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SEXISM IN THE ACADEMY

Troy Vettese

AT EACH MAJOR POINT of the academic career path, there is significant hemorrhaging of female talent. In many countries of the Global North, women compose a little over half the undergraduate student body, which is only slightly more than the share of female doctoral students. It is after graduate school that the precipitous declines begin, as the number of women falls approximately ten percentage points each at the stages of assistant and associate professorship, so that finally the percentage of female full professors hovers around 32 percent. (In the European Union, the average share of full professors who are women is 21 percent.) This inverted pyramid is recognizable across academies in the Global North; even Scandinavia, despite its generous welfare states, conforms to the pattern. The few disciplines that boast large female faculties, such as education and foreign-language departments, tend to have the least prestige and are axed first during fiscal crises.

While there were significant gains during much of the 20th century, feminist progress in the academy has slowed and may have already come to a halt. Since the 1970s, an increasing number of women have joined university faculties, but this obscures the fact that in the last thirty years much of that influx has been directed toward non-tenure-track positions. There are still two tenured men for every tenured woman, a ratio that increases with the prestige an institution has. In the US, the share of female full professors as a proportion of all female faculty remains stuck in the single digits, increasing only modestly since the early 1990s. In medicine, female first-authorship has either stalled or declined in the most prestigious UK journals in recent years, after

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substantially increasing since the mid-2000s. Among the most serious expressions of women's hardship in the academy is the case of US black female scientists, who often experience desolate isolation in addition to sexual and racial harassment, according to a recent study. The proportion of black women among tenured female faculty in the US has actually fallen since 1993.

Given that women have been the majority of the undergraduate student body in many countries for the last three decades, one can no longer argue that equality can be achieved by simply waiting for young female scholars to emerge at the end of the academic "pipeline." The increase in women at later stages of the pipeline is the consequence of a slow 'pull' provided by the expanding pool of women at the beginning," the authors of a 2008 study in *Science* suggest, "not because of an effective 'push' that reduces attrition during career advancement." Strengthening this push, however, means addressing the sexist practices that "push" men along the cursus honorum, because these practices tend to be the very same mechanisms that oust women from the academy. The zero-sum nature of this problem makes it difficult to discuss, let alone redress. Ugly small-brained misogyny explains only part—albeit an important part—of this result. More insidious are banal sexist practices that reinforce one another to compose a vast ramshackle machinery that elevates men to the pinnacle of the ivory tower. This durable, unjust structure largely depends on the attitudes and practices of three social groups: male scholars, male students, and male romantic partners.

GIRLS GROW UP in a world hostile to female intelligence, but the academy is supposed to be a bastion against anti-intellectualism. It isn't. In academia as outside it, female students tend not to receive their fair share of encouragement, and often they are confronted with outright skepticism about their abilities. In one experiment, reported by Corinne A. Moss-Racusin and her coauthors in *PNAS*, 127 US scientists were asked to hire an undergraduate lab assistant and decide on a salary based on fictional CVs of equally qualified men and women. The scientists were more likely to offer the position to men as well as more hours of mentorship, and gave a lower salary to women, about eighty-eight cents to the dollar. These early instances of discrimination matter because the mentorship of undergraduate students is often crucial

the theft of women's time. A supervisor's command to "prove it again" (that is, run another experiment) often leads female scholars to be much more careful in their work, but also less productive as a result. This bias is especially pronounced against black female scientists.*

The "prove-it-again" problem manifests itself in the social sciences, too. In a very well written working paper presented at the American Economics Association conference in 2018, Erin Hengel argues that the best journals in economics force women to write 9 percent better than men. She tracked this discrepancy by measuring the degree of revision between first and published submissions. She found there was no discernible difference between the first submissions of young female and male economists; the margin of better writing was created *during* the editorial process by editors and referees. Although female economists end up writing better, they are not rewarded for their efforts, as their papers are accepted at the same rate as men's. The gulf of good writing widens over the course of one's career to 12 percent, either because women internalize this form of discrimination or come to expect it. In comparison, even as men age and scramble up the career ladder, their writing fails to improve at all; instead, they keep submitting the same poorly written mush as they did as young scholars. Again, one must stress the practical consequences of sexism—the extra labor required for better writing extends the publication process an extra six months, further decreasing women's output relative to men's. Men retain a tight hold on their prejudices: surveying a number of subdisciplines within economics, Hengel found that "the number of women in a field appears to have little effect on the size of the gap."

While in this case women must work harder for the same basic result as less competent men, in some instances they risk receiving much less credit for work they have done—or worse, others may attribute their efforts to men. The prejudice of male competence is blatant in cases of mixed-gender coauthorship, at least according to a 2017 study of US economics departments. The study's author, Heather Sarsons, found that men reap the fruit of their labors when coauthoring an economics paper with women when it is their time to be evaluated for tenure, having an 8 percent greater chance at tenure for each coauthored

*Black women (76.9 percent) were more likely than other women to report having to provide more evidence of competence than others to prove themselves to colleagues (Latinas: 64.5 percent; Asian-Americans: 63.6 percent, White women: 62.7 percent)." Joan Williams et al., *Double Jeopardy? Gender Bias Against Women of Color in Science* (San Francisco: Center for WorkLife Law, 2014).

"Women publish significantly fewer papers in areas in which research is expensive, such as high-energy physics," as Cassidy Sugimoto observed in a 2013 article for *Nature*.

Sexual harassment, in addition to its many other harmful effects, tends to retard a female scholar's progress. This is because women often have to change field sites, topics, or even departments to avoid predatory men, diversions that eat up precious time for scholarship, not to mention the stress of such experiences. In 1997, a study found that among female medical students in the US who reported sexual harassment, 52 percent described their career advancement as having been hurt by the experience. Frequently in the academy the harasser is a postgrad's supervisor, a situation that makes up a third of such incidents in US schools. The anthropologist Robin Nelson conducted a small, nonrandom survey of twenty-six US female anthropologists who had undergone difficult experiences during their fieldwork. Among other issues, sexual harassment caused delays in their research because "collaborators withheld vital information required for data analysis and publication. In other instances, respondents reported that psychological trauma from harassment or assault compromised their ability to revisit, analyze, and publish data collected under difficult conditions."

How much sexual harassment there is in the academy is difficult to determine, but one can be certain that it is extremely widespread. Several studies estimate around a fifth to half of female postgrads and faculty have experienced it. UK universities are suffering, in the words of the *Guardian*, an "epidemic" of sexual harassment. The extent of it first emerged when Sara Ahmed, the director of Goldsmiths's Centre for Feminist Research, resigned in the summer of 2016. University administrators, she charged, had allowed sexual harassment to become "normalized and generalized." Goldsmiths wasn't alone, as sleuthing by the *Guardian* soon revealed. Universities across the UK had spent precious funds on nondisclosure agreements to buy the silence of victims as a means of "reputation management." This allowed perpetrators to stay or leave with their dignity intact for another institution, where they could resume predation. It should be noted that faculty are just as vulnerable to sexual harassment as students. As one scholar at the University of California, Irvine told an interviewer: "I did not file a complaint. This is a very senior person on campus and under no circumstance would I have filed anything. Until you get tenure, you have to take care of yourself, basically."

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Conversely, if they choose to contribute to areas in accordance with their specific interests and can argue confidently, they will have to face thematic disqualification. As long as the work of women in philosophy differs—methodologically or thematically—from the work of their male colleagues it is likely to be dismissed.” The outlook for this problem is bleak; in philosophy as in other disciplines, men have proven stubbornly reluctant to cite the work of their female colleagues.

This problem exerts itself not only at an individual level, where it stymies countless careers, but also at the aggregate level of the discipline itself, and thus society as a whole. The gendering of citation practices combined with the rarity of women in the upper echelons of the academy mean that fewer women are in a position to influence the shape of the discipline itself, leaving such power overwhelmingly in the hands of men. In a study of the five hundred most influential recent philosophy articles and the citation networks connecting them, only 3.5 percent were by female scholars, leaving whole islands of debate networks totally bereft of women.*

Women's attempts to secure tenured positions in the academy are undermined by secretive informal networks that secure jobs for their members. Because they did not confront these networks, Danish universities failed to increase the numbers of female professors in the 2000s when they instituted an affirmative action program that paid financial incentives to departments. In the program's aftermath, a 2016 study in *Science & Public Policy* revealed that nearly half of all openings for full professorships had only a single application because they were “closed” hirings or because even nominally “open” hirings had a job description tailored to fit a specific person—almost always a man. “The shortage of female applicants for positions at associate professor level may, for instance, partly be due to incisional pre-selection practices and the activation of informal network ties for recruiting candidates,” its authors concluded. A similar situation was found in Dutch medical schools, but at an even higher rate: 77 percent of full professorships were filled in a noncompetitive fashion. The author of the Dutch study drily noted that sometimes “candidates are asked to write their own profile.” Searches to fill job vacancies are

*“As [my student] Nick somewhat bitterly remarked at one point during the validation phase, ‘Only in philosophy do Hilary, Shelley, and Jody all turn out to be dudes.’” Kieran Healy, “Gender and Citation in Four General-Interest Philosophy Journals, 1993–2013,” February 25, 2015, Kieranhealy.org. The most cited scholar had twice as many citations as all the women combined.

one self-citation, and is cited by others at the same rate, leaving her with only thirty. "Some scholars have suggested that self-citations should be removed when citations are used as indicators for research assessments," remarked the author of a study on the problem. "One implication of the current analysis is that this may not be enough."

Self-citation is not a small issue, but rampant, composing a tenth of all citations across disciplines. Since the great migration of journals to the web at the turn of the millennium, citations have become easier to track, presenting committees a powerful, albeit distorted, means to calibrate a candidate's intellect and influence. Such measurements can be used to decide if someone is hired, given a raise, or granted tenure. The mini scandal of self-citation, however, cannot simply be resolved by "lean-in" feminism—say, by exhorting women to cite themselves more—because female self-aggrandizement frequently provokes a backlash, a reaction that tends to be especially pronounced against women of color. East and South Asians fare the worst in this regard, according to the study *Double Jeopardy? Gender Bias Against Women of Color in Science*, likely because such behavior upsets stereotypes of their passivity. Nor do men cite themselves more modestly if there are more women in their discipline; King found that "there is no significant correlation between the mean number of self-citations per paper and the fraction of men authors in a field." The seemingly silly problem of self-citation illustrates how even small gaps between female and male scholars become magnified when myriad sexist practices operate in tandem.

MALE UNDERGRADUATES demonstrate a sharp bias against both their female peers and female instructors. In a study of three US undergraduate biology courses, students voted for their most intelligent peer during the semester. Generally the women gave a very slight edge to other women in their voting, but men favored other men by a nineteenfold margin. Such a divergence in gendered evaluative patterns has been observed elsewhere. This meant that a woman would need to have "over three-quarters of a GPA point higher" than a man to be nominated. In the study, an "outspoken" man (someone who participated in class) was always voted by his peers as the best student, even though many course sections had an "outspoken" woman who had earned as high a grade. The study's authors reckon that these results, as skewed as they are, represent a "conservative case" because biology is considered

as not being sufficiently maternal. Mollycoddling on demand, however, leaves women with less time for research. Furthermore, students tend to evaluate a female instructor according to how well prepared she is in the classroom, which forces women to spend significantly more time preparing than men. By comparison, students expected their male teachers to be charismatic and knowledgeable, traits that require much less preparation to perform. Again, the widespread expectation held by boys and men is that only boys and men can be brilliant.

THAT FEMALE SCHOLARS are undermined by sexist colleagues and students is bad enough, but what is more insidious is how women's careers are often sabotaged by their own husbands and partners, patriarchy's fifth column. This group consistently pursues its own interests no matter the cost to their wives. A higher ratio of female professors are married to male professors than the other way around because there are more men on most faculties, and this ratio is even higher among scholars with tenure-track positions. This means that male scholars are much more likely to have a spouse stay at home and less likely to face the "two-body problem"—that is, the difficulty of finding positions for an academic couple in the same town. The two-body problem is rarely decided in the woman's favor, frequently dooming her to the precarious life of an adjunct, one of the "housewives of higher education." Decisions as to where these academic couples end up are often made on the basis of pay, and women still earn around a tenth to a fifth less than men, a gap that varies by country. In the US, this gap has barely budged since 2006.

Yet financial considerations alone cannot explain why the careers of husbands tend to come first—men's selfishness is just as important. Most academic husbands simply don't care very much about their wives' careers; in a 2008 study, it was revealed that half of male partners considered their own careers preeminent, an opinion held by only a fifth of female partners. A woman was much more likely to say that her career was as important as her partner's. This was true a majority of the time, even if women were making more money than their male partners, while the obverse was much less common. Another study in *PNAS* from 2014 showed that male postdocs were twice as likely as female postdocs to expect their spouses to make sacrifices in their careers to help them. In the US, female historians have resigned from their positions

still have an advantage. As one Danish female scientist reflects, "I think younger men are still favored over younger women, because they usually don't have long maternity leaves." The problem in the academy comes down to men's *relative* advantage over women, rather than any *absolute* gains women may make. As long as a gulf remains, women will lag behind in jobs, prestige, and pay.

Although young mothers tend to achieve tenure slowly, if they do at all, it would be a mistake to emphasize childbirth as an explanation for women lagging behind men. There are many mechanisms that ensure men retain their advantage in the academy. An emphasis on childbirth obscures the other causes of women's plight, naturalizing a disparity that is overwhelmingly caused by male prejudice rather than biological necessity. Yet there are plenty of men happy to advocate for this self-serving interpretation. Elissa Cameron, Meeghan E. Gray, and Angela M. White put it best: "Perpetuating the idea that an academic career is incompatible with raising a family may itself contribute to the attrition of women faculty. Furthermore, this focus on maternal obligation, although contributing to the disparity, may cause us to dismiss other societal factors that result in a loss of women to the sciences. Our experience, supported by research, suggests that other, less easily parameterized factors contribute substantially." There are plenty of factors more significant than the biological fact of childbirth for men's continued dominance in the academy, but one should emphasize that they are more zealous about safeguarding time for research, they are skeptical of women's competence, and they endanger and demoralize female scholars through sexual harassment.

INSTEAD OF LOOKING TO Scandinavia as a model—for that model has failed—one should look to 20th-century Turkey for lessons on how to strengthen women's role in the academy. Long before women made inroads in the academies of Western Europe and the US, Turkish women had already established themselves as scholars, especially in disciplines typically gendered male such as STEM. As recently as 2002, the Turkish academy employed proportionately almost twice as many female full professors as the EU average, though since the early 2000s Europe has caught up and Turkey has stagnated under the tenure of the conservative AKP. Still, even as late as 2010, as Gülsün Sağlamer and her coauthors found, "in engineering, science, physics,

widely shared, self-reproducing biases, quota regulation appears to be justified to improve the situation." There is certainly more than enough evidence to justify quotas. Other straightforward measures include making salaries public to help ensure pay equity and publishing referees' reports to journal editors to reduce vitriol and bias. Spousal-hire programs could persuade more husbands to follow their wives.

Furthermore, recruitment, especially for the real prize of the academy—the full professorship—should be open and competitive. Once again, it is worth examining the Turkish model, in which, instead of operating through secretive informal networks, there are strict rules regulating the appointment of professors. The Council of Higher Education (YÖK, for its Turkish name, Yükseköğretim Kurulu) mandates that all competitions must be announced in a major newspaper, and applicants are judged on the basis of a defined portfolio. "While many Western academics assume that their professorial appointment systems are of an equal or superior academic level to those of other particularly less developed countries," wryly remarked Geraldine Healy and her coauthors in the *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, "such assumptions should be questioned, particularly in debates on gender equality."

Their contention is buttressed by a study by the social-policy scholar Pavel Ovseiko and his coauthors in *Health Research Policy and Systems*, who have argued that it has proven difficult to counteract misogyny because the academy is so decentralized: "Whilst national and local policies may be in place, the reality of research is that it is devolved to the level of departments, centres, and, sometimes, individual principal investigators." A centralized body like YÖK would be useful to coordinate an institution as slapdash as the academy, which often presents a screen for sordid biases. The iron cage of bureaucracy may be an unlikely object of radical politics, but it is likely the best mechanism to reduce the old boys' club that has such a tight grip on appointments.

The destruction of these informal networks is one of the most important reforms feminists can pursue in the academy, but likely the one to encounter the greatest resistance. Until such fights are brought into the open, the old boys' club will be protected by a shroud of silence. As an anonymous historian told an interviewer for a study carried out by the American Historical Association, "a department culture that valued 'civility' was used as a way of silencing female professors with ideas about new ways of getting things done." The inscrutable

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and absorbing the glut of underemployed doctoral graduates—a group that is composed mostly of women because they drop out of the academy at every career milestone at twice the rate men do, according to one study of women in the sciences. Redistributive politics are inseparable from feminist goals in higher education.

THE QUOTIDIAN MACHINERY of patriarchy functions as a complex of many moving parts. The same mechanisms that pull women down are the ones that push men up, compensating for the latter's initial lack of numbers in undergraduate studies until they become an overwhelming majority among the academic elite. All these various parts, some seemingly innocuous and others quite abominable, operate together, defeating attempts that remediate only a single aspect of the patriarchal machine. This explains why the results of mainstream feminist prescriptions have proved paltry. Academic patriarchy is too well entrenched and vicious to be defeated by piecemeal reform. Academic feminism needs a Cerberus-headed politics combining a social movement, activist scholarship, and new radical bureaucratic structures. !!

Like universal day care, having more women in positions of power is indispensable, though not a complete solution. For example, having more women as editors in chief of important journals increases the rate of first authorship by women, sometimes raising it to more than double the rates of comparable journals headed by men, according to a study of journals of academic medicine. The presence of senior women at field sites drastically reduces the incidents of sexual harassment suffered by anthropologists. Women-only mentoring programs have a significant effect on retaining younger scholars.

But power seems to follow men, whose informal networks easily slink into the shadows. When women take over formal networks, they become vulnerable to misogynist reprisals and are burdened with increased workloads. "Women were delighted about the increase in female chairs, deans, or central administrators; some considered that these increases signaled genuine improvement," noted the authors of a study on attitudes held by female faculty at the University of California, Irvine. "Too often, however, a woman's holding of this position would devalue or minimize it somewhat, casting it into the service mode, not the power mode. We heard this comment so frequently across all disciplines that we finally named it gender devaluation." Yet again, patriarchy

"intellectual capital," reducing feminism to merely a business-friendly policy to make countries more competitive in the "global marketplace." This overlooks how, like all scholars, women eschew potential riches to seek their intellectual fortune, motivated by a passion to learn and teach. That so many are forced to relinquish this goal because of condescending or lewd supervisors, selfish spouses, smug students, and prejudiced hiring committees is in every case a personal tragedy of an unfulfilled life. To struggle as an adjunct living in poverty or merely as an unsung research assistant to a famous husband is the fate of tens, even hundreds of thousands. For the women who finally reach the top, despite all the structural disadvantages, success often comes at a steep cost. At least at some universities, female full professors are even less content than female assistant professors. As Anne Fausto-Sterling, a pioneering biologist in the study of gender development, reflected on her life's work: "The exhilaration of struggle and pride in social accomplishments is strong. But so too is the hurt of rejection and marginalization." +

