

RESEARCH NOTE

What Is the State of Blacks
in Philosophy?

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**CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RACE,
VOL. 2, NO. 2, 2014**

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Abstract

This research note is meant to introduce into philosophical discussion the preliminary results of an empirical study on the state of blacks in philosophy, which is a joint effort of the American Philosophical Association's Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers (APA CSBP) and the Society of Young Black Philosophers (SYBP). The study is intended to settle factual issues in furtherance of contributing to dialogues surrounding at least two philosophical questions: What, if anything, is the philosophical value of demographic diversity in professional philosophy? And what is philosophy? The empirical goals of the study are (1) to identify and enumerate U.S. blacks in philosophy, (2) to determine the distribution of blacks in philosophy across career stages, (3) to determine correlates to the success of blacks in philosophy at different career stages, and (4) to compare and contrast results internally and externally to explain any career stage gaps and determine any other disparities.

Keywords: black philosopher; diversity; underrepresentation; American Philosophical Association; Society of Young Black Philosophers

Terminology

In our study, we use the following vocabulary:

affiliated	currently affiliated with a philosophy program
black person	a person who self-identifies as black
hot spots	schools that either produce or currently have a lot of U.S. BIPs (as defined below)
internal disparities	between and among U.S. BIPs
professor	tenure track, non-tenure track, or non-retired tenured professor
U.S. BIP	a black person with a Ph.D. in philosophy from a U.S. philosophy program, a Ph.D. student in a U.S. philosophy program, or a non-retired employee of a U.S. philosophy program who is employed in an academic capacity (e.g., postdoc, adjunct professor, tenure track professor, etc.)
U.S. philosopher	a person of undesignated race with a Ph.D. in philosophy from a U.S. philosophy program, a Ph.D. student in a U.S. philosophy program, or a non-retired employee of a U.S. philosophy program who is employed in an academic capacity (e.g. postdoc, adjunct professor, tenure track professor, etc.)
external disparities	between U.S. BIPs and U.S. philosophers more generally

Introduction

In response to a growing sense in the profession that as an academic discipline, philosophy is “demographically challenged” (Alcoff 2013), and in the interest of making strides toward meeting that challenge, the empirical study that is the subject of this research note was instigated by a felt need on the part of its creators for tangible data on the state of blacks in philosophy. Key motivating assumptions behind the study are (1) that as a discipline philosophy would be improved by casting a critical gaze on the degree to which its customs, practices, and foundational assumptions have been shaped by the value systems of a very narrowly

defined set of thinkers; (2) that the profession of philosophy is currently contending with questions about climate, equitable treatment, and the effect on philosophical questions and methods of philosophy's lack of demographic diversity; and (3) that philosophers of different backgrounds have had different experiences which are, and should be, the subject of philosophical reflection.

The specific goals of the empirical study are (1) to identify and enumerate U.S. blacks in philosophy, (2) to determine the distribution of U.S. blacks in philosophy across career stages, (3) to determine correlates to the success of U.S. blacks in philosophy at different career stages, and (4) to identify internal disparities in terms of gender.

Due to its empirical focus and utilization of statistical research methods, some may object that the study's proper home is not philosophy but sociology. However, one of the philosophical inquiries we hope to engage with our study is the question, what is philosophy? In an academic environment in which black philosophers are regularly characterized as not doing "real" philosophy in virtue of their choosing to grapple with the topic of racial injustice and related themes, it seems to the creators of this study that the point should be made that the definition of "real" philosophy is in need of an overhaul. Any and all information bearing on any philosophical question seems to us to operate in the furtherance of doing "real" philosophy, the empirical data that is the subject of this study included. With that said, we are philosophers, not sociologists, and accordingly we invite philosophical critique and analysis on, for example, the research methods employed in the study, the meaning of the data generated, etc. In other words, we recognize and acknowledge that the results we have generated are not problem-free. Thus, while the study is empirical and employs sociological research methods and models, we understand our study to be decidedly philosophical in motivation and character.

It should also be noted that the results presented in this research note are preliminary and represent the state of the study as of May 30, 2013. Since that time, new data has been generated and will become part of the final study that will be the basis upon which a more detailed paper will be produced.

We have reserved philosophical analysis of the data for the more detailed paper; however, a second philosophical question we hope to engage with our study is what, if anything, is the philosophical value

of demographic diversity? Sub-issues we hope to be settled by the study are (a) whether it is the case that the number of blacks in philosophy is dramatically lower than in any other discipline in the humanities or social sciences, (b) identification of career stages at which blacks in philosophy fall through the professional cracks, (c) substantiation of the high correlation understood to exist (anecdotally) between identification as a black philosopher and areas of specialization and concentration, (d) the identification of gender disparities, if any, within black philosophers in terms of promotion and tenure, attrition rate, recruitment into Ph.D. programs, and other issues affecting career success, and (e) the identification of any external disparities.

Methods

The preliminary study was completed on May 30, 2013.

In order to gather data on the number of U.S. BIPs, we started with Bill Lawson's list of black philosophers as a base. Next, we updated that list (e.g., removed retired people, removed dead people, updated affiliations, etc.). Next, we added relevant people from the membership list of SYBP and added people from SYBP's list of black philosophy professors, which was created by Thea Rothstein. Next, we added people from Molly Mahony's list of black philosophers, a list that belongs to the Regents of the University of Michigan. We also added people using feedback from an email listserv linked to the APA CSBP. This gave us a new base list from which to work. From that we found hot spots, which is to say universities that seemed to educate or employ many black philosophers. We used the departmental and university websites of hot spots to seek out other U.S. BIPs (e.g., using placement and graduation pages, Ph.D. student lists, dissertation records, etc.). Next, we used the 2012 APA Guide to Graduate Programs in Philosophy (hereafter, the 2012 Grad Guide) to anchor a systematic sweep of all U.S. Ph.D. programs in philosophy. In other words, we looked for names to match APA head counts of black Ph.D. students and black professors. It should also be noted that we used visual and written clues on websites to identify U.S. BIPs.

With respect to area of specialization (AOS), we used information on personal or departmental websites to ascertain U.S. BIPs' self-reported areas of specialization. For data analysis, we grouped similar self-reported

areas of specialization into the same AOS—e.g., race theory, philosophy of race, and critical race theory designations were grouped as race theory. Throughout this process we used the definition of a “black person” as “a person who self-identifies as black.” However, we also added people to the list based on hypotheses about how they would self-identify. This was often based on perceived Sub-Saharan African ancestry, since people from the United States tend to use that criterion when self-identifying as black.¹ Also, we conducted a sub-study of female U.S. BIPs, wherein we used the same data gathered in the same manner.

While we used a z-test for two proportions (with a significance level of 0.05) to compare proportions from samples that reasonably come from large populations, we used an exact binomial test for comparing proportions that clearly come from small populations. We calculated all p-values using R, which is a standard statistical software package.

Preliminary Results

U.S. BIPs

There are 156 U.S. BIPs, 141 of which are affiliated. See figure 1.

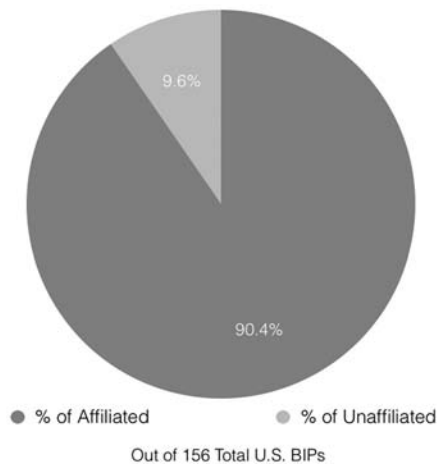


FIGURE 1
How Many Are There?

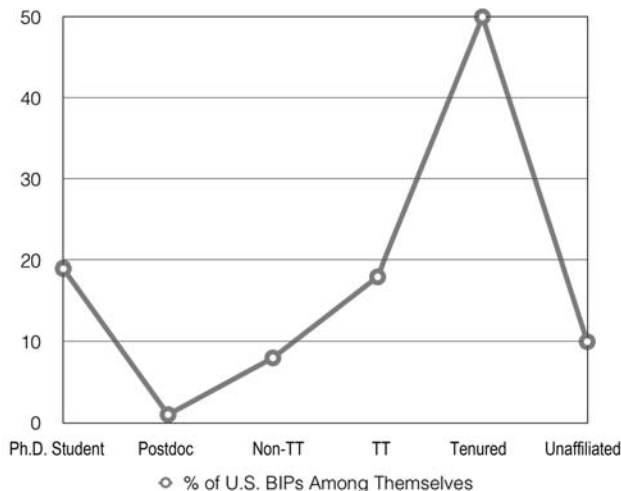


FIGURE 2
Career Stage Distribution of U.S. BIPs among Themselves

Currently about 20 percent of U.S. BIPs are Ph.D. students, about 8 percent are non-tenure track professors, 20 percent are tenure track professors, and 50 percent are tenured professors. See figure 2.

Geographically, U.S. BIPs are distributed throughout the country according to the following percentages: The majority of U.S. BIPs reside on the East Coast, while 11.8 percent reside on the West Coast, and 15.8 percent are in the central United States.² See figure 3.

The majority of affiliated U.S. BIPs are at Penn State, followed by Howard, Columbia, Memphis, and SUNY Stony Brook. See figure 4.

Most tenure track or tenured professors are at Columbia, Howard, and Morgan State. Each of these schools has three professors. CUNY John Jay, DePaul, Memphis, and Michigan State each have two professors. These seven schools have 27.4 percent of affiliated tenure track and tenured professors. See figure 5.

Unaffiliated U.S. BIPs work in the humanities, in nonprofit education, are in a seminary or dojo, and a few are unknown. Most U.S. BIPs earned their Ph.D.s at Memphis, followed by Stanford, Yale, Harvard, and Pittsburgh. See figure 6.

The top areas of specialization for U.S. BIPs are (1) Africana, (2) Race, (3) Social and Political, (4) Ethics, and (5) Continental philosophy. See figure 7.

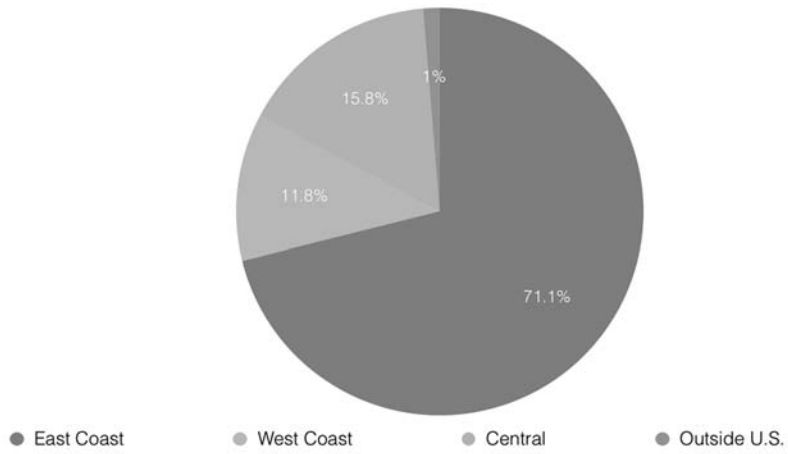


FIGURE 3
Where Are the Americans Located?

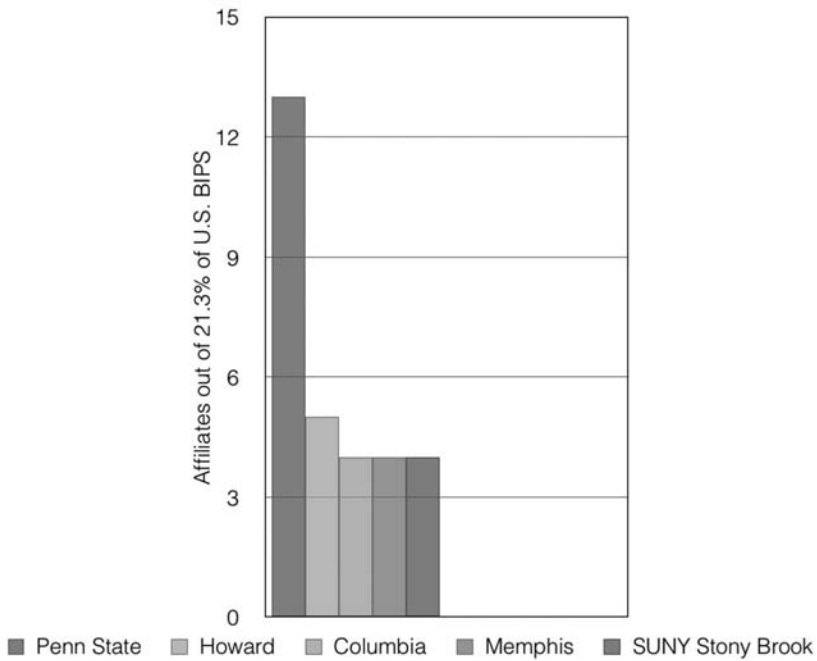


FIGURE 4
Where Are the Affiliated?

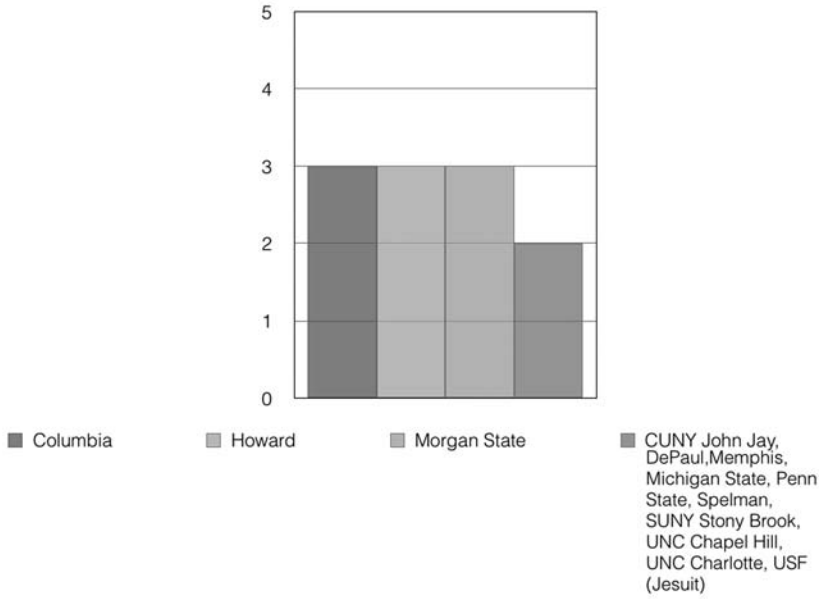


FIGURE 5
Where Are the Affiliated TT and Tenured Professors?

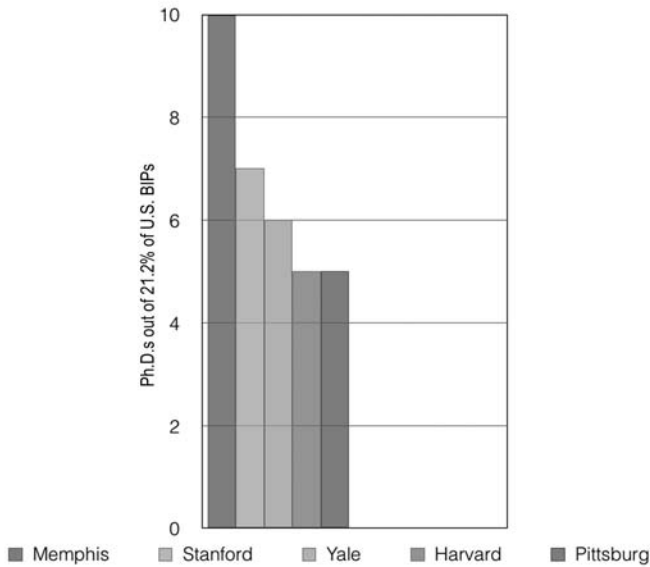


FIGURE 6
Where Do U.S. BIPs Earn Ph.D.s?

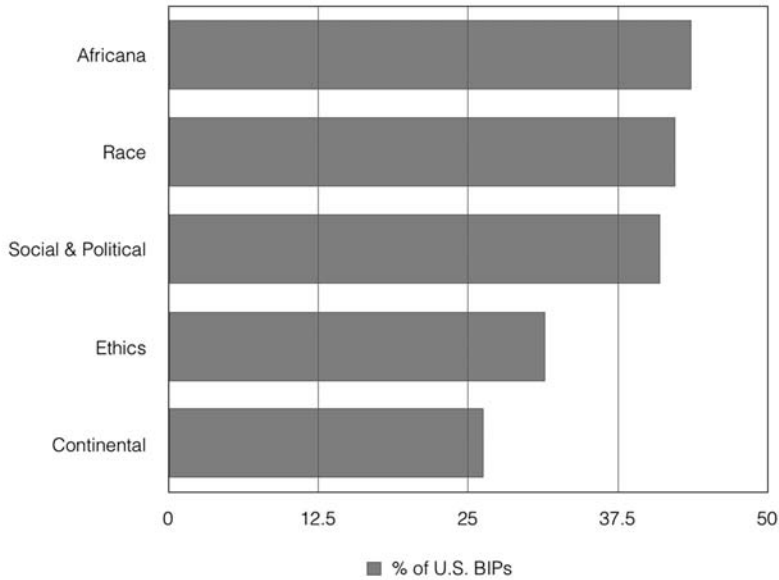


FIGURE 7
Top Five Areas of Specialization for U.S. BIPs

Female U.S. BIPs

There are 55 female U.S. BIPs. They account for 35 percent of U.S. BIPs. See figure 8.

Of female U.S. BIPs, 93 percent are affiliated. As for career distribution, close to 30 percent are Ph.D. students and less than 10 percent are non-tenure track philosophers. See figure 9.

The majority of female U.S. BIPs are tenured professors (35 percent) while close to 20 percent are tenure track professors. Geographically, most female U.S. BIPs are located on the East Coast (84 percent), while 9.8 percent are on the West Coast, and 5.9 percent are in the central United States, as seen in figure 10.

Of affiliated female U.S. BIPs, 31 percent are at three schools: Penn State, Columbia, and Spelman. See figure 11.

Columbia and Spelman together have 13 percent of tenured or tenure track female U.S. BIPs. Most female U.S. BIPs earned Ph.D.s at Memphis (9), while Harvard, Stanford, and UNC Chapel Hill have each awarded two. See figure 12.

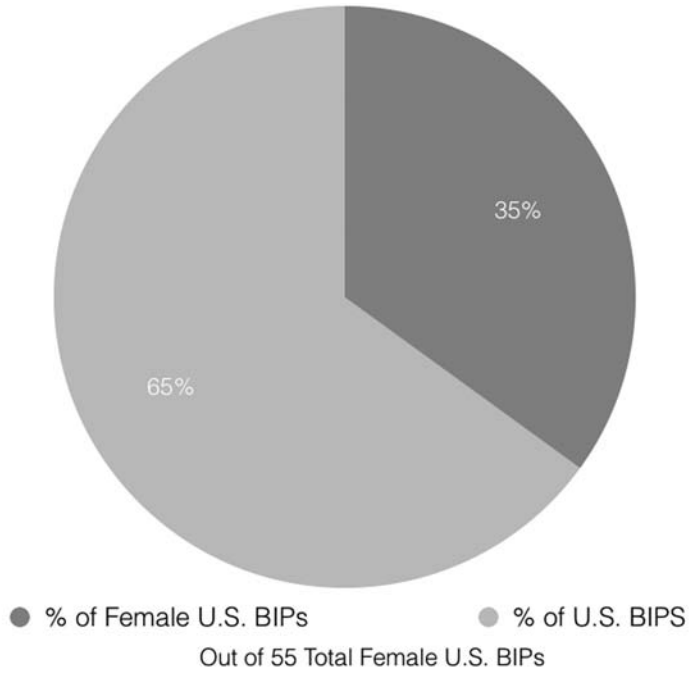


FIGURE 8
How Many Are There?

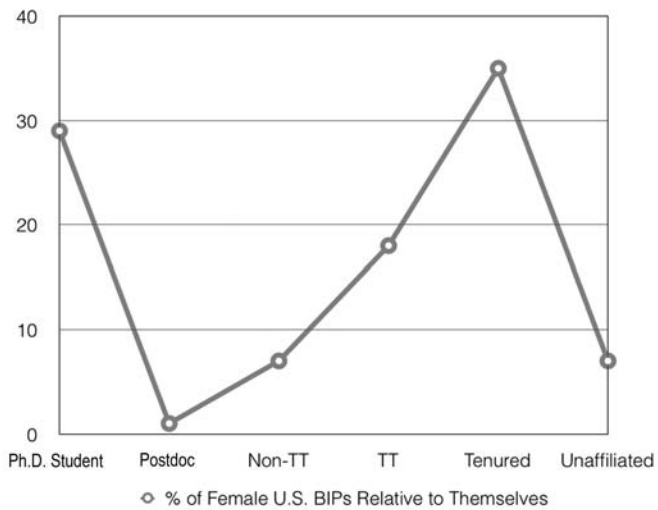


FIGURE 9
Career Stage Distribution of Female U.S. BIPs

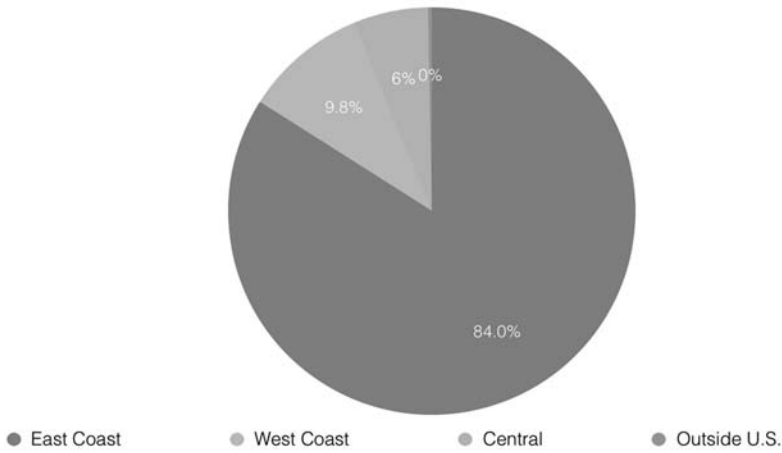


FIGURE 10
Where Are the Americans Located?

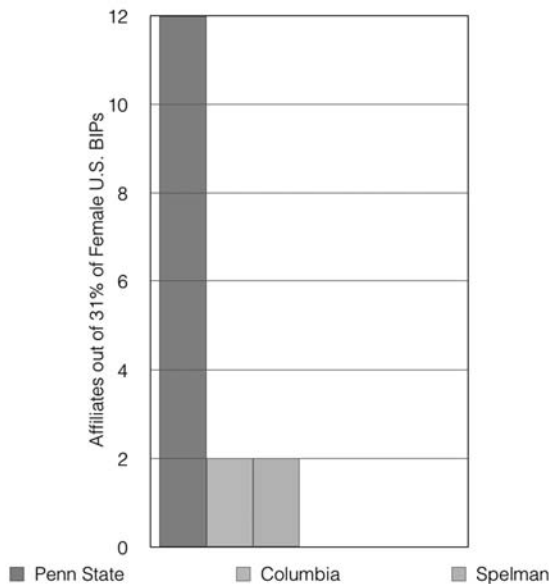


FIGURE 11
Where Are the Affiliated?

The schools just mentioned have awarded Ph.D.s to 27 percent of female U.S. BIPs. Female U.S. BIPs’ top five areas of specialization are: (1) Race, (2) Ethics, (3) Continental, (4) Social and Political, and (5) Feminism. See figure 13.

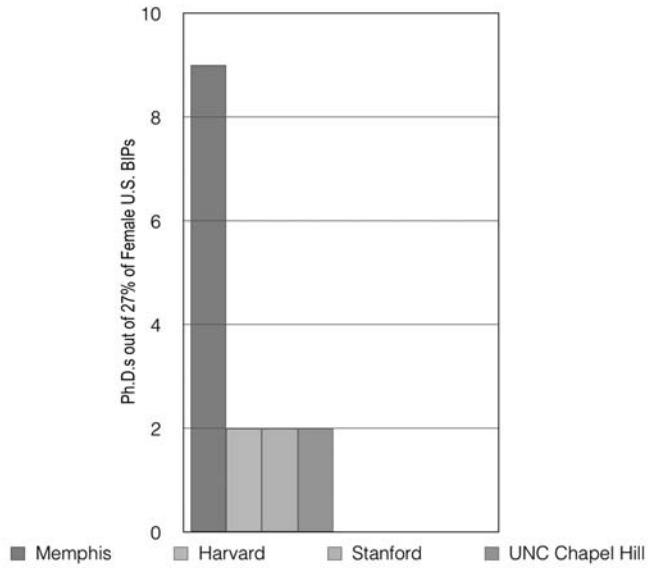


FIGURE 12
Where Do Female U.S. BIPs Earn Ph.D.s?

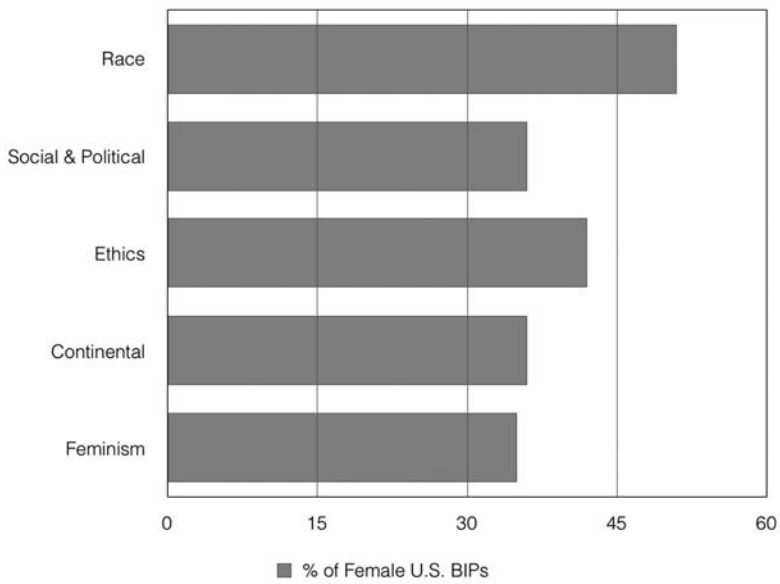


FIGURE 13
Top Five Areas of Specialization for Female U.S. BIPs

Discussion of Empirical Results

Identifying and Enumerating U.S. Blacks in Philosophy

For the specific subgroup of U.S. blacks in philosophy who are affiliated, we believe we have identified and enumerated U.S. blacks in philosophy to a reasonable degree of accuracy. We are aware that a complete picture of U.S. blacks in philosophy would include those who are unaffiliated. There are many reasons for thinking that our count of affiliated U.S. BIPs is approximately accurate. First, our count is close to other counts done by philosophers using different methods. For example, using the APA website and the membership of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, Kathryn Gines estimated that, as of 1996, “there [were] fewer than 125 Black philosophers in the United States” and, as of 2011, there were “fewer than thirty Black women holding a Ph.D. in philosophy and working in a philosophy department in the academy” (Gines 2011, 429). Though Gines did not specify how she defined “Black philosophers in the United States”—if by that phrase she means, roughly, what we mean by “affiliated U.S. BIPs”—then our count of 141 is close to hers. Note also that Gines’ second count is really a count of who we call “female affiliated U.S. BIPs,” and since our count of this group is 50, our count is close to Gines’s. Second, because our counting method involved counting U.S. BIPs on lists of U.S. BIPs from affiliated people and philosophical organizations, and from viewing departmental web content, our counting method should be biased in favor of affiliated U.S. BIPs. Third, the precision of our affiliated count is good. We were able to calculate our precision because we have two U.S. BIP counts: the May 2013 (M13) count and the December 2013 (D13) count (which was not reported). The difference between the M13 and D13 dataset is a total of 19 people, 14 of whom could have been entered in the M13 dataset if we had found them. So, our percent error in the M13 dataset is 8.0 percent. One could be slightly worried that we are not accurately counting affiliated U.S. BIPs who are postdocs, non-tenure track professors, or otherwise not well represented on departmental websites. However, since hotspots (e.g., Memphis, Penn State, etc.) do a good job of listing departmental affiliates on their websites, the error here should be low.

Since it is fair to say that our count of affiliated U.S. BIPs is reliable, we can determine some interesting facts. For example, since the APA has 7,269 non-retired academic members, and since there are 3,420 U.S. Ph.D. students in philosophy according to the 2012 Grad Guide, if we assume the

sum of these two numbers approximates the number of affiliated U.S. philosophers, then the percentage of affiliated U.S. BIPs is, approximately, 1.32 percent.³ In other words, of U.S. philosophy department affiliates, just 1.32 percent of them are black.

Additionally, even though it is fair to say that our affiliated count is reliable, it is also fair to say that our total count of U.S. BIPs is unreliable. Interestingly, however, there is a direct way to estimate the number of U.S. BIPs, and thus calculate our error in that count. Namely, one can sum our count of U.S. BIP Ph.D. students to an estimate of U.S. BIP Ph.D. holders, using the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED).⁴ According to SED data from 1997 to 2006, which is the longest continuous stretch of relevant SED data available online, the average number of U.S. BIP Ph.D. earners per year is 5.3. The oldest Ph.D. conferral date in the M13 dataset is 1970. In that case, we should use the set of years (1970, 2013) for the estimate, which yields an estimate of 233.2 U.S. BIP Ph.D. holders. Together with the U.S. BIP Ph.D. student count (30), this implies that there are approximately 263 U.S. BIPs in the world.

Thus, our percent error in counting U.S. BIPs seems to be around 40.7 percent. This is a humbling fact, since it roughly reflects the rate at which U.S. BIPs leave the profession after earning their Ph.D.

Determining the Distribution of Blacks in Philosophy across Career Stages

Since it is fair to say that our counting method is reliable for affiliated U.S. BIPs, we should have an approximately accurate picture of the distribution of U.S. BIPs across career stages. This implies a number of interesting facts. First, affiliated U.S. BIPs form a bimodal distribution in their occupation of career stages. In short, they're either Ph.D. students or tenured professors. This subgroup represents 76 percent of the population. We could be observing this distribution for several different reasons, and further research is needed to decipher between alternative hypotheses.

Another interesting fact is that the representation of U.S. BIPs among American philosophers is low and doesn't change much across career stages. Using data from the 2012 Grad Guide, we can calculate that there are approximately 0.88 percent black Ph.D. students in philosophy in the United States. Further, according to the APA national office, there are 1,774 tenured professor APA members. Given our data, this means that of tenured philosophy professors in the United States, 4.3 percent are black. The

consistently low black representation across career stages could mean that U.S. blacks are entering Ph.D. programs at low rates and simply maintaining their representation across career stages. This would mean that the most important population to focus on with respect to increasing the representation of blacks in philosophy would be the pre-Ph.D. student population, which mirrors results found for women in philosophy (Paxton, Figdor, and Tiberius 2012). However, the pattern can also be explained by U.S. blacks entering Ph.D. programs at low rates and dropping out of the profession at high rates. Each hypothesis will be tested in future research.

Determining Correlates to the Success of Blacks in Philosophy at Different Career Stages

We have not yet explored why some U.S. BIPs experience more career success than others, but we will explore this in future research.

Comparing and Contrasting Results Internally and Externally to Explain Any Career Stage Gaps.

Internally

We have been able to do several internal gender comparisons of U.S. BIPs, of which the most interesting results are presented here.

First, unlike U.S. philosophers as a whole, we observed no gender skew in black Ph.D. students. Of black Ph.D. students, 16 of 30 (or about half) are female. This is quite different from the observed gender skew among philosophy Ph.D. students as a whole in the United States. According to the 2012 Grad Guide, 25.5 percent of U.S. Ph.D. students as a whole are female.

Second, even if there is gender parity among black Ph.D. students, the distribution of black female Ph.D. students across philosophy Ph.D. programs is much lower than black males. Specifically, 69 percent of black female Ph.D. students are at Penn State.

As for other internal gender comparisons, two more patterns deserve discussion. First, there is a noticeable shift in most popular areas of specialization when we shift from U.S. BIPs to female U.S. BIPs. While race theory, social and political philosophy, ethics, and Continental philosophy were all among the top five most popular areas of specialization for U.S. BIPs and female U.S. BIP, Africana philosophy was switched for feminist philosophy among female U.S. BIPs. Furthermore, “Black feminism” was

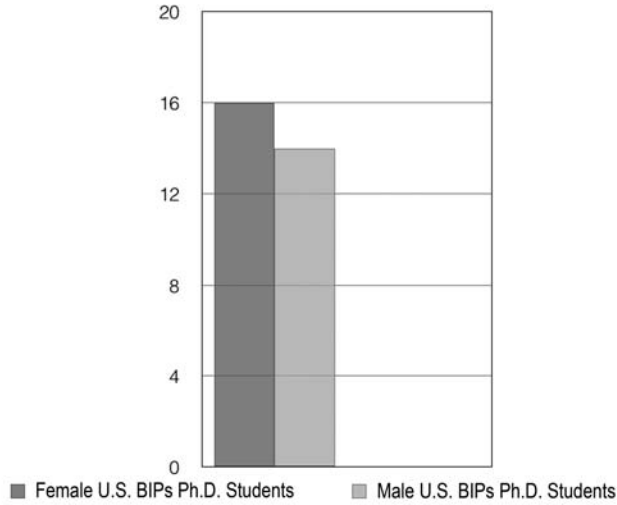


FIGURE 14
Gender Comparison of U.S. BIPs (Ph.D. Students)

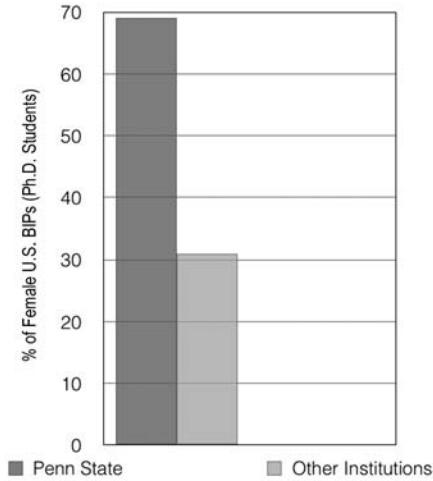


FIGURE 15
Where Are the Female U.S. BIPs (Ph.D. Students)?

a popular type of feminist philosophy among female U.S. BIPs. But the ordering changed as well. While the top two most popular areas of specialization for U.S. BIPs were Africana philosophy (44 percent) and race theory (42 percent), for black females, the two most popular areas of specialization were race theory (51 percent) and ethics (42 percent).

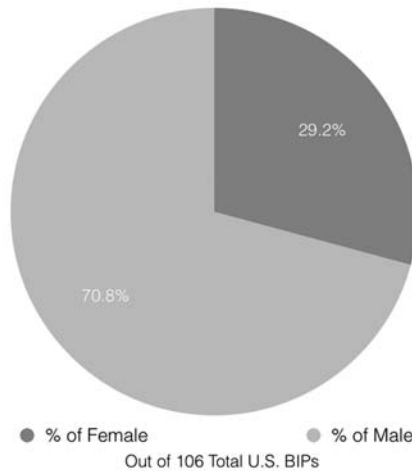


FIGURE 16
Gender Comparison of Affiliated, TT, and Tenured Professors

Finally, black females are noticeably underrepresented (29.2 percent) among affiliated, tenure track, and tenured U.S. BIPs.

While the extent of the underrepresentation here is no different from that in the profession as a whole (Paxton, Figdor, and Tiberius 2012, 952), the pattern among U.S. blacks is puzzling because black females are not observed to be underrepresented among black Ph.D. students.

Externally

Since we have just recently acquired the APA membership demographics dataset, most external comparisons between U.S. BIPs and U.S. philosophers more generally will be addressed in the full study.

The Full Study

Factual issues we hope to be settled by the full study are (a) whether it is the case that the number of blacks in philosophy is dramatically lower than in any other discipline in the humanities or social sciences, (b) identification of career stages at which blacks in philosophy fall through the professional cracks, (c) substantiation of the high correlation understood to exist (anecdotally) between status as a black philosopher and areas of

specialization and concentration, (d) identification of additional internal gender disparities, if any, within black philosophers in terms of, for example, promotion and tenure, attrition rate, recruitment into Ph.D. programs, and other issues affecting career success, and (e) identification of any additional external disparities.

More specifically, our empirical results as of May 30, 2013, give rise to the following non-comprehensive list of questions:

- Why is there virtually no gender skew among black Ph.D. students as compared to the gender skew among U.S. philosophers more generally?
- Why are 69 percent of black female Ph.D. students concentrated at a single university (Penn State). Is this a matter of aggressive recruiting on the part of the university, versus that of other universities, of black, female Ph.D. students? Are there other reasons explaining this disparity?
- Is recruiting in race theory as opposed to Africana philosophy possibly a more gender-neutral way of recruiting blacks into philosophy?
- Why are black females noticeably underrepresented among affiliated, tenure track, and tenured U.S. BIPs, given that black females are not underrepresented among black Ph.D. students?

NOTES

We would like to thank the following people and organizations for contributing lists, names, or otherwise useful data to this project: the APA National Office, the APA Newsletters on Philosophy and the Black Experience, Nathaniel Tobias, the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, Tommy Curry, Amy Ferrer, Sally Haslanger, Bill Lawson, Molly Mahony, Charles Mills, Mike Morris, the Regents of the University of Michigan, Thea Rothstein, and Manuel Vargas. We also benefited greatly from feedback received at the Diversity in Philosophy Conference held at the University of Dayton in 2013, and at the Mentoring Early Career Black Philosophers session at the 2013 Eastern APA meeting. We would like to thank David Latterman for statistical consulting, and the University of San Francisco for funding.

1. For example, using a sample of 1,308 American adults who self-identified as black, Hua Tang et al. 2005 were able to predict their self-identification as black with 99.8 percent accuracy using 326 ancestry informative genetic markers.
2. We defined the East Coast as the region covering the eastern standard time zone. We defined the central region as the region covering the central standard time zone. We defined the West Coast as Pacific, mountain, Alaska, and Hawaii time zones.
3. The data on APA members was acquired from the APA national office on March 7, 2014.

4. This estimate presupposes that the number of U.S. BIPs who do not satisfy one of these constraints is insignificant. For example, there are U.S. BIPs who are adjunct professors who do not satisfy either of these constraints, but that number is probably small.

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