

No evidence of gender bias in philosophy

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Despite being a male-dominated field, a recent study has found no evidence for gender bias against women in philosophy, in terms of securing tenure-track positions as college professors. Good news, but why aren't there more women in philosophy?

Gender imbalance is prevalent in many fields. In the humanities, one discipline stands out for its underrepresentation of women - philosophy. So, why the imbalance? One idea receiving a lot of attention is that subtle forms of prejudice in philosophy departments act to reduce the opportunities for women to advance professionally, and color how people perceive women's academic credentials.

These proposed prejudices include things like unconscious bias, which can affect how someone from a stereotyped minority is perceived, without the explicit awareness of the person assessing them. This could manifest as peers and superiors perceiving women negatively, which might put them at a disadvantage for professional development and advancement.

But are there any concrete data to demonstrate that these prejudices are present in philosophy departments, and are the reason for the [gender imbalance](#)? Sean Allen-Hermanson, of Florida International University and author of a recent study in *Frontiers in Psychology*, doesn't think so. "It was becoming accepted that women are automatically downgraded by advisors and hiring committees despite the absence of data," says Allen-Hermanson. "I saw an opportunity for investigation and critique."

Allen-Hermanson set about analyzing data on the proportion of men and women who secured tenure-track professorships in philosophy from 2004-2014. If significant bias was at work, you would expect a lower proportion of women to obtain these desirable positions. He studied the publication records of early-career men and women in philosophy, where publishing scientific articles is often a crude measurement of career success and a factor when someone is assessed for an academic position.

For candidates who had not had a previous academic appointment, women applying for tenure-track positions had about half the number of publications as their male counterparts, and the male candidates were about three times as likely to have published in a highly regarded journal. However, both men and women from prestigious institutions were more likely to have published in highly regarded journals and were much more likely to obtain a position at another prestigious institution, suggesting a two-tier employment market based on prestige where gender was not a significant factor.

Interestingly, from 2008-2013, 40% of men in the employment market were successful in landing a tenure-track job compared with 50% of women, meaning that women were represented among those securing tenure-track employment 25% more frequently. Women made up 26% of the employment market, but represented 31% of the tenure-track placements.

So, what does this all mean? "We should be reassured," explains Allen-Hermanson. "Going back at least a decade, there is no evidence women are downgraded when they are up for jobs as professors in philosophy, and in recent years women actually appear to be overrepresented." So why are there less women in philosophy overall? Some studies have found that less [women](#) are choosing to major in philosophy at the undergraduate level, and so other factors may be turning them off the

discipline at an early stage, which will require further work to identify.

Increasing diversity in [philosophy](#) is important. "Philosophy is universal, and it's a bit weird if it is dominated by one demographic slice," says Allen-Hermanson.

More information: Sean Allen-Hermanson, Leaky Pipeline Myths: In Search of Gender Effects on the Job Market and Early Career Publishing in Philosophy, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00953](#)

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