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Mapping class groups, covers, and braids

The mapping class group of a surface is the group of isotopy classes of boundary preserving homeomorphisms of the surface. Given a finite sheeted covering space between surfaces we may ask what relationship, if any, exists between the mapping class groups of the two surfaces?

In joint work with Tyrone Ghaswala we investigate this question for surfaces with non-empty boundary. In this talk we will discuss a classical theorem of Birman and Hilden and the evaluated Burau representation of braid groups.