

# GENERIC GENERALIZATIONS: MEANING AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

*Workshop organized by the  
Canada Research Chair in Applied Epistemology  
University of Sherbrooke  
Quebec, Canada  
Dates: March 16-17, 2018*

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Generic sentences are generalizations about the members of a category or a kind. In English, they take the form of sentences such as *ravens are black*, *a raven is black*, *the raven is black*, and *gold is yellow*. Since they do not explicitly carry information about how many members of the category actually possess the property, uncovering their hidden quantifier first seemed to be the way to identify their meaning. As this inquiry went on, it became clear that the most common quantifiers were not enough and that we needed a subtler account, either relying on a new quantifier or doing away with classical set-theoretic semantics altogether. At first, the primary question was *what do generics mean?* But it seems like it has now become *how do they mean?*

A better understanding of generics is more than of purely intellectual interest. Generics regulate in various ways our social interactions. For instance, they are means to express prejudices and stereotypes. In so doing, they can reproduce injustices. But generics are also means to convey important lessons from adult to child or from expert to layperson, lessons which might be for the greater good. Since using generics is not necessarily socially detrimental, an open question is: *How can we evaluate the diverse roles played by generics in society?*

This workshop aims to address these two types of questions about generics – their *meaning* and their *social dimension*. Papers in which these two issues intersect are especially welcomed.

Welcomed topics include (but are not limited to):

- The extensionality or intensionality of generic language
- The cognitive aspects of generic meaning
- The impacts of generics in the social world
- Generics and pragmatics
- Peculiarities of generic knowledge
- New approaches to generics

Keynote speakers:

Marjorie Rhodes (NYU)

Bernhard Nickel (Harvard)

Submission guidelines:

Abstracts (maximum 1000 words) should be prepared for blind review and sent at [jordan.girard2@Usherbrooke.ca](mailto:jordan.girard2@Usherbrooke.ca)

The deadline for submission is **November 30th 2017**.

Organizers

Jordan Girard (Université de Sherbrooke)

François Claveau (Université de Sherbrooke)

Location:

[University of Sherbrooke](#), Quebec, Canada

This workshop is supported by the CIRST <<http://www.cirst.uqam.ca/en/>> and the CRÉ <<http://www.lecre.umontreal.ca/>>.

Questions can be addressed to Jordan Girard <[Jordan.Girard2@Usherbrooke.ca](mailto:Jordan.Girard2@Usherbrooke.ca)>.