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# “Why so Few Women in Value Journals? How could we Find Out?”<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This paper takes as its starting place Meena Krishnamurthy’s discussion in this issue of women’s underrepresentation in “elite” value journals. Her paper discusses a specific remedy, quotas. My paper focuses instead on the causal issue of explanations for women’s underrepresentation in these journals. I argue that we currently lack the data which would allow us to choose between various hypotheses (or combinations of hypotheses) and I sketch the sorts of investigations that would be needed to further our understanding of the causes for this underrepresentation.

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Meena Krishnamurthy for organizing the collection of papers; to Rebecca Kukla’s wise editing; and to Liam Kofi Bright and Natalia Washington for extremely useful discussion of these issues.

Meena Krishnamurthy's paper in this issue presents compelling evidence that women are publishing in "elite"<sup>2</sup> value journals—specifically *Ethics* and the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*— at a rate disproportionate with their presence in this area of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> She posits that alienation, implicit bias, and stereotype threat may be causes of this underrepresentation, and suggests quotas as a partial solution to the problem. Krishnamurthy argues that quotas would reduce alienation, stereotype threat, and implicit bias—and help to compensate for past effects of these. I think we can be fairly confident that the factors Krishnamurthy cites are present in our profession (as I have argued in my "Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Women in Philosophy"), and she makes a compelling case for quotas as a potential means of reducing these barriers. My purpose here is to focus in more closely on the *causal* issue of why women are underrepresented in these journals. There are actually a large number of potential causes, and I argue that we currently lack the empirical data to fully understand the situation. My goal here is not to provide support for any particular explanation, but instead to sketch out the various hypotheses, and to consider what further data we would need to make progress in explaining women's underrepresentation in elite value journals.

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<sup>2</sup> I should note that I am not entirely comfortable with this terminology, use of which might seem to endorse a hierarchy of journals about which I am dubious. However, I am following the usage of others in this issue, and I think it is clear that none of us actually endorses this hierarchy. Rather we acknowledge it as a reality of the philosophical world in which we currently live.

<sup>3</sup> Krishnamurthy is herself drawing on data from Brooks, "The View From the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*"; Norlock, "Gender Ratios of Papers Published in *Ethics* and the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*"; and Henry Richardson, "The Triply Anonymous Review Process at *Ethics*," *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2010). "The Triply Anonymous Review Process at *Ethics*".

First, a brief review of the data, based on Krishnamurthy's discussion (this issue). Krishnamurthy estimates that women are 28-30% of those working in ethics<sup>4</sup>. But they are only 15-17% of those publishing in *Ethics* and the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*. Both of the journals under discussion show lower rates of publication by women than submission by women, with 20-21% of papers submitted being by women, and 15-15% of those published being by women. We should note, however, that even the submission rates are lower than those we would predict given women's representation in this area of philosophy.

It is worth noting that the phenomenon under discussion does not seem to be unique to either value journals or philosophy. The generalist *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* also reports publication rates by women that are substantially lower than their representation in the field.<sup>5</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel's examination of 5 philosophy journals finds that that women represent 15% of authors at ethics journals and 11% at non-ethics journals—ratios nearly unchanged since the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Such low publication rates by women in academia are known and studied as The Productivity Paradox, which has received substantial attention, particularly with respect to women in science.<sup>7</sup>

### ***1. Implicit, Explicit Bias in refereeing/editing?***

An obvious explanation to consider is that of implicit or explicit bias against women authors. Explicit bias needs little explanation: women have long been associated with domesticity and care, rather than intellect or creative thought, and it is only

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<sup>4</sup> This is based on work by Schwitzgebel, "Citation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*"; and Jennings, "The Gourmet Ranking and Gender: How Can it Improve?"

<sup>5</sup> John Heil, "Editorial," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Schwitzgebel, "Only 13% of Authors in Five Leading Journals are Women".

<sup>7</sup> See for example P Bentley, "Gender Differences and Factors Affecting Publication Productivity among Australian University Academics," *Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 1 (2012); *ibid.*; M. F. Fox, "Gender, Family Characteristics, and Publication Productivity among Scientists," *Social Studies of Science* 35, no. 1. M Fox, "Gender ,Family Characteristics, and Publication Productivity Among Scientists".

within the last century that they have been granted widespread access to higher education. Conscious, explicitly stated bias against women and their work in philosophy seems fortunately to be rare today (though not non-existent).

Implicit bias is a phenomenon that has become increasingly well-known by philosophers in recent years, in which a (largely) unconscious, (often) automatic bias affects (for example) judgments about members of social groups.<sup>8</sup> In the case at hand, the thought might be that implicit biases about *women* or *women in philosophy* lead people to assess women's work as less good than it is. There is substantial evidence of a tendency to associate men with intellectual achievement, and seems to affect the assessment of work.<sup>9</sup> For example, Knobloch-Westerwick showed that the very same abstract in was considered to be of lower quality if it was thought to be by a woman<sup>10</sup>, and Moss-Racusin showed that the same CV was considered less impressive with a woman's name than a man's.<sup>11</sup> Very few studies have yet been done in philosophy, but we can expect that general biases regarding women's intellects would affect the assessment of their work. There may also be specific biases regarding women in philosophy that could affect assessments. DiBella, Miles and Saul showed male philosophers to implicitly associate philosophy with maleness.<sup>12</sup> It would not be surprising, then, if—either due to general cultural

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<sup>8</sup> For much more on implicit bias, see ; Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul, *Implicit Bias and Philosophy Volume Ii: Moral Responsibility, Structural Injustice, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). For an attempt to work through ways that implicit bias may manifest itself in philosophy, see my "Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Women in Philosophy".

<sup>9</sup> Valian, *Why So Slow?*.

<sup>10</sup> Knobloch-Westerwick and Glynn, "The Matilda Effect—Role Congruity Effects on Scholarly Communication".

<sup>11</sup> Moss-Racusin et. al., "Science Faculty's Subtle Gender Biases Favor Male Students".

<sup>12</sup> See "Philosophers Explicitly Associate Philosophy With Maleness". They also showed that female philosophers associated philosophy with femaleness. However, given the numbers of men in the profession, it is far more likely that a woman will be assessed by a man who unfairly downgrades her work than that a man will be assessed by a woman who unfairly downgrades his. It should be noted however,

biases about women, or specific ones about women in philosophy—women’s work in philosophy was at least sometimes given less than its due because of implicit biases.

Women are, we have seen, being published by these journals at a rate lower than that at which they submit. Since it seems antecedently plausible that women and men would be producing equally good work, implicit or explicit bias seems initially plausible as an explanation for this gap.

However, the journals studied are actually ones that rigorously practice triple anonymous review. In triple anonymous review, authors are not told referees’ names; referees are not told authors’ names; and editors are not told authors’ names. Double anonymous review, in which editors are aware of author’s identities, is the norm in philosophy (unlike many other disciplines), but triple anonymous is rare. It is, however, quite important, since desk rejections (rejection by the editor without referee input) are very common in philosophy—up to 65%.<sup>13</sup> So, it might initially seem, both explicit and implicit bias are ruled out as explanations.

### **1.1 How bias could still be present.**

This, however, is too fast. There are at least four relevant ways that bias, implicit or explicit, could still be playing a role in decisions about whether to publish papers.

#### **1.1.1 Insufficient anonymisation**

Removal of the author’s name may not suffice for anonymity. If the editor has already encountered the paper in question—at a conference for example—they may know who the author is. It is not at all clear to me whether this is likely to be the case in philosophy or not. Many scientists tell me that their fields are small enough

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that it has not yet been demonstrated that philosophers’ implicit associations regarding philosophy affect their assessment of work in philosophy.

<sup>13</sup> Lee and Schunn, “Philosophy Journal Practices and Opportunities for Bias”.

that this blocks effective anonymising for their areas of research. There may well be areas of philosophy like this.

### **1.1.2 Gender knowledge**

Removal of the author's name may not suffice to remove knowledge of gender. Even if the author is not recognized, their gender might be—either implicitly or explicitly. Sometimes this recognition will be easy—for example when an author draws on her personal experiences as a woman in a feminism paper. However, it has also been suggested that people may be able to guess gender quite effectively, at least in certain sorts of discourse. Zelcer and Litman found that readers can guess gender at better than chance, when they rely on implicit strategies (e.g. hunches) rather than on explicit gender stereotypes.<sup>14</sup> They also found a sub-group of “high performers” who displayed 80% accuracy relying on these implicit strategies. No studies have yet been done to see how accurate such guesses are for philosophical work.

### **1.1.3 Subject/Style bias**

Removal of name does nothing for bias against styles/subject matters. Some have suggested that women have a different philosophical style than men, or that they are drawn to different sorts of topics. We'll start with topics. Sally Haslanger's survey<sup>15</sup> showed that the top 5 areas of specialisation for women were Feminist Philosophy, Applied Ethics, Normative Ethics, Social Philosophy/Social Theory, and Political Philosophy. The top 5 for men were Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Normative Ethics, and Metaethics. This is at least some indication that women are drawn to the value side of philosophy. But the journals we are considering here are specifically value journals, which surely won't be biased against value topics. However, there could still be subject matter biases which could have a disproportionate effect on women, even within value journals—for example, a bias against feminist philosophy (or a bias in favour of metaethics) could lead to a

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<sup>14</sup> Zelcer and Litman, “Gender Attribution and Implicit Bias”.

<sup>15</sup> Haslanger, “Preliminary Report of the Survey on Publishing in Philosophy”.

disproportionately low number of papers by women. Anecdotal reports of biases against feminist philosophy are widespread, including reports from those who do not themselves work in the area.<sup>16</sup> For example:

After expressing fascination with a course a new (female) member of staff was offering, on feminist philosophy of science, my advisor tells me not to waste time on 'rubbish philosophy' and do 'serious subjects'. He also condescendingly described the really established female professor offering this subject as not 'too poor given the pointless field in which she works'.  
<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2014/12/23/things-that-made-me-doubt-my-future-in-academia>

I am a bearded white male with a PhD in philosophy who stopped working in philosophy departments per se some years ago. I left in part because of what I saw as the discipline's shoddy treatment of feminist philosophy in general and my female colleagues in particular. Since then I have become a research scientist respected in another field.

Ironically, the fact that I did graduate work in feminist epistemology as well as in analytic epistemology has proved an asset in doing science. I oftentimes acknowledge my philosophical background in my professional talks, crediting it for my theoretical range and ability to write clearly.  
<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/advising-a-student/>

I do not work in feminist philosophy myself, and apparently that has encouraged several male professors to share with me their view that feminist philosophy is junk and not really philosophy.  
<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2012/05/07/hang-in-there-in-spite-of-it-all/>

It could also be the case that women are drawn to different styles of philosophy. Certainly there have been feminist philosophers who argue that women have a different writing style, or are drawn to more personal reflections than men. Work in feminist philosophy also tends to span across the analytic/continental boundary

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout this paper, I will be taking examples from the blog "What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy". This blog collects brief anonymised anecdotes about life as a woman in philosophy. It has become a very useful resource for qualitative research.



more than work in most areas. If women do more work in feminist philosophy, this may mean that their work has more continental elements to it. And if there's a bias against such work at these largely analytic journals—which is not inconceivable—that could have a disproportionate effect on women.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Unscrupulous refereeing

Unscrupulous refereeing could negate the attempt at anonymity. If referees google the titles of papers, or key phrases, they can easily learn the identities of authors. Once this is done, there is plenty of room for both implicit and explicit biases to have an effect on judgments. And at least one experienced journal editor, Berit Brogaard, has reported having been told many times about such googling.<sup>18</sup>

“But,” you may ask, “is it really true that referees google papers before making decisions?”

Yep. It's true. I know. I know because people tell me. They are not shy about it either. They say that that's what they do. They don't think it will cause them to make biased decisions. They just want to know whose paper they are wasting their time on.

You have a quick comeback: “There is a way to avoid the Google phenomenon. Don't upload your paper to your website until it's forthcoming in a journal. That takes care of the problem, right?”

Not really. If you are prudent, you don't submit your papers until your ideas have been vetted at conferences. So when people google your paper's title, they will find it, because it was listed at those conferences.

“But,” you think, “I am cleverer than the googling referee. I will just change the title of my paper before submitting. So when the referees google it, the paper won't come up.”

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, it is also *possible* that work on these topics or in these areas is *less good*. If that were the case, it would be at best misleading to describe lower publication rates for such work as due to a bias.

<sup>18</sup> Berit Brogaard, “The Journal Reviewing Process Isn't Anonymous. Did You Really Think it Was? Think Again!”

Not so fast. Referees have told me time and time again that if they don't find the title on Google, they may google phrases (slightly unusual ones) or first lines or arbitrary lines. So even if you change the paper's title, the referees may still figure out who you are.

## 1.2 How can we test for these things?

There are studies that could be done that would give us more information about the likelihood of bias creeping in through some of the mechanisms outlined above. It would be well worth studying how good professional philosophers are at guessing the authors of anonymous papers. One could also study how good they are at guessing the gender. It would be quite important for the subjects in this study to not be students, but rather people at a level where (a) they might be asked to referee; and (b) they have been exposed to philosophy long enough that an inability would not be explainable as due to their short time in the profession.

Now let's turn to the issue of bias against styles or subject matters that women tend to work in/on. First, we would need to study whether there are such tendencies among women. We already have some data showing a tendency of women to work in certain broad areas, such as Feminism. It might be possible to do a further survey looking at sub-areas of specialization. It would, it seems to me, be far more difficult to study styles of philosophy by gender, since we would need a reliable way of demarcating styles of philosophy, and then would need to find some way to measure the relationship of this to gender. I am far from clear on how this could be done. It is also far from clear how we might discern whether *biases* against areas and styles of philosophy that are correlated with gender exist—although we could survey philosophers on how they feel that their style/subject matter of philosophy is received by referees. This would at least give us some indicative data to work with.

A study of unscrupulous googling might be possible, via an anonymous survey of philosophers, regarding how often referees google papers prior to reviewing them. Software like SurveyMonkey would give sufficient assurance of anonymity that it

might be possible to get honest answers. Very likely, results would underrepresent the incidence of googling, so even a relatively low percentage would indicate a serious problem. It might even be possible to survey those who have refereed for the two journals studied, but this could be subject to concerns from ethics committees.

## **2. Low submission rates from women**

The data discussed at the start of this paper showed that women submit papers to *Ethics* and the *Journal of Moral Philosophy* at rates substantially lower than their presence in these areas of the subject, with women at 28-30% in these areas of the subject, but constituting 20-21% of submissions. We do not have data on women's acceptance rates at these journals, so we do not know how it compares to men's. But however the acceptance rate compares, we know that submission is playing at least some role in the underrepresentation that we see. And indeed we also know that low submission rates are worth studying more broadly: The *Journal of the APA* reports (Heil 2015) that men submit 6 papers for every 1 that women submit, and then men's and women's papers are accepted at an equal rate. It is clearly worth considering, then, why women's article submission rates might be low.

### **2.1 Women choose other venues for their work?**

Women may be choosing not to submit to these journals, because they have other places to which they have decided to send their work. But there are a number of different explanations that might hold for this (if it's the case.)

#### **2.1.1 Underrating of own work**

Women may well be more likely than men to feel that their work isn't good enough for elite journals. We don't have direct data on this, but we do know that there is a substantial body of work indicating a tendency for women (more than men) to

under-rate their performance.<sup>19</sup> If this tendency carries over to philosophy, then it may make women reluctant to submit to “elite” value journals with low acceptance rates. As a result, they may be sending their papers to less elite journals. If it’s also the case that women are more likely than men to engage in less mainstream methodologies and topics, then they may also think for this reason that elite journals will be less likely to accept their papers.

Women in philosophy may also be deterred from submitting to elite journals by stereotype threat. Stereotype threat arises when someone from a group that is negatively stereotyped at a particular task is doing a very difficult version of that task in high stakes situation, and cares a lot about doing well. It can cause underperformance, and it can also cause avoidance of the task/situation.<sup>20</sup> Attempting to publish in a top-tier journal is high stakes and very difficult, and those trying to make an academic career care very much about it. Women in philosophy are likely to suffer from stereotype threat, due to the explicit stereotype of philosophy as male, and due to the foundational role of logic, which is likely to be affected by the well known stereotype of mathematics as male.<sup>21</sup> If all this is right, stereotype threat may cause women to avoid the most stereotype threat-inducing environments for when they send off their papers, choosing other venues instead.

### 2.1.2 Invited papers

Another possibility arises from the fact that, in recent years, editors of collections have become increasingly concerned about the demographics of their authors. (This

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Ehrlinger and Dunning, “How Chronic Self-Views Influence (and Potentially Mislead) Estimates of Performance”; Reuben, Sapienza and Zingales, “How Stereotypes Impair Women’s Careers in Science”.

<sup>20</sup> See Goguen, “Stereotype Threat. Epistemic Injustice and Rationality”; McKinnon, “Stereotype Threat and Attributional Ambiguity”; Spencer, Steele and Quinn, “Stereotype Threat and Women’s Math Performance”; Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*.

<sup>21</sup> Spencer, Steele and Quinn, “Stereotype Threat and Women’s Math Performance”; Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*; Saul, “Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Women in Philosophy”; Haslanger, “Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy”; DiBella, Miles and Saul, “Philosophers Explicitly Associate Philosophy With Maleness”.

may be due partly to the success of the Gendered Conference Campaign<sup>22</sup>.) Their efforts to find women contributors might be leading to a situation in which women are more likely than men to have an invited venue for their work. (This is one explanation that Heil considers for the low rate of female submission to the *Journal of the APA*.) Given the length and uncertainty of the journal review process, it can be a completely rational decision to take up an invitation rather than sending a paper to a journal.

## **2.2 Women write fewer papers?**

It is also entirely possible that women submit fewer papers to journals because they write fewer papers. But of course this would also need explaining. There are at least two broad categories of explanations for this.

### **2.2.1 Women have more competing responsibilities.**

It may be the case that women spend more time than men on activities other than research, leading to less time for research. Evidence on this is a bit mixed. We'll start with the thought that women spend more time on administrative tasks: Bentley's "Gender Differences and Factors Affecting Publication Productivity Among Australian Academics" reports men and women spending approximately the same number of hours on administrative tasks, and that these tasks interfere with the research to the same extent for women and men. However, Misra's "The Ivory Ceiling of Service Work" reports that women at mid-career (Associate Professor level) spend substantially more time than men on service/administrative work, leaving men at this level with 7.5 hours more for research each week than women at this level.

It is also still the case that women do more housework and childcare than men. Mothers spend twice as much time on childcare as fathers do. Women also do more housework than men. Half of women do some housework on a typical day, but only

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<sup>22</sup> <https://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/gendered-conference-campaign/>

20% of men do.<sup>23</sup> If women have more of their time taken up by these competing responsibilities, it seems reasonable to suppose that they will have less time for writing papers. Surprisingly, however, family responsibilities do not seem to correlate in the expected way with productivity: Fox, reporting the results of several studies, notes that “the presence of children has either no effect...a slightly negative, insignificant effect..., or a positive effect”.<sup>24</sup> Fox hypothesizes that women with children in science are highly selective about their time allocation, cutting back on other activities rather than research and childcare.

This appealing hypothesis, then, might seem to be one that we should set aside. However, not all of women’s competing responsibilities readily show up on studies of time allocation that ask about research, teaching, and administrative duties. Women also tend to spend a great deal of time on the “invisible labour” of mentoring, counseling and advising students in an informal manner. Here is a passage from Green’s recent “Thanks for Listening”:

I estimate that someone cries in my office at least once every three weeks. I’m not a therapist, a counselor, a social worker, a minister, or a psychologist. I’m not even a department chair. I’m a female professor at a research university, where faculty members and students — especially graduate students — regularly show up at my office, often after sending me a vague email asking if I have time to talk. And then they tell me things. Things that lead to tears....

When I mention the frequency of these types of conversations in my office or point to the tissue box I keep on my desk, a few women colleagues nod their heads knowingly, but many professors act baffled: Why would someone cry in your office? Men in particular say that.

This issue has been studied by social scientists as a part of what is called “identity taxation”, a term Amado Padilla initially coined to describe the additional burdens

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<sup>23</sup> Covert, “Why it Matters that Women Do Most of the Housework”.

<sup>24</sup> Fox, “Gender, Family Characteristics, and Publication Productivity Among Scientists”: 132.

imposed on faculty who are members of minority racial and ethnic groups.<sup>25</sup> Hirschfield and Joseph have extended the concept to cover other under-represented identities.<sup>26</sup> They focused particularly on the additional burdens of advising students in crisis, and on the complexities introduced by both intersections of identities (e.g. being a black woman), and the assumption that possessing one minority identity (e.g. being black) would automatically make one an appropriate advisor with respect to other minority identities (e.g. being lesbian). Hirschfield and Joseph suggest that these burdens are both heavy and under-appreciated. They do not count as part of one's academic job in any formal way, but they are often felt to be inescapable, and they are highly demanding in terms of time, energy, and emotion. Indeed, they suggest that this may play a role in lower rates of publication. It certainly seems worth investigating whether this affects research productivity among women in philosophy.

### 2.2.2 Hostile Climate

Settles et. al. studied women scientists and found that "women's perceptions of a positive or supportive department climate were related to higher levels of job satisfaction and productivity".<sup>27</sup> This suggests that a hostile climate for women could be related to women's lower levels of publication. In recent years, many philosophers have argued that women face a hostile environment in Philosophy.<sup>28</sup> And many women have provided stories detailing their experience with a hostile environment on What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy. Here's just one example<sup>29</sup>:

I have been thinking for a while now about sending in my own experiences of

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<sup>25</sup> Padilla, "Ethnic Minority Scholars, Research, and Mentoring".

<sup>26</sup> Hirshfield and Joseph, "We Need a Woman, We Need a Black Woman".

<sup>27</sup> I. Settles et al., "The Climate for Women in Academic Science: The Good, the Bad, and the Changeable," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 30 (2006): 54.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Haslanger's "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy" and Saul's "Philosophy Has a Sexual Harassment Problem".

<sup>29</sup> <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2012/10/23/the-life-of-a-woman-in-philosophy/>.

harassment and discrimination. There are actually too many to list in detail, but here are a few:

1. As an undergraduate I was invited to be a TA. Very soon, the sixty-something professor I was working with started inviting me to his house to discuss philosophy and when I accepted, he asked me if I would pose nude for his art (I was actually quite surprised to see a similar story posted here since I imagined that such a thing would be rare.) He then professed his love for me- making things very uncomfortable since we had to finish out the semester together. I was young and naive (17) and let the whole thing slide.
2. I had just completed my first year at a top graduate program and was excited to receive an excellent evaluation by the graduate adviser that I had been perceived to be a very good student- at the top of my incoming class. Shortly after that, I was approached by a very influential (married) member of the department to be his RA. I had never had a class with him so I thought that this was because I was doing so well in the program. One month into working with this man, as I was pointing out some of the flaws in one of his arguments, he put his hand on my knee and said "I can't concentrate on what you are saying because you are just so beautiful." I was stunned and asked him if we could get back to work. Later, I learned that this sort of thing was common- that he treated many women philosophy grad students the same way, but that it was unwise to report him because he was so famous the department would never really punish him and I would get pegged as a trouble maker.
3. I have heard other male grad student deriding female grad students in a way that makes it clear that they were taking their perceived shortcomings as representative of all female philosophers. These fellow grad students also were much more interested in my sex life than in hearing my ideas. I have had it implied by these fellow grad students that I and other women were at this top philosophy program, not because of their abilities but because of some sort of affirmative action. (I do not mean to suggest that all the male grad students in my department were this way, but the few that were made it really uncomfortable to be a women philosopher.)
4. I have been ignored, talked over, and talked down to on many occasions. When I gave an objection to a view in a philosophy seminar, just ten minutes later, the teacher credited and praised a male student for having come up with the objection. The male student had not even spoken. After conference talks and elsewhere, I have had speakers talk to the other men in a group, but ignore my comments and questions or give cursory, dumbed-down responses.



5. I have been asked, after receiving favorable reports from professors, if I am sure that it this was not just because I am pretty that I was getting such good reviews.
  
6. I have been told that women are not cut out for philosophy and that they are not as gifted in math and logic and this is why they should probably stay away from 'hard philosophy' like metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind (the areas I work in.)

If Settles et. al. are right, then it is no surprise for women in philosophy to be less productive than men. (Notably, we would also expect them to be less satisfied in their jobs.) But we might still want to know *why* women facing a hostile environment are less productive than men, and there are several possible reasons.

### 2.2.1 Lower confidence levels

Being faced with an inhospitable, hostile environment on a day-to-day basis wears one down. It is hard to keep up one's sense of self-worth and abilities if one feels constantly in need of proving that one belongs in a profession, and if others are making comments to undermine one's confidence. One contributor to the blog "What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy" initially wrote of how difficult she found it to believe that she belonged in philosophy, and then followed up with a post explaining how she came to so lack confidence:

It was because my first day on campus the professor who I had intended to work with told me that after seeing my application, he wouldn't be surprised if I performed so poorly that I failed out and that I didn't have the right 'pedigree' for students at a program of this caliber. Waiting in the hall outside my first seminar, I overheard a group of male students in my cohort discussing that the women in our cohort might have been admitted because of affirmative action rather than merit.

<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2014/04/21/on-speaking-the-whole-truth/>

Women in academia, quite generally, report lower levels of encouragement to

publish as PhD students.<sup>30</sup> If women are faced with an outright hostile atmosphere, and then receive less encouragement, it is no surprise at all if they have lower levels of confidence in their work. From here, it is easy to see how less work gets written: those with less confidence will be slower to believe their work is ready to publish, engage in more re-writing, and perhaps spend more time soliciting comments from others before sending a paper off.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.2.2 Anticipation of hostility

This explanation, from Bright's "Decision Theoretic Model of the Productivity Gap", is related to but subtly different from the lack of confidence explanation. It is that women, due to the hostile climate they experience, anticipate that their work will not be taken seriously. Given such a perception, it becomes rational for them to spend more time polishing and perfecting work before sending it off, thus leading to lower productivity. In addition to the evidence of hostile environments surveyed above, there is also anecdotal evidence of women in philosophy anticipating a hostile reception in this way. From *What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy*:

"I'm sick of feeling like an imposter in this discipline, and I'm sick of having to work twice as hard as all the guys to get even roughly comparable marks"  
(<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/things-im-sick-of/>)

There is also (again anecdotal) evidence that this anticipation may be at least sometimes accurate. Here is a story from a male philosopher:

Every time I said something positive about a female candidate (even casually, in the hallway or in someone's office), the immediate response by my former colleagues was to make a case against that candidate. If I said of some female candidate, "I really liked x's writing sample," the response would be, "But there was a line in one of her letters that made me wonder if she is the strongest candidate from her department," or "But she went to college at an

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<sup>30</sup> Bentley, "Gender Differences and Factors Affecting Publication Productivity Among Australian University Academics"

<sup>31</sup> Bright also defends this explanation, which he develops in importantly different ways, in his "Decision Theoretic Model of the Productivity Gap".

Ivy League school, so she might not be the best fit for us.” Meanwhile, if I said anything positive about a male candidate, the response was always just to agree, and perhaps to add a further positive comment about that candidate. (This was such a striking and uncanny phenomenon that I went out of my way to test it, thinking that I was imagining the effect. And sure enough, it was really happening.)  
<<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2015/11/18/do-women-and-minorities-have-an-advantage-on-the-job-market/>>

This explanation differs from the lower confidence explanation because, on this explanation, it need not be that women lack confidence in their abilities: they may think that they are great at philosophy, and that they write great papers. They may even think that the paper they’ve just decided to rewrite some more is already fantastic. However, because of the hostility of the field they may feel that they need to make it even better. (Whether or not the refereeing process is succeeding in preventing referees from knowing their gender, they may well believe that their gender will be known.) Since they believe that they need to make their work even better to get it published, they will take longer over their work and publish less.

### 2.2.3 Hostile environment distracts from research

One facing a seriously hostile environment<sup>32</sup> may have difficulty finding the time or energy to produce a high volume of research. I have not been able to find studies regarding the time taken up by dealing a hostile environment, but it is not difficult to see that this could happen. Obviously pressing formal charges of harassment or discrimination is immensely time-consuming and exhausting. But even those who don’t do this face a level of stress not faced by those in friendlier environments. Stress is known to be exhausting, and fighting battles is time-consuming. It is clear that women in hostile environments in philosophy have to fight many battles:

I was employed as a feminist philosopher in a department where I was the only woman; that is to say, I was employed to teach feminist theory in

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<sup>32</sup> I am focused here on a hostile work environment, but a hostile environment more broadly is also bound to be relevant. Even if a Muslim woman philosopher finds a congenial work environment, regular harassment and airport profiling are very likely to wear her down and make work more difficult. (I thank Natalia Washington for discussion of this point.)

philosophy. From the beginning there were questions about my competency, about the nature of my work, and with that, very little support from my male colleagues. I felt very undermined, and this did not help my profound lack of confidence. I was given no mentoring, and the one senior woman in a cognate discipline, was an anti-philosopher. She had no sympathy or understanding for what I was doing. One of my colleagues came and shouted at me in front of a grad student when I sent him an email in which I mis-spelt his name. As a result, I moved my office. No-one came to invite me back to the department; no-one tried to sort the issue out. No-one apologised. To this day the former colleague has never acknowledged his role in my moving office. I eventually returned to another office in the department but the whole event was ignored and never spoken of. When I unsuccessfully applied for a promotion at the very same time my first book with a first rate publisher was published, no-one helped me out or suggested I lodge an appeal. Yet there were clearly politics involved in my lack of success. When I was head of the department, my male colleagues basically ignored me or undermined any of my efforts to secure pedagogical changes that would benefit the discipline. (<https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/what-drove-me-out-of-my-department/>)

The person who sent in the post above did not mention what happened to her productivity under the circumstances she describes, but it would be very surprising if it was not reduced. Although she mentions publishing a book with a first-rate publisher, one can only imagine how much more she might have been able to do if she had not had to contend with the battles and opposition that she did

### **2.3 How could we study this?**

It seems to me entirely possible to study at least some of the explanations discussed in this section, and indeed I am now in the planning stages of doing so. A simple survey could be used to study decisions by both men and women not to send papers to particular journals that are widely seen as “elite”. By inquiring about the number of and reasons for these decisions, we could learn whether there are gender differences in (a) the likelihood of submitting to these journals; and (b) whether and why other other venues are preferred. A survey could also be used to ask men and women about number of papers written over a particular time period, thus

informing us about whether women write fewer papers. We could also learn a great deal by surveying women and men in philosophy about the climate that they encounter. Various individual departments have done this in order to arrive at a better understanding of their own situations, but this has not yet been attempted as a way of gauging the climate in philosophy more broadly. It would even be possible to ask about publication rates as a part of the climate survey, thus allowing us to learn whether reported hostile climate is correlated with reported lower publication rates. Finally it would be quite easy to survey men and women on the amount of time they spend with students in distress, and to look for a correlation with research productivity.

### **3. Lower quality work from women**

It is, of course, conceptually possible that women are publishing fewer papers in these journals simply because their work is less good than men's. However, there is no reason to believe that this is the case. Given the wide range of other explanations available, we should be extremely reluctant to even entertain a retrograde explanation like this. Our reluctance should increase exponentially when we consider the ways in which taking this unsupported hypothesis seriously would impact on the experience of women in philosophy who are already very likely experiencing a hostile environment. Accordingly, I will give this one no further space here.

### **4. Conclusion**

In short, we do not yet know why women publish at such low rates in the value journals that are the subject of this special issue. We do, however, have a wealth of hypotheses to explore and some clear and promising directions for research.

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