

GENDER AT CRITICAL REALISM CONFERENCES

by

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Abstract. This paper, reports the findings of a case study of recent IACR conferences where subtle, but significant, (negative) gender differences in conference participation were observed. It goes on to use notions of gender order, agency and structure, styles and genres to explain the key causal factors that generate these differences. It concludes with some suggestions about how these gender differences could be minimised in future conferences.

Key words: gender differences, gender order, conferences, styles, genres.

Introduction

As regular attendees at the International Association for Critical Realism (IACR) conferences, we have long been aware of gender differences in attendance and participation. Over three years we confirmed these impressions through formal observations. We found that women are less likely to attend the conferences, and are slightly less likely to offer papers and to contribute in plenary sessions. We also observed gender differences in the types of contributions made during discussion. None of this came as a surprise, since it is well known that the academy is segregated, both horizontally (into gendered disciplinary areas) and vertically (with women concentrated in positions with lower pay, power and status). Philosophy, especially philosophy of science and especially realism, is informally marked as a 'masculine' discipline. We decided to explore the mechanisms generating the effects we had observed, since if critical realism (CR) is a movement committed to emancipatory change, to accept such gender differences as common and inevitable would involve a notable theory-practice inconsistency. If this state of affairs is open to change, as we believe it is, and if it should be changed, as we believe it should be, then a first and necessary step is to seek a causal explanation.

1. Describing Outcomes

We begin, as is usual in CR inspired analysis, with the (gendered) phenomena that we seek to explain. CR conferences are fairly typical academic conferences. Between three and five plenary sessions are addressed by invited speakers. The rest of the time is divided into (usually two) parallel streams, within which sessions usually have two speakers and one chair. The organisers of the three conferences we looked at took what steps they could think of to increase female participation. The 2002 organiser organised child care, and the 2004 organiser was successful in getting two women plenary speakers. All three ensured that plenty of the chairs were women. Apart from this, they did not know what else to do. The following table shows the basic gender differences in participation over three IACR conferences.

YEAR	PARTICIPANTS		PLENARY SPEAKERS		PLENARY CONTRIBUTIONS	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2002	71%	29%	91%	9%	71%	29%
2003	75%	25%	100%	0%	95%	5%
2004	75%	52%	50%	50%	78%	22%

Our preliminary observations were carried out at the Bradford conference in 2002, where we coded contributions for tone, as 'combative', 'assertive', 'appreciative', 'patronising' or 'self-deprecating' (not mutually exclusive). Taking all the plenaries together, women constituted 29% of the audience and of the speakers. Most of the women who spoke, however, spoke in the second plenary where women made up a half of the audience, and women were slightly under-represented as speakers in the other plenaries. We noted that only women used self-deprecating language, such as: 'I got lost somewhere [...] I admire your confidence' (sometimes followed by a challenging point). Women were also more likely to use 'hedging' phrases (such as 'I wonder' and 'sort of')¹ while men were more likely to make long contributions tangential to the theme. A neutral or particularly respectful tone was generally used by both men and women when the content was challenging. While both men and women were frequently appreciative, appreciation from men was more often followed by challenging points. The only contributor whose tone was judged to be aggressive was a man, speaking to the only woman speaker.

Slight though these patterns were, we suspected that women and men experienced conferences differently and had different intentions in contributing to sessions. We decided to continue observing the following year.

Unfortunately the 2003 Amsterdam conference was particularly small, and the proportion of women attendees was lower. All five plenary speakers were men, and only two plenaries were chaired by women. Of the 44 contributions made from the floor, two were made by women, although women made up about a quarter of those present. The two women spoke towards the end of sessions, after a number of men had spoken. No other gender differences were noted.

More gender differences were evident in parallel sessions, of which nine were observed. 27% of the potential contributors were women, but women made up only 13.5% of those who spoke. The two contributors judged to be self-deprecating were both female.

Detailed analysis of particular sessions suggested that not only gender, but age and status affected who contributed and in what way. At one session, for instance, the speaker was female and young, and the chair female. The theme was arguably traditionally masculine: Aristotelian notions of causality. Of the 12 present, all of the eight men spoke but none of the women. One contributor began by describing the paper as 'very interesting' in a tone that the observer felt was 'patronising'. 'I'd like to put an alternative view', he went on. Other contributors were both combative and appreciative. One man, for instance, described the paper as 'Wonderful, splendid', assured her that 'I loved your answer to' but 'I disagreed in one bit' – and now his tone became more urgent and focused, and he interrupted the speaker when she came back. Observers described some other contributions as 'dialogical' or 'respectful', based not only on the words used, but on their judgement of the tone as appropriate between mutually respecting equals. Phrases in such contributions included: 'as you said [...] but shouldn't we?' 'the puzzle is this' 'you could make this a strong methodological argument'. The contributors appeared to be attempting to think together with the speaker, or to assist her to develop or to defend her argument.

In other parallel sessions in 2003, 'combative' contributions (judged both by tone and content) included these phrases: 'I have a real worry', 'I think this is the wrong sort of research', 'that's bloody weird!' 'You are not as [...] as you think you are' (all of these man to man). Of the 17 contributions coded as 'combative' only one came from a woman, who was addressing another woman. 'Combative' contributors tended to speak fast, without seeming to care whether anyone else understood, came back without the chair's permission, sometimes interrupting the speaker or ignoring the wishes of others. More common were contributions with challenging content, delivered with a smile or together with appreciative remarks and in a neutral tone. For example, one man said in a quiet tone, 'What you didn't ground your argument on – I felt, anyway – was' and proceeded to make very critical

comments. Another remarked, smiling: ‘Fascinating [...] but you can’t stop at the level of ideology’ and went on to challenge the speaker’s whole thesis. When women made challenging points they did so in this way. However, in several cases they included self-deprecating comments, such as ‘I don’t have an economics background – all these figures and things ’ or gently pointed out an omission, but robbed the contribution of any challenging tone by finishing with a shrug.

In the Cambridge 2004 conference numbers were back to a more normal level: 80 participants, of whom 21 were women. Women were as likely as men to offer papers, and two of the plenary speakers were women. We abandoned the attempt at coding for tone and simply took detailed notes on what happened.

Here, women were between a quarter and a third of those attending plenaries, and only slightly under-represented as contributors to the plenary discussions. In all plenaries there were slight gender differences in the nature of contributions, similar to those described for 2003. The only new development was that two out of four plenary speakers were women. The third plenary (with a female guest speaker) was also chaired by a woman. On that occasion the first contributor from the floor was a man who asked a short straightforward question. The second was, unusually, a woman. She began with a self-deprecating comment (‘You probably said this, maybe I missed it [...] Could you elaborate?’) She was followed by a man who phrased his question more assertively (‘I’m broadly in agreement with you, but’). At this point the speaker asked the chairwoman to make a comment – something that didn’t happen in any other plenary session observed over the three years. This was followed by three respectful and assertive contributions from men. Once again the speaker elicited a contribution from someone from the floor whom she believed to have special knowledge, this time a man, breaking with the usual sharp division between speaker as performer and floor contributors as minor acts. Plenary Four, where the speaker was female and the chair male, was also unusual in that the first contributor was female. Her contribution was both appreciative and challenging, and she came back after the speaker had replied. After a couple of men spoke, another woman came back with a related, challenging comment. We do not have enough data to know if these are real patterns, but it seems possible that women are more likely to speak, and more likely to speak early in the discussion, if the plenary speakers are female.

Summary

Observations of both plenary and parallel sessions over three years revealed weak gendered tendencies. Women are under-represented in IACR (in 2004, women made up 17% of the membership), and made up between a quarter and a third of attendees at the conferences. Of those coming, women were just as likely as men to present papers, slightly less likely to speak from the floor in plenary sessions, and less likely to speak early in the discussion. They were equally likely to be appreciative and to make challenging, substantive contributions, but sometimes prefaced them with self-deprecatory remarks (which men never did), and used phrases (such as ‘I was just wondering’) which implicitly denigrated their contributions. The few contributors who were combative were almost always men, and only men occasionally made mini-speeches loosely connected to the theme of the session.

2. Ontology

The observations above imply an ontology which now needs further articulation. Although the extra-conference environment and its causal factors are not the focus of this paper, it cannot be simply ignored, and we feel it necessary to situate the IACR conferences within a broader social context, using the well-known structure-agency approach developed via Bhaskar’s transformational model of social action² and elaborated further via Archer’s

morphogenetic cycle.³ It cannot be emphasised too strongly that although some recent feminist writing mistakenly sees the concept of agency as inherently androcentric,⁴ the CR approach to structure and agency is in profound disagreement with the reductionism of rational choice theory and similar approaches.

The gender order

Of all the social structures we encounter as human actors, the ‘gender order’ must surely be the most overarching. Human beings, as a species, are sexed.⁵ The categories ‘female’ and ‘male’ are good abstractions in the sense of being a causal taxonomy, even though intersex exists. At the moment of birth (or before) these sex categories are allocated, and gender kicks in. Powerful social processes now situate the person within the gender order, organising and interpreting their embodied agency. The social implications of sexual difference are many, since like other central facts of our embodiment the reproduction of people is always socially significant, and carries tremendous symbolic weight. Sex cannot be detached from, or reduced to, gender, but the causal powers of differently sexed bodies are in the main only contingently related to the dense web of gender beliefs and gendered practices.

But what sort of structures are gender orders? They are probably best conceived of as cultural structures (i.e. as sets of beliefs and rules) which directly bind to, and affect, social structures. Past activities engaged in by males and females are continually represented and discussed in the light of beliefs about the members of these categories. Acting both on the basis of their beliefs about gender and in response to the interests generated by their social positioning, agents reproduce or modify gender rules such as what sex the incumbents of certain positions may or should be, and what it means for a man or a woman to speak or act in a particular way. This does not mean that the gender order and social structures are parallel or even superimposed social formations, rather like ‘patriarchy’ and ‘capitalism’ (*pace* Eisenstein⁶). The gender order is the formally and/or informally regulated outcome of a process whereby social structures are *gendered*. There is, for example, not a class structure, which interacts with a gender structure: the class structure simply is gendered through and through.

The social structures that organise reproduction are (currently) necessarily sexed and must, therefore, be gendered – though they could be so in many different ways.⁷ Their articulation with other social structures has wide-ranging implications for the gendering of these other structures. In the regulation of reproduction and sexuality, gender rules are acknowledged as central, but in many other structures (including higher education) gender rules are unacknowledged, because the articulation between the key structures and these others is ignored. In advanced capitalist societies, although women tend to be positioned in certain ways and not in others, to be a woman is not in itself a position in social structure. Gender identity makes one more likely (or even certain) to be positioned in particular ways, and it affects the accepted meanings (for oneself and others) of likely and unlikely positioning.

Capitalism, in abstract terms, is gender-neutral, although historical forms of capitalism are, and always have been, highly gendered.⁸ As Jessop puts it, ‘any residual impression that patriarchy [...] is necessarily inscribed into capitalism and/or the state probably results from the structural coupling and contingent co-evolution of different systems (especially the market economy and the liberal democratic state) with modes of domination rooted in the lifeworld.’⁹ In advanced capitalist societies with formally equal citizenship for men and women, there are increasingly broad areas of social life which are officially free from gendered regulation. But ‘structural coupling’ and ‘contingent co-evolution’ are powerful features of actually-existing capitalisms. As current forms of advanced capitalism have developed, the family has become part of the private realm, where most domestic labour is unpaid and labour-power is not usually commodified. Women’s unpaid labour in the service of reproduction of present and future workers, and their ‘flexible’ relationship to paid work, has been central to the

accumulation of capital – and highly profitable to boot.¹⁰ The implications for women are well known.

Gender and higher education

Higher education is formally gender-neutral, in its funding, the legal constitution of its various parts, and the resulting network of positions, their relative and specific powers and the relationships between them. Whether the actors in these positions are female or male, they ‘are motivated to act on the interests structurally built into their social positions’ and by so doing ‘affect the structural relationships that bind them in intended and unintended ways.’¹¹ Yet outcomes are strongly gendered. In relation to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (a mechanism for allocating central funding to UK university departments), heads of department (more likely to be male) are structurally motivated to select as ‘research active’ those with the best record of recent publications (more likely to be male), and to allocate jobs that might interfere with further publication – time-consuming, low status jobs such as dealing with admissions or welfare – to those with less good publishing records (more likely to be female). Male academics were 1.9 times more likely than their female colleagues to be counted as research active in the 2001 RAE.¹²

Despite its formal gender-blindness, higher education discriminates against women workers in several ways, the most significant of which is the way the structure of the higher education labour market articulates with that of the family.¹³ If women have young children, their role as primary carers makes it hard to devote the kind of time necessary to the job to get promotions. Women’s role in reproduction makes some sort of break from work inevitable for mothers but not for fathers, and the structural interests of both parents (in maximising income at a time when costs increase) usually motivate them to give preference to and organise around the father’s work, making the mother’s subsidiary. Thus women academics are likely to have career breaks or periods in which they work part-time. As a result, their position in the life course becomes out of step with normative academic career patterns, so that a woman in her forties may have a curriculum vitae similar to that of a male postgraduate of thirty, and be treated *worse* than him as a result. The sorts of work women do or are allocated tend to be lower status, but their failure to get higher positions can be justified in gender-blind terms (‘insufficient relevant experience’). Women also tend to accept whatever starting salary they are offered, while men are more likely to negotiate a higher one, producing a discrepancy that stays with them throughout their subsequent careers.

Formal gender-blindness co-exists with unacknowledged ‘categorical thinking’ at the level of culture.¹⁴ In the academy as well as in the wider society, women are often thought of as a homogenous group with certain supposed characteristics (e.g. emotionality) believed to be undesirable at higher levels of management.¹⁵ In addition, the constraints supposed to apply to married women and mothers and the behaviour expected to result are often attributed to those who are not married or not mothers. Such prejudices are harder to expose when masked by formal relations of equality.¹⁶

Conferences

With IACR conferences situated within a broader social context, we can turn to the conference itself. An academic conference brings together past and present academic employees of higher education institutions, to discuss subjects defined by and within particular disciplines or schools of thought. We have already noted that disciplines are already culturally associated with (believed to be more suitable and attractive for) one sex or the other. Women participants in IACR conferences are already unusual in being interested in the philosophy of the social sciences, and within that, in being attracted to realism. Conferences are, however, rarely formally gendered. They are structured, involving a network of positions, charged with co-operating to bring about an ordered series of events over a specified time

period. As key actors, conference organisers draw upon wider social structures (of IACR, and of the higher education host institution, for instance), to allocate certain roles or positions (such as chairs for sessions), to draw participants together, to raise fees from them, to provide certain material resources (without which there would be no conference accommodation, no clean toilets, and no dinner), and to provide a local interpretation of more general cultural rules about how to conference, rules that will constrain and enable the actions of conference participants. We refer to this collection of structures, resources, and rules as a *causal ensemble*: that influences, and is drawn upon by, agents, resulting in the generation of certain events and both intended and unintended outcomes.

Conferences are temporary causal ensembles, which articulate with pre-existing, already gendered, social structures and material, discursive and human resources. For example, the people choosing plenary speakers will invite people they know and have heard of, or whose concerns seem to them attractive and important. Unless deliberate attempts are made to invite women, the already gendered nature of philosophy of social science will result in a preponderance of men. Once the conference is under way, both participants and chairs will be inclined to follow taken-for-granted rules about speaking order, which favour the fastest and more confident – more likely to be men. (A rule that no one speaks twice till everyone has spoken once, or a rule that the youngest goes first, would produce different outcomes). The injunction of gender-neutrality paradoxically makes it harder to identify and counter the causal factors which tend to reproduce gender inequalities.

Orders of discourse

Much of what happens at conferences is linguistic or more specifically, discursive. In describing gendered aspects of conference participation we draw on concepts from Fairclough's CR socio-linguistics.¹⁷ He calls our attention to *orders of discourse*, which are simultaneously linguistic and social, and mediate between social structures on a bigger scale and higher level of abstraction, such as a higher education system, and events, such as someone giving a particular paper at a particular time. Orders of discourse (such as the academy in its semiotic aspect) work by selecting certain linguistic possibilities and excluding others.

The three relatively durable elements of orders of discourse are readily identifiable in CR conferences: genres, discourses, and styles.

Genres are partly ritualised ways of *acting*, in which social relations and the social context are articulated with appropriate linguistic practices. Certain elements always occur (in conference sessions, a pre-agreed person talks for a relatively long time, controlled by another person whose contributions are mainly to do with process, others talk for shorter lengths of time, relating what they say to the longer contribution). Genres are related to social purposes and are historically linked to particular social networks.

Discourses are ways of *representing* the world, but also (highly relevant to CR) 'projective', i.e. they may imply the desirability and possibility of changing the world in some particular direction. CR is itself an internally differentiated discourse, variously related to other discourses (e.g. Marxism, feminism, neo-classical economics). Texts produced at CR conferences (in the wide sense of the term that includes spoken contributions) will be expected to draw on the vocabularies, classification systems, arguments and metaphors of CR discourse.

Styles are ways of *being*, the discursive aspects of social and personal identities – including gender. They are realised in such phonological features as pronunciation, intonation, stress and rhythm; in choice of vocabulary and metaphor, and in the interplay between language and body language.

These three aspects of orders of discourse are only analytically separable. They influence outcomes by making certain linguistic and action possibilities far more likely to occur, while excluding others or at least rendering them inappropriate and therefore less likely.

'Doing gender'

In this discussion we have treated sex categorisation as unproblematic, and have compared the groups of women and men, using these 'contrastive demi-regs' (i.e. partial patterns) to direct the further investigations described below.¹⁸ In so doing we draw on a three decades long tradition in socio-linguistics.

In her book *Language and Women's Place*,¹⁹ Lakoff claimed there was a distinct 'women's language', a collection of speech styles that girls are socialised into using. This 'deficit' theory gave rise to much research, which showed that some of the claimed differences had been exaggerated, while others were specific to certain social contexts. For example, it was originally thought that women used more 'tag' questions ('isn't it?') than men, but further studies cast doubt on this.²⁰ Reviews of subsequent research suggest that while women may not use more tag questions, they are more likely than men to use them to facilitate conversation, rather than to confirm information.²¹ Similarly, the earlier finding that in mixed conversation men are more likely to interrupt women than *vice versa*,²² was modified by distinguishing interruptions that disrupt the speaker's 'turn' in conversation from those that are encouraging.²³ Research on compliments offers another example of the gradual deepening of concepts in this field. Women are more likely to pay (and to receive) compliments, 'social lubricants' which tend to 'create or maintain rapport'.²⁴ But, as with interruptions, the effect of such a conversational strategy crucially depends on power relations. Compliments between superiors and subordinates underline power relations, while between equals, where there is potential both for solidarity and competition, they may act as a promise that the speaker favours solidarity.

The original 'deficit' model saw women as linguistically disadvantaged. 'Dominance' theorists offered a more general view of more powerful groups using linguistic strategies to maintain the power differential.²⁵ In the 1980s and 1990s, 'dominance' theorists were challenged by 'difference' theorists, who understood men and women as belonging to two distinct subcultures. 'Difference' theorists argued for a non-judgemental, ethnographic approach to these putative subcultures and their problems of communication,²⁶ glossing over questions of power. However, Troemel-Ploetz²⁷ responded by suggesting that women and men are in fact subordinate and dominant members of the same cultures. Women who speak 'like men' do not get treated just like men.

Shaw found that in the UK House of Commons male MPs were more likely to gain and hold the floor in debates, and to speak longer than women, often by violating the rules. She argued that women and men were following different norms, and using different discursive styles. Men, for example, would interrupt speeches and attempt to gain the floor by ironic cheering. This difference was 'partly volitional on the part of female MPs, as some of them state they do not want to take part in illegal interventions.'²⁸

More than three decades of research has established that men and women tend to use language differently, however such differences are explained. Holmes claims there are 'sociolinguistic universals' applying to gender, including: 'women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do',²⁹ and 'women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity.'³⁰ From a CR perspective this is entirely plausible. Gendered social structures affect agents in two ways. They offer different options to differently positioned agents, engendering different interests, and impose different restrictions in particular situations and interactions. Certain resultant experiences are repeated

over and over, and this process affects agents' dispositions – their aspirations, expectations, perceptions and beliefs.³¹ Such effects are tendential, since there are inevitably many other countervailing, interactive or deepening causal processes taking place. Given the openness and complexity of the social world, the amazing thing is not that 'demi-regularities' are only half-regular, but rather that any clear patterns emerge and endure.

Unfortunately (in our view) Holmes is not consistently realist, but gestures towards a strong form of social constructivism in describing gender and language research as moving from 'an essentialist paradigm' to 'a more dynamic social constructionist approach'.³² Citing Butler, she argues that 'subject positions are 'created and sustained by the use of language'.³³ In their interactions, women and men are 'doing gender' (i.e. constructing gender differences performatively). The proper focus of research is, Holmes suggests, on how women and men construct gendered identities in interaction.

She illustrates such research by analysing a conversation between two women friends, in which 'Helen' describes how she took her children to the swimming pool, as an example of the speaker *constructing herself* as a good mother. But what sort of explanation is this, and what is being explained? The (unsupported) suggestion is that talking about her day, Helen *intended* to construct herself as a good mother, and used the conversation to marshal the evidence. At the same time, Holmes seems to be describing the *effect* of this story on the speaker herself and her listening friend (it shows Helen as conforming to dominant ideas of good mothering). 'Doing gender', then, can be interpreted, or redescribed, in CR terminology as an account of how agents reproduce, and sometimes change, the cultural and social structures they use and respond to.

Critical realists part company from *strong* social constructionists, however, on two counts: first when gendered performances are represented as scripted, and thereby determined, by *nothing other than language*,³⁴ and secondly, when the structures of the gender order are reduced to effects of gender 'performance', such that the conditions that make an action possible are conflated with the actions themselves. Our position is summed up in the following passage, if for 'class' we read 'gender':

correlations between people's class [gender] position, and their use of language as a way of living that class [gender] position, are properties of language as a contextual resource, involuntaristic and often below the level of individual consciousness. However, these patterns cannot in themselves determine how particular people born into particular social locations will use language [...] in specific interactions, the influence of social settings will be variable, and [the person] will always have some choice about the language she uses.³⁵

According to Elizabeth Stokoe both Holmes, and we ourselves, are immersed in essentialism because we assume the gender of speakers is known, as if it were something fixed: 'such studies tend to correlate gender (as a 'fixed' individual trait) with a predefined speech behaviour (such as interruption). Gender is implicitly essentialised.'³⁶ Without entering into wider debates about essences (which we think, with Sayer, are often completely misunderstood³⁷) we do assume that gender, whilst not absolutely fixed, is *relatively enduring*, and certainly expect gender identities to endure over the life of the IACR weekend conferences. But gender identities can only give rise to tendencies. Agents are free to, and actually do, act in ways that contravene gender rules or go against gendered interests.³⁸

A substantial literature about gender differences in moral reasoning may also be relevant here. Gilligan³⁹ claimed to have shown that men tend to have a 'justice orientation' emphasising autonomy, separateness and abstract rights, and in moral argument, tend to refer to principles. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to have a 'care' orientation emphasising concern for the well being of others and a view of people as interdependent. In moral argument they tend to argue consequentially, referring to relationships and context. These claims remain

controversial, with subsequent research complicating the picture.⁴⁰ In related vein, Hochschild shows how the gender division of labour, in which women are allocated emotional labour, gives rise to different purposes and strategies.⁴¹ We could add to this ‘perspectivalist’ work emanating from the standpoint epistemology and ecofeminist traditions.⁴² Such tendencies, we emphasise, result from social positioning rather than from the ‘essence’ of sex or gender difference.

In sum, there is a long tradition in socio-linguistics, much of which is compatible with CR, that hints at gender differences being expressed in, and partly constituted by, differential language use of one kind or another.

3. *Methods*

To explore our best guesses about the influences on participation we used two techniques with the same group of respondents. Before the 2003 conference we gave them all ‘diaries’, to be filled in partly before, and partly after the conference. We also interviewed each respondent over a six months time period. In this section we explain the thinking that led us to these methods, and outline the questions we asked.

Our method, best described as causal-explanatory, should not be confused with variants of deductivism that seek either prediction or data consistency. A causal-explanatory method seeks to explain gendered differences in terms of the causal ensembles in operation, whereas a deductivist method, typically, seeks statistical associations between gendered groups and some other variables. Because it relies on statistical inference, deductivism requires appropriate sampling techniques to ensure randomness, representativeness, reliability and so on. Because causal-explanation does not involve statistical inference, in its aim to uncover typical mechanisms, it is not plagued by sampling problems nor, indeed, is small sample a problem: a group of twenty persons is perfectly adequate for this method, especially considering that conference attendance was not over 80 in the period considered.

Our (fairly international) group of ten women and ten men was largely an opportunity sample, but we deliberately included both women and men at every stage of their CR careers, from neophytes to committed, prominent and widely published scholars. We were spoilt for choice among male critical realists, but had less choice among the women. Yet by being at the conference at all, our female subjects had somehow resisted (while, we presumed, having been affected by) factors that steer women away from philosophy and abstract thought, in the academy as in social life more generally.

In both interviews and diaries we encouraged subjects to describe their emotions. In academic settings, emotional display is normatively rationed. The genre permits statements *about* emotions (in certain discursive contexts) but not their *display*. Since associated emotions are a key to understanding motivations and ostensibly cognitive processes of decision, we asked subjects about the hopes and fears associated with the past events or current aspirations they were describing.

Our ‘guesses’ at causal mechanisms can be grouped under the headings of structure and agency. How were our already gendered subjects conditioned (i.e. motivated, enabled and constrained) by the social and cultural structures of the conference – and indeed beyond? As contributors, what genres and styles did our subjects draw on, and did their gender identity affect their choices and responses?

Structural constraints, including discrimination against women, become visible when actors try to do things that the social context tends not to permit. Having failed or met sanctions, they may modify their ideas of what is possible. When this happens repeatedly, actors modify

their aspirations and their conception of their interests, to bring them more in line with what is readily possible and culturally approved. Actors are changed through such repeated processes of structural conditioning, sometimes to the point where they underestimate the possibilities for action that structures will support. This mechanism has sometimes been termed ‘internalised oppression’⁴³ and is widely documented in relation to women.⁴⁴ If gendered actors are formally positioned as equals and no informal discriminatory processes are occurring, gendered outcomes are likely to be due to the effects of past structural conditioning affecting aspirations and values, and therefore actions.

Formally, at CR conferences women and men are similarly positioned. Any discrimination that takes place at CR conferences has to be informal and unacknowledged, probably unaware, since it would be in breach of dominant cultural structures. Something like this has occurred in past conferences in terms of the selection of plenary speakers and the ordering of papers (in prime slots versus less favoured slots). In the three years we studied we only observed, and were told about, a few relatively fleeting instances of gender discrimination. Our interest was, rather, in possible gender effects of the conference genre, when met and used by gendered actors.

The questionnaire-style ‘diaries’ included questions about what they would like and would not like to happen at the conference, and about their contributions during plenary and parallel sessions. We also asked them about occasions on which they felt like contributing but did not do so, and which of a list of possible factors would make them more likely to contribute in a session. Finally, we asked whether what they hoped would or would not happen had come about. By focusing on aspirations, we explored subjects’ perceptions of the structures at work and of their own interests in this context. By asking about feelings, we hoped to get some idea of the processes of motivation.

The interviews began by asking about our subjects’ experiences in education and it became clear that our subjects were not only gendered, but also classed. They had all become members of a privileged intellectual stratum of non-manual workers, whose space and time to discuss abstruse matters depended on constant servicing by manual and administrative workers (paid by universities), and some mechanisms for carrying out the household work, the (re)production of people (usually unpaid). From different social positions, all our subjects had succeeded in a highly competitive education system, articulated with the thoroughly gendered structures of private life, including the family and reproduction. We believed that to do this would require them to develop ‘gender strategies’⁴⁵ in which they selected from available cultural templates about how to be a woman or a man, developing their own distinctive versions related to their biographies and personalities, and referring to these in evaluating situations and deciding how to act. In other words, they would personify their gender roles.⁴⁶ We tried to discern and distinguish ‘gender strategies’ and ‘class strategies’.

Some of our younger subjects were still in full-time education and had only incidental experience in the labour force, while a couple of older ones had recently become students. Gender mechanisms inevitably interacted with causal processes connected to age and status. These latter were also complex, for our subjects might be competent, and/or recognised, and/or confident in some field, while a novice within CR. We attempted to unpick some of these issues of class, age and status by asking our subjects about their work histories, and their experience of gender at work or as PhD students. We asked them how they situated themselves within CR as a body of knowledge, and whether they had relationships or networks within the conference on which they could draw. We saw networks within the CR community as relevant structures which might well be gendered. We also asked about their aspirations in relation to CR – whether CR research, teaching, or the CR movement.

The questions on which most time was spent concerned participation in conferences. Since paper-giving is often an obligatory ritual, we focused instead on contributions to discussion.

We asked respondents whether they ever spoke in plenary sessions and in parallel sessions, and what circumstances (such as the subject, the nature of the chairing or the people present) made it more or less likely that they would speak. We asked if they ever felt like speaking but held back, and why; we asked what it was like speaking, or not speaking, whether they had physical feelings of apprehension, and how they tended to reflect on their own contributions. We then asked what they considered a good contribution. Lastly, we asked whether they noticed gender differences in ways of contributing, and what they thought about them.

4. Findings

Diaries

The long standing critical realists amongst the men hoped for dialogue: ‘an inclusive environment, and to learn’, ‘for a community of CR people, and good discussions’, ‘for an interchange of views, and to discuss my own work’. They feared that the conference would be marred by aggression, the dominance of a few, lack of respect and point-scoring. Some of the less senior men expressed comparable hopes – for ‘open debate’, and feared ‘pedantry and conflict’. Mostly, though, their hopes were for themselves. They hoped to understand new things, or to get a better grasp of things they already knew. They hoped their own work would be recognised and discussed, and feared not being able to follow, being ignored or being treated with disrespect.

The women mentioned friends and sociability among their hopes. None of the men mentioned this. In other respects the women resembled the men in their aspirations for constructive discussions, interesting papers, and to learn more. Two expressed fears similar to those of the senior men, ‘conflict that polarises CR’; ‘general breakdown in communication’. Other women feared conflict, but related it to themselves rather than to the CR community: ‘the conference might exhibit closure, cliquishness, self-righteousness; people trying to trip each other up [...] aggressive questioning [...] unfathomable responses [...] [I might feel] peripheral, marginal, a fly on the wall.’ Others feared not learning, not understanding, being bored, or being publicly humiliated.

Both men and women hoped to be able to engage with the discourse of the conference, and to feel included. The women were perhaps more open about wanting affiliation for its own sake.

After the conference, respondents commented in the diaries on their participation in the plenary and parallel discussions. Three of the men, and six of the women, had not even thought of speaking in the plenary discussion. Three men and two women had thought of it, but had not spoken, and five men and two women had spoken in a plenary session. In the parallel sessions all of the men had spoken, seven of them several times. Seven of the women had spoken, two of them several times.

We asked what factors would make them more likely to speak. All said the topic must be of interest. Nine women and seven men had to have a good knowledge of it. No men, but half of the women, were influenced by the style of chairing. Three of the men, and seven of the women, would be more likely to speak if people they liked were present.

Commenting afterwards on how the conference had gone, men related their replies (as asked) to their original aims, most of which were achieved (e.g. ‘paper went well’). Two commented that they had not come away with new ideas. Two mentioned the social side of the conference: ‘good to know people’. In contrast, nine women mentioned social relations: ‘friendly, constructive’; ‘nice people’; ‘not enough social interaction’; ‘friendly, stimulating’; ‘I experienced what a better society could be like’.

The responses show that gendered subjects, conditioned by repeated encounters with gendered social and cultural structures, tend to formulate slightly different aspirations. It is impossible to distinguish between the effects of gender norms on what hopes and fears are felt, versus their effect on what emotions can be admitted. We guess that these are mutually reinforcing (sentiments one is allowed to express are less likely to be struggled against).

Interviews

Two male and three female interviewees came from working-class families where no one had been to university, and were not expected to go into higher education. Several respondents had mixed class backgrounds, or parents with different educational levels. In most cases the father was better educated than the mother, and mothers were employed part-time, if at all. Most went to state schools, a few to private schools, some to mixed schools and others to single-sex.

A few women described being affected by gender oppression as school students. The woman who went to university as a mature student did well at school, but discovered ‘to my absolute fury’ that she could not go to university without Latin, which was taught only to boys. Another respondent described how she had been good at physics at her girls’ school, but moved to a mixed school where she found that in physics lessons the girls chatted at the back, while the boys worked at the front. Several women reported that while their education was important to their parents, it was not important as that of their brothers. Fifteen respondents said it was very important to their parents that they do well. Several of these emphasised that their parents put them under ‘absolutely no pressure’, as long as (one can almost hear the parents’ voices) they worked hard and always did their best. Six women (but no men) spontaneously mentioned their father as proud (‘his little girl’), concerned, taxing (‘a disciplinarian’), never satisfied, ambitious, or pleased. With one exception, mothers were mentioned as supportive in a more background way rather than pushy. With such small numbers this may mean nothing, but a picture emerges of families in which the mother has a lesser role in the public realm or is a full-time housewife, and the father becomes a mentor for daughters taking a different route.

We asked respondents what it was like doing well at school, whether they were competitive and how they got on with fellow students. Both men and women described family pressures to succeed: ‘I had a grandmother who was pretty keen on ranking her grandsons.’ ‘I failed an exam and I was traumatised.’ ‘Doing badly at school was not an option.’ ‘Top of the class, me, yes.’ Although to succeed in most education systems requires or induces competitiveness, most respondents were reluctant to describe themselves in this way, often insisting that they were not competitive, but merely had an ‘intrinsic wish to achieve’. Some admitted: ‘The word isn’t very socially enjoyable but yes. It was important what marks I got.’ ‘Oh yes. I wanted to be the best really [...] my attitude was extreme at times.’ ‘I was just always the best at it [...] and after a while teachers treat you differently.’ Most encountered some sort of resentment or bullying, and several took aversive action by keeping quiet in certain classes, or developing a talent for football. ‘I was very anxious to learn [...] in every class there were some students who didn’t like me, because I was a good student.’ ‘I was helping the other students, that’s how I made up for it. I would whisper the right answer.’ ‘Every time the exam results were read out my friends would groan [...] I was always the best, I’m ashamed to say.’ Again a couple avoided the dilemma at some stage: ‘I didn’t want to be average, so I didn’t do anything.’

Sooner or later all these people did succeed. Although no gender differences were apparent in their success and the resentment they faced, the cultural implications of being envied and disliked are, we believed, different for men and for women, and such experiences may well have differentially influenced the gender strategies they took up.

Women and men agreed that CR conferences were something of a rest from gender discrimination, compared with workplaces they had known. 'I am less aware of gender issues in CR than anywhere else. I don't even think about it' one woman said, but another thought that male networking just happened in more subtle ways than at most conferences. One woman with a high powered job described her difficulties at work with 'the boys banter, the put-downs, the loud belly laughter', occasions when the real decisions were made after work in a pub, and she only heard about them the next morning. A woman academic described getting her own way 'by flirting', adding that she felt 'very junior' (compared to her actual status). Women academics agreed that they tended to be allocated caring roles, such as pastoral work, admissions tutor, or found themselves informally assuming some of such work. 'You look around and find that imperceptibly you have done all the dirty work.' Another at the beginning of an academic career with two young children said that despite her husband's active parenting, she had lost many, many hours and days at a crucial point for getting her career started. A PhD student described offensive comments from supposed friends attributing her success to her supervisor's fancying her. No one described anything comparable happening at CR conferences or in the CR movement.

One instance involving gender was described by a woman respondent who had felt 'particularly bad' about her difficulties in speaking out, when a woman speaker had been

bravely [...] mapping out a feminist agenda and she was met firstly with total disinterest [...] like no one reacted, the one reaction she got was from X who tried to turn the argument round saying she was sexist, because he didn't understand the first steps [...] It was a very provocative statement, and he said it quite bitterly and angrily [...] but he was the only person in that conference that reacted, the next person [...] ignored what had been said and moved it on. I remember thinking I should have helped you [the woman] out there.

She had not done so because of a lack of confidence that had made it impossible to speak up.

There were striking differences between what our male and female respondents said about contributing to discussion. Most of the women went to the plenary sessions expecting not to speak. 'A plenary is theatre and not meant to be inclusive', said one. Even in parallel sessions, they would only speak with a particular purpose in mind, usually that of helping the speaker, sometimes the group. If they considered the presenter to be dogmatic or arrogant, they were unlikely to even consider speaking. 'If an arrogant person is presenting, even if you had a serious challenge or a serious question you don't bother, because there isn't any point [...] dogmatic men tend to talk past each other.' 'When people make comments in an aggressive, gladiatorial way, once that is there, I think "I don't want to get into the fight"'.

Women and non-native speakers of English were similarly disadvantaged in discussions, because it would take them much longer to formulate a question and decide to speak (presumably female non-native speakers are doubly disadvantaged). For the women, the delay was occasioned by a process of self-censorship and environmental checking that took time. 'When I feel I have something to contribute that can make the discussion clearer, I censor myself in advance. It takes a long time. I'm very careful not to be domineering.' 'I wouldn't normally be the first to ask a question. I'd usually see what sort of questions are coming out.' – but then, this woman admitted, she would often find she'd lost her chance to speak. The environment had to be checked for danger: 'Somebody could pull your argument to pieces.' Several women named men they would not speak in front of lest they do exactly that. On the other hand, if people they knew and liked were present, the more reluctant women would be more likely to speak. If they did speak, many would opt for the safest type of contribution, a question. 'You can say: "I wonder if you can clarify this?" that's a sort of okay way to ask a question because it doesn't threaten the speaker.' Such interventions serve the dual purpose of meeting the ethic of helpfulness and averting attack.

Two of the more senior women who frequently spoke, were often dissatisfied with their own contributions. 'I thought I was onto something but I couldn't articulate it in a sharp academic manner. I still think it was important but there are a whole body of expressions that didn't come to my lips in time.' 'When men intervene they can speak in paragraphs. I feel I must get my point out as quickly as possible – two or three sentences.' She felt a mixture of annoyance and envy towards these men. Another woman was frustrated by her own felt lack of clarity and assertiveness. When women who were usually silent did speak, the process of self-censorship was still evident: 'I'd just been working on something very similar myself, so I was interested in juggling with it. It caused me a lot of anxiety at the time, an adrenaline rush, often I find that when I do force myself to speak I speak too quickly or it comes out wrong.' INT: 'How did you feel about it afterwards?' 'I felt fine about *what* I said, I felt the *way I said it* was too energised, and whether I actually helped the person who presented, I'm not sure.' INT: 'And you were concerned about that, about the effect of your contribution?' 'Yes [...] I'm not sure I was saying what he wanted to hear, you see.'

Women were often frustrated by their own failure to speak, yet ambivalent about their own wish to be heard, because they disapproved of domineering or 'space grabbing' behaviour. Several reported that on occasions when their own time-consuming standards had prevented their speaking they looked back and thought 'I could have said something and it would have been just as good as anything anyone else said.' One of the more senior women lamented 'When I was young, what boys and men said was treated as so much more important than what women said. Now I've such a wish to be heard – I'm so argumentative – but it's a destructive way of doing it: "Look at how clever I am".' The interviews suggested that all ten women experienced, to different degrees, conflict between an anti-individualist ethic of mutual help which had become incorporated into their gender strategies and personal styles, and the aims and genre of the conferences (and indeed of academic life in general).

The men's descriptions of contributing to discussions contrasted with those of the women. For the non-native English speakers, as mentioned above, there was a distinct similarity in one respect: 'I can't formulate questions because of language. I make contributions in my mind.' One of these was affected by who was present, not because they made him more or less nervous, but because as a PhD student, he hesitated to speak in front of someone of higher status. 'I might be humiliated if others thought it was a silly question.' By the time he had negotiated these internal obstacles, it tended to be too late. Another non-native speaker hesitated to speak to new people – which almost always ruled out discussion in sessions. Like several of the men, inclusion and recognition were big issues for him (perhaps equivalent to most of the women's emphasis on affiliation). 'If I were a core member of the conference [...] [I would speak].' One native English speaker (upwardly mobile working class) was frank about wanting to speak in order to be part of things. This meant he, too, took time formulating questions, since his aim was to think of a good one that would bring recognition.

Others, for whom language and class were no problem (or no longer a problem), made straightforward decisions to speak. 'If someone says something and I feel I need to join in I put my hand up.' 'If I think there's a fruitful addition to be made then I will do.' 'I don't think about it as a contribution, I think is it intellectually stimulating?' 'I would only not speak if I didn't understand. The size of the session is irrelevant.' This man would speak if he wanted to know more, or 'to query a dodgy argument', or 'to make a link to other things that might help the speaker'. Only this last motive would be considered an acceptable motive in terms of the helpfulness ethic to which most of the women subscribed.

Unlike the women, the men did not talk about being nervous, which of course does not mean that they weren't. In answer to a direct question, one senior man said, 'There are times when I seem to be without nerves at all and times when I'm very nervous and I don't see why.' A well-known male critical realist was often mentioned by both male and female respondents

because he had high status, was personally friendly and unassuming, but often seemed nervous – which did not stop him speaking. Some people found his presence encouraging because of his personal qualities, while others found it off-putting because of his status. A male PhD student remarked that it was comforting to see this high status man still nervous.

One man commented on a session in the pre-conference workshop where a woman who had been leading a session was asked a question and asked someone else to answer it on the grounds that she was tired. He saw this as an admission of weakness that would have been impossible for a man.

Yes, never admit it in such a way [...] she said you know I just can't respond to that because I'm tired so could somebody else come in. I think that's quite brave to do that because [...] it's not normative behaviour [...] I always feel that in a conference you have to be very rational so you can't show much emotion, and if you do you will disqualify yourself. I've seen some women who [...] contribute and are more emotional and you feel that [...] is seen to be less academic [...] men are also emotionally engaged [...] but they tend to kind of hide that behind a very rational [...] you know, you can't read their mind, they just take on a role.

The differences he is commenting on come under the heading of style, and he is arguing – rightly, we think – that the genre of conferencing does not readily permit one of the styles that tends to emerge from women's gendered experience.

The forms of displayed emotion most often mentioned were nervousness and aggression. One man sometimes mentioned as intimidating in his manner was aware of this criticism and troubled by it. 'Once I start speaking I've got like a switch [...] it comes out almost on automatic. I have no fear whatsoever.' INT: 'Why do you speak?' 'Because I think I've had a good idea or I'm interested to know what someone's said in some detail.' INT: 'Anything else?' 'Is there any other reason you'd want to speak?' This man expressed an impersonal 'rational' ethic (in contrast to the 'helpfulness' ethic). 'Some people, when you discuss with them it spirals out of control quite quickly, because they take what you say to be implicitly critical in a way that you didn't intend it to be. But it's difficult to withdraw, because you think it's interesting about the actual idea and you want to see what they will say.' He then named two male critical realists with whom his arguments always became fights.

What is a good contribution?

These differences persisted in answers to what emerged as our key question – i.e. the one which pointed most clearly to key mechanisms producing the observable effects. Yet again there was more agreement within than between groups. Two basic qualities that mark a good contribution emerged. In both aggression was deplored (though it is possible respondents in the two categories may not mean the same thing by this). First, *intrinsic qualities* (two women, seven men): the relevance, the clarity, the length, pitch, intelligence and other intrinsic qualities of the contribution. The value in reaching a better grasp of truth or reality was sometimes mentioned, but in an impersonal way with no reference to the group or individuals. A bad contribution was an incompetent one which failed to reach these standards because it was wrong, misjudged or unclear. Second, *relational (pedagogic/dialogic) qualities* (two men, eight women): the contribution was of value to the speaker, to other individuals or to the group in assisting learning, or encouraged and opened out dialogue and discussion. A bad contribution was inaccessible, showing off, negative, elitist or intimidating, or took up too much time.

Some examples of 'intrinsic' responses: 'Short, to the point, clear and relevant'. 'Flows, at the right level, focussed, understandable and clear.' "'Having a go" is counter-productive. Good contributions are long, articulate and detailed. Bad contributions are forgettable, repetitive and pointless.' (This man mentioned an admirable complex contribution that lasted for five minutes and was made clearly, without notes.) 'Good contributions clarify things or show a

defect in the argument.’ Orientation to the group (in terms of clarity and relevance) and to the common project of the conference were sometimes mentioned, but not orientation to the speaker. One man in this group (quoted above) and both women spontaneously mentioned an aggressive style as affecting the value of a contribution. When prompted, the other men agreed that an aggressive or intimidating style was a bad thing, but some were concerned that an interdiction on intimidating interventions might, in certain conditions, preclude expression of serious disagreement.

Examples of ‘relational’ responses included: ‘Good contributions open up discussion. Their form is as important as their content.’ ‘Anything that helps advance the understanding of others, introduces people to new things, or takes things a step forward.’ ‘Accessible, general, not specialised. Not alienating “up your arse” language.’ ‘It is generally helpful, it doesn’t just bring the questioner into the limelight [...] not rude or aggressive’. ‘It makes the presenter think about what he or she has said – a real elaboration or a real critique.’ ‘They should be encouraging [...] They could show weaknesses, but without offending.’ ‘They often offer alternative experience in a way that doesn’t dismiss the other.’ ‘Builds on what the speakers been saying, helping her or him and the rest of the audience develop their thinking.’ One respondent summed up the ‘relational’ ideal:

At the last conference X gave a wonderful paper. I asked a question and she came back and said “That’s a really important question.” Then there was a silence while she thought of how to respond. She responded in a very interesting way, so I felt she and I had an important intellectual exchange, which was I think also useful for other people who followed it up with rather similar sorts of issues, and we continued to talk about it afterwards.

For members of the ‘relational group’, the style of a contribution was directly relevant to its ability to achieve the valued aim and therefore to its worth. We did not systematically ask what contributions were considered intimidating, but women frequently volunteered examples.

These two groups *do not* represent two polarised perspectives, a masculine one in which the style of interventions is irrelevant and criticism is simply part of the necessary rough and tumble of conference participation, and a feminine one in which the style of interventions is highly relevant, and fear of criticism and conflict prevents women from participating fully in conferences. Although men did not spontaneously mention an aggressive or intimidating style as implying a bad contribution, when asked directly, they agreed that this was so. Both women and men valued co-operation in the common intellectual project, but a real disagreement did emerge about how that should be achieved. For men, the accepted genre of conferencing was taken as given, to be worked round or modified as necessary. Their gender strategies, including their styles, could be accommodated within the genre. This was not true for most of the women. Whereas for the men, the intellectual aspects of the common project were primary, and could be achieved in fairly conventional ways that did not challenge the gender order, our findings suggest that for the women relationships were primary. The ‘helpfulness’ ethic implicit in so many responses suggested that the common intellectual project would not be genuinely achieved unless the intellectual advances made were shared. Because their gender strategies incorporated this different purpose, the conference genre did not work well for the women, and was in partial contradiction with their preferred styles, which disadvantaged them – producing the outcomes referred to at the beginning of this paper.

Given that there are different styles, how can we account for them? The following can be no more than informed guesses. Our results are strongly reminiscent of those of Gilligan⁴⁷ and Shaw,⁴⁸ in that women tended to act differently from men because they set themselves different goals and standards. Styles are usually an expression of gender strategy, although they do have some relative autonomy – sometimes a contributor’s style seemed in conflict

with their purpose. As already said, gender strategies are responses to positioning, one of the ways in which people make sense of their place in the world and make their identities part of themselves.⁴⁹

Secondly, we suspect that academic men have more choice of gender strategy and of styles than women. Both women and men with ‘combative’ styles risk being feared and disliked (though they may also be admired), but women with such styles are likely to be criticised in sexist terms, by both women and men. Men on the other hand may safely adopt the quieter, inquiring, non-combative styles conventionally considered feminine, since by participating in the academy, as part of the public realm, they are already expressing an acceptable version of masculinity. Women’s participation in the academy, forbidden until recently, does not in itself express any form of femininity, but rather the fragile gender neutrality of academic structures. Academic life remains a place where women can be *despite* being women. However, gender identity is culturally compulsory (actors cannot leave it at the door of supposedly gender-neutral structures) and culturally inappropriate displays meet certain sanctions. Since so much of women’s significant experience tends to be in the private realm, their gender strategies, including their styles, are likely to import ways of displaying femininity which are not formally rewarded in academic life, but which stave off sexist criticism. Our guess would be that women who are sometimes sharp and challenging in academic debate are likely to combine these ‘masculine’ traits with strong ‘feminine’ traits, such as affiliation, mediation, and attentive listening.

Conclusions

Our analysis retroduded the ensemble of orders, structures, resources and rules, that could generate the effects that were our starting point. One is the structure of the CR conferences, in particular in its linguistic aspect – the genre. Another relates to gendered dispositions of agents, particularly gender strategies incorporating different beliefs and purposes, and giving rise to different styles. Genres are implicitly purposive, and the purposes of the ‘intrinsic’ group were more congruent with the conference genre than those of the ‘relatedness’ group. Broadly speaking, adherence to the helpfulness ethic and a considerate, other-oriented style quietens conference participants (unless, we might speculate, they have already achieved high status). If they succeed in influencing the whole, it is likely to be in the conventionally feminine way – from behind.

What should be done about this? This depends on whether critical realists believe our purposes, as a movement, are already well served by the conferencing genre, and that the advance of the movement will best be brought about through individual excellence ‘trickling down’ or by attempts to build an even less hierarchical and inclusive movement. If the genre is taken as given, attempts could be made to increase equality by encouraging women to make more use of it, or by recruiting those that will. We do not think such policies would have much chance of success. In our view, unreflective acceptance of a genre which is an integral part of the hierarchical, unequal structure of higher education is a theory-practice inconsistency for CR. To modify it could make our conferences more inclusive not only for women but for non-native speakers and beginners to CR, who tend to struggle and be silent at conferences. There is a contradiction between being inclusive and encouraging excellence which would need handling.

The recommendations made by both our female and male respondents included:

- Put not only papers, but also questions, on the net before hand so people would have longer to think about them and come to sessions better prepared.
- Have ‘rounds’ in sessions where everyone is invited to speak briefly at some point in the discussion.

- Use small groups, seated appropriately (i.e. not in rows) in small rooms ‘so you are literally talking to each other’.
- Use more workshop type sessions within the conference itself.
- Recognise the crucial role of social interaction. Coffee breaks and meal times should not be treated as a distraction from the ‘proper’ business of the conference but as part of the causal ensemble that is a conference.
- Recognise that chairing matters greatly and is not merely a routine administrative chore. Conference organisers should have a pre-conference meeting with chairs to provide some guidelines about what is expected of good chairing. Chairs should be given the authority, by the organisers, to intervene where necessary. The role of chairs should then be made explicit to all participants at the start of the conference, to give it necessary gravitas.
- More proactive chairs might ask presenters beforehand what they want to get out of the session and encourage contributors to begin with more general points. At present, the first speaker tends to make a sophisticated, nuanced point, which assumes detailed knowledge and silences others. More proactive chairs might also provide informal encouragement: the chair could remind participants not to be afraid of asking any questions: there are no ‘stupid’ questions. More women chairing has already helped.

These suggestions tend to assume a priori that the implicit purposes of the ‘helpful’ ethic should become those of the CR movement. This may not be the case. The emancipatory way to proceed is to begin by discussing what we want to achieve, and then reflect upon how best we might meet these purposes. The recommendations are also relatively timid, assuming the conference genre is given – it is not. Lastly, the biggest source of gender difference in the conferences is their failure to attract women, which is, in large part, due to causal factors at work outside the conference venue. However, we suspect that practical attention to identifying and eliminating unwanted gendered effects would be deeply attractive to both women and men.

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