. In some cases, the thought is, the practical stakes of relying on a false belief can be so high that taking the risk of relying on the belief anyway ceases to be rational. On the view I examine below, in some cases the stakes can be so high that they offer reason to withhold belief, such that in order to believe justifiably, the agent would need more or stronger evidence in favor of belief. In such cases, if the agent nonetheless acts on the relevant belief, the thought is, he acts irrationally for a distinctively epistemic (and not practical or moral) reason, since he relies on a belief that is not epistemically warranted for him.

Pragmatic encroachment is often motivated by what is known as the 'reliance' conception of justified belief and knowledge. According to it, a belief is justified and thereby counts as knowledge only if one can rely on it when acting. This idea is illustrated in the Knowledge-Action Principle, which holds that if an agent knows that *p*, she is rationally permitted to act on *p*. [20] According to this principle, if an agent cannot rationally rely on a belief that *p*, then she does not know that *p*. Consider a classic example from the pragmatic encroachment literature: whether you know the proposition 'This is an almond butter sandwich' can depend on the stakes of believing it. You can know it in a low-stakes scenario: for example, when you prefer almond butter to peanut butter; but can fail to know it in a high-stakes scenario: for example, when you are allergic to peanut butter (Ross & Schroeder, [47], p. 261). This is because if you know that 'This is an almond butter sandwich', you are rationally permitted to act on this belief (e.g., by eating the sandwich). But when the stakes are high because you are allergic to peanut butter, it would not seem rational for you to rely on your belief without further or stronger evidence. And if it is not rationally permissible for you to rely on your belief that 'This is an almond butter sandwich', then your belief is not knowledge.

According to pragmatic encroachment, then, the practical stakes of relying on a belief can raise the amount or the strength of the evidential support required for a belief to count as knowledge.[21] One plausible way in which the practical features of a case can impact whether a belief is justified or counts as knowledge is if the practical stakes of relying on a false belief are so high that they raise the level of evidential support required for the belief to be justified and to thereby count as knowledge.[22] On this view, when the stakes of relying on a false belief are high enough, one may need further or stronger evidence to *believe justifiably*.

It may seem puzzling to someone who believes that only truth-relevant factors can bear on what someone knows or is otherwise justified in believing just how the moral features of a case could affect the epistemic rationality of a belief. One might think, for instance, that pragmatic encroachment entails that the practical features of a case can influence the truth or falsity of a belief. But this worry is misguided. The version of pragmatic encroachment I'm considering holds that the practical features of a case can *raise the amount of evidence, or the strength of the evidence*, required for a belief to be justified—not that they can offer evidence

for the truth or falsity of a belief. Thus, in the almond butter cases above, the idea is not that the fact that in the high-stakes case you risk death gives you reason in favor of the truth or falsity of your belief that the sandwich is an almond butter sandwich. It's that the fact that you risk death if you act on your belief that the sandwich is an almond butter sandwich and your belief is false raises the amount of evidence or the strength of the evidence required for you to justifiably believe that the sandwich is an almond butter sandwich. Thus, if the practical stakes of believing affect the justification of a belief, they do not do so by offering evidential reasons.

Nevertheless, the practical stakes of relying on a false belief might affect the justification of a belief by providing reason for *withholding* belief.[23] To be more precise, while the practical stakes of relying on a false belief cannot offer truth-relevant reasons for that belief, they may provide reasons for *withholding* belief: by increasing the costs of relying on a false belief. Thus, when the practical costs of relying on a false belief are high enough, one can fail to meet the level of evidential support required for one's belief to be justified, because one has a strong reason to withhold belief instead. Epistemic justification thus need not depend strictly on evidential (i.e., truth-relevant) reasons; it can also depend on *practical* reasons for withholding belief.

The branch of moral encroachment that I wish to consider here makes a parallel case for *moral* features, arguing that the *moral* stakes of relying on a false belief can raise the level of evidential support required for the belief to be justified and, thereby, for it to count as knowledge.[24] To clarify, let us consider a low-stakes and a high-stakes version of 'Dinner' from above. Suppose that in the low-stakes case, Gloria is not white and is wearing a black blouse that is similar in color to the staff's uniform. Suppose, further, that in this scenario there is no history of unjust treatment of certain racial and ethnic groups that would determine the meaning of an action.[25] If Harry acts on his belief that Gloria is a server (i.e., by asking her for some water) in this case, and he is wrong, then, the stakes are low: he does not express any objectionable race- or ethnicity-based attitudes, and Gloria kindly responds "Sorry, I'm not a server." Consider now a high-stakes version of the case: just as in the low-stakes scenario, Gloria is not white and is wearing a black blouse that is similar in color to the staff's uniform, but, in this scenario, there *is* a history of unjust treatment of certain racial and ethnic groups which determines the meaning of certain actions. If Harry acts on his belief that Gloria is a server (i.e., by asking her for some water) in this scenario and he is wrong, the stakes are quite high: he expresses an objectionable race- or ethnicity-based attitude about Gloria (e.g., that in virtue of her race or ethnicity, she occupies a lower social or moral position), and thereby demeans her.

The idea, then, is this: In the same way that the practical stakes of acting on your belief 'This is an almond butter sandwich' when it is false and you are deadly allergic to peanut butter can raise the level of evidential support required for you to believe justifiably, the *moral* stakes of Harry's acting on his belief that 'Gloria is a server' when it is false and the background conditions make it the case that he demeans her can raise the level of evidential support required for him to believe justifiably. This is because in the same way that the (high) practical stakes of relying on your belief that 'This is an almond butter sandwich' when you are wrong can provide you reason to withhold belief when you are deadly allergic to peanut butter, the (high) *moral* stakes of Harry's relying on his belief that 'Gloria is a server' when he is wrong can provide Harry reason to withhold belief when he demeans her. In each case, more or stronger evidence is needed to justify belief.

Again, the idea is not that the fact that in the high-stakes case Harry risks demeaning Gloria gives him an evidential reason (truth-relevant) in favor of or against the truth or falsity of his belief that Gloria is a server; if the moral stakes of believing affect the justification of his belief, they do not do so by offering evidential reasons. Rather, the idea is that the fact that Harry risks demeaning Gloria if he acts on his belief that Gloria is a server and his belief is false raises the amount or strength of evidence required for him to believe justifiably that Gloria is a server by providing an epistemic reason for him to withhold belief.[26] In other words, the reason Harry does something wrong when he believes that Gloria is a server is that the fact that he treats Gloria disrespectfully when he relies on this belief and he is wrong may *raise the level of evidential support required for*

his belief to be justified, by providing him a reason to withhold belief. Thus, if he acts on this belief anyway, he would seem to act irrationally in a distinctively epistemic sense, since he would seem to rely on a belief that is not epistemically warranted for him given the moral features of the case.[27]

To sum up, the branch of moral encroachment I have been considering here entails that when an agent who would otherwise have enough evidence to rely on some belief that p can do something wrong, or at least blameworthy, in believing p , if she has a nonevidential yet epistemic reason to withhold belief that is stronger than her reason to believe. Importantly, the plausibility of this moral encroachment thesis does not depend on the idea that moral features give evidential reasons for or against belief. The idea is simply that if the moral costs of error are high enough, they can provide a nonevidential epistemic reason for withholding belief, such that if an agent nonetheless acts on that belief, she acts irrationally, for she relies on an epistemically unwarranted belief.

Microaggressions and moral encroachment

With the moral encroachment thesis in hand, we can now begin to examine my contention that there may be not only practical and moral reasons against committing microaggression, but also epistemic ones. This section argues that the moral reasons against committing a microaggression can sometimes impact the epistemic rationality of microaggression. In particular, the idea is that the risk of committing a morally objectionable microaggression when one relies on a belief and it is false can raise the level of evidential support required for one's belief to be justified, such that it would be irrational, in a *distinctively epistemic sense*, to rely on one's belief, since this may, in some cases, involve believing when one should withhold belief instead.

We have already established, in Sect. 2, that there are several ways of conceiving of 'Francisca' as a practically and morally objectionable microaggression. To see how the moral encroachment thesis can illuminate the *epistemic* (im)permissibility of such a microaggression, however, it will be useful to devise a version of 'Francisca' from the point of view of her microaggressor and friend, Ethan, just prior to committing the microaggression:

Ethan. Ethan, an American (of irrelevant descent), and his friend Francisca, an American of Chilean descent, go to a potluck together, where Ethan notices that someone brought rice and beans. Aware that 'rice and beans' is a Hispanic dish, and that Francisca is of Hispanic descent, Ethan infers that 'Francisca eats rice and beans because she is Hispanic', and wonders whether he should simply tell her "There's rice and beans!" since this information might bring her joy.[28]

In what follows, I will refer to Ethan's belief that 'Francisca eats rice and beans because she is Hispanic' as his belief that ' f '. The question that will concern us is whether, in light of the moral facts of the case, it is epistemically rational for Ethan to believe that f .

In order to answer this question, we should consider a low-stakes and a high-stakes version of 'Ethan'. Suppose that in the low-stakes case, this kind of comment does not occur on a regular enough basis to be annoying, offensive, or harmful to someone like Francisca. When Ethan acts on his belief that f (i.e., by telling Francisca about the rice and beans), then, the costs of error are low: Francisca, who isn't subject to this kind of comment on a regular basis, explains to him that she is of Chilean descent and that Chileans don't, as a culture, eat rice and beans. Now suppose that in the high-stakes case, Ethan's comment *is* a type of comment that Francisca experiences regularly and in many spheres of life—say, because it is a function of a widely held belief that Hispanics are a homogenous group that occupies a lower social (and moral) status in society. The costs of error in *this* case are high: when Ethan acts on his belief that f , he partakes in a harmful pattern of slights or insults experienced by Francisca, thereby (risking) harming her.[29]

Following the moral encroachment thesis discussed in Sect. 3, it seems like Ethan could be sufficiently justified to rely on his belief that *f* (by telling Francisca about the rice and beans) in the low-stakes case but not in the high-stakes case. This, in turn, suggests that on some elaborations of the high-stakes case, the moral features of the case—that is, (the risk of) committing a microaggression that harms—can raise the level of evidential support required for Ethan to rely on his belief high enough to provide reason for him to withhold belief. At some point, his epistemic reason to withhold belief may be stronger than his evidential reason for belief, such that he will need more or stronger evidence to believe *f* justifiably. In that case, if he acts on *f* anyway, he will be acting irrationally in a distinctively epistemic sense, since he will be relying on a belief that is not epistemically warranted for him.[30]

Now, the thought is *not* that *all* microaggressions yield cases in which an agent acts on an epistemically unwarranted belief. After all, not all microaggressions harm or wrong; there may be cases in which the moral features that raise the level of evidential support required for the agent to rationally rely on the relevant belief to be justified are not strong enough to provide a strong enough epistemic reason to withhold belief, thereby preventing the belief from being justified. Suppose, for example, that Ethan's comment is an isolated incident that causes Francisca brief annoyance: that is, his comment is low-stakes. In that case, Ethan may well have a *practical* reason against acting on his belief (i.e., that doing so would be impolite), but he would nevertheless believe justifiably because those reasons would not seem to provide an epistemic reason to withhold belief.

The thought is, rather, that anytime a microaggression that is based on a false belief harms or wrongs—for instance, by causing self-doubt, perpetuating an oppressive social order, or demeaning another person—this harm or wrong raises the level of evidential support required for a potential microaggressor to rationally rely on his belief, such that in some cases, the stakes of relying on her false belief may be so high that they provide a reason to withhold belief, such that the potential microaggressor would need more or stronger evidence to believe justifiably. This suggests that even among harmful or wrongful microaggressions, the level of evidential support required for a belief to be justified need not be raised high enough that it won't be met by the evidence available to the microaggressor.

To see this, consider the widely agreed-upon microaggression of telling a person of color "Your English is great!" This comment is often taken to be a microaggression in light of the message it is said to express: that the person of color is not truly American.[31] But, suppose that, in conversation with a stranger who is American (of any race or ethnicity), an Asian-American reveals that she moved to the U.S. from Taiwan at the age of five. Given this information, the American forms the belief 'English is a second language for this person' and, relying on this belief, replies, "Wow, your English is great!" Suppose, moreover, that this microaggression harms the Asian-American—say, because this kind of thing happens all the time and, despite having moved to the U.S. at the age of five, she considers English to be her Native language. In this case, the fact that the Asian-American is harmed when the American acts on his belief that 'English is a second language for this person' and this belief is false may well raise the level of evidential support required for American to rationally rely on his belief, but it need not raise it to a point that the American's evidence—that the Asian-American moved to the U.S. from a country in which English is not a national language at the age of five—does not meet. When the agent does have enough evidential reason for belief, his belief may be epistemically warranted even if he harms when he relies on it and it is false.[32] Thus, this would seem to be a case in which the harm that the American causes gives him a reason against engaging in the action, but, given the amount of evidence that he has, it does not give him a reason to withhold belief.

To sum up, the moral encroachment thesis seems to reveal some distinctively *epistemic* reasons why microaggression is sometimes epistemically objectionable. In short, when an agent finds herself in a choice situation in which the costs of error involve committing a morally objectionable microaggression, the level of evidential support required for her belief to be justified may be raised just high enough that her belief ceases to

be justified because, even if she has reason *for* belief, she may have stronger reason to withhold belief. In such cases, relying on that belief is epistemically irrational: it involves relying on a belief that is not epistemically warranted for her. This does not mean that all microaggressions involve acting on a belief that is not epistemically warranted for an agent. All it means is that, sometimes, microaggression involves acting on a belief that is not justified because the microaggressor needs further or stronger evidence to believe rather than to withhold belief. The reasons against committing microaggression are thus not just practical and moral; they are also, at least sometimes, epistemic.

A worry

Thus far, I have argued that similarly to eating a sandwich that you believe is almond butter can involve acting on an epistemically unwarranted belief if you are deadly allergic to peanut butter, telling, for example, an American of Chilean descent who you believe eats rice and beans because she is Hispanic that there is rice and beans, may also involve acting on an epistemically irrational belief if in doing so you contribute to a harmful pattern of slights and insults experienced by her. But notice that there may be a disanalogy between these cases: in the former case, the agent would seem to be aware that the stakes are raised for her, since she is presumably aware that she is allergic to peanut butter, whereas in the latter, the agent may not be aware that the stakes are raised for him, since he may not be aware that the recipient of his action is repeatedly subject to a harmful pattern of slights and insults. One might thus wonder: if an agent's belief were epistemically warranted for him in a low-stakes situation, wouldn't it also be epistemically warranted for him when the stakes are raised but he is not aware of this? Moreover, one might wonder, if his belief *is* epistemically warranted in the high-stakes case, wouldn't this exculpate him from believing when his belief turns out to be false?

It is widely agreed upon that an agent can escape blame for believing falsely if her belief is justified. Thus, in 'Ethan', if Ethan's belief is justified, he could escape blame for believing that *f* when *f* is false. However, it's not clear that an agent who is ignorant of the high stakes actually believes justifiably.[33] It would seem that, at least on some versions of moral encroachment, if the stakes are high enough, an agent may need more or stronger evidence for or against belief independently of whether or not she is aware of the stakes. To clarify, if I have a peanut allergy but I don't know it, the stakes of relying on my belief that the sandwich I'm about to eat is almond butter when it isn't are high regardless of whether or not I'm aware of them. Moreover, the stakes may be so high that I may need more or stronger evidence in order to believe justifiably. If this is correct, then it would seem that, at least on some elaborations of the case, if Ethan relies on his belief that *f* when he is in a high-stakes situation, he may need more or stronger evidence for the belief he relies on to be justified *even if he is ignorant that he is in a high-stakes situation*.

This may seem counterintuitive. One might think, for instance, that Ethan's belief is warranted so long as his ignorance of the high stakes is blameless. Suppose, for instance, that although Ethan has average cognitive capacities and is appropriately sensitive to contemporary moral facts, he simply has no access to the relevant moral facts. In other words, despite being a responsible epistemic agent, Ethan, through no fault of his own, simply does not know that his comment would be part of a harmful patterns of slights or insults experienced by Francisca. In this case, Ethan's ignorance would seem to be blameless.[34] Moreover, it would seem to exculpate him if he were to rely on *f* and *f* turned out to be false.

This might lead some to conclude that Ethan's belief is justified after all. But this would be a mistake. After all, as I have been suggesting, what seems to matter for whether or not he is justified in believing, according to at least some versions of moral encroachment, is whether he meets the level of evidential support required for his belief given the high stakes. If relying on his belief is too risky, he may have a reason to withhold belief instead, such that he may need more or stronger evidence to believe justifiably whether he is aware of this or not. Instead, we

might think that even if Ethan's ignorance is justified and therefore exculpatory such that he is blameless for believing, he may nonetheless believe unjustifiably; he could believe unjustifiably but blamelessly.[35]

Note that if this is correct, then the notion of epistemic justification would seem to come apart from the notion of epistemic blame. I won't argue for this here, but it's worth noting that most accounts of blame used in current epistemic debates are about *moral* blame for believing—not *epistemic* blame. Thus, the analysis presented here may offer a reason for agreeing with Brown ([9]) that we need a new account of blame: an account of *epistemic* blame that is distinct from current accounts of professional and moral blame.[36] If this is correct, then it may be that in some cases microaggressors may be not only morally blameworthy, but also epistemically blameworthy for committing a microaggression.

Concluding remarks and a practical implication

I have argued that some microaggressions are not only morally objectionable; they may also be irrational, as they sometimes involve relying on a belief that is not epistemically warranted. This is because the moral facts surrounding microaggression may sometimes raise the amount and strength of evidence required to believe justifiably by giving reason to withhold belief. To clarify, I do not mean to suggest that moral encroachment-based (nonevidential) epistemic reasons are the only epistemic reasons against committing microaggression. My goal has been simply to show that moral encroachment can explain at least one way of conceiving of why microaggression is sometimes epistemically objectionable.

In closing, it's worth flagging the practical value of projects that aim to identify the epistemic reasons against committing some microaggressions, specifically in terms of microaggression pedagogy. Over the last decade or so, a surge of research on microaggressions has focused on devising a wide range of pedagogical tools to address the topic of microaggression in the classroom, suggesting, in particular, that educators should discuss and affirm the experiential reality of students who have experienced microaggressions, as well as that of students who have trouble understanding what a microaggression is or why it should be taken seriously.[37] Supporters of this approach further maintain that educators should act as facilitators and "refocus the dialogue on feelings," as "each individual perceives and responds to microaggressions differently, depending on their history and current context" (Sue & Spanierman, [54], p. 200, p. 220). This approach can be fruitful in many respects: for instance, it can help one attain a better understanding of the social world and one's place in it, as well as foster meaningful dialogue about subtle forms of oppression.[38] But, it seems to me, it can also unduly encourage defensiveness and resistance to efforts aimed at combating microaggression. As one educator reports: Students who are members of dominant/privileged groups often struggle to differentiate microaggressions from general rudeness, and trivialize these experiences by suggesting that the targets of microaggressions should "grow thicker skin" or realize that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never harm me." It can be challenging to communicate an experiential reality to those who do not have similar experiences to draw on as sources of empathy. (Sue & Spanierman, [54], p. 201) Students who take this view that people who report microaggressions should "grow thicker skin" are not alone. Prominent psychologists have offered popular criticisms to efforts aimed at combating microaggression, arguing, for instance, that such efforts may help create a culture of victimhood, not only in college campuses, but in society at large (Campbell & Manning, [14]). Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt ([34]) have even argued that instead of encouraging students to look for microaggressions left and right, universities should be training students to be more resilient to these supposed slights and insults.[39] If only students grew a thicker skin, these critics suggest, the imaginary problem of microaggression would go away.

I cite these objections not to argue against them; others have already done this convincingly.[40] My goal is, rather, both to underscore the widespread defensiveness and resistance to efforts aimed at combatting microaggression, and to suggest that we may be well advised to devise new strategies for teaching about

microaggression and showing that microaggression is not an imaginary problem. The argument offered in this paper suggests an interesting strategy to this end: that highlighting that sometimes things go wrong in a distinctively epistemic sense, independently of and in addition to people's experiences and reactions to microaggression, may be a valuable approach to the topic of microaggression in the classroom. This could both fend off erroneous "thicker skin" claims and get our foot in the door to discuss with far less resistance the subtle yet significant harms and wrongs that members of certain groups endure on a regular basis in our society.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Julius Schönherr and Aiden Woodcock for fruitful conversation on these topics and for helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks also to Francisca Perez, the audience at the Fall 2020 Philosophy Seminar Series at Marquette University, and to three anonymous referees for this journal for helpful comments, questions, and suggestions.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

References

- Armour Jody D. Race ipsa loquitur: of reasonable racists, intelligent bayesians, and involuntary negrophobes. *Stanford Law Review*. 1994; 46; 4: 781-816
- Auguste E, Cruise K, Jimenez M. The effects of microaggressions on depression in young adults of color: Investigating the impact of traumatic event exposures and trauma reactions. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. 2021. 10.1002/jts.22675
- Baril AKim B, McGrath M. Pragmatic encroachment and practical reasons. *Pragmatic encroachment in epistemology*. 2019; Routledge
- Basu R. Radical moral encroachment: The moral stakes of racist beliefs. *Philosophical Issues*. 2019. 10.1111/phis.12137
- Basu R. What we epistemically owe to each other. *Philosophical Studies*. 2019; 176; 4: 915-931
- Basu R, Schroeder MKim B, McGrath M. Doxastic wronging. *Pragmatic encroachment in epistemology*. 2019; Routledge
- Bolinger, R. J. (2018). The rational impermissibility of accepting (some) racial generalizations. *Synthese* 1–17.
- Bolinger RJ. Varieties of moral encroachment. *Philosophical Perspectives*. 2020. 10.1111/phpe.12124
- Brown J. What is epistemic blame?. *Nous*. 2020; 54; 2: 389-407
- Brown J. Epistemically blameworthy belief. *Philosophical Studies*. 2020; 177: 3595-3614. 10.1007/s11098-019-01384-z
- Brownstein M, Madva A. Ethical Automaticity. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 2012; 42; 1: 68–98.
- Buchak L. Belief, credence, and norms. *Philosophical Studies*. 2014; 169; 2: 285-311
- Burns K. Minimizing and managing microaggressions in the philosophy classroom. *Teaching Philosophy*. 2014; 37; 131–52: 140
- Campbell B, Manning J. Microaggressions and moral cultures. *Comparative Sociology*. 2014; 13: 692-726
- Coss D. Pragmatic encroachment and context externalism. *Logos & Episteme*. 2019; 10; 2: 165-174
- De Houwer J. A propositional model of implicit evaluation: Social and Personality. *Psychology Compass*. 2014; 8: 342-353
- Evans, C. & Mallon, R. (2020). Microaggressions, mechanisms, and harm. In: L. Freeman, & J. W. Schoer (Eds.), *Microaggressions and Philosophy*.
- Fantl J, McGrath M. *Knowledge in an uncertain world*. 2009; Oxford University Press
- Fatima SCole K, Hassel H. On the edge of knowing: microaggression and epistemic uncertainty as a woman of color. *Surviving sexism in academia: Strategies for feminist leadership*. 2017; Routledge: 147-154

- Fatima, S. (2020). I don't know what happened to me: The epistemic harms of microaggression. In L. Freeman, & J. W. Schroer (Eds.), *Microaggression and philosophy*.
- Finlay, S, & Schroeder, M. (2017). Reasons for Action: Internal vs. External. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/reasons-internal-external/>
- Freeman L, Stewart H. Microaggressions in clinical medicine. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. 2018; 28: 411-449
- Friedlaender C. On microaggressions: Cumulative harm and individual responsibility. *Hypatia*. 2018; 33: 5-21
- Fritz J. Pragmatic encroachment and moral encroachment. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. 2017; 98; 1: 643-661
- Gardiner GKevin M. Evidentialism and moral encroachment. *Believing in accordance with the evidence*. 2018; Springer Verlag
- Gendler T. On the epistemic costs of implicit bias. *Philosophical Studies*. 2011; 156; 1: 33-63
- Guerrero ALackey J. The epistemology of consent. *Applied epistemology*. 2021; Oxford University Press
- Haidt J. The unwisest idea on campus: Commentary on lilienfeld (2017). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2017; 12: 176-177
- Hawthorne J, Stanley J. Knowledge and action. *The Journal of Philosophy*. 2008; 105; 10: 571-590
- Kidd IJ, Carel H. Epistemic injustice and illness. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 2016; 34; 2: 172-190
- Kim BKim B, McGrath M. An externalist decision theory for a pragmatic epistemology. *Pragmatic encroachment in epistemology*. 2019; Routledge
- Lilienfeld SO. Microaggressions: Strong claims, inadequate evidence. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2017; 12: 138-169
- Littlejohn C. *Justification and the truth-connection*. 2012; Cambridge University Press
- Lukianoff, G, & Haidt, J. (2015). The coddling of the american Mind. *Atlantic*.
- Madva A. Why implicit attitudes are (probably) not beliefs. *Synthese*. 2016; 193; 8: 2659-2684
- Mandelbaum E. Attitude, inference, association: On the propositional structure of implicit bias. *Noûs*. 2016; 50; 3: 629-658
- McClure E, Rini R. Microaggression: Conceptual and scientific issues. *Philosophy Compass*. 2020. 10.1111/phc3.12659
- McTernan E. Microaggressions, equality and social practices. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. 2018; 26: 261-281
- Moss S. Moral encroachment. *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. 2018; 118; 2: 177-205
- O'Dowd O. Microaggressions: A kantian account. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 2018; 21: 1219-1232
- Pace M. The epistemic value of moral considerations: justification, moral encroachment, and james' 'will to believe'. *Noûs*. 2011; 45; 2: 239-268
- Perez Gomez J. Microaggressions as hyper-implicatures. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. 2020. 10.1111/jopp.12243
- Pierce CBarbour FB. Offensive mechanisms. *The black seventies*. 1970; Porter Sargent: 265-282
- Rini R. How to take offense: Responding to microaggression. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*. 2018; 4: 332-351
- Rini R. *The ethics of microaggression*. 2020; Routledge
- Rini, R. (2020b). Taking the measure of microaggression. How to put boundaries on a nebulous concept. In L. Freeman, & J. W. Schroer (Eds.), *Microaggressions and Philosophy*.
- Ross J, Schroeder M. Belief, credence, and pragmatic encroachment. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 2014; 88; 2: 259-288
- Schroeder M. Stakes, withholding, and pragmatic encroachment on knowledge. *Philosophical Studies*. 2012; 160; 2: 265-285
- Schroeder M. When beliefs wrong. *Philosophical Topics*. 2018; 46; 1: 115-127
- Schroer JW. Giving them something they can feel: On the strategy of scientizing the phenomenology of race and racism. *Knowledge Cultures*. 2015; 3; 1: 91-110
- Skenazy, L. & Haidt, J. (2017). The fragile generation. *Reason*.

- Sue DW. *Microaggressions in Everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. 2010; Wiley
- Sue DW. Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*. 2007; 62: 271-286
- Sue DW, Spanierman LB. *Microaggressions in everyday life*. 2020; Wiley
- Sutton J. *Without Justification*. 2007: Cambridge, Massachusetts; MIT press
- Toribio J. Implicit bias: From social structure to representational format. *Theoria*. 2018; 33; 1: 41-60
- Williamson T. Very improbable knowing. *Erkenntnis*. 2014; 79: 971-999
- Worsnip A. Can pragmatists be moderate?. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 2020. 10.1111/phpr.12673

Footnotes

1. See, e.g., Basu and Schroeder ([6]), Basu ([4], [4]), Bolinger ([8]), Fritz ([24]), Gardiner ([25]), Moss ([39]), Pace ([41]), Schroeder ([49]).
2. Note that there are other ways to conceive of the moral encroachment thesis. On some views, "the type of evidence provided by statistical generalizations (or specifically demographic generalizations)" is problematic (Bolinger, [7]). See, e.g., Armour ([1]), Moss ([39]). On other views, "the moral reasons against belief undermine the epistemic permission otherwise afforded by [one's] evidence" (Bolinger, [7]). See, e.g., Basu and Schroeder ([6]), Basu ([4], [5]), Fritz ([24]).
3. Note that my analysis might exclude microaggressions that do not have an epistemic component—in particular, what are sometimes called 'environmental microaggressions': that is, "racial assaults, insults and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels" (Sue et al., [53], p. 278). An example might be being the only person of color in veterinary school. Moreover, my analysis might also exclude some (nonverbal) microaggressions that are based on an implicit bias: for example, a case in which a white woman clutches her purse at the sight of a Black man approaching without forming a belief regarding the criminality of the man. An analysis of whether such a case has an epistemic component is well beyond the scope of this paper, but it's worth noting that whether or not it does may depend on whether implicit bias arises from unconscious associative structures or processes (see, e.g., Brownstein and Madva, [11]; Madva, [35]; Toribio, [56]) or from unconscious propositional beliefs or belief-like states (see, e.g., De Houwer, [16]; Mandelbaum, [36]).
4. This example is adapted from a case I introduce in Perez Gomez ([42]).
5. This set of views has been referred to as a 'psychological account' of microaggression (Perez Gomez, [42]; McClure and Rini, [37]). For more on this view, see Burns ([13]), Lilienfeld ([32]), Pierce ([43]), Sue and Spanierman ([54]).
6. Elsewhere, I call this set of views the 'expressivist account' of microaggression (Perez Gomez, [42]). Other seeming supporters of this view include Sue et al. ([53]) and Sue and Spanierman ([54]).
7. This set of views has been referred to an 'experiential account' (McClure and Rini, [37]; Rini, [45], [46]). Supporters of this kind of view include Fatima ([19]), Rini ([45], [45]), Sue et al. ([53]).
8. Attributional ambiguity is taken to be harmful both because it prevents victims from acting on what they suspect is the case (Fatima, [19]; Friedlaender, [23]; Sue et al., [53]), and because it can cause a microaggression victim to experience undue self-doubt about what she knows is the case (Fatima, [19]).
9. This set of views has been referred to as a 'structural account' of microaggression (Perez Gomez, [42]; McClure and Rini, [37]). For more on this view, see Friedlaender ([23]), Freeman and Stewart ([22]), McTernan ([38]).
10. See, e.g., Burns ([13]), Fatima ([19]), Freeman and Stewart ([22]), Perez Gomez ([42]), Rini ([44], [45]), Sue et al. ([53]), Sue ([52]), Sue and Spanierman ([54]).
11. See also Perez Gomez ([42]).
12. For the idea that practical/moral stakes can impact justification, see, e.g., Fritz ([24]), Guerrero ([27]), and Ross and Schroeder ([47]). For the idea that practical/moral stakes can impact knowledge directly, see, e.g., Hawthorne and Stanley ([29]) and Moss ([39]).

13. Note that the classic motivating example for moral encroachment considers a story in which a woman orders John Hope Franklin, one of the few African American members of the exclusive Cosmos Club, to bring her her coat (Gendler, [26]). Note, also, that although I will not in this paper use this example as a case of microaggression, this kind of case is generally taken to be a standard example of a microaggression. See, e.g., Sue et al. ([53]), who maintain that mistaking a person of color for a service worker expresses the following message "People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions" (Sue et al., [53], p. 276). Of course, one need not think that such an action always expresses this specific message. As I argue in Perez Gomez ([42]), the content of the message that is expressed by such an action may depend on the intention of the speaker, the understanding of the interpreter, and the context in which the action occurs.
14. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Blacks and Hispanics fare worse than whites and Asians, and people with disabilities fare worse than people without disabilities, across all of the work force characteristics examined by the report: educational attainment, occupation, earnings, and employment status (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. "Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2016." Report 1070.<https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2016/home.htm>). Similar disparities exist in other spheres of life: for example, in terms of life expectancy and other key health outcomes. See: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013. "CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report—United States, 2013." <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/other/su6203.pdf>.
15. The American Philosophical Association. "Demographic Statistics on the APA Membership, FY2016 to FY2018i." <https://www.apaonline.org/page/demographics>. Of course, Hispanics/Latinx are not the only group that is underrepresented in the profession. People who identify as women, Asian, Black, American Indian, Pacific Islander, as well as people who report having a disability are also underrepresented in the profession.
16. "Population estimates, July 1st, 2019." United States Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>.
17. Given the background conditions of this case, it may well be that Harry is motivated by implicit bias. However, for the purposes of the analysis I seek to offer here, I will set this aside and focus instead on what may be going on rationally and epistemically in such a case.
18. Supporters of moral encroachment differ with respect to why this is epistemically impermissible. Some appeal to the upstream factors of an agent's belief-formation process to argue that moral features can limit what it is permissible for an agent to take into account when forming her beliefs. (See, e.g., Buchak, [12]; Bolinger, [7]; Moss, [39].) Others argue that moral features—such as the content of a belief—can determine whether holding a belief is permissible. (See, e.g., Basu, [4], [5]). Finally, some appeal to the idea that the downstream moral effects of one's belief can impinge upon the rationality of relying on one's belief (see, specifically, Fritz, [24]; see also Guerrero, [27]). This latter view is the one that interests me in this paper. Although this is a broad category of views—including, e.g., the costs of error in having a certain attitude, and the risks of error on the basis of the relevant belief—in what follows I focus only on stakes-related reasons.
19. See, e.g., Fritz ([24]), who agrees with this description of the relationship between these theses. Cf. Basu ([4]).
20. This is a simplified version of this principle. For other formulations of it, see Bolinger ([8], p. 4), Fantl and McGrath ([18], p. 66), Hawthorne and Stanley ([29]), and Ross and Schroeder ([47]). Note, however, that, as Bolinger ([8]) indicates, many supporters of moral encroachment depart from this principle, replacing it with a "No conflicts" principle according to which "If an epistemic attitude is epistemically impeccable, it must be morally permissible" ([8], p. 4). Cf. Fritz ([24]).
21. This view is controversial (see Brown, [9], [10]), but it is increasingly accepted. See, e.g., Basu and Schroeder ([6]), Basu ([4], [4]), Bolinger ([8]), Fritz ([24]), Gardiner ([25]), Moss ([39]), Pace ([41]), Schroeder ([49]).

22. It's important that the practical features must encroach upon believing falsely, and not upon belief itself. If they encroached upon belief itself, the thesis would entail that one ought to believe for Pascal's Wager-type reasons—that believing in God's existence would be prudent—thereby justifying being bribed into believing, as this would also be prudent (Worsnip, [58]), which would clearly be wrong (see also Moss, [39]). The same applies to the moral encroachment thesis I discuss below. Also, that there are other takes on how practical factors can encroach upon knowledge. See, e.g., Fantl and McGrath ([18]), Moss ([39]).
23. See also Schroeder ([48]). As Schroeder writes, "When you form a belief, you take a risk of getting things wrong that you do not take by withholding. In contrast, when you withhold, you guarantee that you miss out on getting things right. So plausibly, one important source of reasons to withhold will come from the preponderance of the cost of having a false belief over the cost of missing out on having a true belief" (Schroeder [48], p. 277).
24. For more on this view, see Fritz ([24]).
25. In order to get the contrast between a low-stakes case and a high-stakes case, we must imagine drastically different background conditions. I take this to be a plausible exercise, but note that Basu has argued that this move does not work in a society such as ours, where, for example, race and racism have "formed the bedrock for society" (Basu, [4], p. 15).
26. To see this point, we need not endorse the controversial claim that the moral features of a case prohibit or require holding a certain belief—a view sometimes called radical moral encroachment. (See, e.g., Basu and Schroder, [6]; Basu, [4]; Schroder, [49]). All we need to see is that moral features can affect whether acting on a belief is epistemically rational: e.g., by affecting the epistemic status (e.g., the justification) of an epistemic state (e.g., a belief). This is sometimes called moderate moral encroachment.
27. On this picture of moral encroachment, a belief is justified only if the reasons for belief are at least as good as the reasons for withholding belief. As Schroeder puts it: "It is epistemically rational for S to believe that p in c just in case, in c, S has at least as much epistemic reason to believe that p as to believe that $\neg p$ and S has at least as much epistemic reason to believe that p as to withhold with respect to p" (Schroeder, [48], p. 274). Thus, the epistemic reasons required to justify belief increase as a result of increasing reasons for withholding belief, which are the result of the increased moral stakes of believing p.
28. Just as in 'Dinner' above, I will set aside issues concerning implicit bias or other mechanisms that may impact Ethan's behavior. My goal is to examine what may be going wrong epistemically if we could pause and examine Ethan's thought process.
29. One might worry that there is a disanalogy between the peanut butter case and the microaggression case: in the former, the agent has access to the raised stakes (because she is deadly allergic to peanut butter), but in the latter, the agent may not have access to the raised stakes (because she may not know of the pattern of harmful slights or insults experienced by the recipient of her comment). I discuss this point in Sect. 5.
30. Let me clarify that the cases relevant for moral encroachment are cases in which the moral problem bears "an obvious connection to the epistemic justification of a belief" (Fritz, [24], p. 10). Suppose you are jealous of your new colleague because you believe that she was offered the job simply because she is Black, which makes you wish you could denigrate her. One day, you say to her "Wow, you are so articulate," successfully microaggressing her—say, by communicating a demeaning message about Blacks in general and about her in particular. In this case, even if you attempted to denigrate her on much stronger or much weaker evidence that she got the job because she is Black, "you would still be engaged in an evil project" (Fritz, [24], p. 10). The problem here is not an epistemic problem; it is strictly a moral one.
31. See, e.g., Sue et al. ([53], pp. 276–77).

32. Of course, if the American came to believe that English is a second language for the Asian-American without the strong evidence supposed in this case, the harm that he causes if he acts on this belief and it is false may well give him reason to withhold belief.
33. Internalists about reasons would presumably say that an agent who is ignorant of the high stakes believes justifiably, but externalists can say that in order to determine when such an agent is in a position to know, and thereby to rationally rely on her beliefs, we must account for factors that are external to his internal state. Settling this debate is well beyond the scope of this paper, however (see Finlay and Schroeder, [21]). For a defense of the externalist position, albeit with regard to knowledge and in the context of decision theory, see Kim ([31]). See also Baril ([3]), Coss ([15]). Cf. Schroeder ([48]), who argues that when an agent is ignorant of the stakes, she fails to know the relevant proposition but may nonetheless believe justifiably.
34. Contrast this with a case in which Ethan is culpably ignorant of the stakes. Suppose, for instance, that although Ethan has average cognitive capacities and lives in a society in which it is well-known that certain people are regularly subject to certain subtle but harmful slights or insults, Ethan is negligent in recognizing this fact. This, in turn, means that he is ignorant, too, that when he acts on his belief that f and it is false, he commits a morally objectionable microaggression. In this case, Ethan is not simply ignorant of the high stakes; he is culpably ignorant of them. He lacks the appropriate sensitivity to the moral features of the situation he is in.
35. Several authors have made room for the possibility that an agent can believe blamelessly but unjustifiably. See Brown ([10]). See also, Littlejohn ([33]), Williamson ([57]), Sutton ([55]).
36. For a defense of the idea that epistemic blame is separate from moral or professional blame, see Brown ([10]). Consider Brown's own example: "if a private citizen dogmatically clings to a belief, say, about the age of the earth, even after receiving evidence which undermines her belief, it is much less obvious that she is blameworthy in a moral or professional sense. For it is not obvious she has any moral or professional duty to conform her belief about the age of the earth to the evidence" (Brown, [9], [10], p. 3596).
37. These tools range from forming support networks with faculty from other department (Sue and Spanierman, [54]), to representing diverse perspectives in course materials (Burns, [13]), to using one's own anxiety as a pedagogical tool (Sue & Spanierman, [54]) and practicing critical humility (Burns, [13]), to many others.
38. See Kidd and Carel ([30]) and Schroer ([50]) for examples of the importance of phenomenological analyses of the importance of "how to listen and how to be heard" (Schoer, [50]).
39. See also Haidt ([28]) and Skenazy and Haidt ([51]).
40. See, e.g., Evans and Mallon ([17]), Rini ([44]).