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A MANIFESTO FOR PHILOSOPHY

Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting

Most academics in philosophy departments accept that the discipline needs to change for the better. In this piece, Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting offer several proposals for how to make philosophy a more inclusive place for everyone.

Following our work on *The Philosopher Queens*, a book on women philosophers by women philosophers, the two of us are often asked what can be done to improve philosophy as a discipline. With only our own experience to draw on we sometimes find it difficult to offer immediate solutions to something so endemic, not only in our own spaces but in the world outside the academy as well. For many, philosophy departments are happy places to work where people are able to flourish and feel secure. However, too many women and other minority groups have experienced the ways in which philosophy departments can be hostile and difficult places in which to work, teach, research, and study. We therefore want to use this opportunity to sketch a list of practical steps that can be taken to make philosophy departments better places for us all.

What follows, then, is a manifesto for change in institutions of higher education with a specific focus on philosophy departments. We draw as much as possible on peer-reviewed evidence and best practice from other disciplines. Some of this builds on valuable reports such as the Society for Women Philosophers (SWIP) report with the British Philosophical Association (BPA) from 2011. We have also taken and expanded upon the discussions that we've had with women philosophers over the last three years.

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First, a brief note on our approach. We take a feminist approach to these recommendations. As such, we believe that any form of feminism should be intersectional and should thus attend to the ways in which different institutional structures and policies can affect women of colour, members of LGBTQI+ community, and disabled and neurodiverse colleagues and students. We therefore aim to put forward policy suggestions that can make philosophy departments a better place for everyone, not only straight, white, middle-class women. Some of this intersectional focus has been missing from discussions of women in philosophy in the past. We do our best to remedy this in the recommendations that follow. However, we also call for a more general intersectional approach from our senior colleagues. Without it, we will perpetuate the exclusion that we seek to overcome.

We also take diversity within philosophy to be essential both as an end in itself and as a means to the end of supporting and creating a more comprehensive philosophy and philosophical understanding of the world. Philosophy departments should strive to represent a diverse society both because it is just, and also because our collective wisdom will be incomplete unless we recognize the value of ideas and approaches that sit outside our limited experience. Such progress is only likely to come about if we radically transform who is included, and which approaches are deemed legitimate, within those conversations.

Of course, what we propose here can only be a sketch and anything we propose is simply a suggestion of possible ways forward. We hope that this set of resources and suggestions will be useful to some people hoping to make a positive change in philosophy.

The Importance of Representation

Women often lack role models in philosophy, in terms of both their teachers and their reading lists. Women make up

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around 27 per cent of staff in university philosophy departments in the UK. This is the worst of all humanities and social science subjects, including economics. This is of course compounded for people of colour, who face multiple barriers to inclusion in the academy. For instance, in a 2017 interview for the *New York Times*, Professor Anita L. Allen notes that:

> white women are better represented and perhaps more easily accepted in philosophy than men or women of color. Pay equity and status gaps between women and men tend to favor men. Only about 1 percent of full-time philosophy professors are Black, whereas about 17 percent are women. A higher percentage of Black men than Black women PhD students go on to tenure-track positions.

This lack of representation leads to several problems that all intersect. First, it leads to implicit bias from colleagues (and women themselves) about their performance and expectations. For instance, it is well documented that when a woman's name appears on a CV it will be under-scored when compared to the same CV with a man's name. This is compounded even further when the name sounds as though it belongs to a person of colour. Philosophy may be specifically subject to this kind of implicit bias. For instance, the 2011 SWIP/BPA report notes Sally Haslanger's comments that:

> As feminist philosophers have been arguing for decades, the familiar dichotomies with which Anglophone philosophy defines itself map neatly onto gender dichotomies – rational/emotional, objective/subjective, mind/body; ideals of philosophy – penetrating, seminal, and rigorous; and what we do – attack, target, and demolish an opponent, all of which frame philosophy as masculine and in opposition to the feminine. (p. 213)

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The lack of representation also of course can discourage students from pursuing philosophy as a viable career choice. If philosophy reading lists are overwhelmingly white and male, those from underrepresented backgrounds will struggle to see themselves as valued in the discipline. In the last few years, there has been some effort to remedy the lack of diverse voices in philosophy, particularly on reading lists. Much of this effort has come from young academics and students mobilizing for themselves. However, anecdotally it seems to be the case that when women, LGBTQ, disabled and non-white writers *do* feature, they are too often included as supplementary or additional material to the 'core' philosophical texts. Women often only take centre stage when a specific week focuses on feminism or gender itself. Although this recent shift is a first and important step on the way to better representation in philosophy, it is not enough.

We offer here two concrete recommendations. First, if you are in a position to do so, hire more women in philosophy departments! The most obvious solution to the lack of diverse voices in philosophy is to be more ambitious and inclusive in hiring practices. If you have junior women in your department, consider whether you are able to support them on the route to a promotion or permanent position. If you know a young woman working in philosophy who needs support, support her. Second, if you are not able to hire new members of staff, undertake a detailed survey of who is in your department and importantly what kind of contract they are on. It may be the case that you have more women and people of colour in your department than others, but they are all on precarious and junior contracts. Likewise, women in academia tend to take on a disproportionate amount of pastoral care, leaving them less time for research and career development. If that is the case in your department, it is time to think about redistribution. Drastic action has already been taken by some universities. For instance, in 2011 Delft University in the Netherlands posted adverts for women-only positions.[1] Eindhoven

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University of Technology has recently done the same.[2] If you cannot do something similar, the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) offers training programmes specifically aimed at reducing bias during the application and hiring process.[3]

Second, if you are in a position to shape and change reading lists in your department, then do so. Many new courses are becoming more inclusive and diverse because individual faculty members are making an effort to change things for the better. This could also involve setting up networks in your department to build a more inclusive and representative curriculum, or it could involve developing alternative reading lists for core modules and presenting them to other members of staff. *The Diversity Reading List* is an important resource, as well as *Women's Work*, which is a categorized and searchable list of research by women.[4] Importantly, look at your reading lists and see exactly *where* the non-male non-white authors appear. Are they always at the end of the reading list? Or all placed in one week? If so, it may be time to make a change.

Tackling Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is rife in academia. Nearly every woman has a story of how they or someone they know has been harassed, either in their own workplace or at conferences and workshops. We recently asked women in philosophy to share their stories of harassment, in order to better understand how this affects our colleagues and students. Some of the respondents recounted male colleagues making sexual remarks in seminars, another discussed a long-term relationship with her supervisor (for him then to move on to another of his students when they broke up). Many shared stories of older men in our discipline saying that women were simply biologically incapable of rational thought and were therefore unable to do philosophy properly at all. Another woman shared a story of a man stroking

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her leg under the table and a colleague coming to assist. Other forms of harassment are rampant in philosophy as well. One source recounted a white faculty member saying to a Black woman that she 'wouldn't mind owning some slaves', then noting that the woman in question might be particularly suited to the job. Several philosophy lecturers have been dismissed for sexual harassment, but some remain in prominent positions in the academy.[5]

Jennifer Saul, a well-known philosopher of language and feminism, has created the website *What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?* Here you'll find a collection of stories from women in our discipline. Some speak of problems in finding women mentors, others recount times when men grabbed them in bars or hit on them in departmental meetings. It makes for a depressing read. This is of course damaging to women. It makes them feel unsafe and unable to speak out. A recent report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine considered the impact of harassment in academia more generally.[6] They concluded that 'the cumulative result of sexual harassment in academic sciences, engineering, and medicine is significant damage to research integrity and a costly loss of talent in these fields'. The report also finds that higher education has the second highest levels of sexual harassment, surpassed only by the military.

So what is to be done? We are going to make three concrete recommendations. First, if you are in a position to do so, put in place a formal mechanism for dealing with sexual harassment in your department. This is recommended by the Centre for Gender Equality in Research and Academia.[7] This involves making sure that there is a member or several members or staff who can be contacted should sexual harassment occur. These individuals need to be trained and have sufficient power to escalate concerns to more senior members of the department. At conferences, a similar mechanism needs to be put in place. Conferences should ensure that they have a clear sexual harassment policy, which is disseminated to all participants.

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They should then ensure that participants have access to a member of the organizing committee whom they can approach should an act of harassment occur. There should then be a clear procedure in place.[8]

Second, departments should implement training in preventing sexual harassment and misconduct. However, the National Sciences report found that this is only impactful when the training is of high quality, and that poor quality (or one off) sexual harassment training and awareness building can actually have a negative impact. Training therefore needs to be catered to specific populations (such as students or staff) as opposed to generic and all-encompassing. It also needs to be conducted in small groups, so that individuals are able to voice concerns or questions without fear. This training then needs to implement some concrete or ongoing change. For instance, staff might organize a mentoring scheme following up on the recommendations made by the trainer. Mentorships, particularly between junior and senior women, can be important for establishing relationships of trust and allowing people to be listened to when they bring forward claims.

Third, there is a need to move beyond mere legal compliance and also address the climate and culture of sexual harassment. This means not only ensuring that the correct mechanism is in place for catching instances of sexual harassment, but also changing the way in which people interact with each other more generally. Sexual harassment occurs under a more general structure of patriarchy and domination, in which women are belittled and undervalued. It also pertains under a system of disbelief, particularly when women who come forward with claims are junior, working class, queer, and/or women of colour. An opinion piece on sexual harassment in the academy from 2020 argues that 'the most effective solutions to sexual harassment lie not in individual victims reporting or wrongdoers retraining. Instead, we should prevent sexual harassment by overhauling the structures of power that support it.'[9] Therefore, to tackle sexual harassment in

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philosophy, we ought to diffuse power as much as possible throughout all members. This may involve ensuring that people are on stable contracts such that they are able to come forward without fear. It may also involve ensuring that there is a transparent way in which decisions are undertaken, allowing it to be clear when something has gone wrong.

Improving Working Conditions

The working conditions in academia have shifted in recent years to increased casualization and division between teaching and research staff. The University College Union found that around 70 per cent of researchers in UK universities are on fixed-term contracts, with many of those being paid hourly.[10] In a survey conducted in 2019 they found that over 60 per cent of staff at universities had struggled to make ends meet, with around 40 per cent unable to pay some of their bills. Eighty-five per cent of participants said they had considered leaving the sector in the last 12 months, with the principal reason for doing so being the lack of job security. A great deal of undergraduate teaching work is now also being undertaken by doctoral and postdoctoral students, with much of this being a mandatory part of their programme. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those without permanent and secure contracts are often women and people of colour. International students who require visas are put in an even more difficult situation, with their ability to stay in the country often tied to their worker status. A recent study on student-migrant workers in Finland found that this led to increased unpaid work and exploitation.[11] This comes at a time when Vice Chancellor pay is higher than ever before, with many earning over £350,000 per year.[12] Similarly, zero hours contracts can often be especially damaging for disabled or chronically ill colleagues, as they are only paid if they are able to complete the work, which is not always possible if people need

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to take time to rest. Secure contracts then become particularly important when taking all of these intersectional concerns into account.

Of course, this problem of casualization occurs within a broader system of university marketization. It is therefore not something that can be resolved in a single university department, but instead requires a much broader approach. Here we offer two recommendations. First, departments should endeavour to conduct research into the distribution of casual and secure work among staff. This is of course not likely to change the ability of people to access non-precarious work, but it will make it clear to students and staff how this work is shared. For instance, some academics have written on their reading lists the kind of contract that they are on, particularly for people who are not paid for preparation or marking time. Being aware of the distribution of contracts and how they operate is the first necessary step in changing the nature of employment at universities. There are of course other steps that could also be considered. For instance, a report written by Nick Megoran and Olivia Mason of Newcastle University, *Second Class Academic Citizens: The Dehumanising Effects of Casualisation in Higher Education*, recommends that grant funding be tied to the provision of secure employment.[13]

Second, members of staff on secure and well-paid contracts must show solidarity with those in insecure work. Recent UCU industrial action has shown the potential for such solidarity, with many permanent staff joining temporary workers on the picket line to fight against the marketization of higher education.[14] That kind of support should be made more consistent and be fed into the policies of departments. For instance, in showing solidarity with international students who have precarious visa status, tutors might refuse to take attendance (or simply always mark everyone down as attending) during their classes, as this is often used to check whether visa conditions are being met.

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Fair Access to Higher Education

Whilst philosophy and philosophers can flourish outside universities and academic structures, educational institutions are frequently the domain where people develop philosophical skills and are seen to contribute to philosophical knowledge. Therefore, *who* is admitted to universities is important. Whilst women are entering philosophy programmes at equal levels to men, this headline statistic fails to consider other dimensions of disadvantage, and poorly considered admissions processes and insufficient financial and educational support will become barriers to women from marginalized backgrounds. A recent government report highlighted the extent to which disabled people are disproportionately less likely to enter higher education, and those who do go to university are less likely to be positive about the quality of their course.[15] UCAS data highlight that BAME students are underrepresented in philosophy and that there is an overrepresentation of private school students, suggesting there are challenges in attracting and recruiting students from ethnic minority and lower socio-economic backgrounds.[16]

Philosophy departments may only have control over some elements of admissions, but the influence they do have should be geared towards facilitating fair recruitment practices and considering what the department can do to recruit a more diverse range of students. This could include advocating within the university for greater financial support for students from marginalized backgrounds, developing study options for part-time, distance or foundation year students, assessing the disparate impact of admissions criteria, to name a few. In terms of the latter, criteria can have disparate impacts, for example if admissions criteria require or value prior study of philosophy, there is likely to be skewed demographics as only certain schools teach philosophy prior to university. Grade requirements within selective universities that fail to take into account unequal

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education environments can also become a barrier to widening participation.[17]

It is also important for departments to recognize that recruiting diverse students is only the first step in supporting a diverse student body and such efforts can even be harmful unless changes are made to internal cultures and practices to support them. This will involve philosophy departments evaluating all the ways in which their policies and practices may facilitate structural disadvantage, from the physical accessibility of buildings, to the cost of books required for courses, to representation on reading lists, to providing childcare facilities and flexible learning options. These are just a few examples, but they demonstrate the necessity of a holistic approach to improving access to, and support for, a diverse cohort of future philosophers.

Building Supportive Communities

As evidenced by some of the recommendations so far, women and other groups are greatly benefited by supportive and meaningful work environments. This fosters greater cohesion and allows people to be believed and supported when they come forward with a concern. Building supportive communities is a necessary step that goes hand in hand with all of the recommendations so far. Legal regulations preventing sexual harassment are useless if women in departments do not feel that they will be believed. Inclusive and diverse reading lists do not make as much of a difference in departments where women are belittled and undervalued. There is a growing network of supportive communities in philosophy. Most notably, MAP (Minorities and Philosophy) helps to establish university chapters that allow people to build supportive communities and establish solidarities. If you do not have one at your university, they can assist you in establishing a chapter and running events. They also host a mentoring scheme for early career philosophers. Creating networks of solidarity and

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support then is central to creating a better philosophy for everyone. There are two areas we want to focus on here: the inclusion and treatment of transwomen and disabled and/or chronically ill students and staff.

As we outlined in our introduction, taking a feminist approach to improving philosophy demands including transwomen. Transwomen are women, and they are some of the worst treated women in philosophy. Many people still lack the knowledge of how to make their departments and classrooms better for trans or gender non-conforming students. Here are some easy steps that can be taken. New York University outlines a set of trans-inclusive practices in the classroom that can easily be adopted.[18] For instance, lecturers can share their preferred pronouns when introducing themselves in seminars and ask students to do the same.[19] Senior philosophers who see blatant transphobia in our discipline ought to voice their solidarity with trans students and colleagues.

Chronically ill and disabled students or colleagues also face many barriers in philosophy departments. For instance, Aimi Hamraie argues in *PhiloSOPHIA* that:

> the presumption of conference presenters and audiences with normative cognitive, sensory, and physical characteristics governs the norms of oral speech, visual aids such as slides, the presentation of logical arguments, the assertion of expertise, and the analysis of texts – particularly when scholars practice these norms without providing multiple means of accessing their content.[20]

Philosophers therefore often use disability as a source of theoretical inquiry but fail to make philosophy departments and conferences more accessible. We draw two recommendations from Hamraie's paper here. First, Shelley Tremain recommends interview-based documentation of structural inequalities experienced by disabled philosophers. This involves setting up a system of accountability

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within departments to document injustice when it occurs. Second, Hamraie argues that we must move beyond discussions of mere accessibility and instead focus on reciprocal structures of dignity and respect. They write: 'the goal of meaningful access should be to create channels for accountability and re-iteration, rather than to decide for others what counts as access'.

Alternative Methodologies in Philosophy and Valuing Interdisciplinary Research

The project of creating philosophy departments that reflect the diversity of the societies in which they operate will need to go beyond recruiting diverse students and professors. The approaches and topics within philosophy that are valued by philosophy departments will affect the extent to which philosophy can describe itself as genuinely diverse, inclusive, and comprehensive. Many of the people who are working on the cutting edge of philosophy are doing so in areas that are often not traditionally considered core curriculum within philosophy, such as non-Western philosophical traditions, or topics such as gender and sexuality studies and disability studies. As some of these topics are interdisciplinary, they are not always prioritized within philosophy departments, particularly when the Western philosophical canon is so dominant in core teaching. Even in these cases, departments can ensure that critiques from these theories are presented, such as including disability studies perspectives in biomedical ethics, and feminist and anti-racist critiques of dominant political theories. It is disappointing that the topics that reflect the lives of marginalized communities are often confined to the periphery of philosophy, despite their philosophical relevance and importance. In relation to gender, we often find that feminist philosophy is confined to one or two lectures in courses where one male philosopher may constitute a whole term.

To those who are sceptical of defining philosophy in a way that allows for the inclusion of gender studies,

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decolonial thought, and disability studies, it is worth remembering that philosophy has constantly evolved its parameters in response to topics considered by philosophers to pose interesting and important questions. Sometimes philosophers, and therefore departments, fall into the trap of methodological gatekeeping, whereby approaches that deviate from the Western analytic history of philosophy are considered non-philosophical or less valid. In an article 'On Diversifying the Philosophy Curriculum' in 1993, the philosopher Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò wrote of the importance of 'opening up our philosophical canons to take cognizance, and even advantage, of the comparative experiences of other people' and their philosophical traditions. Táíwò argues that this is not just because it is the right thing to do, but because our philosophical understanding is improved by it, and the education of students will be fuller when they are taught the full spectrum of philosophical approaches and insights. Students are then taught to compare and evaluate competing approaches and consider the relative benefits and insights each generates. Therefore, in terms of both methodology and content, philosophy departments should consider whether they are fulfilling the ambitions Táíwò sets out. However, to do such teaching, departments must invest in their own knowledge of these areas, as well as prioritize recruiting staff with diverse specialisms.

Whilst departments may not always be able to accommodate the diversity of topic areas, they do have influence over the areas of research that are prioritized and the impact this may have on both teaching and the production of knowledge. Practical ideas for how departments may take this forward could include collaborating with other departments when these specialisms overlap, such as by offering joint modules, or research seminars, inviting (and paying) guest speakers who specialize in areas outside the department, or allowing students to take modules on interdisciplinary topics outside their 'core' classes. Another key recommendation would be to encourage open-mindedness when recruiting for academic staff whose work may fall

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outside what a department has historically considered to be core philosophy.

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Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting are the authors of The Philosopher Queens: The Lives and Legacies of Philosophy's Unsung Women.

Notes

[1] <https://www.theconversation.com/one-way-to-fix-the-gender-gap-in-academia-only-hire-women-25845>.

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/15/its-what-students-look-for-the-dutch-university-thats-only-hiring-women>.

[3] <https://www.wiseli.wisc.edu/>.

[4] <https://www.diversityreadinglist.org/about/>.

[5] <https://www.dailynous.com/2020/10/21/lecturer-fired-sexual-misconduct-allegations/>.

[6] <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/sexual-harassment-in-academia>.

[7] <https://www.uab.cat/doc/recomanacions-egera>.

[8] An example of a conference anti-harassment policy can be found here: <https://www.geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Conference_anti-harassment/Policy>.

[9] <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/37/22614>.

[10] <https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10336/Counting-the-costs-of-casualisation-in-higher-education-Jun-19/pdf/ucu_casualisation_in_HE_survey_report_Jun19.pdf>.

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[18] <https://www.nyu.edu/life/global-inclusion-and-diversity/learning-and-development/toolkits/trans-inclusive-classrooms.html>.

[19] There is an informative video as to why pronouns matter at <https://www.mypronouns.org/>.

[20] <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/641844>.

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