

What is on Women Philosophers' Minds? Ann Garry

Women philosophers at various stages in their careers have been discussing a number of thorny professional issues and concerns on feminist organizations' list-servs, particularly SWIP-L (Society for Women in Philosophy) and FEAST-L (Feminist Ethics and Social Theory). This discussion was generated in part by panels sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women starting in the spring of 2007. I will briefly sketch some of the issues raised on the list-servs and at the APA Pacific Division meeting In March 2008. Interspersed with the views of others I include informal personal commentary.

Issues

The set of issues discussed on the list-servs encompasses ways to encourage and support women of all backgrounds and men of color at all stages in the profession of philosophy. So while my focus here is on "women" keep in mind that it is part of a broader concern with "underrepresented people." In the case of those who have already chosen academic philosophy as a career, there is little controversy about what needs to be done: we clearly need to support each other as graduate students, as potential colleagues, and as colleagues. On the other hand, there are issues to be raised about encouraging underrepresented students (indeed, anyone) to go into academic philosophy. Those of us in the academy need to ask ourselves about our motivations. Do we encourage underrepresented students in our own self-interest in order to have future colleagues who are more congenial to our values and our work? In order to change the demographics of the profession for reasons of equity or because we believe it will change the way philosophy is done? Is it a cognitive loss to philosophy that it is done predominantly by white men? Do we hope or expect that our students' lives will be happier if they can do what they believe they will most enjoy? Or is it something I have not captured here at all?

Even if we do not have full answers to the questions I just posed, it is clear that *if* we are encouraging members of underrepresented groups to become professional philosophers, we need to be very active in trying to change the hostile aspects of our professional environment. This hostile atmosphere has been noted by many philosophers of color. For example, in 2007 at the first meeting of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, Anita Allen gave an address in which she spoke candidly about the hostile atmosphere in professional philosophy for women of color. In spite of a small increase in the number of women of color, she said, "philosophy still feels to me like an isolated profession."¹ There is much work to be done here.

If we are going to encourage women and other underrepresented groups to become professional philosophers or even to major in philosophy as undergraduates, consider the suggestions below. I am sure that other ideas can be found on list-servs on teaching philosophy and in *APA Newsletter* essays.

- Stop using elitist/classist/racist/misogynist examples in logic and essays that have these characteristics in other philosophy classes.
- Work with teaching assistants so that they do not discourage women or turn them off to philosophy.
- Send a letter in hard copy to everyone who got an A in an introductory philosophy class inviting them to consider being a philosophy major or minor.
- One undergraduate department significantly deemphasizes metaphysics and epistemology in favor of social philosophy and ethics. I confess that this bothers me, but one could at least create options in the major that include more social philosophy if women on that campus seem more interested in it.

- Point out the various kinds of graduate work and careers for which philosophy is helpful.
- Cheshire Calhoun offers a cluster of suggestions to “degender philosophy” systematically at the undergraduate level in order counteract the gender schema that codes philosophy as male. She notes that undergraduates come to us already with this schema in their minds. She suggests that we “court cognitive dissonance” by using images of women to represent philosophy on websites and bulletin boards, teaching courses (not labeled as feminist) that use only women authors, creating a visiting lecture series of women, and so on.²

Most of us believe from anecdotal evidence that there is attrition at every step as women philosophy students advance from undergraduate majors to graduate school, then to academic positions. However, Miriam Solomon and John Clarke in their “CSW *Jobs for Philosophers* Employment Study” found that there is “little, if any, attrition of women between undergraduate majors and Ph.D. graduates.”³ The US National Center for Education Statistics shows that women receive 30.8% of Bachelor’s degrees in Philosophy in 2007; the National Opinion Research Center shows women receiving 25% to 33% of Ph.D.’s in Philosophy (without a growth pattern) from 1997-2006; in 2006 it was 29%.⁴ I found these data very surprising (Miriam Solomon assured me in an email message that she did as well).

In the step between obtaining a Ph.D. and securing an academic position in philosophy the numbers are mixed. Women hold approximately 21% of philosophy positions so are not represented at the same level as Ph.D. recipients.⁵ Solomon and Clarke point out that the attrition levels in philosophy and the physical sciences are comparable. However, in the 2006-2007 data on hiring in philosophy that Solomon and Clarke compiled, women received approximately one third of the appointments. They note, and I would certainly concur, that more work needs to be done on the details. Nevertheless, at this point there is still attrition between receiving a Ph.D. and obtaining an academic position.

On the list-servs participants discussed the reasons that women sometimes do not apply for academic jobs (or for higher numbers of jobs) after they receive their PhDs.

- Two groups should be thought of separately: feminist philosophers and women who do not specialize in feminist philosophy might have different (though overlapping) sets of issues.
- Some women have geographical limitations so apply for fewer positions.
- Some people maintained that women apply in smaller numbers to “AOS open” positions. Candidates believe that such positions are wired or that there will be too much competition. They also cited the cost of each application.
- In my own anecdotal experience on appointments committees, women are less likely than men to apply for positions for which their backgrounds are wildly unsuited. They also seem somewhat less likely to stretch their AOC’s into AOS’s.
- Participants offered their own departmental statistics: often the number of women applicants was very low, between 10-15%.
- My own department recruited for two positions in 2007-2008. Candidates could apply to either or both positions: (1) AOS: ethics/social political philosophy, (2) AOS: open—with several disjunctive AOC’s: feminist theory, race theory, applied ethics, East Asian philosophy, or Latin American philosophy. Most women applied for both—29% of these applicants were women. Of those applying for only the ethics /social political position 12.3% were women. Applicants seeking only the open position were 21.5% women.
- In 2008-2009 my department’s percentages were as follows: A position in Chinese philosophy drew 17.4% women, most with degrees in Asian Studies, not in Philosophy. Not surprisingly, our position listed as “AOS or strong AOC in feminist philosophy” drew 75% women applicants.

Also discussed were various other hiring concerns:

- Ways to make job searches easier, fairer, and less expensive for on candidates. For example, drop APA interviews in favor of interviews using Skype or its competitors; use completely electronic applications (or, at a minimum, electronic writing samples).
- If you specialize in feminist x (e.g., feminist philosophy of science) will you be taken seriously for an “AOS: x” position? Negative answers were common.
- Contract negotiations before accepting a job: what to demand, how to find out what to demand? (My quick view: you have the most power with respect to your dean *before* accepting a position. Your base salary carries over to many future raises. Don't compromise easily on salary in exchange for a higher one-time payment for travel or moving.)
- There is a strong desire among women on the job market to network in a systematic way with others who can be mentors. Through FEAST and other organizations a few (but very few) volunteers have come forward. To my knowledge, there is no good structure in place for mentoring.
- From the side of the hiring faculty members: How do you best talk to your colleagues about the importance of hiring women, people of color, or other underrepresented groups? Should your strategies vary depending on whether you are the only woman? Should you give your colleagues essays to read as background?

Once women find positions they want information and mentoring on many topics. Here are some examples.

- How do you balance teaching, research, and extra-work life? What to expect to improve after your first year? Can you get research done during your first year of teaching? If you have children what does that do to the balance? (Suggestions here included strategies I have certainly never managed to adopt, for example, to write a few hours every morning before you do anything else and systematically cut down the time you spend preparing for class.)
- Joint-appointments: how do you navigate tenure and dual sets of demands? Even if you have a clear set of expectations laid out when you begin teaching, are expectations likely to creep up as years pass?
- How do you deal with difficult male, sexist students who show disrespect for you, especially when your colleagues tell you that these students aren't really sexist?
- Just as for job candidates, new faculty members need a structured system of mentoring. There have been some good panels at professional meetings such as FEAST that led to a few volunteer mentors, but to date there is still no structure.

As a senior faculty member you are not finished. For example,

- You need to socialize younger colleagues who might or might not be initially sympathetic with your goals. Even if you have younger feminist colleagues, do not place the entire burden on them to do it. Your voice carries more weight than you probably believe it does.
- You should be willing to write tenure and promotion letters for other feminists and women.
- You probably will need to take on way too many tasks and serve on too many committees until you have other people with good values to do these things.
- You should serve in visible positions, for example, be involved with the APA or other professional organizations, be willing to act as an external reviewer for program review or on panels such as for the Leiter Report (this last is controversial because of its structure and method as well as the uses made of it).

Of course, other issues were raised concerning a range of inequities and biases, for example,

- Many philosophy journals still do not practice anonymous review. The APA Committee on the Status of Women was tackling this problem in 1975-1980 when I first served on the committee. It, along with childcare at professional meetings, seems to be one of the enduring problems of philosophy.

- Many criticisms were raised concerning the ways in which the Leiter Report biases a variety of facets of professional philosophy.

Finally, many sources are available to us online. They can be helpful both for the information they contain and for decreasing someone's sense of isolation. The list below contains examples of several types of web resources. Most of the sites contain links to further resources.

Websites focused on status or women or related issues in Philosophy:

- APA-Committee on the Status of Women. There are many different "resource" links on the site: <http://www.apaonline.org/governance/committees/women/index.aspx>
- CSW *Jobs for Philosophers* Employment Study by Miriam Solomon and John Clarke:
- Equity in Philosophy wiki (Sally Haslanger) on which links and new data are posted. <https://wikis.mit.edu/confluence/display/philequity/Equity+in+Philosophy+-+Wiki>
- Julie Van Camp's list of percentage of women teaching in Philosophy Ph.D.-granting departments http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doctoral_2004.html
- Top Research Universities' Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index (FISP), Philosophy Data <http://chronicle.com/stats/productivity/page.php?primary=10&secondary=91&bycat=Go>
- Kathryn Norlock worked with the Bureau of Labor Statistics to come up with these figures: <http://www.apaonline.org/documents/governance/committees/Women%20in%20the%20Profession%20CSW.pdf>
- List compiled by the APA-Committee on the Status of Women from volunteered information about MA and PhD programs, numbers of women and feminist friendly faculty, etc. <http://www.apaonline.org/documents/governance/committees/GradPrograms2008.pdf>
- Noelle McAfee's wiki on which data are to be posted and issues discussed. Email noelle_mcafee@mac.com to join it in order to contribute. <http://philosophydata.wikispaces.com>.

Websites that speak to the status of women or gender equity projects more broadly than philosophy:

- Virginia Valian's gender equity project. <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/genderequity/equitymaterials.html>
- Barnard study, *Women, Work and the Academy Report*, that Alison Wylie co-authored. Two different sites:
 - UW website: http://faculty.washington.edu/aw26/WorkplaceEquity/BCRW-WomenWorkAcademy_08.pdf
 - BCRW conference website (with podcast of panel: Nancy Hopkins, Claude Steele, Virginia Valian): <http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/womenandwork/description.htm>
- ADVANCE programs. Google "ADVANCE programs." Sites from all over the country will appear. ADVANCE is a science-focused gender equity program that has been developed in many different ways.
- The Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT. <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/women/women.html>

Websites of philosophy organizations for women or feminists:

- Society for Women in Philosophy <http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/index.html>
- Collegium of Black Women Philosophers <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cbwp/>
- Feminist Ethics and Social Theory (FEAST) <http://www.afeast.org/>
- Feminist Epistemologies, Methodologies, Metaphysics, and Science Studies (FEMMSS) <http://myweb.dal.ca/lt531391/findex.html>

Websites of philosophers that contain many links and helpful information:

- Sally Haslanger's website lists many links to feminist sites including blogs: http://web.mac.com/shaslang/Sally_Haslanger/Links,_etc..html including links to the

Symposium on Gender, Race, and Philosophy

<http://web.mac.com/shaslang/SGRP/Welcome.html> and to her own paper that kicked off much of this discussion, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason Alone," *Hypatia* 2008 <http://www.mit.edu/~shaslang/papers/HaslangerCICP.pdf>

- Elizabeth Anderson's Race, Gender and Affirmative Action Resource Page for Teaching and Study (contains a very long bibliography) <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~eandersn/biblio.htm>

Other sites of relevance:

- Feminist Philosophy Draft Exchange (a Google group that can be joined). <http://groups.google.com/group/feministdraftexchange/>
- Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute (PIKSI) for underrepresented undergraduates. <http://rockethics.psu.edu/education/piksi>

A Few Blogs:

- Knowledge and Experience. <http://knowledgeandexperience.blogspot.com>. Of special note here (among the many facets of the site) is Evelyn Brister's material on women's undergraduate degrees using data from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/xls/tabn258.xls>
- Feminist Philosophers. <http://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com>
- Noelle McAfee's blog. <http://gonepublic.wordpress.com/>
- Lemmings (contains much feminist discussion as well as other topics). <http://lemmingsblog.blogspot.com/>

¹ Carlin Romano, "A Challenge for Philosophy," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 23, 2007.

² Cheshire Calhoun, "The Undergraduate Pipeline Problem," *Hypatia* 24:2 (Spring 2009) 221-22.

³ Miriam Solomon and John Clarke, "CSW Jobs for Philosophers Employment Study," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 82:5 (May 2009), 192 .

⁴ Cited by Solomon and Clarke, 192.

⁵ Solomon and Clarke, 191