

Gender Discrimination In Italian Academia within Logic and Philosophy of Science

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Abstract

This feature reports on the output of the World Café table on Gender Discrimination in Italian Academia which took place at first meeting of the Milano Logic and Philosophy of Science Network (12 March 2025).

Keywords

Gender Inequality; Italian Academic Institutions; Philosophy of Science

Submitted 7/11/2025

Accepted 7/12/2025

How to Cite

Mara Floris and Maria Raffa. *Gender Discrimination In Italian Academia within Logic and Philosophy of Science*. THE REASONER 19(4) 2025. <https://doi.org/10.54103/1757-0522/30079>

THE REASONER 19(4)

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<https://doi.org/10.54103/1757-0522/30079>

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The underrepresentation of women in academic philosophy is a well-documented and persistent problem in many countries (Tripodi, 2017: The value of diversity and inclusiveness in philosophy: An overview. *Rivista di Estetica*, 64, 64, 10.4000/estetica.2077, 3-17). Italy is no exception. Despite a broader movement towards gender equality in higher education, philosophy remains a strikingly male-dominated discipline, especially in its senior ranks and more formal sub-fields. Drawing on recent national data and insights from a World Café on gender and academia held at the first meeting of the *Milano Logic and Philosophy of Science Network*, at the Politecnico of Milan on 12 March 2025, this Feature offers a snapshot of the current situation in Italy and reflects on some of the underlying structural and cultural causes, including those discussed during the event.

According to the latest 2023 report by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR: https://ustat.mur.gov.it/media/1244/focus_carrierefemminili_universit%C3%A0_marzo2023.pdf, last accessed 9/7/2025), women make up 41.1% of all university faculty and researchers in Italy. However, this aggregate figure conceals significant disparities across disciplines. In areas such as Medicine and Health Sciences, women hold 70.4% of research fellowships. In Engineering and Technology, by contrast, only 34.3% of research fellows are women. This reflects both horizontal segregation (women and men tending to cluster in different fields) and vertical segregation

(a decline in female representation at higher levels of the academic hierarchy).

Philosophy lies somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, but the patterns are telling. Data from AlmaLaurea (2023) show that women represent 52.8% of students earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy (<https://www2.almalaurea.it/cgi-asp/classi/Scheda.aspx?codiceAggr=10029&tipoCorso=L&lang=it>, last accessed 9/7/2025), and 49.2% at the master's level (<https://www2.almalaurea.it/cgi-asp/classi/scheda.aspx?codiceAggr=11200&lang=it>, last accessed 9/7/2025). However, this early gender balance does not carry through into permanent academic positions.

According to MUR data, out of 332 full professors (professori ordinari) in philosophy (classified under macro-sector M-FIL), only 91 are women – approximately 27%. The distribution becomes even more skewed when broken down by sub-discipline. In Logic and Philosophy of Science (M-FIL/02-A), women account for only 9 out of 45 full professors (20%). In Theoretical Philosophy (M-FIL/01-A), the figure is 14 out of 56 (25%). Similar numbers are found in Moral Philosophy (13/48) and Philosophy of Language (17/43). These statistics point to a consistent and significant gender gap at the top levels of the discipline.

The pipeline problem in philosophy appears to begin after the master's degree and intensifies during the transition from temporary to permanent positions. Anecdotal and qualita-

tive evidence suggests that several factors contribute to this attrition.

One major issue is the timing of academic career progression, which often coincides with the years in which many women choose or feel social pressure to have children. The lack of robust parental leave policies and the challenges of balancing caregiving with precarious academic contracts can push women out of the academic track.

Moreover, there is growing recognition of a confidence gap (Herbst, 2020: Gender differences in self-perception accuracy: The confidence gap and women leaders' under-representation in academia, *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 46, 1, [10.4102/sajip.v46i0.1704](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v46i0.1704), 1-8), whereby women are less likely to apply for competitive positions or to self-promote within highly competitive and often male-dominated environments. This is exacerbated by what many describe as a toxic or aggressive intellectual climate, particularly in subfields such as analytic philosophy, where debate styles may discourage participation by those who experience the environment as confrontational rather than constructive (Garry, 2024: Analytic feminism. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman Eds., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/femapproach-analytic/>).

Another factor is the unequal distribution of labour within academic departments. Women are more frequently tasked with administrative roles, student support, and teaching-

heavy assignments, leaving less time for research output, i.e. the primary criterion for promotion (e.g. Guarino & Borden, 2017: Faculty service loads and gender: Are women taking care of the academic family? *Research in Higher Education*, 58, 6, [10.1007/s11162-017-9454-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-017-9454-2), 672-694).

The gender imbalance in philosophy is not just a matter of numbers. Indeed, it creates a climate in which women are more vulnerable to harassment and discrimination (cfr. Saul 2014: Stop thinking so much about ‘sexual harassment’. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 31(3), [10.1111/japp.12046](https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12046), 307-321). Several high-profile cases of harassment in Italian academia have prompted public reflection on how environments dominated by one gender can foster abuse of power and complicity through silence.

Moreover, women often face implicit biases in hiring and evaluation (e.g. Moss-Racusin et al. 2012: Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109, 41, [10.1073/pnas.1211286109](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1211286109), 16474-16479). Even when formal quotas or diversity initiatives are in place, women may be perceived as “diversity hires” or face higher standards of evaluation. Although gender quotas in hiring processes are legally encouraged and sometimes implemented, the overall effect remains limited without sustained institutional change and cultural shift.

The World Café tables held at the first meeting of the *Milano Logic and Philosophy of Science Network* gathered philoso-

phers from various subfields to reflect on gender inequality in the discipline. Participants shared experiences, exchanged data, and discussed both problems and possible interventions.

Several themes emerged:

- The importance of mentorship: many attendees highlighted the lack of female mentors in senior positions as both a consequence and cause of gender disparity. Women often do not see themselves reflected in leadership roles, which may limit aspirations or reinforce imposter syndrome.
- The need for inclusive epistemic environments: the “style” of philosophical engagement especially in analytic circles was frequently criticized as unnecessarily adversarial. Participants called for a shift towards more collaborative and respectful discourse norms.
- Intersectionality and marginalization: some discussions focused on how gender inequality intersects with other axes of marginalization, including class, disability, race, and language. Migrant and non-Italian women, in particular, often face compounded disadvantages in navigating the Italian academic system.
- Institutional responses: while some universities have begun implementing gender-sensitive policies (e.g.,

awards for female scholars, family-friendly work arrangements, and gender equality offices), participants stressed the importance of moving beyond tokenistic gestures and fostering deep structural change.

- Data collection and transparency: there was consensus on the need for more systematic data collection on gender representation at all career stages and across subfields. Without transparency, it is difficult to track progress or identify where interventions are most needed.

On this basis, it can be argued that the academic philosophical environment in Italy, as in many other countries, faces a paradox: while the discipline teaches critical reflection and ethical reasoning, its institutional practices often fall short of these ideals when it comes to gender equity. Addressing the underrepresentation of women in philosophy requires both bottom-up and top-down efforts. Departments must cultivate inclusive environments, mentor underrepresented scholars, and challenge norms that valorize competitiveness over collaboration. Institutions must monitor data, ensure transparency in hiring and promotion, and design policies that support work-life balance.

The problem is not just that there are too few women in philosophy. It is also that the current structure of the discipline – its culture, incentives, and hidden hierarchies – often deters them from staying or thriving. The workshop concluded

with a shared commitment to continuing the conversation, amplifying marginalized voices, and holding the discipline accountable to its own normative standards. This Feature hopes to contribute to that effort.

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