# CLUSTER: Women in Philosophy

To appear in *Hypatia* 26.2 (Spring 2011)

Alison Wylie
*Editor's Introduction: The Costs of Exclusion*

Marije Altorf
*After Cursing the Library: Iris Murdock and the (In)Visibility of Women in Philosophy*

Kristie Dotson
*Concrete Flowers: Contemplating the Profession of Philosophy*

Anita Superson
*Strategies for Making Feminist Philosophy Mainstream Philosophy*

Jacqui Poltera
*Women and the Ethos of Philosophy: Shedding Light on Mentoring and Competition*

Kathryn T. Gines
*Being a Black Woman Philosopher: Reflections on Founding the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers*

**Book Reviews**

Lauren Freeman
*The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy*. Edited by George Yancy.

Edrie Sobstyl
*Review of Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies in Canada and Quebec, 1966–1976*. Edited by Wendy Robbins, Meg Luxton, Margrit Eichler, and Francine Descarries

## Editor's Introduction: The Costs of Exclusion

ALISON WYLIE

Philosophy has the dubious distinction of attracting and retaining proportionally fewer women than any other field in the humanities, indeed, fewer than in all but the most resolutely male-dominated of the sciences. As Marije Altorf notes in her contribution to this cluster, "the debate on the sparseness of women in philosophy often starts with shocking numbers or with anecdotes about means of exclusion" (xx).  and certainly there is much to report on this front. It is striking however, that while the contributors to this "found cluster"<1> take such evidence as their point of departure, their focus is on questions about the implications of under-representation—not just of women but of diverse peoples of all kinds in philosophy, as Kristie Dotson characterizes the problem—and on devising effective strategies for change. I begin with some of the depressing figures presupposed by the article, the four Musings, and two reviews that make up this cluster, and then briefly identify key themes that cross-cut these discussions.

Although those interested in counting find it challenging to assemble robust data on the representation of women in philosophy, current wisdom is that women have earned between 23% and 33% of doctorates in philosophy since 1997 (van Camp 2010; based on the Survey of Earned Doctorates), and currently make up 21% of those employed teaching philosophy in colleges and universities in the US (Norlock 2009; from payroll data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics). In some contexts the representation of women is lower: for example, Solomon and Clarke report that women make up just 15% of the membership of the Philosophy of Science Association (Solomon and Clarke 2006; 2009); and van Camp's summary of women faculty in US doctoral programs shows that close to a quarter have 15% or fewer women in tenured or tenure-track positions.<2> These are striking statistics when you consider that women have received over half the graduate degrees granted in the US since 2004<3> and, by 2006, constituted between a third and half the full-time faculty teaching at US universities and colleges (West and Curtis 2006, 5-7). In the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), where the case has been made that the "needless waste of the nation's scientific talent" is insupportable, it is only in the physical sciences and engineering that the representation of women is lower than in philosophy: between 17% and 25% of earned PhDs, and less than 20% of faculty appointments (NAS 2007, 1-2, 1-3).<4>

The representation of minority scholars who received PhDs in philosophy and among faculty who currently teach philosophy is not typically reported in these sources, although the experience of being an extreme minority within the field is discussed at length in the 2008 *Hypatia* symposium, "On Black Women Philosophers," assembled by George Yancy, and is the point of departure for Yancy's recent edited volume, *The Center Must Not Hold* (2010), reviewed here by Lauren Freeman. In two of the Musings contributed to this cluster, Kathryn Gines and Kristie Dotson describe a picture familiar from many other fields; minority scholars make up less than 14% of faculty nationwide (Turner 2002), and in the sciences, where the data are most robust,<5> the National Academy of Sciences reports that "minority-group women" are less likely to hold tenured positions than men of any racial group or white women, even in fields where they are better represented among earned PhDs than their male counterparts (NAS 2007, I-2, I-5). Gines notes that there were just sixteen Black women who held PhDs in philosophy in the 1990s when she began graduate work, and that there are still fewer than thirty in the field today. And Dotson describes in searingly candid terms some of the ramifications of these figures for those who find themselves "acutely under-represented" (Nelson 2005): they are concrete flowers who, if they flourish in philosophy, do so under duress.

In short, philosophy has a serious problem, not just where the representation of women is concerned but, as Dotson argues, in attracting and retaining anyone who does not fit the dominant race and gender demographic of the discipline. Not surprisingly, there is a great deal of interest in the question, why? What exactly is the nature of the problem, and what can be done about it? Cheshire Calhoun suggests, in a recent *Hypatia* Musing on "The Undergraduate Pipeline Problem" (2009), that the under-representation of women in philosophy seems to arise not so much because women are deflected midway through graduate school or at key transition points in their professional careers (the leaky pipeline model proposed for the STEM fields<6>), but rather at the point when undergraduate students choose their

majors, despite strong representation in lower-division philosophy courses: "there's *some* leakage in the pipeline but the major locus of women's under-representation in professional philosophy seems to be further back in women's educational careers" (Calhoun 2009, 216). What is it that discourages women from entering philosophy soon after their initial exposure to the discipline? Calhoun suggests that it has everything to do with gendered presuppositions that women (and men) bring with them to college in the form of powerfully gendered cognitive/cultural schemas that represent "real philosophy" as a male preserve (221).

Much that has appeared in print on the striking lack of demographic diversity in philosophy makes it clear that the professional and pedagogical environment perpetuated by philosophy is anything but welcoming, powerfully reinforcing the presuppositions identified by Calhoun about who is, or can be, a philosopher. For *Singing in the Fire: Stories of Women in Philosophy* (2003) Linda Alcoff assembled a dozen inspiring and sobering accounts by senior women whose passion for philosophy is palpable and whose contributions are widely recognized, all of whom describe experiences of marginalization and misrecognition that range from overt sexual harassment to more subtly undermining isolation and skepticism. There may be less tolerance for overt discrimination now than in the decades when most of the contributors to *Singing in the Fire* entered the field, but still, white women and minority-group women and men, routinely find their philosophical talents, contributions, and interests discounted, even by colleagues who endorse principles of equity and often in ways that seem unintentional and inadvertent. This "post-civil rights era" mode of discrimination (MIT 1999), widely documented in the "chilly climate" literature since the early 1980s (Sandler 1986; Wylie 1995; 2011), is no less effective for all that it operates below the threshold of conscious intention. On the now standard analysis, persistent, small-scale differences in uptake and response—patterns of evaluation bias deeply rooted in cognitive schemas (as described by Valian 1999), and transacted through what Mary Rowe dubbed "micro-inequities" in the early 1970s (Rowe 1974; 1990)—can have large-scale cumulative effects, generating substantial differences in outcome for white women and for minority-group men and women long after explicit barriers have been dismantled. It is clear, from Halsanger's watershed *Hypatia* Musing, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy" (2008), and the outpouring of stories posted on the recently initiated blog, "What Is It Like to be a Woman in Philosophy?" (2010), that both overt and subtle discrimination is by no means a thing of the past in philosophy. Sadly, as Altorf details in her account of the resolute erasure of Iris Murdoch's philosophical writing, these "means of exclusion" (xx) reflect attitudes and practices that serve not just to deflect those who might take up a career in philosophy, but to marginalize what has been accomplished by those who have made it their intellectual and professional home.

It seems, then, that women are still "very much on probation" in philosophy, as Murdoch was warned (with respect to Oxford) when she entered Somerville College in the late 1930s (Altorf, xx). What the contributors to this cluster make clear is that these patterns of exclusion exact a heavy cost, not just from those they directly affect but from the discipline as a whole. What is at stake are not only principles of equity and a lamentable squandering of potential and realized philosophical talent, but the systematic impoverishment of philosophy itself, conceptually and intellectually.

This is not a new point. The contributors to an APA symposium organized by Diana Tietjens Meyers in 2003<7> identify "cognitive distortions" of various kinds as fundamental to the marginalization of women in philosophy, "short circuit[ing] women philosophers' professional recognition" and, in the process inculcating gender- and race-normative assumptions that systematically narrow the range of acceptable questions and what counts as "excellent philosophical exposition and argument" (Meyers 2005, 150). Even as subfields as diverse as meta-ethics and philosophy of science take a naturalizing turn, the predisposition to privilege the purely abstract—to identify the proper domain of philosophical inquiry with "ideal theory" devised in response to questions presumed to be of enduring and universal significance (Mills 2005)—rules out of court any line of inquiry predicated on contingent social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, class. At best, an analysis that takes these to be philosophically relevant is relegated to the margins, as a specialist subfield or an application of philosophical principles that are properly worked out in the abstract. This is one aspect of the phenomenon of institutional encapsulation so powerfully captured by Margaret Urban Walker in her contribution to the 2003 APA symposium (Walker 2005, 159).

Anita Superson takes up these issues of marginalization here in the context of challenging disciplinary conventions that insulate "mainstream" philosophy from serious engagement with feminist analysis even when it directly addresses questions central to the philosophical canon, and they are discussed by Edrie Sobstyl in her review of *Minds of Our Own*.<8> At worst, "non-ideal" inquiry is summarily dismissed as not-philosophy. Dotson gives a compelling analysis of the fallacy that underlies the boundary-marking question, "How is your project 'philosophy'?," familiar to anyone who has taken up questions that lie outside the philosophical mainstream.

The erasure of Murdoch's philosophical thinking detailed by Altorf is a case in point and one that illustrates what is at stake intellectually. What has been obscured by a biographical fascination with Murdoch's fiction-writing, her sex life, and her struggle with Alzheimer's is a distinctive philosophical stance that reflects her self-conscious positioning as an outsider to professional philosophy. It is Murdoch's commitment to take everyday life and literature as the reference point for her thinking—the world outside philosophy rather than the philosophical canon—that Altorf credits as the source of inspiration for her persistent questioning of the imagery that animates philosophical discourse. "An insider is more likely to notice their presence," Altorf notes (xx), and more likely to bring a critical perspective to bear on the work that these images do and the tensions between them.  It is precisely these insights, the creative, dissident perspectives that arise from the experience of those "diverse peoples" who have not played a role in defining the philosophical canon, that are deflected by the disciplinary conventions presupposed by the question, "but is this really philosophy?" Beyond the manifest injustices of testimonial misrecognition, it is this alienating diminution of the intellectual scope of philosophy that Walker finds so regrettable when she details the costs of the "hidden curriculum" communicated by syllabi and question periods that resolutely emphasize "certain histories, problems, peoples . . . to the exclusion of others" (Walker 2005, 156), and that Dotson finds so confining today. The risk, Dotson argues, citing Robert Solomon, is that "what was once a liberating concept ['philosophy' itself] has become constricted, oppressive, and ethnocentric" (Dotson, xx).

A compelling account of how such self-limiting, alienating conventions have become entrenched and are perpetuated in philosophy will no doubt require consideration of a wide range of cognitive and cultural, institutional and historical factors: all those cited here and more. But insofar as internalized cognitive schemas play a role, it will be crucial to challenge the resolute internalism—the conviction that judgments of philosophical salience and excellence arise exclusively from reasons accessible to reflective deliberation that are presumed to transcend context—that insulates disciplinary conventions from critical scrutiny of their contextual and historical specificity. The challenge of disrupting the cognitive schemas that structure professional interactions and philosophical judgments—"degendering philosophy" as Calhoun puts is (2005, 221) and, more generally counteracting its implicit ethnocentrism on any number of other dimensions—will require a great many different strategies of intervention and concerted hard work on all our parts. The contributors to this cluster identify a number of different ways to constructively engage these issues. Jacqui Poltera makes the case that the challenge of coming to grips with gender schemas confronts women as well as men; effective intervention requires that we devise creative strategies for ensuring that women are not burdened with "equity work" (as Fehr 2011 puts it) and, at the same time, that we come to terms with our own complicity in oppressive disciplinary practices. The contributors to Yancy's collection, *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy* (2010) take up this latter task with respect to racialized norms and practices, illustrating in concrete terms the pluralism of voice and strategy that will be necessary to "push . . . methods, boundaries, and pedagogical practices of mainstream philosophy" (Freeman: xx). Superson urges that, until venues for publishing feminist scholarship (like *Hypatia*) are no longer needed, we should pursue "bridge-gapping solutions" that foster mainstream engagement with feminist work. And Gines describes the constructive, creative benefits of creating, through the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, a context in which to foster the professional development of Black women that, at the same time, opens space for intellectual grown and exploration.

Although they diverge in their analyses of the problem(s) and recommendations for changing the culture, the practice, and the demographics of philosophy, all the contributors to this cluster engage the issues constructively, with a resolve that reflects deep commitment both to principles of justice and to the

integrity and vigor of philosophy itself. As they make clear, the stakes are high; they are intellectual as well as political and institutional.


NOTES

  1.  By "found cluster" I mean that the majority of the contributions to this cluster were open submissions that we received for review within four to six months of one another, just as the Women in Philosophy Task Force was taking shape and a growing stream of publications on these issues were appearing (for example, in special issues of the American Philosophy Association *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*). We editors were struck by the convergences among them and are grateful to the authors for their willingness to work to tight deadlines or, in some cases, to allow us to hold their articles an issue or two so that we could publish their contributions together as a thematic cluster.
  2.  See also Haslanger's summary of the representation of women among faculty teaching in the top 20 graduate programs; she finds that 19% are women (Haslanger 2008, 215, 222).
  3.  The AAUP reports that, by 2004, women were earning 59% of all Master's degrees, 48% of all PhDs, and 53% of PhDs earned by US citizens in all fields (West and Curtis 2006, 5-6).
  4.  Compare these figures to those for the social and life sciences: by 2004 over 50% of PhDs in the social sciences and just under 50% in the life sciences were being awarded annually to women, and women make up over 30% of assistant and associate professors in these fields (NAS 2007, 1-2, 1-3). As you might expect, women are most strongly represented in the humanities. The American Historical Association reports that the proportion of women faculty in the humanities peaked at just over 50% in the early 1990s, and that in recent years 52% of PhDs in the humanities have been awarded to women, ranging from 60% in English to 42% in History (figures for 2008; Townsend 2010).
  5.  Although, see Nelson 2005 for a critical appraisal of how thin the reported data are on the representation of minority group women in the sciences. I have not found comparable data for the humanities.
  6.  I refer here to the leaky pipeline model made famous by Widnall in her AAAS Presidential Address (1988) and detailed in recent reports issued by National Academy of Sciences (2007) and the National Research Council (2010; Kuck 2010). For a more complex analysis of career tracks in the STEM disciplines that turns on a critique of the pipeline metaphor, see Xie and Shauman 2003. And for an overview of work on these issues see Wylie, Jakobsen and Fosado (2007).
  7.  Published by *Hypatia* in 2005, this 2003 symposium was titled, "Women Philosophers, Sidelined Challenges, and Professional Philosophy" (Meyers 2005).
  8.  Sobstyl notes that, even in the context of Canadian scholarship, which was shaped by a second-wave women's movement that began a decade earlier than in the United States, philosophy stands out as a field that lagged behind most others, especially where the integration of feminism into existing disciplinary formations was concerned (xx).

REFERENCES

Alcoff, Linda Martín, ed. 2003. *Singing in the fire: Stories of women in philosophy*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
Calhoun, Cheshire. 2009. The undergraduate pipeline problem. *Hypatia* 24 (1): 216-23.
Fehr, Carla. 2011. What is in it for me? The benefits of diversity in scientific communities. In *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, ed. Heidi Grasswick. Dordrecht: Springer.
Haslanger, Sally. 2008. Changing the ideology and culture of philosophy: Not by reason (alone). *Hypatia* 23 (2): 210-23.
Kuck, Valerie J. 2010. Progress of women in academic science. *Chemical and Engineering News* 88 (42): 32-33.
Meyers, Diana Tietjens. 2005. Women philosophers, sidelined challenges, and professional philosophy. *Hypatia* 20 (3): 149-52.
Mills, Charles W. 2005. "Ideal theory" as ideology. *Hypatia* 20 (3): 165-84.
MIT Committee on Women Faculty in the School of Science. 1999. *A study of the status of women faculty*

*in science at MIT*. Special edition of *The MIT Faculty Newsletter* 11 (4): http://web.mit.edu/fnl/women/women.html (accessed January 5, 2011).

National Academy of Sciences (NAS), Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering. 2007. *Beyond bias and barriers: Fulfilling the potential of women in academic science and engineering.* Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press. http://www.nap.edu (accessed October 21, 2010).

National Research Council. 2010. *Gender differences at critical transitions in the careers of science, engineering, and mathematics faculty*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council.

Nelson, Donna J. 2005. *A national analysis of diversity in science and engineering faculties at research universities* http://cheminfo.chem.ou.edu/~djn/diversity/briefings/Diversity%20Report%20Final.pdf (updated October 20, 2007; accessed October 22, 2010).

Norlock, Kate. 2009. Love to count: Arguments for inaccurately measuring the proportion of philosophers who are women. *APA Newsletter, Feminism and Philosophy* 8 (2): 6-9. http://www.apaonline.org/publications/newsletters/v08n2_Feminism_06.aspx (accessed October 21, 2010).

Rowe, Mary. 1974. Saturn's rings: A study of the minutiae of sexism which maintain discrimination and inhibit affirmative action results in corporations and non-profit institutions. In *Graduate and Professional Education of Women*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Women.

———. 1990. Barriers to equality: The power of subtle discrimination. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 3 (2): 153-63.

Sandler, Bernice R. 1986. *The campus climate revisited: Chilly for women faculty, administrators, and graduate students.* Washington, D.C.: Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges.

Solomon, Miriam, and John Clark. 2006. Some demographics of the PSA. Report to the Philosophy of Science Women's Caucus, November.

———. 2009. CSW jobs for philosophers employment Study. *APA Newsletter, Feminism and Philosophy* 8 (2): 3-6. http://www.apaonline.org/publications/newsletters/v08n2_Feminism_index.aspx (accessed October 21, 2010).

Townsend, Robert B. 2010. What the data reveal about women historians. *Perspectives on history,* American Historical Association. http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2010/1005/1005pro1.cfm (posted May 2010, accessed October 22, 2010).

Turner, Caroline Sotello Viernes. 2002. *Diversifying the faculty: A guidebook for search committees*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Valian, Virginia. 1999. *Why so slow? The advancement of women*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

van Camp, Julie. 2010. Tenured/tenure-track faculty women at 98 U.S. doctoral programs in philosophy. https://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doctoral_2004.html (updated August 25, 2010; accessed October 21, 2010).

Walker, Margaret Urban. 2005. Diotima's ghost: The uncertain place of feminist philosophy in professional philosophy. *Hypatia* 20 (3): 153-64.

West, Martha S., and John W. Curtis. 2006. *AAUP faculty gender equity indicators*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Professors. http://www.aaup.org (accessed December 20, 2010).

What is it like to be a woman in philosophy? http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/about-2/ (accessed December 20, 2010).

Widnall, Sheila. 1988. Voices from the pipeline. *Science* 241: 1740-45.

Women in Philosophy Task Force. http://web.mit.edu/wphtf/Welcome.html (accessed December 20, 2010).

Wylie, Alison. 1995. The contexts of activism on "climate" issues. In *Breaking anonymity: The chilly climate for women faculty*, ed. the Chilly Collective. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

———. 2011. Standpoint (still) matters: Research on women, work, and the academy. In *Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science: Power in knowledge*, ed. Heidi Grasswick. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing.

Wylie, Alison, Janet R. Jakobsen and Gisela Fosado (2007). *Women, work and the academy: Strategies for responding to 'post-civil rights era' gender discrimination*. *New feminist solutions* (series). New York:

Barnard Center for Research on Women. Available at:
http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/. Accessed October 21, 2010.

Yancy, George. 2008. Situated black women's voices in/on the profession of philosophy. *Hypatia* 23 (2): 155-160.

Xie, Yu, and Kimberlee A. Shauman. 2003. *Women in science: Career processes and outcomes*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

# Mary Ann Warren Remembered (1946–2010)

LORI GRUEN

Mary Anne Warren was a pioneer in practical ethics and feminist philosophy.  Much of her work focused on the complex ethical issues raised by reproductive practices: she coined the term "gendercide" to describe sexually discriminatory killings, particularly in the practice of sex selection (1985); she wrote about the significance of birth and the rights of future generations (for example, 1977a and 1989); and she wrote about the effects IVF has on women's interests and autonomy (1988).  Reproductive discrimination is as relevant today as when Warren first wrote about it; women and girls continue to be targets in countries with restrictive reproductive policies and in which religious extremism and civil upheaval prevail. Warren also wrote about other topics of perennial concern, such as affirmative action and environmental issues (for example, 1977b and 1983), but she is perhaps best known for her work on abortion.  Her widely reprinted paper, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," published while she was still a graduate student in 1973, is one of three articles most commonly read by undergraduate philosophy majors.  In it she argued that the moral community consists of persons, beings who have some combination of the following five traits: consciousness, reasoning, self-motivated activity, the capacity to communicate, and self-awareness.  These capacities, and not simply being "human," are what matter from a moral point of view, and since fetuses at an early stage of development do not possess these person-like traits, they cannot directly make moral claims on women's bodies. Although this was a crucial piece of ethical reasoning that continues to inform work in bioethics, animal ethics, and personal identity (see 2000), it is also one that Warren came to regret writing because it caused such controversy.

Her friend and colleague Wanda Taeys notes that "Mary Anne was an amazing, talented, kind, and adventuresome woman. Not only did she make a contribution to the field of Philosophy and to Feminism, she helped keep SWIP alive all those years there were just a few of us at the meetings. Over her 30+ years in SWIP, she served in many capacities, the last being the Pacific Division SWIP treasurer. Thanks to her work in feminism, she expanded the possibilities for all women and particularly for feminist philosophers." A supportive teacher and a magnanimous colleague, Mary Anne Warren was known within SWIP and throughout philosophy as a sensitive and incisive interlocutor; her generosity of spirit will continue to be a model for women (and men) in philosophy.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORK BY MARY ANN WARREN

1973. On the moral and legal status of abortion. *The Monist* 57 (1): 43-61.

1977a. Do potential people have moral rights?  *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7 (2): 275-89.

1977b. Secondary sexism and quota hiring. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6 (3): 240-61.

1983. The rights of the non-human World. In *Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Robert Elliot and Arran Gare. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

1985. *Gendercide: The implications of sex selection*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld.

1988. IVF and women's interests:  An analysis of feminist concerns. *Bioethics* 2 (1): 37-57.

1989. The moral significance of birth. *Hypatia* 4 (3): 46-65.

2000. *Moral status: Obligations to persons and other living things*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.