

Tips for Tutors on Gender Equality

At the moment, there are imbalances and inequalities in academic philosophy, which are problematic for the discipline as a whole as well as for the individuals within it. For the facts and figures you can look at the BPA/SWIP report [Women in Philosophy in the UK](#), and the other resources available on the [EWPG blog](#):

This document will focus specifically on the problems that might arise in the tutorial room, and on what you, as a tutor, can do to help combat them.

Problems:

Implicit Bias

[Studies](#) have found that the majority of people have ‘implicit biases’ against such groups as blacks, women, gay people, and so on, based on unconscious stereotypes of these groups. These implicit biases are found even in people who explicitly and sincerely deny such views, and even in people who are members of the group in question. There is, therefore, a really strong chance that you and your students will have these biases, which could lead to subtle, but incredibly important, inequalities in the way some of your students are treated, both by you (the tutor) and each other.

Stereotype Threat

What is more, a phenomenon called ‘[stereotype threat](#)’ can negatively affect the performance of students within the stereotyped groups, even if their philosophical ability is as good, or better, than the other students you teach. (In fact, stereotype threat tends to have a greater effect on the performance of those who are most invested in the relevant activity – in other words, those who care about philosophy, or studying in general, are likely to be affected most severely).

What can you do?

Encourage participation

- Look out for non-verbal cues that people have something to say (eg. leaning forward) and invite them to speak
- Note patterns of interruption (who tends to interrupt and who tends to be interrupted) and intervene where this is disproportionately affecting members of under-represented groups
- Pay extra attention to women, and call on them specifically. (Most people are more likely to notice men attempting to contribute than women). Refer to female contributors by name so that others notice their contributions too
- If one person or group dominating discussion intervene: ask others to speak, or even ask the dominant person/group to chair the session/find out what others think.

Language

- Avoid the generic “he”, use inclusive terminology (eg. refer to ‘partners’ not boy/girl-friends), and reverse stereotypes in examples (eg. make Drs women and primary teachers male)
- Make a point of referring to female authors by full name/gender-based pronouns (there’s no point having women visible on reading lists if the students all assume they’re men!) and refer to female members of faculty as “Dr” or “Prof”.
- No sexual jokes, avoid sexual examples, and prohibit the same in discussion.

Non-verbal communication

- Think about eye-contact and posture – are you showing that you are interested in all contributions equally?

- Classroom set-up can be helpful. Eg. if one student tries to force a dialogue with you then have the students sit in a circle and you stood outside, not in that student's eyeline).
- Tone: do you use different 'voices' or language for male/female students? Try to avoid being patronising or dismissive, especially to members of particular groups.

Tutorial techniques

- Splitting students into smaller groups is great, for encouraging discussion, but also be mindful of gender balance. (Are the female students more or less likely to speak when grouped together? This could vary for individuals/groups, so try different things out).
- Teach your students how to have a fruitful and respectful discussion early on – if you spend five minutes in the first/second tutorial talking about this then you can refer back to it later on if problems arise. Eg. 'remember how we talked about balancing being a listener and a contributor? Right now you're doing great at contributing, and I think it would be good if you could work on listening some more too'.
- Allow similar amounts of time for different groups to respond to questions (eg. don't 'give up' on female students quicker than male), and 'coach' for further information equally (eg. 'ok, and what else does Hume say?').
- Vary the types of questions you ask (avoid only asking comprehension questions to certain groups and opinion questions to others).

Other ideas

- Be aware that feminine/masculine styles of a student's comment might affect perceptions. Eg. a student saying "I feel like maybe X is the case, but I don't know" might be responded to differently to one saying "X is the case" – but they've made the same point and should be commended equally.

- When marking try not to guess/think about the gender of the student. If it helps pick one student to imagine you are writing all your comments/feedback to, to limit how much the quality/tone etc varies.
- Have similar expectations of your female students as you do of your male students.
- Make a point of encouraging all promising students to consider postgraduate study in the areas in which they show promise/interest. Marking feedback is probably the most appropriate forum for this.