Editorial: Women's experience and gender bias in higher education

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Women's experience and gender bias in higher education

Gender bias continues to shape women's experiences in higher education, impacting everything from access to academic leadership to equitable evaluations (Ceci et al., 2023; Haynes et al., 2020; Llorens et al., 2021). This Research Topic highlights scholarly contributions that examine *Women's experience and gender bias in higher education*. The collection of manuscripts provides a comprehensive view of these issues, exploring how longstanding biases, structural barriers, and cultural expectations restrict women's academic and professional opportunities (Casad et al., 2021; Smith, 2016; SteelFisher et al., 2019; Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). This Research Topic features eight manuscripts, including original scholarship, systematic reviews, and brief research reports highlighting women's challenges and emphasizing the need for systemic changes to create a fairer, more inclusive environment. This theme is purposefully broad, and our editorial provides a brief overview of the essential findings from the papers published in this research area.

In "*STEM and gender gap: a systematic review in WoS, Scopus and ERIC databases (2012-2022),*" Beroíza-Valenzuela and Salas-Guzmán reveal how STEM fields remain male-dominated, with biases discouraging women from entering these areas. Their systematic review identifies strategies to help bridge the gender gap, such as fostering a growth mindset in scientific learning environments. They argue that more targeted efforts are necessary to counteract the ingrained barriers women face in STEM.

Giaconi et al. delve into the intersecting factors of gender, socioeconomic status, and academic background in "*The intersection of gender, rurality, income, and school track in university access mathematics test scores.*" Their findings indicate that access to higher education remains inequitable, with males, higher-income students, and those from urban areas achieving better test scores. This study highlights the compounded inequalities women experience, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.

Examining biases in student evaluations, "*Evaluating student evaluations: evidence of gender bias against women in higher education based on perceived learning and instructor personality*" by Khokhlova et al. reveals that male instructors are often rated higher in personality traits like enthusiasm and expressiveness. The study points to the problematic influence of gender bias on evaluations, which can hinder women's career progression and influence their perception of teaching efficacy.

In "*Women in academia: an analysis through a scoping review*," Araneda-Guirriman et al. review a decade's worth of literature on women's challenges in academia. Their analysis identifies recurring themes, including the effects of neoliberal policies, COVID-19′s impact, and structural hurdles that persistently disadvantage women. They call for renewed attention to dismantling these barriers and fostering inclusive academic environments.

Morales-Romo et al., in "*Romance cinema for debunking gender bias of non-egalitarian couple relationships in higher education*," explore how romantic movies reinforce traditional gender roles. Analyzing the impact of romance cinema on students' perceptions, her study reveals how film can perpetuate outdated gender norms. The findings suggest that engaging students in a critical examination of such portrayals can foster awareness and encourage the deconstruction of gender biases.

Caudill et al.'s "*Gender discrimination in the business school's C-suite? Evidence from aggregate decomposition approaches*" examines wage data among U.S. business school deans, aiming to identify potential discrimination in pay. Their findings demonstrate that while evidence of gender-based wage disparities is limited, transparency regarding administrative salaries may help prevent wage inequities. This underscores the importance of openness within institutions.

In "*Gender bias interacts with instructor disfluency to negatively affect student evaluations of teaching*," LaPaglia et al. investigate how gender bias intersects with speech fluency in academic evaluations. Their findings reveal that female instructors receive significantly lower ratings than their male counterparts when exhibiting disfluency, shedding light on how such biases can adversely impact female instructors' career prospects and their perceived competence.

Finally, Kruse's "'*I am the chair': women and department leadership in the academy*" examines the experiences of female department chairs navigating academic leadership. Through qualitative interviews, the researcher highlights the ongoing challenges women face in these roles, including the "glass ceiling" and "glass cliff" phenomena, which often require balancing institutional and personal challenges. The researcher advocates for structural and cultural reforms that would better support women in leadership positions.

Each of these articles enriches our understanding of the unique obstacles women encounter in academia and provides a roadmap for addressing these inequities. Together, they form a powerful call to action, urging institutions to examine and address gender biases that limit opportunities for women and to foster a more equitable and inclusive academic landscape. Overall, these studies provide a clear directive: the academic sector must intensify efforts to identify, address, and eradicate gender-based disparities. By fostering greater equity, transparency, and inclusivity, higher education can become a more supportive and empowering environment for women and all underrepresented groups. By tackling these challenges, institutions can work toward creating a more equitable and inclusive environment in higher education, benefiting women and the entire academic community.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

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