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Is the Climate any Warmer for Women in Philosophy?

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out of the meeting, although their papers made it. These papers move in the direction set by Sally Haslanger's powerful essay on "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)," moving beyond where we are stuck to deeper understanding of how and why (Haslanger 2008).

Peggy DesAutels (current Chair of the Committee on the Status of Women) is right to remind us that, beyond some rough head-counting, we are not in a position yet to answer many questions about trends, and much less about professional climate. Our professional association, the APA, has been late to begin collecting basic data on underrepresented groups in the academic profession of philosophy, although that work is (only) now starting. We are fortunate, however, to be able to learn even now from other fields where investigation of discrimination, bias, and climate issues is farther advanced. DesAutels is able to report to us from research in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields, that certain trends—overt discrimination and subtle bias—are likely relevant to philosophy due to the failure of women to reach "critical mass" of at least 25% in the field. No one who has worked in our profession or attended our APA conferences will fail to see the potential of these findings for professional philosophy. It is the likelihood that STEM findings will bear on philosophy that situates the anecdotal evidence that continues to pile up. Linda Alcoff, whose moving and disturbing book *Singing in the Fire: Stories of Women in Philosophy* (Alcoff 2003) collected harrowing tales from successful women in the profession (raising the question of what might have happened to less successful ones), acknowledges that the past decades have seen significant and positive changes in the situation and prospects of women in philosophy. Yet current reports, including ones now collecting in the recently emergent philosophical blogosphere, reveal that stunning and overt forms of sexism, including physical aggression, are not, it seems, uncommon. Michelle Saint, a recently minted Ph.D., digs into the new virtual world surrounding our profession, with decidedly mixed results. I repeat: anecdotal evidence remains important against the backdrop of what has been established in other professional academic areas through careful research. The anecdotal evidence should make us feel an urgent need to have such careful research done for our own discipline and profession; in the meanwhile, it brings to life vividly what it is like to live in those worlds characterized by "overt discrimination and subtle bias," and worse, by sexual predation, harassment, and demeaning insult.

Our contributors, however, do not leave us in despondency. On the contrary, they bring forward not only fresh information, but also reports of effective interventions, grass roots movements, novel channels of information, and targeted trainings and practices, that offer us things most of us can actually do and insist upon, as well as learn and educate about, to start moving our profession forward in more gender-just and gender-friendly directions, as well as toward greater diversity, desperately needed, of other kinds. DesAutels conducts workshops, based in the body of research already available, aimed at advancing women faculty and improving the gender climate in STEM fields, targeting basic and changeable features of academic practices and physical environments, and this could clearly be done in philosophy. Alcoff is one architect of a forthcoming web resource, "The Pluralist's Guide to Philosophy," that will provide, at long last, fair and accurate information on opportunities for graduate work in areas such as feminist philosophy, critical race theory, GLBT philosophy, and continental philosophy that are marginalized and misrepresented in the disproportionately influential Leiter Report. Alcoff urges us to think politically and institutionally about how to change obstacles that are politically and institutionally maintained within our universities and within our profession. Michelle Saint emphasizes the

novel potential of the professional philosophical blogosphere, despite its own dangers and morale traps. She directs us (as do DesAutels and Alcoff) to the unprecedented and revealing blog, *What Is It Like To Be A Woman in Philosophy?* (<http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>), and its more recent pendant blog, *What We're Doing About What It's Like* (<http://whatweredoingaboutwhatitslike.wordpress.com/>). Saint also alerts us to the aggressive public stand taken by several male philosophers on ways to discredit known sexual harassers. The hierarchical structures, formal and informal, of academic institutions and departments have made it difficult for those most vulnerable to abusive and disrespectful treatment to speak up or find allies within or beyond their environments. The virtual philosophical community might change that in important ways, by recruiting new and wide communities of concern and solidarity.

Finally, Rae Langton returns us to the question of what the profession itself can accomplish institutionally. She provides us with the brief overview of a report on women in philosophy in universities in Australia, compiled with almost complete participation of Philosophy Departments and sponsored by the Australasian Association of Philosophy, the counterpart to our APA. Here we get useful comparative data and recommendations. Now all we need is something to compare them to.

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Is the Climate any Warmer for Women in Philosophy?

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Is the climate any warmer for women in philosophy? Unfortunately, there is no way to answer this question with much confidence. There are no systematic measures of even the numbers of women in philosophy let alone systematic measures of the overall climate. When we add in that the climate for women varies significantly from department to department and subfield to subfield, assessing the climate for women in philosophy becomes even more difficult. I take climate to include overt instances of sex discrimination and sexual harassment as well as cumulative instances of subtle bias against women. Both overt and subtle contributors to climate are difficult to ferret out and summarize even for a

single department let alone for such a wide-ranging group of people as philosophers and the diverse departments these philosophers inhabit.

The APA is significantly behind other professional organizations in collecting data about and assessing the climate for underrepresented groups. There are a number of efforts underway to remedy this. As you may know, some philosophers have formed themselves into the Women in Philosophy Task Force. The group's subcommittee on data (Sally Haslanger, Kate Norlock, Linda Alcoff, Miriam Solomon, and I) recently sent a letter to the APA Board of Officers that met at the beginning of November 2010. The letter emphasizes the need for gathering data on underrepresented groups in philosophy and urges the Board to take specific immediate steps to obtain relevant data about APA members and about hiring outcomes. The APA Committee on the Status of Women and the Inclusiveness Committee were co-signatories of the letter. A special thanks goes to Miriam Solomon for her relentless efforts in drafting this letter and moving it forward. As a result of these efforts, the APA agreed to gather data on APA members and from departments advertising in JFP. Nonetheless, there has been difficulty bringing new software online, so it remains unclear how much can be done anytime soon. The APA board is supposed to provide a report by the beginning of February updating the Inclusiveness Committee and the Committee on the Status of Women on its progress in collecting data, so stay tuned.

Meanwhile, more qualitative data on the climate for women in philosophy is being collected, albeit non-systematically, by a recent blog entitled "What is it Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy" (<http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>) and the even more recent "What We're Doing About What Its Like: Making Things Better for Women in Philosophy?" (<http://whatweredoingaboutwhatitslike.wordpress.com/>). Female and even a few male philosophers have sent in short accounts of their individual experiences, both negative and positive, related to being a woman in philosophy. The stories range from horrifying to quite encouraging. But for the most part, readers write in that when strung together, the stories leave them discouraged and depressed. At the very least, philosophy appears to house a number of very bad apples who harass and discriminate against women often with impunity. But exactly how many overt harassers and discriminators are at large within philosophy at this time is impossible to determine. Meanwhile, if you haven't yet visited this blog, I encourage that you do so.

Although we know very little about the degrees and extents of either overt or subtle discrimination against women in philosophy today, the National Science Foundation has funded a number of studies and initiatives tied to hiring and advancing women faculty in Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math (STEM). There are clearly a number of parallels between issues tied to STEM women faculty and those tied to philosophy women faculty. For example, studies show that there are special climate-related issues for any minority group that has failed to reach critical mass in a particular field. Critical mass is reached when a group comprises at least 25% of a field. Right now, our best calculations estimate that women faculty comprise approximately 23% of philosophy faculty in the United States. For some subfields in philosophy this percentage is lower. Although I have no data to back me up, based on my own experiences at various conferences, my guess is that the percentages of philosophers who are women are even lower in such subfields as metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language, and are higher in such fields as feminist philosophy, applied ethics, and possibly even philosophy of science.

When a minority group does not reach critical mass in a field, studies show that it is far more likely that this group will be subject to both overt discrimination and subtle bias that in turn prevents members of that group from being hired or advanced. Certainly, other factors contribute to a continuing chilly climate for women in philosophy, but I think that much insight can be gained by focusing on issues tied to the failure of women faculty in philosophy to reach critical mass. It would be interesting, for example, to compare the climates for women in departments in which women have reached or surpassed critical mass and those that fall far short of the mark. Although such studies have not been done, I can report from personal experience the climate warmth in my own department. My department is quite large (fifteen or so tenure/tenure-track positions) and is very women- and feminist- friendly. I maintain that much of the warmth of our departmental climate is tied to the fact that we have seven tenured and tenure-track women in the department, two of whom are full professors. Thus over forty percent of our philosophy faculty is women and thirty-three percent of our department's full professors is women. It is approaching "normal" to be both a woman and a philosopher at my particular university. Having a significant number of women in a department means that overt instances of discrimination against and harassment of women faculty by other faculty members in the department are much more likely to be challenged and reduced. When departments add in training on implicit bias and implement best practices to prevent it, even the more subtle forms of discrimination have a better chance of being identified and reduced.

Unfortunately, the ratio of women to men philosophy faculty found in my own department is anything but normal nationwide. What I would like to do with the remainder of my time is describe some of the findings of relevance to the climate for women in philosophy tied to implicit bias and a lack of critical mass. I have been building my knowledge on this topic over the past several years, ever since I began serving as a principal on a National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant. This grant was awarded to four Dayton, Ohio regional degree-granting institutions: University of Dayton, Wright State University, Central State University, and Air Force Institute of Technology. Like many other ADVANCE grants awarded throughout the country, this is a five-year, multi-million dollar grant given out by the National Science Foundation with the goal of increasing the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce. My job on this grant is to conduct workshops for faculty and staff at all four institutions on best practices tied to increasing the numbers of and advancing women faculty in STEM fields. One of my emphases is on how best to recognize and address implicit gender biases that contribute to barriers against recruiting and advancing women STEM faculty. Although NSF funds only projects tied to STEM women faculty, much of the research and best practices coming out of these grants are directly relevant to climate issues for women faculty in philosophy. I should note here that there is at least one other philosopher, Carla Fehr, a philosopher of science at Iowa State, who has actively worked on an NSF ADVANCE project.

For a very nice summary of relevant research to date on recruiting and advancing women STEM faculty, see *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* (National Academy of Sciences, 2007), put out both online and in hardcover. For more general gender-related psychological and neuroscientific research, see *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (Fine, 2010). And for specific work on gender schemas and the role they play in the advancement of women

in academia, *Why So Slow?: The Advancement of Women* (Valian, 1998). For those unfamiliar with Virginia Valian's work, gender schemas (or implicit biases) involve non-conscious expectations or stereotypes associated with members of a group that guide perceptions and behaviors. Schemas influence the judgments of both non-group members and group members themselves. These biased judgments affect hiring and advancement and result in an accumulation of disadvantage. Schemas are widely culturally shared; both men and women hold them about gender; both whites and people of color hold them about race. Of special relevance to philosophy, schemas are more likely to be invoked when groups (e.g. women) lack critical mass. We no longer rely on group-based schemas when there are many individuals, since we cannot differentiate among these individuals by resorting to these schemas. On the other hand, when there are very few women and minorities on a faculty, schemas are much more likely to be invoked.

Some of the more striking studies showing the effects of implicit bias on judgments include: (1) A study involving hiring for orchestras. When auditions were behind a screen, the percentage of female new hires for orchestral jobs increased 25-46% (Goldin and Rouse, 2000). (2) A study involving hiring of faculty for psychology departments. When evaluating identical application packages, male and female university psychology professors preferred 2:1 to hire "Brian" over "Karen" (Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke, 1999). And (3) A study examining letters of recommendation for successful medical school faculty applicants. Letters for men were longer and contained more references to the applicants' CVs, publications, patients, and colleagues. Letters for women were shorter and contained more references to personal life as well as more "doubt raisers" (e.g., hedges, faint praise, and irrelevancies). Comments in letters for women included: "It's amazing how much she's accomplished." "It appears her health is stable." "She is close to my wife" (Trix and Psenka, 2003).

Other studies of relevance to the climate for women in philosophy are tied to women's reticence to participate in fields where women are outnumbered by men. As Cordelia Fine points out, there are a number of subtle ways that women can be sent the message that they "don't belong" in particular fields. For instance, one study shows how changing the physical environment from "geeky" to "less geeky" (e.g., from a room containing Star Trek posters, geeky comics, technical magazines, junk food, video game boxes, electronic equipment to a room containing art posters, general interest magazines, and water bottles) significantly increased women's expressed interest in technical jobs and internships (Fine, 45-46). I was reminded by this study of my own graduate student days. All four walls of the graduate student lounge were lined with blown-up photos of past chairs of the department of philosophy—all of them white males. In another study of special relevance to philosophy meetings, advanced women undergraduates were attached to equipment that recorded heart rate and skin conductance and then shown advertising videos for a Math, Science, and Engineering (MSE) conference.

There were two, near-identical videos, depicting about 150 people. However, in one video the ratio of men to women approximated the actual gender ratio of MSE degrees: there were three men to every woman. In the second video, men and women were featured in equal numbers. Women who saw the gender-equal video responded very much like men, both physiologically and in their sense of belonging and interest in the conference. But for women who saw the more realistically imbalanced version, it was a very different experience. They became more aroused—an

indicator of physiological vigilance. They expressed less interest in attending the conference when it was gender unbalanced. ...And although women and men who saw the gender-balanced video very strongly agreed that they belonged there, the conviction of this agreement among women who saw a gender imbalance was significantly lower. (Fine, 42)

How many times have I attended a philosophy conference that consisted almost entirely of men? Although there were many reasons why I decided to engage in feminist philosophy, one of these reasons was simply so that I could attend feminist conferences where for once the women outnumbered the men—where for once I belonged.

Let's go back to the question of whether the climate is warming for women in philosophy. Not only are the chances quite slim of the climate's warming significantly as long as woman faculty fail to reach critical mass, but the APA's ability adequately to assess past, present, and future climates for women in philosophy is grossly inadequate. One of the first expectations for those institutions receiving NSF ADVANCE grants is that there is an assessment of the success of these grants in achieving NSF's goal of warming the climate for STEM women faculty. The only way to assess the degree to which this goal is achieved is to design and implement pre- and post-grant climate surveys that are distributed to both female and male STEM faculty. These surveys are then analyzed for sex effects tied to the degree to which responders agree with such statements as: My department does not engage in sex discrimination; my department is open to women; women have influence in the department; I am able to maintain a good balance between my personal and professional life; and so on. Such surveys are difficult to design well and analyze meaningfully especially when they involve multiple institutions. As a result, these surveys need the expertise of those trained in psychology. Ideally, we will find ways to conduct similar surveys in the APA. Unfortunately, however, NSF doesn't provide funding for philosophy-related projects. I think an important next step for both the Women in Philosophy Task Force and the relevant APA committees is to identify expertise and funding for collecting meaningful demographic data and conducting climate surveys. Once this is done, we can begin to target the chilliest aspects of the climate for women in philosophy and apply best practices towards warming these aspects. As the current Chair for the APA's Committee for the Status of Women and as a member of the Women in Philosophy Task Force, I will do what I can to promote and collaborate on important data collection and climate assessments. Who knows? Perhaps someday in the not-too-distant future, women in philosophy will finally reach a critical mass; all philosophers will live in balmy warmth; and no APA meetings will involve blizzards.

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A Call for Climate Change

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The story in a nutshell about the climate for women in philosophy is this: Although there are more of us than ever, the climate is still bad. We need to take serious steps toward climate change, but the philosophy profession as a whole is as full of denial about this situation as Fox News is full of denials about global warming.

Recently I was sitting in a coffee shop near NYU, reading the blog "What Is It Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy?" and finding myself, with some embarrassment, tearing up.¹ The blog is over-full with stories of disrespect, harassment, sexual objectification, even an attempted rape at an APA conference. Where else but in the U.S. military are women the targets of such regular abuse by their own close colleagues? I have been in departments where new female graduate students are looked over as the new meat in town. At the department holiday party I attended just a few months ago, one of my female students said afterward, "That was a good party! No one groped me in the corner this year." Turns out that happened six years ago and she has not been back to a department party since that time.

I have also known about consensual relationships that developed between male faculty and female students that seemed to be benign, but there continues to be an adverse effect on the general credibility of women students (even women faculty) when such relationships are even suspected: it raises the specter of favoritism and unfair advantages, a specter that can tar anyone's career. Even more disturbing is that, in the consensual relationships I have seen between male faculty and female graduate students, the women almost always drop out of the field. Causality is, of course, difficult to trace with any certainty, yet one begins to wonder. Perhaps the psychic shift from apprentice to lover creates a category transference that changes one's self-understanding. I remember vividly a brilliant young female philosophy student who was very shaken up by a come-on from her (much older) main professor, asking me, "Was that what all his compliments about my exams and papers were really about?" She later "chose" not to pursue philosophy.

But the principal issue that comes out in sharp relief from the blog "What Is It Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy?" is not about harassment or come-ons but the thousand daily cuts that collectively dissuade women from staying in: the aggressive and peremptory dismissals in seminar, the *a priori* rejections and derision of feminist philosophy, the ignoring, the assumptions that affirmative action is the only reason someone has been accepted, the nasty notes put in mailboxes and under one's door, such as the note that just said "whore" in large letters.

Some men have been writing into this blog with surprise, real concern, indignation. I take their concern to be legitimate, and don't think we should scoff too much at their surprise and naiveté. They live and work in a parallel universe, a profession without sexual overtones to be negotiated and managed, and most have never heard women talk in an honest way about the situation they experience.

In my experience, women in our profession are, as a group, afraid to complain, loathe to complain, absolutely committed to not complaining. When I began editing the collection that became *Singing in the Fire: Tales of Women in Philosophy* more than ten years ago, I found that senior women, even women with tenure who had great jobs and enormous prestige, were quite fearful of looking like self-indulgent whiners or political activists rather than philosophers.² Several declined my invitation to write for the book with letters outlining these concerns. They were afraid they'd lose male friends and support just by the act of truthfully describing their experiences of making it into the profession. And, of course, they were right to be afraid. We get reputations for being certain sorts of philosophers, for operating in certain sorts of ways professionally. And successful women who are attractive are whispered about, as using their sexuality for advancement. When even tenured and powerful women keep silent about this situation, it keeps well-meaning men in the dark, lets perpetrators get away with murder, and maintains the climate of victim-blaming.

Reading the blog (and *Singing in the Fire*) will also convey that there has been some significant change over the last 20-25 years. Many more women (at least white women) are in the field, without a doubt. Some female faculty are portrayed in the blog as hostile to women students, as even harassers themselves. I don't doubt these stories, but I'd want to underscore that the overall situation in philosophy is hardly one in which male graduate students are preyed upon sexually or experience objectifying remarks on a regular basis, as well as hostility in seminars and barely concealed disbelief that they might be equally smart. Some men may indeed get belittled, but (white) men as a group are not viewed with skepticism about their abilities or their right to be in the profession given their gender identity.

Anecdotal reports need to be interpreted in light of an understanding of the overall situation. Statistics can help.

Some Recent Statistics:

In 2008 the percentage of PhD's earned by women in the U.S. in all fields was a respectable 46%.³

But, of course, this is not distributed evenly across the disciplines. Two-thirds of Ph.D.'s in Education were female; 58% of PhD's in the social sciences were female. Only 28% of PhD's in the physical sciences went to women, and only 22% of those in engineering. This is still a big increase from 1978, 30 years earlier, when only 10% of PhD's in the physical sciences went to women and 2% in engineering.

In terms of racial and ethnic identities, 23% of PhD's in 2008 were earned by minorities **who reported their identities**. Asians earned the most, 2,543, with African Americans earning 2,030, Latinos 1,765, and American Indians 123. Interestingly, there is a noticeable concentration of minority doctorate recipients in a small number of institutions, a noticeably greater institutional concentration than for the doctorates as a whole. This is an important phenomenon that requires analysis. I would suggest it largely accords with the situation in philosophy.⁴

In regard to philosophy, as we know, the numbers of women are much more comparable to the physical sciences than to the humanities, a fact that no doubt pleases those among us with closet or otherwise unexamined scientific tendencies. The numbers are striking: 21% of employed philosophers are women, compared to 41% in the humanities as a whole.

Also striking is the following. About 27% of PhD's in philosophy have been going to women on average over the last 15-20 years (there may be a bump in a year here and there, but the average remains about this). In the mid-1980s the percentage was 24%. This indicates that we have been stuck