Winning in philosophy: Female under-representation, competitiveness, and implications for inclusive high school philosophy competitions

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Abstract

Women are currently under-represented in academic philosophy. This paper first considers ways in which the competitive atmosphere of philosophy might help explain this lack of diversity. For example, women are stereotyped as less competitive and as less capable of exhibiting what are considered 'winning behaviours' in philosophy, leading to a more stressful, less rewarding experience; lower assessments of merit by themselves and others; and potential under-performance. Second, this paper draws out the implications of this discussion for high school philosophy competitions. Are these competitions likely to further exacerbate existing trends of representation, by associating philosophy with competition and winning? I argue that the way that these philosophy competitions are set up, as friendly, low-stakes team events, rewarding attributes that are 'stereotypically female', mean that these events are likely to support, rather than damage, diversity in the discipline. Indeed, there are reasons to think that these events form an important part of an image-change that is required for philosophy if it is to become a more diverse discipline at university-level and beyond. I finish by offering a series of practical recommendations for high school philosophy competitions, in light of the aim of increasing diversity in academic philosophy, but also with the more immediate aim of making these competitions inclusive, enjoyable events for everyone.

Key words

competition, diversity, Ethics Bowls, gender, inclusion, Philosothons

Introduction

Women are currently under-represented in academic philosophy. Whereas most academic disciplines have seen steady increases in women's participation, often to the point of equal representation or over-representation, in philosophy the proportions of women to men are as low as in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and

mathematics). In the US, women make up 29% of those earning philosophy PhDs (Schwitzgebel & Jennings 2017), far less than the average for all disciplines (Figdor & Drabek 2016). There is a notable 'leaky pipeline' effect, where women's participation in philosophy drops off as we move 'up the stages'. In the UK, women make up 48% of philosophy undergraduates, 37% of Master's students, 33% of PhD entrants, 32% of permanent lecturers, and 25% of professors (Beebee 2021). In the US, women make up 40% of assistant professors in philosophy, 30% of associate professors, and nearly 20% of full professors (Conklin, Artamonova & Hassoun 2019-20). Similar effects can be seen in Australia (Baron, Dougherty & Miller 2015).

In this paper, I first explore one possible explanatory factor in the gender gap: that academic philosophy is competitive (by 'academic philosophy', I mean university-level study, research, and events attended by professional philosophers.) I begin by setting out ways in which the norms and practices of philosophy might stand out from other disciplines as competitive. I then summarise the research on sex differences in relation to competitiveness, explaining the case for why the competitive atmosphere of philosophy might damage female representation. I argue that this case for current disciplinary norms being damaging to women is exacerbated by the significant 'genius culture' at play in academic philosophy.

In the second half of the paper, I reflect on the import of this discussion for high school philosophy competitions such as Ethics Bowls and Philosothons. Are these competitions likely to further exacerbate existing trends of representation, by associating philosophy with competition and winning? I acknowledge that there is at least one legitimate concern here: associating 'being a good philosopher' with the need to participate orally may put some girls off further study in philosophy. However, overall, the set-up and success criteria of these competitions are such that they present to students beneficial norms and images of philosophy that are likely to help retain diversity in the discipline. Moreover, these events tend to reward attributes less commonly perceived to be fixed, such as effort and collaboration, with likely positive effects for the participation of minorities. Additionally, since there is some evidence that early exposure to philosophy positively correlates with women staying in philosophy, events promoting philosophy in schools, such as these, seem overall likely to increase diversity within the discipline.

I finish by offering a series of practical recommendations for high school philosophy competitions. These recommendations focus on how these competitions might be set up so as to increase diversity in academic philosophy, but also fulfil the more

immediate aim of making these competitions inclusive, enjoyable events that people from diverse backgrounds are able to benefit from being involved in.

Whilst my focus in this paper is on *female* under-representation, some of what is said here may be applicable to other groups that are under-represented in philosophy, such as ethnic minorities. For example, the evidence suggesting that emphases on skills requiring 'natural brilliance' damage women's participation applies to other groups that are stereotyped as lacking these skills, such as African Americans (Leslie et al. 2015). So, some of the measures discussed that make philosophy events more accessible to women may also have positive effects for other under-represented groups.

Before going on, it is worth outlining some reasons for why we ought to care about under-representation in philosophy, and why achieving a more balanced representation in the discipline is a worthwhile aim. First, there are social justice reasons. Though women and African Americans are arguably not losing out on wealth or power by missing out on a career in philosophy, there are benefits to engaging in philosophy (for example, the worth that comes from living an 'examined life', employability, critical thinking skills, etc.). It would be unfair if these benefits were more available to some socially salient groups than others. Second, diversity contributes to the flourishing of the discipline. Diverse participation enables entrenched norms to be questioned, a greater diversity of topics to be discussed, and different methodologies to be emphasised.[1]

Competitiveness in academic philosophy

The under-representation of women in philosophy is most probably explained by a number of distinct but interacting factors, resulting in a 'perfect storm' (Antony 2012).[2] In this paper, I focus on just one possible explanatory factor: the competitive manner in which academic philosophy is currently practised. As Sally Haslanger (2008) has argued, philosophy departments are often 'competitive, combative … highly

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[1] For the argument that it matters for philosophy who is doing it, see Jenkins (2013). Friedman argues that having greater diversity will 'improve the quality of philosophy … by enriching the philosophical quest for the wisdom to guide the enormous variety of human lives' (2013, p. 36). Research suggest that women favour methodologies that use observation over appeals to intuition (Buckwalter & Turri 2016) and that women enjoy the use of thought experiments less than men (Thompson et al. 2016).

[2] For discussion of possible explanations of philosophy's gender gap, see Baron, Dougherty and Miller (2015), Easton (2021), Thompson et al. (2016) and Thompson (2017).

judgmental, oriented toward individual accomplishment … [and] hostile to femininity' (p. 217).

A key way in which philosophy might be said to be competitive is with its focus on *arguments* as things that are *won* or *lost*. Several authors have noted that there is a tendency for philosophy seminars and presentations to be particularly combative, especially when compared to the same events taking place in other academic disciplines. For example, Fiona Jenkins (2013, p. 101) talks of the 'mortal combat of the Philosophy seminar'. Indeed, the metaphorical language often used to describe what goes on in philosophy is that of competition and fighting. We 'attack, target and demolish an opponent' (Haslanger 2008, p. 213). Arguments suffer from 'fatal flaws' and get 'shot down' by counter-arguments (Rooney 2010, p. 222).

The issue being identified here is not with argument in the sense of presenting premises towards a conclusion. Nor is it with the adversarial method in and of itself. Given the distinct subject matter of philosophy as addressing particularly intractable questions that are often immune to empirical evidence, presenting arguments and having people identify ways that such arguments go wrong is part and parcel of what it is to do philosophy. As Timothy Williamson (2020) has argued, the adversarial method may 'serve the pursuit of truth' by helping identify and then test the strength of background assumptions, rooting out bad ideas that cannot stand up to scrutiny, and improving theories. The issue is more with the *manner* in which this feedback on arguments is given. [3] Counter-arguments are often presented in a nit-picking, competitive manner, so as to give the impression that the speaker is stupid and the interlocuter superior (e.g. Beebee 2021). Post-presentation Q&A can involve relentless attacks on the case just presented by the speaker, with the primary goal of audience members being to find flaws—any flaws, however minor—in what was just said, in order to prove that the speaker is wrong. These 'competitive attacks are unending' (Friedman 2013, p. 28); the back and forth of argument is expected to continue until one member 'surrenders', at which point, someone has 'won' and someone has 'lost'.

In a 1974 philosophy textbook Alston and Brandt talk about 'the greatest philosophers' as exemplifying the image of the 'gadfly': 'the man with a sharp eye for distinctions, and a quick wit for objections. He is more adept at tearing down than at building up, and he delights in reducing his interlocutors to confusion' (Alston & Brandt 1974, pp. 9-10, cited by Friedman 2013). Whilst this is an old text, there remains

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[3] See Beebee (2013) for the distinction between style and content, and Govier (1999) for the distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality.

a tendency to see those who engage in this exercise in competitive argumentation as 'doing good philosophy'. These people are viewed as 'smart', sometimes irrespective of the actual content of the objections that they raise (Schwitzgebel 2010). An observer would be forgiven for viewing these exchanges as *games* or *contests* rather than a part of a genuine search for truth or wisdom (Friedman 2013, p. 28).

This kind of 'verbal smackdown' (Friedman 2013, p. 27) between competing individuals sets up philosophy as an individualistic, rather than collaborative enterprise. There are good reasons for thinking that philosophical virtue is not being exhibited in these types of behaviours, and that the aim of winning arguments may not be conducive to the pursuit of truth or wisdom. If so, then the disciplinary norms just discussed are bad for philosophy. I will not discuss these arguments further here. Rather, in the next section I will show how these disciplinary norms might be bad for philosophy via their negative effect on diversity within the discipline.

Sex differences, competition and competitiveness

It has been suggested that the adversarial argument style discussed above helps explain women's lesser participation in philosophy (e.g. Beebee 2013; Friedman 2013; Rooney 2010). Gender studies do offer some support for this hypothesis. For example, a study by Lee, Kesebir and Pillutla (2016) found evidence for gender socialisation theories which posit that females value harmony and the appearance of equality, neither of which can be found in the academic philosophy environment described above. In this section I make a related, but slightly different, case from that which has been made by Beebee and others, focusing especially on the *competitive* aspect of the adversarial style. Why, specifically, might norms of competitiveness be bad for women?

One major reason is because competitive norms may lead to women performing less well in philosophy than they might otherwise do. In an article reviewing both laboratory and field studies, Niederle and Vesterlund (2011) show that gender gaps in performance are often greater in competitive environments than in non-competitive ones. Performing a task as part of a competition tends to make men perform better than they would have done had the task been non-competitive, whereas it tends to make women perform worse. Poorer performance means that women are less likely to stay in philosophy—both because they are unlikely to want to stay in a discipline where they are struggling to achieve, and because they are less likely to be selected for a course or job.

Multiple studies suggest that women and men differ in their attitudes towards competition, with women being less likely than men to enter competitions for which they are qualified.[4] If women have more negative attitudes to competition than men, then perhaps competitive norms may make women less likely to enjoy doing philosophy. This could explain why some men view the post-presentation Q&A as an enjoyable game or contest, whereas for some women it is an ordeal to be endured (Beebee 2013).

Women tend to be less confident than men about their relative ability, and these gender differences in confidence account for a large part of women's lower performance in and more negative attitudes towards competition (Niederle & Vesterlund 2011). This lack of confidence also makes a significant difference to the likelihood of women entering competitions (Niederle & Vesterlund 2011).[5]

There is, therefore, some evidence of gender differences in response to competitive norms. However, the argument that competitive norms harm women does not require this to be the case. Gender stereotypes exist that tell us that women should be passive, non-confrontational, conciliatory, and deferential (Manne 2018). They should not 'fight to the death' to win an argument. Nor, say the stereotypes, are they competent to do so, being more adept at interpersonal communication and care than they are at rational argumentation. These stereotypes may be entirely false and yet, at the same time, act alongside current disciplinary norms to damage women's performance in and enjoyment of philosophy. They may do so in at least three ways.

First, women who 'play the game' by joining in aggressive and adversarial contests to 'win' philosophical arguments may be subject to penalties. 'Backlash effects', defined as social and economic reprisals for behaving counterstereotypically, are fairly well-documented (e.g. Rudman 1998; Rudman et al. 2012). Women who exhibit counter-stereotypical traits, such as engaging competitively in a philosophical debate, may be less well-liked than their male peers who do the same, and, as a consequence, be treated with greater hostility and be offered fewer opportunities. At the extreme, they may be viewed as 'ballbreakers' (Manne 2018, p. 254). Thus, even where women are as happy and comfortable in a competitive 'philosophy contest' as are men,

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[4] The original Niederle and Vesterlund (2007) study has been replicated numerous times with similar results; see Niederle and Vesterlund (2011, p. 605) for a summary.

[5] Women's comparative lack of confidence is also likely to be a factor in women's under-representation in philosophy *independently* of the role confidence plays in women's attitudes to competition. This is because confidence plays a major part in successful progression in the field of philosophy (Easton 2021, p. 153).

competitive norms in philosophy may still have the effect of alienating women, via 'gendered norm enforcement' behaviours that penalise women (Manne 2018).

The second mechanism by which stereotypes about competition combined with competitive norms in philosophy may harm women is stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when individuals feel at risk of performing in a way that confirms a negative stereotype. Victims of stereotype threat perform worse on relevant tasks than they do when the threat is not present. Even when unaware of stereotype threat, they show signs of a physical stress response, including elevated heart rate and blood pressure (Steele 2010, pp. 119-120). Claude Steele (2010, p. 111) argues that 'when you realise that this stressful experience is probably a chronic feature of the setting for you, it can be difficult for you to stay in the setting, to sustain your motivation to succeed there' (quoted by Beebee 2013, p. 72). So, an effect of stereotype threat can be withdrawal of the negatively stereotyped group from the setting.

Given the stereotype that women are less able to withstand competitive or aggressive environments, women in a competitive and aggressive post-talk Q&A may experience an increased stress response and may under-perform. Helen Beebee (2013) has raised this issue in relation to philosophy seminars, and has argued that even where there is no under-performance and women continue to engage in discussion and give papers, simply the increase in stress levels is 'a recipe, or at least a part of a recipe, for discouraging women from staying in the profession' (2013, p. 73).

Third, people may develop conflicting schemas of 'women' and 'philosopher'. Schemas are mental constructs, sets of implicit and often unarticulated expectations about what a particular thing is like (Haslanger 2008; Valian 1998). Competitive norms in philosophy, combined with gender stereotypes that women are disinclined towards competitive behaviours, may lead to women feeling that they do not belong in the discipline, and consequently choosing not to continue (or begin) philosophy. That beliefs about stereotypes might have such an effect is backed up by several research studies. For example, Ma et al. (2018) found that gendered beliefs about philosophy indirectly affect participants' interest in philosophy as a course of study via an effect on their identification with the discipline. 'Women who viewed the field as more masculine identified with it less and this related to lower interest in the major' (Ma et al. 2018, p. 77)

The case that competitiveness in philosophy harms women is strengthened by noting that the 'winning behaviours' in philosophy tend to be associated with attributes often regarded as fixed. Leslie et al. (2015) suggest that some fields are perceived as

requiring 'natural brilliance'—fixed intellectual talents—as opposed to malleable skills that can be developed via persistent effort. Their study found that disciplines where success is associated with natural brilliance have lower proportions of women and African Americans obtaining PhDs. Significantly, philosophy was found to have the highest emphasis on brilliance across all the disciplines assessed. This finding coheres with anecdotal reports of a 'cult of genius' in philosophy (Goldhill 2017; see also Saul 2015, Schwitzgebel 2010).

Where might these brilliance-based beliefs be coming from? We might hypothesise that philosophy's culture of competitiveness is one partial factor. This is because what are currently regarded as 'winning behaviours', such as thinking quickly on one's feet, coming up with 'smart questions', and raising razor-sharp objections, tend to be associated with fixed intellectual talents (Saul 2015). They are behaviours shown by 'smart' people or 'geniuses'. These 'smartness judgements are deeply tied to the notion that there is such a thing as smartness, of which some people are lucky enough to have a big dose while the unlucky get less' (Saul 2015). The pertinence of a question asked in a Q&A, and whether or not a particular episode of 'combat' in the seminar room has been won or lost, is partly a matter of subjective judgement. So, assessments of merit made in light of these episodes are influenced by unfalsifiable judgements about who is 'naturally smart'. This subjectivity allows for more opportunities for implicit bias and stereotyping to creep in. As Eric Schwitzgebel (2010, para. 2) anecdotally reports, 'In every case I have noted the smart-seeming person has been a young white male'.

We might therefore hypothesise that the culture of competitiveness exacerbates the perception that philosophy requires certain natural traits such as being able to think quickly on one's feet—traits stereotyped as being more present in men than women (Easton 2021).[6] This, and the wider emphasis on 'natural brilliance', further increases the likelihood of stereotype threat, because women (and African Americans) are stereotyped as not possessing the requisite talents. It may also have a negative effect by leading to clashing schemas that result in a sense of not belonging. In their study of 1,540 undergraduates taking an Introduction to Philosophy course at Georgia State University in the USA, Thompson et al. (2016) found that women believing that success in philosophy is rooted in brilliance affects their sense of belonging and

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[6] I have argued elsewhere that we should question whether 'thinking quickly on one's feet' is an important philosophical virtue. Reflectivity, understood as 'involving an indefatigable pursuit of answers, even where these are particularly hard to find', is of more value and importance to the long-term philosophical project of pursuit of truth or wisdom (Easton 2021, pp. 156-157).

willingness to continue in philosophy in a way that it does not for men who possess similar beliefs. The authors hypothesise that since Leslie et al. (2015) found a high prevalence of brilliance-based beliefs about philosophy outside of academia, in the general public, that undergraduates think that philosophy requires natural brilliance more than most other subjects and this leads women, more than men, to feel that they do not belong in philosophy and to be more likely to stop taking philosophy courses (Thompson et al. 2016, p. 17).

In this section, a number of reasons have been presented for why a culture of competitiveness may be bad for women. Women tend to under-perform in competitive environments and tend to have more negative attitudes towards competition. Yet even if this were false, stereotypes that say that women are non-competitive have pernicious effects. They lead to 'backlash effects' against women who exhibit counter-stereotypical traits such as being highly competitive. They pave the way for activation of stereotype threat in women in competitive environments, resulting in poorer performance and higher levels of stress. They lead to women developing schemas for 'philosopher' that conflict with schemas for 'woman', which then result in women feeling that they do not belong in philosophy. These negative effects are exacerbated by the 'genius culture' in philosophy, a culture that is associated with lower participation rates of women. This builds a picture of why women tend to trickle out of philosophy and how competitive norms may play a role in this.

High school philosophy competitions

High school philosophy competitions are popular in Australia and the US, and are growing in popularity in the UK. In the US, these competitions take the form of 'Ethics Bowls'; in Australia and the UK, they are 'Philosothons'. Whilst there is no uniformity as to the rules by which such competitions are run, they tend to be inspired by P4C Community of Inquiry approaches, and there are a number of features in common between the various competitions. Most significantly for our topic, whilst these are competitions, they are generally not *competitive*. Unlike debating events, where teams are required to take adversarial positions, to hold fast to their assigned perspective, and then bat down the arguments of their opponents at all costs in order to win the argument, the focus in Ethics Bowls and Philosothons is *dialogue*. One of the most important success criteria on which students are judged is collaboration with peers, and thus there is an emphasis on respectful and engaged discourse with others, with the aim of mutual pursuit of truth, rather than simply persuasion and scoring points.

These are, nevertheless, competitions. Students are given numerical scores based on how well they meet a number of criteria, scores are added up, and one school walks away with a trophy. It is also common for winning individuals to be selected from different year groups and/or for the 'most promising philosophers' to be identified (e.g. AAP 2021). Given the research discussed in the last section, these competitions prima facie look problematic. The research implies that girls will be less likely to put themselves forward for these competitions and to perform well at them. Stereotype threat may mean that girls under-perform in these competitions and find them stressful events. Moreover, these events may contribute to people developing mismatched schemas of 'philosopher' and 'women'. Young women might come to believe that philosophy requires an ability to succeed in a competitive environment, which, if held alongside a belief that says that they, as female, cannot succeed in competitive environments, may put them off continuing with philosophy. Whilst the focus of this paper is gender diversity in academic philosophy, clearly if girls are finding such events stressful and/or are put off participating in them because they are competitions, then this is a problem independently of a concern with gender balance in academic philosophy. Since participation in these type of activities is rewarding for those involved (for example, by helping develop cognitive abilities (e.g. Fair et al. 2015), fairness considerations mean that we should want these to be inclusive events that everyone can enjoy and participate in on an equal footing.

So, should we view philosophy competitions as problematic? Certainly we should be concerned about what is going on before students arrive at university. Although research has been limited, there is evidence of a pre-university effect on the gender gap in philosophy, markedly on student attitudes towards philosophy and intention to continue in the subject (Baron, Dougherty & Miller 2015; see also Calhoun 2009). Dougherty, Baron and Miller (2015) found that 'female students were less likely to believe that they could do well in philosophy, were less able to imagine themselves becoming philosophers, predicted they would be less comfortable participating in classroom discussions, and found philosophy less interesting than male students' (p. 469). These attitudes were all found to be predictive of each other, clustering effects that support the hypothesis that students enter university with a gender schema pertinent to philosophy (Dougherty, Baron & Miller 2015, p. 469).

Gina Schouten (2016) points out that even if there were no evidence of a pre-university effect on the gender gap in philosophy, people's pre-university experiences will affect the way that their university experiences are received. For example, building confidence in school-age girls, and developing schemas about philosophy that are

more likely to make women feel like they belong in the discipline, may 'inoculate' students against the effects of later negative experiences. It therefore matters a great deal what perceptions of philosophy we are giving out, from an early stage.

However, there are a number of good reasons to think both that these competitions are giving out a perception of philosophy that is conducive to diverse participation within the discipline, and that they are set up in a way that makes them attractive, fair and inclusive competitions for girls. In their review of research on sex and competition, Niederle and Vesterlund (2011) find that gender effects are significantly reduced when competitions are low-stakes, testing stereotypically 'female' attributes, and in teams. All of these apply to philosophy competitions.

First, these are not high-stakes competitions. They are touted as 'friendly' events. There is a heavy emphasis on the value of taking part, rather than on winning. As one anonymous facilitator commented after a UK Philosothon,

> … although the Philosothon was a competition it hardly felt competitive at all. Students almost forgot that they were being judged against each other. The 'prize' for the students was just being in the discussions and being able to thrash out these things. A medal for winning was just the icing on the cake. Everybody walked out feeling like the proverbial winner. (Philosothon UK 2021)

Additionally, whilst there are winners, there is no real sense of the non-winners being 'losers' in the manner of a boxing match (or perhaps a philosophy seminar).

Second, many of the criteria against which participants are judged test stereotypically female attributes; asking for help, facilitating, collaborating, and deep listening result in higher scores. Indeed, the criteria might even be described as 'punishing' stereotypically male attributes; grandstanding, dominating and combative behaviours result in lower scores. The effect of this may be to make the competition more friendly for women because they then have greater confidence in their abilities to succeed at the task; 'relative performance beliefs may change when performing in a stereotypical-female rather than a stereotypical-male task' (Niederle & Vesterlund 2011, p. 606). One reason might be that stereotype threat is less likely to be activated; indeed, positive stereotypes exist about women's abilities at these skills which may bolster female participant's confidence.

Third, these are team events. 'Women are more likely to enter a tournament when in a team, whereas men compete somewhat less, and the gender gap in tournament entry is reduced by about two-thirds when participants are in teams.' (Niederle & Vesterlund 2011, p. 623) So, we can predict that girls are less likely to be put off by the fact that these events are competitions than they would be if they were individual events. This coheres with my initial look at levels of participation of girls versus boys in philosophy competitions, which appear roughly equal.[7]

It is also notable that these events tend to reward attributes less commonly perceived to be fixed, such as effort and collaboration. This is in clear opposition to 'a "genius" culture built around praising those students and philosophers who think quickly on their feet, know the philosophical jargon, or are able to phrase their questions in particular ways' (Thompson et al. 2016, p. 20). As the empirical data from Thompson et al.'s (2016) study shows, preventing students from developing the belief that philosophy requires natural brilliance may be one way to prevent women from leaving the field. These authors suggest that 'Working to counteract these beliefs about philosophy among the general population will also help prevent women from feeling they don't belong in philosophy before they even take any courses in it.' (Thompson et al. 2016, p. 20) Philosophy competitions are one way to help encourage people to develop such beliefs about philosophy—amongst the students involved, but also more widely.

There is also a general case to be made that pre-university exposure to philosophy, of which philosophy competitions are an important part, is conducive to diversity within the discipline. There is some qualitative evidence that women who continue in philosophy are more likely to have been exposed to philosophy prior to college (Aymelek 2015). This fits with the fact that female drop-off in the UK occurs most dramatically at a later stage than in the US and Australia, between undergraduate and master's level study (Beebee & Saul 2011, p. 8). In the UK, children are often exposed to philosophy via religious education, a compulsory subject in the curriculum. Schouten (2016) argues that a theoretical case can also be made for why early exposure to philosophy might be useful in encouraging diversity within the discipline. For example, it might reduce the likelihood of stereotype threat by making it less likely that people develop all-things-considered judgements of philosophy as stereotypically male. It is also easy to incorporate pedagogical strategies shown to

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[7]   This is an anecdotal judgement arrived at from looking at results of competitions in the US, UK and Australia published online (e.g. AAP 2021). Future empirical research might analyse the gender balance of entrants and winners.

protect against stereotype threat, such as values-affirmation exercises and exercises emphasising the malleability of valuable intellectual traits.

Philosophy competitions are both an *effect* of increased interest in philosophy at high school level, and a likely *cause* of increased visibility and interest in high school philosophy in future. Thus, we might see them as an important part of the image-change required of philosophy in order to improve diversity in the discipline. We might also hope that such effects will trickle upwards to the university, through the involvement of practising academics and future philosophy university students in these events. This might help contribute to more epistemically-beneficial norms being cultivated at university level, and a less 'chilly' climate in general within academic philosophy.

There is, however, one worry about high school philosophy competitions. These events are highly focused on participation. Students are judged almost entirely on their oral contributions; non-participation will result in lower scores. Many university-level teachers, particularly in philosophy, have observed that women have lower rates of class participation than men (e.g. Brighouse 2016). And although results have been mixed, many studies have backed up this anecdotal reporting of women under-participating in verbal discussions (see Leraas, Kippen & Larson 2018 and Jones & Dindia 2004 for summaries). A concern is that female students may enjoy these events less than their male counterparts because of their discomfort making oral contributions. Additionally, students might take away the message that being good at philosophy requires being good at making oral contributions, putting female students off continuing in philosophy (as well as students from ethnic minorities who have been observed as participating less often in class). This is particularly worrying in light of the finding that 'gender differences in comfort speaking in the philosophy classroom partly explain why women score lower than men in [the survey item] IdentificationWithPhilosophy' (Thompson et al. 2016, p. 9). In reality, making oral contributions to philosophical dialogue is only one fairly small part of what professional philosophers get up to, and it has a minimal role in formal assessment of university students.[8] It would therefore be a shame if associating 'being a good philosopher' with the need to participate unnecessarily put some female students off further study. Perhaps this concern might be offset if P4C approaches increase confidence and participation, 'training' girls and ethnic minorities so that they are

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[8] On the value of silence in philosophy, and potential over-emphasis on class participation, see Liu (2020).

more involved in class participation at later stages than they might otherwise have been.

With the exception of the focus on verbal participation, the attributes of Philosothons and Ethics Bowls discussed in this section suggest that the negative effects of competitions are *significantly reduced*. However, this does not mean that they are *eliminated*. So, an objector might say that philosophy competitions are still bad for women, and that it would better to drop the competition aspect of these events altogether. A number of responses are available to this objection. First, this section has flagged various benefits of such events for inclusivity and diversity. Whilst these benefits would still be available were the competition aspect of these events dropped, it seems unlikely that inter-school and national events would take place *at all* if the competition aspect were removed. Given that gender effects are significantly reduced and sometimes eliminated (Niederle & Vesterlund 2011) it seems likely that, on balance, these events are beneficial from the perspective of diversity. Second, concerns about under-performance and lack of inclusion of girls are not borne out by results published online, where girls seem well-represented or even over-represented amongst individual winners (e.g. AAP 2021). Third, whilst inclusivity and diversity are the concerns of this paper, these are concerns amongst other values and concerns we have. There are many benefits to running such events—benefits for individuals competing in these events, and for the wider aim of promoting philosophy in schools. Thus, even if it were false that on balance these events are beneficial from the perspective of diversity, it is unlikely that any negative effects for women would outweigh the various benefits of these events.

Implications for making high school philosophy competitions inclusive

From the above discussion we can draw out several implications for how philosophy competitions can be inclusive events that promote gender diversity in the discipline. First, to partially address the concern raised about the value placed on oral participation, additional opportunities could be woven into philosophy competitions for participation prior to the event. For example, students could submit written questions or counter-examples to other groups in response to the stimulus material prior to the main event. Many events already do this; for example, the 2021 Australasian regional and national competitions required that students submit four questions in advance in response to stimulus materials (AAP 2021). There could also be more diverse means of participation during the event. For example, with

competitions taking place online, text comments could be included in the assessment as a form of participation.

Second, organisers could attend to the sex distribution of groups. Students are usually randomly allocated into groups, with the consequence that there can be significant gender imbalance. This has the effect of making sex more salient, meaning that stereotype threat is more likely to be activated, possibly leading to worse performance and greater stress. More balanced groupings would reduce these negative effects.

Third, competition organisers should continue to make the competitions friendly, low-stakes events that emphasise the importance of attributes generally seen to be malleable. Teachers, facilitators and judges should take care to use language that avoids attributions of 'genius' or 'natural talent' to those who are successful. Building confidence in and enjoyment of philosophy should continue to be a primary aim of such events.

Fourth, organisers of philosophy competitions should take care when choosing stimulus materials to think about the image being given of philosophy, and how welcoming it is to people from a diversity of backgrounds. For example, rather than a traditional Gettier case involving Smith and Jones having ten coins in their pockets, it might be preferable to use a real-life case that includes some biographical information. The use of real-life ethical dilemmas is already the norm in Ethics Bowls. Or one might select a fictional short story, read in advance of the event.[9] This helps with the image-change of philosophy that we might hope that such events contribute to, 'supplanting images of philosophy as masculine, isolating, and impractical with images of philosophy as practical, inclusive, and socially valuable' (Schouten 2016, p. 285). It would also help respond to a finding by Thompson et al. (2016) that women seem to enjoy the use of thought experiments less than men.

Last, philosophy competitions can include explicit opportunities for students to reflect on their own values in light of the dialogue. 'Value-affirmation' exercises have been shown to reduce the anxiety that students feel at the prospect of confirming stereotypes. For example, a brief in-class writing assignment asking students to reflect on what they valued was found to significantly improve the grades of African American students, reducing the racial achievement gap by 40% (Cohen et al. 2006). As Schouten (2016) has pointed out, P4C easily accommodates these kinds of

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[9] For an excellent collection of thought-provoking short stories, specifically designed for teaching ethics to young people, see Bovens (2018).

exercises. Indeed, some competitions already include explicit opportunities for participants to reflect on the impact of the dialogue on their own lives and the practical implications of what has been discussed. For example, one organiser asks students to reflect on 'What are you more aware of now in your lifestyle after participating in this Community of Inquiry?' and 'Have you discovered anything practical which may enrich or change the way you live?' (Smith 2020) Aside from the obvious benefits that asking such questions have for making these competitions enriching, valuable exercises, they could help increase the confidence and performance of minority groups engaged in philosophy.

Conclusion

Academic philosophy as currently practised is often marked by a competitive atmosphere; individuals compete to 'win' arguments by demonstrating the flaws in the case of their 'opponent'. Arguably something has gone wrong here with philosophy's focus, for philosophy should be a collaborative exercise in pursuit of the goal of finding truth or wisdom. Rather than focusing on this type of argument for why competitiveness might damage philosophy, I have argued that competitiveness might damage philosophy via the damage it does to diversity within the discipline. Drawing on empirical research, I have shown how competitive norms may be harmful to women's participation in academic philosophy. Even if stereotypes about women preferring harmony and disliking individual competition are false, women may still suffer negative consequences as a result of the competitive environment. First, women may experience hostility because they engage in the competitive behaviours expected of philosophers. Second, they may suffer additional stress and possible lower performance as a result of stereotype threat. And third, the competitive environment may contribute to people developing schemas about philosophy that lead to women feeling that they do not belong in the discipline. Matters are made worse by 'winning behaviours' (such as thinking quickly on one's feet or coming up with 'smart questions') exemplifying a 'genius culture' where being good at philosophy is associated with fixed, intellectual talents—a culture that is associated with lower participation of women (Leslie et al. 2015).

How does this bear on high school philosophy competitions? Initially we might be worried about the inclusivity of these events—that girls might be put off participating, and that they might find such events stressful and under-perform compared to boys. And, since research suggests a pre-university effect on the gender gap in philosophy, we might be worried that these events do not help encourage diversity within

academic philosophy. However, there are good reasons to think this is not the case. The way that these events are practised—for example, rewarding stereotypically female attributes—suggests that they are inclusive events that form part of the positive image-change needed for philosophy. Moreover, since these events tend to reward attributes less commonly perceived to be fixed, such as effort and collaboration, there are likely positive effects for the participation of minorities. Thus, the net benefits these events have for supporting diversity in the discipline are likely to outweigh concerns around setting up philosophy as having winners and losers.

A number of steps can be taken to further support these already inclusive events in being both accessible to females and likely to promote gender diversity in academic philosophy: there should be a diversity of means of participation, care should be taken to avoid minority groups being alone in their group; the friendly, low-stakes nature of the competitions should continue to be emphasised; stimulus materials should include practical, real-life examples; and explicit opportunities should be included for students to reflect on their own values and how they influence, and are influenced by, the dialogue. In this way, these events can continue to be an important part of the image-change that is required in philosophy, hopefully with effects that might filter up to representation within, and the practice of, philosophy at university level and beyond.

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