

Report from the Gender and the Academy Subcommittee of SSCE
(GASUB)
to the
Committee of SSCE
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Claire, Joel, Stephen, and I gathered resources a wide range of resources about and relevant to gender and the Academy, and specifically sexism that affects women in the Academy. Claire Hein Blanton set up a way to record resources and recommendations. She and I recorded 44 articles, organisational policies, and news stories pertaining to Gender and the Academy. This does not exhaust the available material, but it does give an initial sampling of resources to consider. Here we offer observations and recommendations based on our research.

Overview

All documents we read support our own experiences and observations that sexism persists throughout the academy and the church. TRS programs in secular and Christian educational institutions display more systemic sexism than do most other disciplines. SSCE necessarily participates in this systemic sexism, because its members both participate in the academy and the church and prepare students to participate in the academy and the church.

In particular

Many women report that they experience blatant, offensive sexism in the Academy, chiefly (but not exclusively) from male supervisors and colleagues.

In addition, our research reveals three categories of unintentional, “benevolent” sexism that were all cited as roadblocks to women in the Academy. The first is that female faculty are disproportionately asked to do service for the university or department. Reasons given for this are that women, “need to represent themselves,” or “are better at care related activities.” These faculty members feel unable to say no (unlike most of their compared to male colleagues) and as a result have reduced time to work on research. Less time to work on research corresponds to fewer promotions and is a deterrent to continue working without advancement. Secondly, women report more external criticism than their male colleagues about how they balance family and departmental commitments. This leads many women to accept lower ranked positions, to postpone or not have families, to try to carry out unsustainable work-life balances, or to drop out of the Academy all together. Finally, women from postgraduates to senior faculty positions report feeling isolated from male colleagues and supervisors. Traditional gender norms tend to underscore these informal relationships, especially in TRS. Thus, whereas male faculty, staff, and postgraduates form informal relationships, women felt barred from them. As a result, they feel cut off from the informal

departmental decision-making that happens during more social gatherings. Women feel excluded and devalued in the department, regardless of how congenial colleagues and supervisors are to them on a professional level. This discourages women from feeling that they have a place in the Academy.

Two Options

SSCE has a choice. It can understand sexism as an occasional social factor that has no *necessary* connection to the scholarly substance of Christian Ethics, and therefore no necessary bearing on the identity of SSCE. In this case, SSCE might respond to concerns about sexism by supporting women who work in Christian Ethics through women's mentoring and networking programs.

Or, SSCE might understand sexism as an ethical concern that plays out at all levels of daily life, across private, public, ecclesial, and scholarly domains. In this case, SSCE might incorporate the analysis of gender and sexism into its schedule of conference themes, into paper topics on a variety of themes, and into its organisational policies and practices. SSCE might learn about the various manifestations of sexism within and without the Society, using the tools and resources that SSCE already applies to other concerns. SSCE might support mentoring programs and provide opportunities for women and men to share experiences of sexism with the whole membership. And, the Society might address sexism as both a concern of scholarly Christian ethics and a concern of the Society's own identity and practices.

Recommended Option

GASUB encourages SSCE to take the latter approach and incorporate gender and sexism as ethical concerns into its schedule of conference themes, paper topics, and organisational policies and practices.

Proposals

A. GASUB proposes that SSCE begin by choosing Gender in the Academy as an upcoming conference theme. (The last relevant conference themes were Sexual Ethics, in 1990, and Feminism and Christian Ethics in 1991.)

B. GASUB proposes that SSCE ask a member to write a brief history of women in the SSCE to add to the website (following the example of Women in Theology at Marquette University).

C. GASUB proposes that SSCE consider the relationship between sexism in the academy and the identity and goals of the Society.

D. GASUB proposes that the subgroup continue to explore resources and then propose more actions for SSCE to take.

E. Finally, GASUB notes that the intersectional character of discrimination in the academy. Racism is a problem at least as significant as sexism. We propose that SSCE establish an additional subcommittee to investigate racism and SSCE's engagement with racial discrimination. That subcommittee would interact with GASUB.