

Classes 19-21: Gender Differences
Buckwalter and Stich, “Gender and Philosophical Intuition”

I. Gender Differences and Philosophy

Academia in general, through the mid-twentieth century, was mostly comprised of men. In the past fifty years or so, the numbers of women in many academic fields has risen remarkably. More women than men receive degrees in higher education. Indeed, [recent data](#) shows that the number of women receiving degrees at all post-secondary levels in the United States is far greater than the number of men. You can track the historical shift [here](#). Even at the [doctoral level](#), the number of women getting degrees is greater than the number of men; the shift happened in 2007 and the distance between women and men is projected to increase.

Still, academic philosophy continues to be dominated by men. Buckwalter and Stich provide a table of the difference among faculty in top departments. The disparity appears at many levels. [Here](#) are some good stats, from Evelyn Brister, with links to more on the upper left. [More good stats](#), from Richard Zach. An [article from *The Philosophers Magazine*](#) and some blog commentary from [Feminist Philosophers](#). While many of the other humanities have reached gender equity, at least in terms of numbers, philosophy seems stuck in a disparate rut.

We have been looking at variations in intuitions among the folk regarding some thought experiments important in philosophy. Buckwalter and Stich hypothesize that gender disparity might be explained by gender differences in intuitions.

Students come to philosophy with somewhat different intuitions about many standard philosophical thought experiments, and as we have shown, in many cases there are statistically significant differences between women’s intuitions and men’s. However, most of the faculty members who get to say which intuitions are correct (and “obvious”) are now, and always have been, men. So women students are more likely than men students to find that their intuitions about the thought experiments discussed in their philosophy classes are at odds with those of their instructor. If it is indeed the case that students (of either gender) are less likely to continue in philosophy if their intuitions do not accord with those of their instructor, then all the elements of a powerful and cumulative selection effect are in place – a selection effect which “filters out” a greater proportion of women than of men (30).

The claim made by Buckwalter and Stich depends on several factors: whether there are gender differences in intuitions, how those gender differences manifest themselves in the classroom, whether those differences lead to disparity in the pursuit of philosophy degrees, both at the bachelor and graduate levels.

Our first task is to look at the data regarding gender differences in intuitions. Then we can wantonly speculate about how to interpret that data and what it might show.

II. The Data

Buckwalter and Stich divide their data into two kinds.
The first class includes data from other people's experiments.
The second class involves their own experiments.

First Class (Others)

- Gettier Cases
- Compatibilism
- Physicalism
- Dualism
- The Violinist
- The Magistrate and the Mob
- The Trolley
- Causal Deviance

Second Class (Buckwalter and Stich)

- Epistemic Side Effects
- Brain in a Vat
- Twin Earth
- Chinese Room
- Plank of Carneades

In both classes, many experiments showed no significant gender differences.
But, many did show some significant differences.
One question for us is whether those differences in intuitions can explain the gender discrepancies.
Another question is whether gender differences in intuitions should indicate something about how philosophers should change their methods.