MUSINGS

The Mentoring Project

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I. ORIGINS OF THE MENTORING PROJECT

Readers of this journal are well aware of the underrepresentation of women in the profession of philosophy: in its journals, its most highly regarded programs, and in the top ranks of the professoriate (Haslanger 2008; Gines 2011; Wylie 2011). In these ways, philosophy is to the other disciplines in the humanities as economics is to those in the social sciences; it is sometimes referred to as "the philosophy exception." Periodically over the past several decades this problem has reemerged in the consciousness of the profession, and various solutions have been pursued.[1] Although each has been important for many individual women philosophers' careers, they have reached only what has been called the first tipping point: the point at which the presence of women as a group is noticed but resisted, which occurs when women become 20% of the workforce. None have met with enough success for the profession to reach the second tipping point, the point at which a change has enough momentum to no longer require extraordinary, externally imposed measures to sustain itself. In this case, when a tipping point is reached the forces of implicit bias and outright sexism are unable to keep women out of the profession. With regard to ending sex segregation and bias in the workplace, that point seems to be around 40% (Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering et al. 2007). We are now in a time of heightened awareness of the low representation of and implicit bias against women in philosophy. In 2007 Sally Haslanger presented her study of the problem in philosophy, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)" at the Central APA meeting, then published it in this journal (Haslanger 2008), and its claims have become the subject of much discussion in departments and on blogs in the English-speaking philosophical world. In 2009 Haslanger organized the first meeting of a group that has come to be known as the Women in Philosophy Task Force. This group focuses on solutions to the specific problems of implicit bias,

sexual harassment, and underrepresentation of women in philosophy department faculty and student bodies, as well as underrepresentation of women's work in conferences and journals.

There are broadly two kinds of solutions to the problem of underrepresentation of women in a profession: either fix the institution (that is, make changes to the profession and the process by which people are accepted into its ranks) or fix the women (that is, change the behavior of the excluded to more precisely mimic that of the included). The task force agreed that both should be pursued, and various initiatives have resulted, such as gathering data to using blogs for discussing the problems widely and calling out bad behavior, such as the "Gendered Conference Campaign" (Feminist Philosophers 2009) and the "What Is It Like to be a Woman in Philosophy" blog (What Is It Like), and disseminating information about solutions, such as the "What We're Doing about What It's Like" blog (What We're Doing). During the initial task-force meeting, the authors of this Musing agreed to work together on what came to be known as the Mentoring Project: a mentoring workshop for junior faculty women in philosophy. In this Musing we describe how we designed the mentoring workshop, its aims, what it accomplished, and what we have learned about this kind of effort.

II. AIMS AND DESIGN OF THE MENTORING WORKSHOP

A great model for a philosophy-mentoring workshop was presented at the task-force meeting by the University of Kansas economist Donna Ginther. Economics as a profession, as was mentioned, is similar to philosophy in the numbers of women (around 23% of the professoriate). To address this underrepresentation, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) started a mentoring program in 2004 with funding from both the American Economic Association and the National Science Foundation. As good empiricists, they treated the program as an experiment by randomly choosing only half of the applicants for the program, while keeping the other half as a control group. The resulting study has recently been published by Francine Blau, Janet Currie, Rachel Croson, and Donna Ginther (2010). The results are very impressive: by three years after the intervention, workshop participants were 20% more likely to have a top-tier publication, and they had two more publications than controls did. After five years the treatment groups had 3.2 more publications on average, and were 17% more likely to have an NSF or NIH grant.

The key aspect of the economists' workshop has been its focus on the work of the participants, as opposed to the facts of exclusion or bias. There is neither mere complaining nor wishful thinking that if they just do their best and ignore gender issues, parity would somehow be reached. The economists are not trying to change ("fix") their profession in order to make it more friendly or accommodating

to women; rather they are trying to teach women the attitudes, networking techniques, and work habits that have worked for those women who have become well-respected, senior members of the profession. The point of focusing on the work is that taking the participants' work seriously and engaging in good, hard critique among peers will presumably have good effects for both the participants and the work that they present. The mentees will be more likely to publish the particular work and also have greater confidence about the value of their work because it has been taken seriously by senior mentors and improved through critique. The rationale behind the economists' mentoring workshop design involves two other basic assumptions that are made very explicit: 1) networking is teachable and important, and 2) there are unwritten rules that mentors can share. Mentors were thus chosen for their abilities to network and their willingness to examine and teach their techniques, as well as their high-quality work as professors of economics.

The economists were able to host two types of workshops: one for assistant professors in research-heavy institutions, and the other for assistant professors in teaching-oriented institutions. The study just cited came from the former type of workshop. Since we in the task force were more concerned with the issues of research visibility and success in research-heavy, highly visible institutions, and because we were limited in the resources (financial and human) we had available to us, we decided to implement a workshop that would focus on research.

The workshop plan divides the mentees into cohort groups according to field and assigns a senior woman mentor to each one. The cohort groups exchange papers; first and second readers are assigned for each one in advance of the workshop meeting. During the workshop an hour is devoted to discussion and critique of each paper within the cohort group, including discussion of where the paper should be submitted for publication and what needs to be done to tailor the paper to that journal. Between paper discussion sessions are panel discussion sessions for the entire assembled workshop group, in which groups of mentors speak about important topics for career development in the field. Informed by a survey of participants taken before the workshop, we organized panels on: professional visibility, getting tenure, research and publication strategies, and workplace balance (that is, balancing teaching and research). We also organized a presentation by a human-resources consultant. Fran Sepler, who specializes in gender climate issues, presented a session entitled "Gender and the Workplace," which discussed ways to reduce gendered bias in academia, including ways to deal with sexual harassment and complaints about sexual harassment by students. The entire workshop was kicked off by a keynote speech from Christine Korsgaard the first afternoon. There were organized dinners both evenings, and during the lunches people were to sort themselves to discuss suggested topics: teaching strategies (for research-heavy vs. teaching-heavy institutions) one day and strategies for future communication with their cohorts the next. The group stayed fairly close

(sessions and meals in the campus student center with accommodations either in a dormitory or the campus hotel located in the student center) for the entire meeting (beginning at 4pm on Sunday and ending at 1pm on Tuesday), with very little opportunity for a break, which was by design.

We advertised the Mentoring Project with flyers at the 2010 Eastern APA, and then through listservs and blogs. We sent out emails to our networks of colleagues around the country, asking them to spread the word. Applications required a cover letter explaining the applicant's career stage and needs for mentoring, a CV, and an abstract for a paper that would be critiqued at the workshop. We received 54 applications by the deadline, and immediately set about selecting and sorting them into cohorts. Although we had budgeted for only 30 participants, the evident need for the workshop led us to expand the numbers to accommodate as many of the applicants as we could. Given the applicant pool, and the fact that we wanted groups of five mentees in each group, we classified the cohorts as follows: agency/autonomy, Aristotle/Descartes, ethics, continental, history of modern, Kant, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science/decision theory, and political philosophy. For some of these groups, the papers had less in common with one another, and the matches between mentees and mentors were less than ideal because there was quite a bit of difference in the literature that the papers were addressing and that mentors and mentees were knowledgeable about. One of the accepted applicants, who did not fit well into her group, withdrew just before the workshop. (Unfortunately, this was a point at which it was too late to replace her with someone who had not been accepted to the workshop, and so that cohort had one fewer member.) Also, there were a few applicants whom we could not place into cohorts because they were the only one or two in their field among the applicants, and the field was, we judged, too far from others to be workable. In the end, 42 mentees participated in the workshop (including one who had to come late and one who had to attend via Skype for last-minute personal or health reasons).

We had tremendous success recruiting senior women in the profession to be mentors for the workshop, despite the fact that we offered only to cover their expenses, and we invited them less than two months before the workshop was held.[2] We thought it important to match mentors to the cohorts that we assembled, and given that the mix of fields did not match our preconception, that was the right strategy. The timing of the meeting in late June seemed to be especially convenient for the mentors. The workshop was held at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, where one of the co-directors is a senior faculty member; the Philosophy Department generously contributed to the workshop and lent logistical and moral support for the efforts. The website was hosted by the Philosophy Department of the University of Kansas, where the other co-director is a senior faculty member and associate dean. Kansas also provided considerable financial support for the workshop. After the workshop was over, we followed up with a detailed survey of the mentees.

III. How It Went

To say that the workshop went well is a complete understatement. Qualitatively it was, for us and for many of the mentors and mentees with whom we spoke after the event, a great experience of philosophizing, networking, and exchanging ideas like the best of philosophy conferences. Statistically, of the 33 survey respondents, 73% said the experience was extremely positive, and another 15% said it was positive. Anonymous comments gathered after the conference indicated that it was "deeply helpful," "wonderful," "phenomenal," and "awesome." One said, "I am so thrilled that I got to participate. I finally feel like I am part of a real philosophical community." Another said, "This was definitely the best, most inspiring philosophy event I've ever attended." Still another said, "I really really really needed many of the different things I took away from this workshop."

Although there were no negative overall comments, there were some aspects of the workshop that were not as satisfying for some of the participants. With the exception of only one of the respondents, the participants stated that they most wanted feedback on their work, and second, they wanted the opportunity to network with senior women and peers in their field. Although we recruited outstanding mentors in their own fields of research, we were limited in our ability to exactly match each one of the mentee's fields with cohorts specialized enough to have a deep familiarity with the literature and journals with which they were engaging. All in, 11 of 33 respondents expressed some dissatisfaction with the feedback they received on their work (9 saying that this goal was achieved only "to some extent"). It is not clear how to solve this problem, since it is unrealistic to think that all mentees can be precisely matched with a mentor, but it would be better to communicate the fact that some mentors may not be conversant with the precise literature of all the members of their cohort. Networking with senior women was also problematic: only 10 said this was achieved to great extent, 20 to some, 3 not achieved. The comments suggested it was because each mentee had only one mentor and not much time to socialize with the others. This situation could be improved with a greater amount of time for the workshop in which mentees could meet with other mentors, and perhaps, as one person suggested, having the panel discussions run as smaller roundtable discussions, allowing participants to interact with more of the senior women in small groups. However, any lengthening of the workshop timeframe would be more costly both financially and time-wise, and the potential benefits must be weighed against those costs.

All of the panels were reviewed favorably overall (that is, they all received a rating of at least 1.6 on a 5-point scale, with 1 as "extremely helpful"), with the one that focused on strategies for publishing rated the highest. One panel excited a somewhat heated debate about whether the advice for raising one's professional

visibility should be the same for everyone, regardless of their type of institution or career goals. During the conference a few topics for which we had not planned panel discussions arose as crucial for at least some of the mentees. One was the issue of how to combine childbearing and rearing with a successful career. Another was the issue of finding jobs for both spouses in dual-career couples. These were issues that we did not think were of primary importance for the majority of the participants, but could have been included in an additional panel or replaced one of the existing panel discussions. Yet another unsatisfied desire was more information about how to handle hostility, bullying, or just plain politics in one's department. Although there was one session on harassment, it was focused more on sexual harassment, and could be tweaked to include other forms of bad behavior by colleagues and department chairs. Some of the mentees were interested in strategies for finding better second, or in a couple cases even first, jobs. There was also some disappointment about the way that teaching was relegated to the background in the discussions; the panel on balancing teaching and research was entitled "Finding Time for Research," and the panel discussion on "Getting Tenure" focused on the research requirements at research universities. Finally, some wanted more problematizing of the profession itself in light of sexism and other forms of exclusion and marginalization in the profession. These comments make clear that we did not communicate the aims of the workshop clearly enough. Given our original choice to focus on "fixing the women" and on doing so by giving them advice designed to help them publish in high-status venues in the profession, the workshop was not well equipped to advise those who did not have employment at an institution where they were expected to publish in such venues, whether that was because they were at a teaching-oriented institution or they did not yet have a tenure-stream position. We might also have limited participation to those who were in tenure-track positions at research institutions, but after considering that possibility, we rejected it as too paternalistic. But of course the best way not to be paternalistic is to supply the potential participants with full information so that they can make an informed decision about whether to participate. Furthermore, although we did have one session on sexual harassment, it focused more on how to work within the existing systems rather than on how the philosophy profession might be transformed.

IV. What We Should Consider for Next Time

The most important consideration, then, is whether to limit the scope of the workshop to those who wish to be mentored to succeed in the profession as it currently exists and as success is currently defined. That is, should we continue to produce a mentoring workshop to help women to publish in the top journals, as currently defined, and to achieve professional visibility through presentation

of their work at conferences, colloquia, and on the Internet? The answer, it seems to us, is clear. There is a place for such a workshop, and provided that it achieves its aims, it is worth continuing. We also think that there is a place for discussing the scope of philosophical work, for working to widen that scope, and for transforming the field in ways that may be friendlier to women and minority philosophers as well as discussing work on gender, race, disability, and other topics that are currently marginalized in the profession. But given the origin of the Mentoring Project in the Women in Philosophy Task Force and in the concerns about the underrepresentation of women in the top departments and top journals of the field, this is its most appropriate aim.

A second very important consideration is funding. We sought and received funding for this project from the APA, but those funds had to be greatly supplemented by our own institutions. For this to be sustainable in the future, the Project will require longer-term institutional support. The APA has made it clear that it is not prepared to award larger amounts of money in any given grant request, and that a repeated event will need to seek other sources of funds. We shall again be seeking institutional and foundation support to conduct a second workshop in 2013.

Notes

1. The Society for Women in Philosophy was founded in 1972, "to promote and support women in philosophy" (Society for Women in Philosophy). The APA Committee on the Status of Women was founded in 1970 (Lopez McAlister 1994).

2. We are pleased to acknowledge, with thanks, the mentors: Linda Martín Alcoff, Louise Antony, Ann Cudd, Elizabeth Harman, Jennifer Nagel, Lisa Shapiro, Anita Superson, Jennifer Uleman, and Charlotte Witt. Sally Haslanger, while not a mentor for a cohort group, participated as a discussant in the workshop and was an important informal mentor.

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