

A paradox of surprising female underrepresentation in analytic philosophy

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Abstract. In this paper, I raise and respond to the question of why females are underrepresented in parts of analytic philosophy which one might classify as feminine.

Draft version: Version 2 (June 2nd 2022, bibliographic additions).

Introduction. Nowadays there is quite a lot of research into why females are underrepresented in analytic philosophy. There are of course sub-questions within this general question and I shall present one. I believe some people divide topics within the tradition of analytic philosophy into more masculine and more feminine topics. I have actually seen a print-out of website contents pinned up by a postgraduate which implies this division. Masculine topics, I suppose, involve more use of formal symbols and fewer psychological insights.¹ But if we grant the division, we are left with a question: why are females underrepresented in some of the feminine parts of analytic philosophy? For example, John McDowell on the myth of the given: there is a lot of secondary literature on that, but how much of it is done by females? I guess around 12% is.²

A paradox. One might set this up as a puzzle, a paradox even:

(A) There are masculine and feminine research topics in analytic

¹ But what are psychological insights? Here is a starting point: a psychological insight is a proposition about a person's mind or emotions, or a set of persons' minds or emotions, which pleases some readers because they believe it to be true or roughly true.

² Observe the contributors to the *Reason and Nature* Colloquium (Willaschek et al. 1999) and edited collections (e.g. Lindgaard 2008; Schear 2012)

philosophy.

- (B) A quality is feminine only if it is more likely to be possessed by a female.
- (C) There is female underrepresentation in feminine research topics in analytic philosophy.

How can we keep all three propositions? “Surely something has to go.” I shall not directly address the question of which proposition, if any, should be abandoned, but here are some hypotheses about why there are few females in more feminine analytic research topics (or at least some seemingly more feminine analytic research topics).

“Disprove you” hypothesis. In a coauthored paper, Helen Beebee tells us:

Indeed, one of the authors of this paper (Beebee) did, in her younger days, think that feminist philosophy (about which she knew virtually nothing) was signed up to the idea that women just aren’t congenitally suited to, say, logic or analytic metaphysics – an idea to which she took great exception. (2020: 173)

So here is a hypothesis: some female analytic philosophers work in masculine topics just to prove that females can do this, and a lot of the females attracted to the analytic tradition are of this prove-you-wrong disposition.

“Too unstable” hypothesis. The feminine topics of analytic philosophy are regarded as too unstable to be worth investing in. They are likely to disappear, or likely to face perpetual struggles. I suspect some women look at such material as John McDowell on the given and think, “I would just write on Derrida rather than that.”

“Escaping from that” hypothesis. There are female-dominated areas of research within the university in general and female analytic philosophers are

well-acquainted with these. The females that pursue careers in analytic philosophy are hoping for a better deal of some kind than they can get in these female-dominated areas, but the feminine areas of analytic philosophy mostly offer the same deals.

“Not the rock” hypothesis. “In these so-called feminine research areas of analytic philosophy, I would have to be a rock for others, enabling the many nervous and stressed-out philosophers there to continue their research, and I cannot be bothered.”³

References

Beebe, H. and McCallion, A-M. 2020. In Defence of Different Voices. *Symposium 7*: 149-177.

Lindgaard, J. 2008. *John McDowell: Experience, Norm, and Nature*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schear, J.K. (ed.), 2012. *Mind, Reason, and Being-In-The-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*. London: Routledge.

Willaschek, M. (ed.) 1999. *John McDowell: Reason and Nature*. LIT: Münster.

³ This is to be distinguished from the second hypothesis in at least the following respect: the person who makes this statement suggests that if they play this role, then the area would stabilize.