When sexual harassment becomes embedded in or as academic culture, then we are talking about how some women do not have access to universities even after they have applied and been admitted. Sexual harassment is an access issue. Sexual harassment is an equality issue. Sexual harassment is a social justice issue. We are talking about women who have to exit the institution to survive the institution. We are talking about missing women.”

-- Sarah Ahmed, “Against Students”

Within the humanities, no discipline is more white and more male than Philosophy (Healy 2011). Data shows that women philosophers are far less likely to be published, and their publications are far less frequently cited (Healy 2013). Growing bodies of research both track Philosophy’s indifference to women and people of color at all stages in the discipline, and investigate the marginalization and oppression of women and people of color (Patel 2015). Although the discipline has been aware of these disproportions for more than twenty years, recent data suggests that Philosophy’s “woman problem” is getting worse, not better (Norlock 2011).

When mainstream Philosophy engages with its problem, the results are frequently a symphony of stereotype threats, microaggressions, and just-so stories that favor the status quo. After unpacking Philosophy’s white male problem and the discourse that sustains it, we will articulate why the common mainstream solutions tend to fail or falter: a masculinist line of thinking not only controls the narratives around sexism in Philosophy, it also determines the

1 To highlight the fact that this discussion is focused not on philosophy as method of intellectual inquiry but instead as an ornate bureaucratic professional practice, we will use capitalization to mark this distinction. We will refer to the practice, the main site of our criticism, as Philosophy. While we will engage with some literature that comes dangerously close to implicating philosophy as a method in the gender and race problem faced by Philosophy (the academic practice), we will table this question. 1) There isn’t sufficient space for that inquiry in this essay. 2) We worry that focusing on philosophical inquiry problematically reframes the problem away from the individuals, actions, strategies, and ideology that function to maintain Philosophy as a discipline that is missing women.

2 Our contention is not that men are the only source or propagators of these narratives only that these narratives especially serve the interests of people who benefit from male privilege.
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criterion by which we judge what kinds of narratives, strategies, and understandings are legitimate.

We will then discuss the strategies that have been successful in combating the “woman problem” in Philosophy, and the fact that they are widely criticized by mainstream philosophers. Various kinds of public campaigns that embrace and indulge the role of the feminist killjoy; what has been decried as “finger-pointing”, “gossip”, “social justice bullying”, “partiality”, and “coddling” — these strategies have worked. We argue that these campaigns of feminist joy killing are key to solving Philosophy’s white male problem. We must reject the typical narratives and embrace the thorny, antagonistic relationship between feminist critique and Philosophy. To quote feminist philosopher Sally Haslanger, “We are the winning side now. We will not relent; so it is only a matter of time.”

I. Philosophy’s Missing Women

Discussions about the women missing from the discipline of Philosophy began as early as the 80s. The maleness (and whiteness) of Philosophy put it in league with Physics, Engineering, Math; in the humanities, only history and religious studies were even close to being as homogeneous (Healy 2011). In the last fifteen years, approximately 27% of the PhDs were earned by women, with only 22.2% at the top 50 doctoral programs (Van Camp 2014). Women represent up to 21% of the paid professoriate (Norlock 2011), but these numbers can be misleading. Breaking down the numbers of employed female philosophers, however, reveals women are actually doing much better in the “non-regular” job market -- women are 26% of those in part-time positions, but only 16.6% of those in full-time positions (Norlock 2011). As you ascend the ranks -- associate and full professors -- they are even less represented. Women are also underrepresented at conferences and in journals and are less likely to be cited (Cf. Healy
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem (Healy 2013a, Healy 2013b). Of the top 500 most cited items from 1993 - 2013 in the four most influential journals, nineteen of them were by women, that’s 3.6%. As a point of comparison, 6.3% of that same set were authored by philosopher David Lewis. This rate of absence actually outstrips their disproportionate representation in the discipline as a whole. Of course, numbers alone only tell part of the story; as Sally Haslanger says, “With these numbers, you don’t need sexual harassment or racial harassment to prevent women and minorities from succeeding, for alienation, loneliness, implicit bias, stereotype threat, microaggression, and outright discrimination will do the job. (Haslanger 2013).” The persistent disproportionate representation of women in Philosophy can be traced (in part) to the practice of Philosophy. There is growing documentation of how Philosophy has created a climate that is anathema to women (Cf. Patel 2015).

It is important to be clear about three categories of “climate” concerns in philosophy: hostile climate, uncontroversial harassment, and sexual assault. These things combine to create a culture and climate in Philosophy that is unfathomably difficult to navigate. Sexual harassment law makes a distinction between hostile environment and quid pro quo harassment and to some degree our distinction follows those contours, but the nature of sexual harassment law -- combined with universities’ unapologetic, overly simplistic allegiance to the letter of said law, (Cf. Schroer 2012) -- ignores much of the hostility relevant to women’s experiences in Philosophy. The alienation, loneliness, implicit bias, stereotype threats, and microaggressions

3 More precisely they are described as “four high-impact, highly-selective, general-interest philosophy journals: Nous, the Journal of Philosophy, the Philosophical Review, and Mind” (Healy 2013).
Haslanger mentions are unlikely to be successful as grounds for a legal sexual harassment case, but are often central features of the environment in which women philosophers find themselves. 4

In addition to the more subtle phenomena that comprise hostile climate -- which we will discuss in detail in the next section -- Philosophy has in recent years become infamous for its outrageous acts of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Women philosophers have long had their own version of “The Talk” warning what departments, which philosophers to avoid and how to navigate those that cannot be avoided; blogs like “What It’s Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy” are just a Web 2.0 version. Recently there has been a shift so that Philosophy (and the rest of academia) are finally talking more about prominent philosophers and their (allegedly) predatory behavior. What is remarkable about two of the most recent, most well known instances -- the charges against Colin McGinn, formerly of University of Miami, and those against Peter Ludlow, formerly of Northwestern University -- is that the narratives provided by the accused philosophers reads as though they followed a predators playbook (Compare Roiphe 2013 and Wilson 2015 to Johnson 2014). However, the way that Philosophy talks about its hostile environment, the grooming, the sexual harassment, and the sexual assault, you’d think these phenomena were fantastic figments of feminist nightmares, not actual issues that require address.

In her “Against Students” Sarah Ahmed has captured something poignant about the experience of being a “successful” woman PhD: Beyond the subtly and overtly hostile climate for women, beyond the sexual harassment and assault, there is the felt loss. There is a present

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4 To be precise, our view isn’t necessarily that we need better or different laws, though we probably do. Equally concerning is the over reliance on legalistic models to respond to these challenges. Schroer imagines that thinking of universities and departments as communities -- as opposed to systems of individuals engaged in purely self-interested exchange -- is a better model for responding to problems like sexual harassment, especially hostile environment.
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem absence. Women are missing; and those who remain are haunted. When you are a “successful” woman in Philosophy -- you get a PhD; you get some sort of job -- you discover more haunted spaces. The specters become hazier, more faint, but you can sense the absence as you look around departments, conferences. For women, Philosophy becomes a place of mourning.

While Philosophy has a number of issues to address, we will focus our analysis on the discursive strategies used within Philosophy to respond to the now overwhelming evidence of its “gender problem”, its hostile climate, its sexual harassment problem. Our contention is that this discourse is a key factor in not solving Philosophy’s problems. In the next section, we will review this discourse.

II. Getting the Story Right

Here, we will give a brief overview of some of Philosophy’s more common responses to its missing women. The discourse employed often turns on assumptions about (or insistence upon) the moral innocence of Philosophy, what women are like, what philosophers are like, and what the world is like. These responses are offered as objective or disinterested and presuppose gender equality. We will look at two narrative structures: one describes the innocence of Philosophy and second characterizes the guilt of Philosophy’s detractors.

The Clean Hands Strategy. This first set of strategies attempts to minimize the worry’s about representation or climate (or both) through comparisons to other equally bad or worse disciplines, by appeal to abstract mathematical inevitabilities, by insisting that the problem is just with the rare individual philosopher not Philosophy as a whole, or by claiming a personality mismatch between women and Philosophy. While it may be true that the numbers are low, this is not due to something inherent in the discipline of Philosophy, they claim. There are many
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versions of this assertion: from pointing out other disciplines\(^5\) with low numbers of women -- “What about Physics?!” “Look at Astronomy!” -- to admitting defeat to a mathematical inevitability -- a pipeline problem, the absence of women in PhD programs and in high-profile jobs, ensures their absence in full professorships and high-impact journals. Further evidence of Philosophy’s innocence comes in the form of the few bad apples and the personality mismatch. As with many other disciplines and the working world at large, there are individuals who do harmful thing: harassers assaulters and others who make tdepartments inhospitable to women, but these are the actions of individuals. Otherwise, the problem is a personality mismatch: Philosophy is based upon argumentation, and often no-holds-barred critique. Conference presentations and graduate seminars can be combative, purportedly because of Philosophy’s relentless commitment to discovering truth. Philosophy is the “hard” humanities: hard-nosed, hard charging, hard core. It’s not for everyone, including many men, and women just aren’t well suited to aggressive argumentation or at the very least they tend not to like it. In short, Philosophy isn’t actively driving women away, it like the women excluded from it are merely victims of circumstance.

The Feminist Killjoys. At the other end of the spectrum are narratives that identify Philosophy’s detractors as the real culprits in its woman problem. They respond to claims of deep-rooted sexism within Philosophy by defending the status quo -- again under the guise of rational, objective considerations regarding fairness, freedom, or reasonableness. Thiw recalls Sarah Ahmed’s feminist killjoy -- a figure often seen as exaggerating or even creating the problems she purports to draw attention to (Ahmed 2010). Calling attention to Philosophy’s climate issues will drive more women away from Philosophy; small incidents, where the details

\(^5\) Philosophy seems to harbor a secret pride in their similarity to other hostile disciplines. Philosophy just has more in common with the hard sciences and mathematics than it does with other humanities disciplines.
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem may not be quite clear, will be taken up as indicative of a larger, more pervasive problem. Reasonable women will not want to enter a profession with such a bad reputation. Philosophy has also invoked the fashionable dismissal of the so-called feminist outrage machine: the recent movement to alter the climate of philosophy, so the claim goes, is really just the overreaction of a tiny faction of the disgruntled. Fomenting this outrage is unhealthy, and worse, irrational. “Calm down, Ladies; you’re getting hysterical and that’s what’s really driving people away.”

The outrage is made worse when coupled with her incredible power used to smother self expression, creativity, free speech, and natural human behavior. This “worry” is especially evident in the discourse around the assessment of the climate in the philosophy Department at the University of Colorado, Boulder (Hardcastle et al. 2014). Though the department requested that they be assessed in this way and was found lacking in several areas and was offered meaningful strategies to correct their climate problems, Philosophy’s response was that the report was an overreaction by a bunch of overwrought feminists who think they can solve the harassment problem by outlawing people hanging out together and shaming grown professionals into not talking shop at pubs? They won’t be satisfied until they have sucked every bit of “fun” out of philosophy by infantilizing everyone involved. The APA Committee on the Status of Women’s report on Boulder’s climate noted,

*The Department uses pseudo-philosophical analyses to avoid directly addressing the situation.*

Their faculty discussions revolve around the letter rather than the spirit of proposed regulations and standards. They spend too much time articulating (or trying to articulate) the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior instead of instilling higher expectations for professional behavior. They spend significant time debating footnotes and “what if” scenarios instead of discussing what they want their department to look and feel like (Hardcastle et al. 2014).
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Finally, these feminists scrutinizing department cultures and relationships between consenting adult professors and their graduate students simply fail to grasp the complexity of the world. Departments gutted of their drinking culture are sterile, pale imitations of the richness of academic life. These conventional and anti-sex attitudes run counter to a sophisticated philosophical take on the world, even counter to some feminist concerns and commitments.

Love is complex and can blossom in unusual ways; relationships and sex and life are messy. In any case, graduate students are autonomous. How can feminists ignore feminine agency? The final move in the suppression of naive but outraged, marginal but powerful feminist critics is to warn of the real danger they pose: false and/or overstated accusations. We must be vigilant in remembering that any accusations, particularly of sexual harassment or assault, may be false. The real facts are uncertain and even a discredited false accusation could ruin someone’s career.

Again, this point is offered as objective, disinterested, and fair-- especially so if a white male is making it.

The feminist philosopher’s inclination is to address these claims as earnest engagements with the serious issues plaguing Philosophy. We spend energy refuting them or responding to them. Some of them are fallacies -- the comparison to worse disciplines is the two wrongs fallacy, the reference to the pipeline problem is a bit of a red herring, the “bad apples” response is also a non sequitur; others misrepresent the facts -- the feminist isn’t responsible for the problem she reports, and both the degree of “feminist outrage” and the power of the feminist philosophy cabal are greatly overestimated; finally, some seem to move standard philosophical goalposts or willfully ignore clear-minded analysis. The task of the philosopher is to unveil what is not apparent, to reframe questions in ways that are revelatory. What if seemingly neutral traditions really do contribute to the exclusion and disenfranchisement of a vibrant philosophical
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem community? What if petulantly clinging to these traditions when confronted with their effects gives the lie to Philosophy’s commitment to a purely merit driven discipline? What if Philosophy’s stalwart insistence on giving accused parties the benefit of the doubt while denying it to the wronged reflects a willful ignorance about the sexist ideological structures that best explain Philosophy’s missing women? These efforts to counteract Philosophy’s standard responses, however, are not the best strategies for combating this discourse or for reversing Philosophy’s white male problem. In the next section, we will discuss the strategies that do work and explain why they do.

III. The System is Not Broken

There are a number of effective strategies that have been used to address the climate in Philosophy; our focus, however, will be on those strategies that function by rejecting the narratives described in the previous section. These strategies either function unimpeded by the critiques offered in those narratives, function as if those narratives simply didn’t exist, or they effectively disprove or nullify those narratives. To understand the way these strategies function and why we extol them, we are going to follow a strategy borrowed from one of our philosophical forefathers: we are going to posit an evil demon (Descartes 1993).

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the the system is not broken. It is not a misstep or a few bad apples that have created Philosophy as an environment that many women reject outright, some women withdraw from, and few manage to survive. Let’s imagine that the toxic climate of Philosophy is a result of structures within it that serve a white male population with and without their intention for it to do so. Let’s imagine that many philosophers (men and women) earnestly embrace the values of objectivity and charitableness, but don’t see how conceiving of one’s self as objective when that objectivity is imperfect at best will facilitate
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charitable attitudes toward some views, while blocking that same extension to others. They don’t see that this error will make them believe they can be empathetic when, in fact, they cannot. Let’s imagine that some philosophers may wish to see their discipline unchanged by the impositions made by postmodern theory, feminist theory, critical race theory or the philosophers invested in those theoretical constructs. They wish to sustain the traditions including the way those practices distribute power to some and not others. Let’s imagine that these folks are very clever and have the capacity to occupy roles as gatekeepers or to endorse structures of gatekeeping that will inherently devalue arguments and efforts that are critical of the status quo that they value and/or function to preserve.

In this imagined world, arguments against those who view themselves as charitable and objective will be useless (after all, they will view the critic as uncharitable, possibly recklessly so, and definitely biased). They will feel it is their duty, possibly the satisfaction of a special function, to unflinchingly denounce and reject such criticisms and possibly those who offer them. They will entrench narratives and values that seem neutral but which instead serve an unjust status quo. When they neutrally seek evidence for their position, they will find it. When they neutrally seek evidence against their interlocutors, they will find that as well. When confronted with countervailing evidence, they will deny it is evidence and double down on their commitments to their traditions.

What would be the best practices for changing the climate in this demon world? How would those strategies be described and critiqued? How would one respond to those criticisms? For clarity we will focus our analysis on three strategies and a few specific examples of feminist attempts to slay Philosophy’s evil demon. The strategies include embracing the feminist killjoy, rejecting the culture of justification, and focusing effort and resources on problem-solving action.
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem (instead of on discourse and defense). Demon world feminists are licensed to be uncharitable to “earnest” but self-serving responses, to reclaim labels that are meant to demonize them, and to take action toward the goal of social justice (instead of just debating which policies could work in any possible world). To a certain degree, these actions employ counternarratives, but key to their success is the way they dismiss, reject, ignore, or even partly embrace the subverting narratives they encounter through Philosophy.

Embrace the Feminist Killjoy. “What It’s Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy” is brimming with demoralizing accounts of microaggressions macro aggressions, sexual predation, sexual assault, and disenfranchisement. It has even confronted those of us who identify as feminists with our worst nightmare: the male colleague unabashedly invested in a compendium of cruel stereotypes about feminists (Cf. “What We’re Up Against” 2010). It’s bad news. How it is often received makes it an exemplar of the feminist killjoy. It’s construed as invalid, as propaganda, but also as dangerous and destructive; it both threatens the careers of important philosophers and discourages women who might otherwise join the profession. The blog posts are anonymous and thus impossible to verify; they are hearsay and even the whiff of impropriety is dangerous and can destroy the wellbeing of the accused. Outside the evil demon world, the inclination might be to concede to what Dotson calls a “culture of justification” and presume that the norms by which strategies like this blog will be criticized are legitimate (Dotson 2012, 6-7). We might worry that the blog is rightly criticized as “gossip-y”; that it makes dangerous insinuations; that it fails to give the accused the right to defend themselves against their accusers. However, positing the evil demon allows us to ignore these criticisms without justification. We cannot assume that all philosophers share a common set of univocal justificatory norms, so we should resist engagement in justificatory projects that presuppose them (Dotson 2012, 12 - 16).
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Failing to justify reframes the critic as the unrepentant feminist killjoy. She gleefully tells tales, throws shade, creates chaos, and she gets the job done.

The climate review of Colorado provides an even clearer example of embracing the role of the feminist killjoy. Philosophy did not take the report well; its methods, the members of the reviewing committee, and their recommendations were all subjected to more and less explicit demands for justification, including explicit attacks on the philosophical bonafides of the committee members. Our contention isn’t that no one tried to justify the review, the committee members, or the committee’s recommendations; rather, we’re interested in the clear attitude of the committee executing the project. Even convening a committee that would specialize in this sort of climate review -- that would engage with the way the sexual harassment thrives in dark corners and is managed only through gossip (if it is managed at all) -- embraced being flagged as a feminist killjoy who is basically “inventing” the problem rather than discovering it. Both of these efforts -- the climate review of University of Colorado and the “What It’s Like” blog -- revel in voicing Philosophy’s problems.

Ask for Forgiveness Not Permission. A tremendous amount of feminist energy is directed toward explaining feminist critiques and justifying feminist strategies and principles. Much of the time, these explanations are directed at interlocutors whose arguments are at best inept and at worst totally disinterested in the truth-seeking principles that form the groundwork of philosophy. The culture of justification, however, places a tremendous burden on feminists to indulge these inquiries. Again, looking at the Climate Report on the University of Colorado and the responses to it is helpful here. Among the recommendations made in the report were suggestions that departmental activities no longer occur after business hours and no longer

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6 This practice is shared with a significant segment of contemporary political discourse, cf. Kozma and Schroer 2014.
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include alcohol. Philosophy’s response to these suggestions were flagrantly defensive of a status quo that favored young men and excluded both parents and women. Feminist concerns about systematic sexual harassment and discrimination were weighed against the pleasures of having the opportunity to chat with professors over a beer. The feminist concerns were found wanting. Philosophy’s disgust with the conclusions of the climate report opened the door to demands for a top down defense; it became popular again to make the “brave” choice to deny the legitimacy of all feminist philosophy (Case 2014).

Finally, perhaps the most crucial strategy is a sharp focus on the tasks at hand -- the concrete, practical changes that will allow women (and minorities) to flourish in Philosophy. The discipline of Philosophy may not be for everyone, but it should be truly open to anyone. While embracing the role of the feminist killjoy and rejecting the discipline’s standard modes of justification are essential to mitigating the rhetoric that supports the status quo, we must at the same time create and employ the new policies, standards, and modes of interaction that support diverse philosophers. ‘Diverse’ here means anyone straying significantly from the assumed ideal or model philosopher: white, male, pedigreed, ‘brilliant’, unencumbered, with interests in a rather narrow range of philosophical topics (Weinberg 2015).

This demands the initiation of policies that accommodate caregivers -- home institutions that have parental leave, that stop or lengthen tenure clocks to accommodate those who are the primary caregivers of elderly parents; conferences that don’t occur immediately adjacent to major holidays. It requires supporting strategies that foreground access by actually gathering data about gender, race, and ethnic representation in the undergraduate and graduate student populations, then recruiting students and revising curriculum as needed based on that data. It necessitates providing professional development that focuses on how ableist language or cool
“For the Love of the Feminist Killjoy: Solving Philosophy’s Woman White Male Problem but access-hostile tools might disenfranchise students and faculty with disabilities. It calls for addressings problems using both large-scale approaches -- for example streamlining procedures for reporting sexual harassment and assault on college campuses and making those procedures more prominent -- and localized ones -- making those policies reflect the rights of victims of sexual harassment and assault to seek support without being forced (by reporting requirements) to subject themselves to university bureaucracies. In short, do something because to paraphrase feminist philosopher Sally Haslanger, “We are the winning side now. We [must] not relent (Haslanger 2013).”
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