How To Avoid A Manel And Beyond:
Some Guidance For Classicists On Increasing Diversity In The Profession

What's the problem?

Simply put, that while there now are roughly equal numbers of men and women being employed in UK classics, you would not necessarily realise this from a casual glance at a sample of conference announcements from the Classicists list or a browse through special editions of journals. The Women's Classical Committee UK would like to encourage colleagues putting together collaborative academic enterprises to consider how they might increase the diversity of their line-ups, and reach out to people who are currently not represented in a wide range of prestigious academic activity.

It is commonly recognised that areas such military, economic and political history, and Greek and Roman comedy, tend to be male-dominated, at least as far as research profiles are concerned. However, this is not just a problem in classics – in 2012, *Nature* ran the numbers on who they were asking to act as referees for their papers, who they were profiling, and who was writing Comment and World View articles. They found that despite having a gender balance at the editorial and reporting level, they were asking a significantly lower proportion of women to take on these more visible, 'authoritative' tasks.

This problem also affects representation of other genders, including agender and nonbinary people, as well as other minority groups, particularly BAME and disabled classicists. The advice we offer here focuses on the gender aspect of the problem.

What kind of things does this affect?

The problem turns up all over the place. A non-exhaustive list includes:

- Recruitment
- Organised conference panels
- Conference programmes
- Conference chairs
- Keynote speakers
- Speakers in a seminar series
- Collected volumes
- Special issues of journals
- Journal referees
- Book reviewers
- Which books get reviewed
- Grant applications
- Nominations for awards
- Awards

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Why should I care?

Because if academia is about sharing our ideas and building the conversation, the conversation can only get better if more voices from more perspectives are included in it. Aristotle recognised this in his *Politics* (1281b):

> For the many, of whom each individual is not a good man, when they meet together may be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. (Trans. Jowett.)

Because while these things are framed as primarily affecting women, as Athena Swan has found, making things better for women makes them better for everyone in the profession.

Why does this happen?

We believe that nobody in classics actively *wants* to exclude women or other minority groups from their events or activities. However, there are two factors which are at work here.

1. Comfort networks

When you first have a great idea for an academic event and are brainstorming who you think should be invited, it is only natural that the first people to come to mind will be people you know, people whose work you have read, people who have seen speak on a relevant subject before.

However, many organisers don't go beyond the people they already know once they have had this initial brainstorm. This is partly for reasons of comfort, and partly for reasons of trust – after all, you assume that if someone's work were worth knowing about, you would have come across them already. This creates a circular problem, in that you invite people who already have a profile, who are then invited to do the next thing because other people have seen them have a profile, and so on, and so on.

2. Unconscious bias

> "Implicit or unconscious bias happens by our brains making incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people and situations without us realising. Our biases are influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. We may not even be aware of these views and opinions, or be aware of their full impact and implications."[1]

Women are just as affected by unconscious bias as men, and this advice applies to people of all genders. That's because these sorts of biases help us make very quick decisions in a very complex world, and mean we don't have to process a great deal of data consciously. However, our biases can be based on outdated information, and lead to us making decisions that serve to reinforce those biases rather than getting us to the best possible outcome.

The implications of unconscious bias are starting to be recognised within university recruitment processes, and some institutions now offer unconscious bias training to those involved in the interview and shortlisting process. Research has shown that, when asked to rate two applications which were identical apart from the gender of the applicant's name, science faculties were more

[1] Equality Challenge Unit, http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/employment-and-careers/staff-recruitment/unconscious-bias/

likely to rate the male candidates as better qualified, want to hire the male candidates at a higher starting salary, and invest more in the male candidates' development.

The effects of unconscious bias don't just operate in hiring procedures, or along gendered lines. We make assumptions about the quality of others' research without noticing, or meaning to do so – and that affects what we may invite them to do. Sarah Bond, for instance, has written about the tendency to assume that female ancient historians do "soft history", covered under headings like 'women in antiquity' – which may mean that the work they do in other fields is unconsciously discounted as being 'soft' and thus may affect whether organisers invite them to participate on panels highlighting other sorts of research. A recent article exploring science faculty's gender bias towards male students also noted the assumption that a female-presenting CV was viewed as less competent than an identical male-presenting CV;[2] an unconscious assumption that women are less competent than men may also be in play here, although it is easily dispelled by contemplating one's past and current female colleagues.

What can I do as an organiser to avoid these problems?

We know there are some genuine factors that lead to an imbalance, such as a low proportion of women active in a given research field. Sometimes the most appropriate conference panel line-up will genuinely be all-male. That said, these considerations are not an excuse for the predominant gender imbalance currently on display; the mathematical odds that a panel would randomly be all men are miniscule.[3] Organisers should therefore take steps to respond proactively.

1. Raise the issue

When you start planning or organising an activity, don't leave diversity to the last minute as an add-on. Think from the very beginning about what processes and methods you are going to use to address the problem, so they're built into your planning from the very first stages.

When *Nature* realised they had a problem with gender balance in their content, they decided to ask each editor "to work through a conscious loop before proceeding with commissioning: to ask themselves, 'Who are the five women I could ask?'"[4] The point was not to then go on to ask any of those women to undertake the article being commissioned, or to ask anyone who wasn't fully qualified, but to introduce the names of women into the commissioning process consciously. We believe that this could be a useful strategy to adopt more generally.

2. Reach out

Actively attempt to go beyond the networks of people with whom you are comfortable. Ask people for recommendations. If somebody says no, ask them to recommend someone else. Use of some of the resources listed below to approach people who are not on your radar. Write to people who might be interested in responding to your CFP and flag it up to them individually. If you are starting out with an all-male organising team, you might want to think about whether there is someone of another gender you could invite to join you, so their networks are at work from the beginning of your organising process.

[2] http://www.pnas.org/content/109/41/16474
[3] https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/the-odds-that-a-panel-would-randomly-be-all-men-are-astronomical/411505/
[4] http://www.nature.com/news/nature-s-sexism-1.11850

3. Think about how to make accommodations

Like it or not, women are still statistically likely to take on a higher load of caring responsibilities, whether for children or older relatives. Are there ways to make your activity more accessible to these people? In particular, multi-day conferences are difficult to coordinate; can you offer a one day attendance rate, or perhaps consider a single day event? These steps will also increase the pool of attendees more broadly.

4. Advertise – and advertise widely

The Classicists list is commonly used to advertise CFPs for conferences and job adverts – consider whether it might be appropriate to circulate other opportunities on it as well. In particular, before thinking 'ah, here is an opportunity that would suit X, I'll drop them an e-mail', consider whether more people than X should know the opportunity is available!

5. Don't make assumptions

Don't assume that somebody won't want to hear about an opportunity because, for instance, they have children. Give them the information and let them make their own choice – and, if you know that's a factor, think about what you might be able to do to make the opportunity accessible to them.

6. Collect and analyse data

The simple way that these inequalities are spotted is by looking at actual numbers, not our general impressions. For instance, despite the general perception that women speak more than men, when the male/female ratio of speech in meetings is timed, it turns out that women speak less despite the perception of meeting attendees that women have spoken equally or more than men. So run the numbers on your diversity, especially for things that it's less simple to see in one place, like book reviewers.

7. Make it public

Let people know the processes you are going through so that they can see you are making an effort to widen diversity in good faith. Make your policies and strategies public and easily accessible. Include your selection criteria and process in your CFP or call for contributors so people know it is genuinely open and they will stand a chance. This opens up the conversation and, if it turns out that you have ended up with a line-up composed entirely or almost entirely of men, you are able to show that you have made a genuine effort for things to turn out otherwise.

There are always complex considerations at play in deciding which of these actions are appropriate to take. For instance, when organising a big conference like the Classical Association annual meeting, organisers may decide that the best way to decide which papers to accept is to use blind peer review. Working 'blind' has the advantage of removing any assumptions about an abstract's author and allowing academic reviewers to consider the scholarship purely on its own merits. This has been proven to benefit women. The most famous example is the adoption of blind auditions by orchestras in the 1970s and 1980s, where musicians auditioned behind a screen; the percentage of female performers in orchestras has since been on the increase. Given the rigour of the blind peer review process, it would be inappropriate for the conference organisers to then disqualify organised panels if they were found to be all male. However, the organisers could consider how to organise individually submitted abstracts into panels which were not all-male, within the obvious constraints

of disciplinary appropriateness. Equally, despite their best efforts, an organiser might find themselves with an all-male panel – but might then decide to invite a female panel chair.

I really want to get this right – what pitfalls should I avoid?

The biggest pitfall to avoid is **tokenism**. Increasing diversity isn't about being very proud about having three women speakers in a conference that has sixteen papers, or one chapter authored by a non-binary person in a ten chapter book. It's also not about inviting the *same* few women to do the job of being 'the woman who does this subject' to the exclusion of others. When you are considering who to involve, you need to make the effort to go beyond the 'usual suspects' – although they might be good people to approach to ask for suggestions of who they know who might be interested.

What can I do as a participant to help improve the situation?

1. Ask the difficult questions

If you are invited to participate in a panel or an invited conference, ask what the composition of the event is going to be. There are various pledges on the internet for men to promise not to appear on an all-male panel, or an invitee could point out the problem to the organisers. Everyone can suggest the names of more women who might be invited to participate. You could also direct event organisers to these guidelines!

Ask what the conference speaker policy is – and if there isn't one, offer to help draft one.

2. Be aware of stereotype threat

Stereotype threat is the way in which awareness of a stereotype about a group to which you belong makes you conform to that stereotype. This has been studied, for instance, in relation to girls and maths. Girls tested before and after being told 'girls aren't any good at maths' or 'isn't maths hard for girls?' scored lower than boys or a control group – not for any reason other than they'd been primed to do badly. Equally, having been primed to think 'women don't do [subject]' may mean you don't consider a particular CFP or opportunity to fit you and your research, where you might actually be a good fit.

3. If you are asked and decide to decline, think about why you are saying no

One of the skills that academics, particularly at the early career stage, are told to cultivate is the ability to say 'no'. Strangely, one gets the impression that we are much better at saying 'no' to career-boosting research-related opportunities than to administrative or teaching-related tasks. When you are about to say 'no' to an invitation, consider what your motivation is for saying no – there may well be an absolute logistical impossibility involved, you might have been approached for something that's totally beyond any research you have ever done, or you might have a workload to rival all workloads. Conversely, you might be saying no for reasons more related to stereotype threat, lack of confidence, imposter syndrome and similar phenomena. Take a moment to consider your motivations – and, depending on what you come up with, think about whether are things you could ask for that would turn what feels like an impossibility into a possibility. For instance, if you genuinely can't attend a conference because of logistics, perhaps you can still contribute your paper to a subsequent publication – raise this possibility with the organisers rather than waiting for them to think of it.

4. Keep track of the numbers

Are the events you are attending balanced in terms of the ratio of male and female speakers on the programme versus the ratio of male and female attendees in the audience? If the balance doesn't match up, raise this issue – or you could ask the WCC to raise it for you.

5. Raise the issue

If you know a colleague is taking over a journal editorship or planning a conference, ask them what they're doing to address diversity. Ask them what their speaker policy is for the conference they're planning. Ask your Director of Research to circulate these guidelines. Pass them on to colleagues and graduate students. Remind people on interview panels that they should review their unconscious bias training. Don't let the issue lie.

Can you point me towards some handy resources for this sort of thing?

Want to check out where your areas of unconscious bias are? Harvard have designed a test you can take to identify your bias; you can find the UK version at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/uk/

The Equality Challenge Unit has some helpful publications on unconscious bias and its role in the recruitment process that you can download at http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/employment-and-careers/staff-recruitment/unconscious-bias/

Here's a set of ten simple rules to achieve conference speaker gender balance, aimed at the sciences but applicable to classics too - http://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003903

The Feminist Philosophers blog has written a guide on how to avoid a gendered conference as part of their Gendered Conference Campaign: https://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/2011/03/26/how-to-avoid-a-gendered-conference/

If you are looking for women to reach out to, why not check out WOAH: Women Of Ancient History? http://woah.lib.uiowa.edu/

The Modern British Studies Association created a discussion board for people to post panel ideas in an effort to help organisers connect to people beyond their pre-existing networks – see https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/2017/02/14/looking-for-panels-or-panellists-mbs-2017-2/

Blind peer review is often offered as the solution to problems of inclusion, but it's not always that simple. Liv Yarrow has written about her experiences of attempting to consult a diverse conference line-up and still not succeeding - https://livyarrow.org/2018/05/21/peer-review-as-self-pedagogy/

This working document was approved at the 2017 AGM of the Women's Classical Committee UK. It is an evolving work in progress and will be updated to reflect best practice.

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