



Review

Gender Bias Versus Gender Violence in Higher Education: A Critical Analysis of the Literature in Social Sciences and Humanities (2018–2022)

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Abstract: While gender inequality continues to be widely reported as a problem and global priority, there has been a general pattern of progress in the last 25 years. In the academic world, this has meant an increase in women's enrollment in higher education and the female academic workforce. Despite visible progress, significant problems remain, particularly gender violence within academia, which is often underexplored or understudied. From queer feminist studies of science frameworks, we conduct a scoping literature review that aims to identify knowledge gaps. It highlights the consequences for policymakers of focusing on biases instead of most structural ones by reviewing literature in the social sciences and humanities, expanding the focus of gender issues of bias and violence beyond the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The findings from 43 articles show that gender bias is more commonly discussed (79%) than gender-based violence (21%) in publications between 2018 and 2022. We conducted a thematic analysis to identify the main topic addressed. Later, we discuss the consequences for policymaking when the focus is on "bias" versus "violence". We state that the overemphasis on "gender bias" does not transform the binary reasoning about gender, which is the basis of gender violence.

Keywords: binary gender norm; gender violence; gender bias; queer feminist studies of science; social sciences and humanities; academia



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1. Introduction

Gender inequality is a widely reported phenomenon and a high priority when implementing policies at the global level. Thus, year after year, data emerges—not at all promising—indicating how much time is still needed to reduce the gender gap. For example, the Global Gender Gap Index—developed by the World Economic Forum and reported annually in the areas of health, education, economics, and politics—confirmed in 2024 that closing the global gender gap would take 131 years. Given this trend, fully “closing” the gap seems an unattainable goal. Despite a general pattern of progress towards gender equality over the past 25 years with significant advances in education, increased fertility control and—to a lesser extent—labor force participation and politics (Harper et al. 2022), these advances seem symbolic when contrasted with the number of years ahead involved in closing the gender gap.

In higher education, the necessary advances are reflected in higher female enrollment and an increase in the female academic workforce, among others (Crabtree and Shiel 2019; Demeter and Toth 2020; Filandri and Pasqua 2021). However, efforts to advance equity should focus not only on the incorporation of women but also on those conditions that ensure their permanence in higher education institutions. For example, how does the institution safeguard the integrity of women, given that they are more likely to experience sexual harassment, intimidation, and exclusion (Hanasono et al. 2019)? How do these—often

invisible—practices affect not only women but also people belonging to minority groups, the LGBTIQ+ population, and younger or more precarious teachers (Banner et al. 2022)?

This scoping literature review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Levac et al. 2010; Peters et al. 2015; Munn et al. 2018) aims to show the difference in the number of publications that refer to bias versus violence when reporting on gender inequality issues in the social sciences and humanities in the last five years. We state that it is not only the difference between the number of publications but the dominance of the discourse of “bias”. This is problematic because it reinforces and naturalizes the operations of the binary gender system, which is behind gender violence.

We use a queer feminist science studies framework to conduct the scoping literature review on gender bias and gender violence. This analytical framework helps us to address three main problems. First, it allows us to challenge the unquestioned heteronormativity and the binary thinking about gender in the notions of “bias” and “violence”. Second, it lets us explore when intersectionality, as an analytical tool, is more resourceful in documenting bias and violence in academia. Finally, this framework allows us to question the traditional concept of scientific objectivity, which assumes that science is neutral, unbiased, and detached from personal or social values. Instead, we acknowledge the ways science, as a field of knowledge production, when shaped by a binary understanding of gender, might not produce the transformative expected results.

2. Materials and Methods

A scoping review was conducted using the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases. Scoping reviews are valuable for exploring emerging evidence, particularly when the specific research questions that can be addressed through a more targeted systematic review remain unclear. They provide an overview of the evidence available, offering insights into how research is conducted and its relevance to practice within a given field. Scoping reviews aim to identify and map the existing body of evidence (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Levac et al. 2010; Munn et al. 2018). We conducted a scoping review as an exploratory phase to identify knowledge gaps between “bias” and “violence” in research published in social sciences and humanities. First, it clarified conceptual differences around definitions and discussions in the existing literature about the concepts. Second, identifying knowledge gaps allowed us to identify unexplored areas in the literature, particularly the lack of problematization of the operations of the binary gender norm, mainly when research informs policymaking. Third, this scoping review is a valuable first step in shaping future research inquiries; it identifies key themes and questions that have not been sufficiently addressed and guides the development of more focused, systematic studies in subsequent phases of research.

A total of ten searches were carried out in each database, considering articles published in English and Spanish. The keywords used were oriented to the two main topics of interest, namely gender bias and gender violence in the context of higher education, particularly the experiences of female academics. For this reason, articles focusing on students' experiences were omitted. The search was limited to the last five years, given that there has been a revitalization of feminist movements since 2018, generating an increase in research and academic publications. This review focused on publications in social sciences and humanities, based on the need to report and update the state of the art in these areas of knowledge beyond science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The keywords used to search for articles addressing gender bias in higher education were “gender bias”, “faculty/professors”, “higher education”, and “discrimination”. In comparison, the search for articles addressing gender-based violence in higher education used the keywords “gender”, “violence”, “faculty/professor”, “gender-based violence”, “sexual harassment”, “sexual abuse”, and “discrimination”. After applying the filters, the abstracts of the articles returned by the 20 searches were reviewed. We again filtered out articles addressing students' experiences, those less related to the topic (e.g., because they focused on school education), and those repeated in other searches. In addition, during the

review, one further article on sexual harassment in Chilean academia that had not appeared in the databases reviewed was added due to its relevance to the topic and the context of the project in which this review is framed.

Overall, 43 articles were selected, based on which a thematic analysis was conducted to identify the main areas that the literature addresses regarding gender bias and gender-based violence.

3. Results

3.1. Gender Bias in Higher Education

While multiple factors contribute to gender inequality in academia, one relevant factor identified by the literature reviewed is the subtle yet systemic biases that permeate cultures, practices, and interactions to favor certain masculinities in workspaces. According to Cundiff et al. (2018), gender biases are rooted in broad cultural assumptions about gender that ascribe more significant value to masculine rather than female characteristics. These are generally unconscious stereotypes that sometimes impede women's career advancement despite not always explicitly seeking to do so (Cundiff et al. 2018). Shields et al. (2018) state that unconscious biases are systematic judgment errors due to relatively automatic cognitive processes rather than conscious decisions. The authors posit that these cognitive shortcuts, i.e., judgments deployed automatically and without deliberation, enable processing large amounts of complex information without getting caught up in details. People are often unaware of their own biases and how they shape the judgments of others, especially minorities (Beddoes and Schimpf 2018).

In academia, gender biases can be understood as obstacles that prevent women from advancing and remaining in academia (Tiainen and Berki 2019; Welten et al. 2022; Windsor and Crawford 2020). Put differently, they can be viewed as enhancers that disproportionately benefit men, especially whites, and other systemically advantaged groups (Bird and Rhoton 2021). In this sense, some authors choose to use the term discrimination when the gender bias is structural (Filandri and Pasqua 2021) because they closely relate it to sexual harassment (Hurren 2018) or posit that it emanates from prejudice and constitutes a form of discrimination (Overholtzer and Jalbert 2021).

Some authors posit that gender biases emanate from gender stereotypes according to which certain "masculine" traits, such as assertiveness, and "feminine" traits, such as concern for others, are differentially attributed to men and women (Wiedman 2019). On this basis, it is inferred that women are more other-oriented and men are more self-oriented (Henningesen et al. 2022). An example of this is evident in a study by Marini and Banaji (2022) that tested the association of female sex and male science in the general population and among academics of the STEM field in particular using six experiments. The authors found an implicit belief in both men and women that associates femininity with sex rather than linking it with science. They suggest that this implicit belief is a product of historical and current representations of masculine and feminine categories as we learn and experience them as members of society. Along these lines, Erthal et al. (2021) posit that negative cultural stereotypes of weak scientific performance are implicitly associated with women and other social groups and influence attitudes and judgments toward them. Eaton et al. (2019) also found racial and gender biases that influence the hiring of women and minority groups in this STEM area.

In their study of gender biases in academic medicine, Welten et al. (2022) identify four main patterns. The first is "prove it again", whereby women are expected to repeatedly provide evidence of their suitability and ability beyond what is expected of their male peers. For example, according to Dengate et al. (2021), female STEM academics who perceive gender bias feel that they must work harder to be considered legitimate. The second pattern is the "tightrope" bias, whereby assertive women are seen as competent but unpleasant, while modest women are seen as ineffective leaders. The third is the "motherhood wall", whereby women are offered fewer opportunities due to perceived external responsibilities related to pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare (Welten et al. 2022).

For example, [López et al. \(2018\)](#) state that motherhood bias causes women in STEM to have their motherhood judged if they are competent at work, and they are not considered valuable or dedicated professionals because they have family responsibilities. Finally, [Welten et al. \(2022\)](#) identified the “tug-of-war” bias, whereby women feel challenged by other women in the same field, fueling a sense of competition for opportunities perceived as limited for women. However, beyond identifying a typology of biases ([Welten et al. 2022](#)), the literature reviewed focuses on showing how and in what domains they arise.

3.1.1. Gender Roles

Some studies on gender biases focus on the division of gender roles in academia. In their study on gender biases in the visibility and valuation of faculty service, [Hanasono et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed the gendered nature of academic service activities. Their study participants indicated that their departments, colleges, and universities tended to recognize and reward task-oriented (more masculinized) service work that is competitively selected, leadership-oriented, and quantifiable. However, relational service work in which collaborative and supportive activities such as mentoring, writing letters of recommendation, or recruiting students predominate were more invisible and less valued. In addition, the authors found that cis women and racialized faculty members tended to have heavier service loads than cis white males. This imposes an additional workload on these individuals, affecting their research productivity, teaching, and career advancement. In addition, it might incur emotional labor costs, foster feelings of burnout, and increase the likelihood of leaving the institution. The authors’ findings show that the dominant institutional policies and practices continue to favor forms of service that are more oriented to quantifiable tasks than collaborative work, as can be seen in the decision not to document service activities in curricula, dossiers, and other documents.

[Montes-López and Simbürger \(2021\)](#) compare the results of two studies focused on the work demands of academia and work–life balance through interviews conducted in Chile and Spain. Their findings highlight that female academics have a dual perception of their work in both countries. While they consider an academic career as vocational and a source of personal satisfaction, they emphasize that academic work is overwhelming and involves excessive working hours, making it easier for people with more time (without children or a partner in the Chilean case and children in the Spanish case). The interviewees emphasize that being a mother affects their research trajectory and progress by preventing them from dedicating time outside of work to it. For this reason, in general, they choose to postpone motherhood, at least until they have a more stable position. Along these lines, the accounts in both countries show that the reconciliation of work and family life primarily depends on an individual effort with high personal costs. Finally, in both countries, the interviewees emphasize the lack of alternatives for childcare in their jobs. The authors conclude that gender inequality manifests itself in academia through the conscious postponement of motherhood to prevent it from interfering with academic careers, as well as the invisibility of the difficulties that women face in the development of their work. According to the authors, most of them take individual responsibility based on the strong gender biases in which men hardly appear as co-responsible figures and given that the university does not take charge of creating an environment that allows them to reconcile life and work.

3.1.2. Academic Promotion

[Filandri and Pasqua \(2021\)](#) report how the gender gap affects career advancement in Italian universities, conducting an empirical analysis testing whether accredited female professors are less likely than their male colleagues to advance in their careers. In addition, they investigated whether women’s lower scientific productivity can explain their low percentage among the higher ranks of Italian academia and whether a higher proportion of female academics in the scientific sector reduces gender discrimination in career advancement. The results indicate that the observed lower probability of women being promoted in Italian universities cannot be explained by their lower scientific productivity—above the

minimum level needed to obtain accreditation—or their reluctance to apply for promotion. Unfortunately for the authors, it remains unclear what mechanisms produce gender discrimination. These findings align with [Chen and Crown's \(2019\)](#) discussion about gender biases in the academic promotion of women and their impact on the salary gap.

In a similar study focused on the UK experience, [Crabtree and Shiel \(2019\)](#) explore the experiences of female academics, specifically the barriers to progression they experience within higher education institutions. Among the findings, they highlight that from the outset, the career paths of most female participants had a gendered component that pushed them towards more administrative jobs. Once this route was initiated, they stated that it was difficult to escape from it. In addition, while men are typically relegated to research, women are more commonly relegated to teaching, which presents difficulties in achieving a suitable work–life balance.

The situation described above is more complex when considering other power relations and how they affect female academics from under-represented minority groups, for example. According to [Settles et al. \(2021, 2022\)](#), despite the increased focus on diversity in higher education, the increase in women and minority faculty members and their representation in such institutions remains very low. They still face barriers to their recruitment and retention, including a lack of belonging, marginalization, social exclusion, and tokenism. These barriers can negatively affect their well-being and provoke them to leave academia. The authors mainly focus on epistemic exclusion as a form of academic delegitimization rooted in disciplinary biases concerning what types of research are valued and social-identity-based biases against individuals from marginalized groups. According to this theory, individuals from these groups are disproportionately disadvantaged by invisible biases embedded in supposedly objective and neutral performance standards within evaluation systems. These disciplinary biases exacerbate social-identity-based biases that culminate in devaluing their knowledge. [Settles et al. \(2022\)](#) used data from 1341 tenured faculty members at one institution and examined whether women and racialized faculty were more likely than others to experience epistemic exclusion. In addition, they explored whether job satisfaction and climate mediate the relationship between epistemic exclusion and turnover. The results indicate that women and minority academics risk experiencing epistemic exclusion through academic devaluation, which was related to turnover intentions through reduced job satisfaction and less favorable perceptions of the work climate. These individuals reported more significant academic devaluation than men and white teachers. While these findings do not enable us to speak directly of bias as a motivation for epistemic exclusion, they indicate that bias in academic devaluation occurs through its unequal impact on certain groups. Moreover, they suggest that women of all races and minority males are especially likely to experience devaluation.

Following the logic of approaching the problem from an intersectional viewpoint, [Mousa \(2021\)](#) explores why women teachers are represented in senior positions and hierarchies in the Egyptian academic context. Using intersectional and substantive representation theories, the author identifies the main cultural and institutional factors limiting women's status and active representation in this field. Based on interviews with 22 female academic leaders working in four Egyptian public universities, the author found that female faculty representation is determined by cultural barriers such as family obligations, managerial thinking, masculine culture, and religious barriers, as well as institutional constraints such as a lack of administrative support, gender biases, and highly restrictive accountability systems of academic institutions.

[Henningsen et al. \(2022\)](#) studied the gender biases and self-selection processes that influence female academics' ambition to become deans. For this purpose, the authors draw on role congruence theory, according to which the incongruity between the cultural understanding of leadership as predominantly masculine or agentic and the cultural stereotype of women as predominantly feminine or communally focused places women at a disadvantage in attaining leadership roles. In their study, they considered both gender discrimination by others and self-selection processes. The results show that contrary to

their hypotheses, the representation of women among academics or deans of faculties—conditions that are supposed to diminish the masculinity of the leadership role—was not related to whether male and female academics received recommendations for the deanship. Furthermore, contrary to the assumption that a bias against women would be manifested by judging them with a stricter standard, the relationship between previous experience in administrative leadership and recommendations did not differ between male and female academics. Finally, female academics' domestic care responsibilities—which supposedly disadvantage them by increasing the salience of their communal qualities—were positively related to their recommendations for the deanship, unlike those of men. According to the authors, this is a significant finding contrary to their predictions. Despite the positive nature of these findings, the authors did not rule out that the gender biases revealed could have operated in other phases of academic careers or the previous education and training of their study participants.

As with other forms of discrimination and gender bias in academia, the situation of access to senior positions poses greater complexities for female academics affected by other power relations (Abramo et al. 2021; Hanasono et al. 2019; Chancellor 2019; Gause 2021; Raj et al. 2020; Rudakov and Prakhov 2021; Warren 2021; Woitowich et al. 2020). Using narrative research and a semi-structured protocol, Gause (2021) interviewed racialized female leaders of community colleges in the United States to address their experiences in senior positions. According to the author, these spaces still have stereotypical gender expectations of the white, heteronormative male leader and racial and gender biases that generate resistance against women occupying high positions, given that white privilege continues to limit their access and generate discrimination. The author highlights how the women interviewed frequently recognized being victims of racial microaggressions, particularly when they reached administrative ranks. However, they also encountered organizational and structural barriers, including limited access to mentoring.

3.1.3. Evaluation Processes

Research has focused on evaluating gender biases in more specific areas of academic life, such as evaluations and letters of recommendation. Rivera and Tilcsik (2019) conducted a meta-study showing that gender biases in teaching evaluations contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities in academic careers. These biases appear not only in numerical ratings of teaching performance but also in qualitative comments describing male and female teaching staff. Based on the authors' argument that there is a gender bias in the very architecture of evaluations, they focus on how the design of the tools used to judge merit could attenuate or exacerbate gender gaps. For this purpose, they analyze the number of response categories on a rating scale as a fundamental element of grading systems that affects the degree to which this bias is reflected since they can significantly affect the evaluation of men and women in higher education. This is relevant given the importance of such evaluations in decisions affecting academic careers and their effects on women. The authors hypothesized that given common gender stereotypes associating exceptional or brilliant performance with men rather than women, people might be hesitant to assign 10/10 to a woman when evaluating their performance. Through two studies focusing on faculty ratings of teaching, the article demonstrates that the design of the tools used to judge merit—in this case, the specific numerical scale chosen to evaluate performance—can powerfully affect gender inequalities in workplace evaluations. Thus, their experiments showed that a seemingly minor change from a ten- to a six-point scale helped to eliminate previously wide gender gaps in performance evaluations in more male-dominated fields at a professional school at a large university in North America. These results are consistent with those proposed by Chen and Crown (2019), who highlight the biases in course evaluations by students who assign lower ratings to female professors.

Madera et al. (2018) focus on the gender gaps and biases observed in selection processes for academic careers, particularly in the content of recommendation letters. They argue that the processes before selection and hiring should attract attention, not only

focusing on selection rates and how biases are experienced during one's academic career. In the article, they present two studies, in which they first examine gender differences and their relationship with the presence of expressions of doubt in recommendation letters. The second study focuses on how these differences negatively affect the evaluations of male and female candidates. The results of both studies indicate that recommendation letters for women contain more expressions of doubt than those for men, specifically negativity, evasiveness, and weak praise. This result is consistent despite controls for academic productivity, such as the number of publications and teaching experience. Therefore, according to the authors, an explanation based on deliberate differences made based on gender seems more appropriate. The second study showed that negativity (i.e., a type of doubt generator that highlights weaknesses) and hedging (i.e., directly admitting uncertainty) in recommendation letters lead to lower evaluations, regardless of gender. The authors subsequently conclude that expressions of doubt in recommendation letters harm women more than men, albeit only because they are more frequent in letters about women. According to the authors, this occurs partly because traditional ways of conceptualizing gender can influence what is expected of men and women. Biases against women can arise in recommendation letters because what is required for success in many academic departments might be based on masculinity norms.

In conclusion, this review demonstrates the persistent gaps in addressing gender bias in higher education, offering a comprehensive critique of how systemic inequities are perpetuated. Drawing on the insights of queer feminist studies of science, we argue that these challenges cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of binary thinking or reductionist frameworks that separate bias and violence as discrete phenomena. Instead, a transformative understanding of gender inequity in academia must interrogate the structural and cultural norms that underpin these issues, including the binary gender system and its associated power dynamics.

Queer feminist studies of science encourage us to question the objectivity and neutrality of academic institutions, revealing how ostensibly meritocratic practices embed systemic discrimination. Bias in hiring, promotion, and evaluation processes—frequently justified as neutral or unconscious—emerges as a manifestation of deeper cultural and institutional structures. These structures privilege masculinized norms of excellence, leadership, and productivity while marginalizing collaborative, relational, and community-oriented practices often associated with feminized labor. By critically examining these norms, queer feminist approaches enable a reimagining of academia as a space that values diverse epistemologies and methodologies, fostering equity.

The emphasis on the entanglement of bias and violence in queer feminist thought further highlights the limitations of treating these phenomena separately. As this review illustrates, the focus on bias—while significant—tends to obscure the more pervasive and destructive forms of systemic violence that disproportionately affect women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racialized academics. These forms of violence include exclusionary practices, epistemic devaluation, and the maintenance of hostile work environments. By addressing these interconnected dynamics, queer feminist studies underscore the need for a critical approach that situates bias and violence within the broader operations of the binary gender system.

Additionally, queer feminist studies challenge binary conceptualizations of gender itself, which reinforce inequities by framing gender as static and oppositional. The persistence of this binary framework in research and policy perpetuates exclusion by rendering non-binary, trans, and intersectional experiences invisible. This invisibility not only limits the scope of interventions but also reinforces the systemic erasure of those who do not conform to dominant norms. Policies informed by queer feminist principles would instead prioritize intersectionality, recognizing the complex interplay of gender with race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity to address the diverse experiences of marginalization in academia.

The insights from queer feminist studies also call for a re-evaluation of how academic institutions produce and sustain knowledge. From the design of evaluations to the allocation of resources, these processes must be scrutinized for their role in reproducing inequality. A shift toward collaborative, interdisciplinary, and participatory approaches in knowledge production can help dismantle exclusionary practices and foster transformative change.

In conclusion, addressing gender inequities in higher education requires moving beyond surface-level solutions and engaging with the structural and cultural roots of the problem. By integrating the tenets of queer feminist studies of science, we can develop policies and practices that challenge binary thinking, value diverse contributions, and create inclusive academic environments. This critical perspective not only deepens our understanding of gender bias and violence but also provides a roadmap for meaningful and lasting institutional transformation.

3.2. Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education

In this section, we review the results of the literature focused on expressions of gender-based violence in higher education, in particular, studies addressing sexual harassment within university campuses. It is important to clarify that the gender biases addressed in the previous section are also considered a form of gender-based violence. For example, [Takeuchi et al. \(2018\)](#) address both sexual and gender-based harassment, which refers to discriminatory, degrading, and imposing gender roles, e.g., calling someone effeminate if they are a man or masculine if they are a woman, stating that the job is not suitable for their gender, and calling women by their first name and men by their last name, among others. [Periyakoil et al. \(2020\)](#) provide another example pointing to the microaggressions reported in academic medicine, describing that women face this type of aggression in six themes: facing sexism, prejudices related to pregnancy and child care, being underestimated for specific abilities, receiving sexually inappropriate comments, being relegated to mundane tasks, and feeling excluded or marginalized.

Sexual harassment in the workplace can take many forms, including unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. In higher education, this reinforces that campuses are “male territory” and that women can only advance so far in the power structure ([Kirkner et al. 2022](#)). In the workplace, it undermines equality in employment between women and men ([Lizama-Lefno and Hurtado-Quiñones 2019](#)). These forms of violence have potentially devastating effects on women’s mental health and career paths ([Kirkner et al. 2022](#); [Lizama-Lefno and Hurtado-Quiñones 2019](#); [Raj et al. 2020](#)). In academic medicine, for example, sexual harassment has been cited as one of the main reasons why women fail to advance in their careers ([Zeidan et al. 2022](#)) or are less likely to be retained in the field ([Vargas et al. 2021](#)). The latter is also true in other disciplines ([Raj et al. 2020](#)).

While sexual harassment can be overt, harassing behaviors are often covert or nuanced, taking place in what [Banner et al. \(2022\)](#) call the “yellow zone” (e.g., sexist jokes, showing sexual images, or making comments about women’s competence). This leads employees to overlook or ignore them, even when they are also dangerous ([Banner et al. 2022](#)).

According to the literature reviewed, little research addresses this topic in higher education, and even fewer studies focus on the experiences of academic or administrative staff ([Kirkner et al. 2022](#); [Banner et al. 2022](#); [Hurren 2018](#)). Most existing research focuses on the experiences of students based on the #MeToo movements globally and feminist movements in Latin America. However, it is known that women are particularly affected, especially those from minority groups, people from the LGBTIQ+ population, and younger or more precarious teachers ([Banner et al. 2022](#)). Despite this, the literature reviewed broadly focuses on reasons whether or not to report cases of sexual harassment in the academic field.

In one of the existing studies, [Kirkner et al. \(2022\)](#) explore harassment survivors’ reasons for disclosing and reporting sexual harassment in academia. Disclosing refers to communicating to informal sources of support, such as colleagues or friends, while

reporting involves filing an official complaint to someone with the power to handle the procedure institutionally. Based on the survey responses of academics and staff ($n = 88$) on experiences of sexual harassment within their higher education institution, the authors report a low rate of reporting sexual harassment despite efforts by universities to improve such processes. Most of the sample disclosed their cases to family, friends, or partners rather than reporting them. Among the main reasons for not reporting, respondents stated that they did not consider the incident to be sufficiently severe (or that others would consider it as such) and did not believe that serious action would be taken. The results also indicate that experiencing electronic harassment was the only form significantly related to the decision to report and disclose. Finally, the results show few demographic differences: while it is known that women of color experience more harassment than men, this difference was not observed for white women. Nonetheless, the authors found a gender difference: men were less likely to report or disclose. Finally, the authors conclude that universities have reasons to minimize and silence victims of sexual harassment. On the one hand, institutions are determined to protect their reputation, thus explaining why reporting rates are so low even in the era of MeToo. On the other hand, victims feel that they must present strong evidence when reporting, which is often impossible to obtain.

The study conducted in the Chilean context by [Lizama-Lefno and Hurtado-Quiñones \(2019\)](#) stands out among the research on sexual harassment experienced by teachers in higher education. In their article, the authors present part of the results of the “Projective diagnosis of the gender situation at the University of Santiago de Chile” study carried out in 2016 by the Gender, Equity, and Diversity Area of that institution as part of the “Institutionalization and Mainstreaming of the Gender Perspective” project (2015–2019). This diagnosis sought to detect inequalities, inequities, and sexual or gender discrimination and identify behaviors and situations related to gender violence. The results indicate that 39.9% of the people surveyed experienced some situation of sexual harassment, with the most frequent being verbal harassment. Among such cases, 15.8% corresponded to administrative staff and 9.8% to academic staff. In all cases presented in this diagnosis, women were found to be more vulnerable to suffering sexual harassment. The situation was only reported in 38.5% of the total cases, whereby not giving importance to the facts is among the most substantial reasons for not doing so. This reason is stronger among academic staff, where not wanting to be seen as a conflictive person also prevailed. According to the authors, this is possibly related to wanting to protect one’s job.

However, another explanation might be in line with [Zeidan et al.’s \(2022\)](#) findings, focusing particularly on experiences of sexual harassment in the area of academic medicine. The authors identified that the participants in their study (men and women, professors, and residents) described confusion about what constitutes a definition of reportable sexual harassment, as well as a lack of familiarity with the reporting processes. They also mentioned a lack of confidence in reporting and power imbalances, which negatively affected the survivor in the event of reporting, mainly if she was in a lower position within the academic structure.

In conclusion, this review underscores the pervasive and systemic nature of gender violence in higher education, with a particular focus on sexual harassment and its impact on academic environments. Integrating insights from queer feminist studies of science provides a critical framework to deepen our understanding of this issue and suggests transformative approaches to addressing it. By challenging binary conceptualizations of gender and critiquing the supposed neutrality of institutional structures, queer feminist studies illuminate the power dynamics that sustain gender violence and its normalization within academia.

Central to queer feminist studies is the recognition that the binary gender order is not just a backdrop but an active agent in perpetuating inequality. The framing of gender as male or female, rigid and oppositional, reinforces the power structures that allow gender violence to persist. This binary thinking obscures the experiences of individuals who do not conform to these categories, including LGBTQ+ populations, whose specific

vulnerabilities are often rendered invisible in discussions of violence. A shift toward non-binary approaches would enable more inclusive understandings of gendered experiences, challenging the institutional practices that sustain inequities.

Moreover, queer feminist studies call attention to the entanglement of violence and bias, rejecting the notion that these are separate phenomena. As this review highlights, gender violence is often minimized or reframed as bias, a categorization that diminishes its severity and systemic origins. For example, microaggressions, verbal harassment, and covert forms of discrimination are frequently overlooked, yet they collectively create hostile environments that normalize more overt forms of violence. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of these dynamics, queer feminist perspectives push for a redefinition of gender violence that encompasses both visible and invisible forms of harm.

Queer feminist studies also critique the assumed objectivity and neutrality of academic institutions. Universities often present themselves as meritocratic spaces, yet their policies and practices frequently reflect and reinforce systemic inequalities. The low rates of reporting sexual harassment, as discussed in this review, are a case in point. Institutional silencing, reputational protection, and the burden placed on survivors to provide “evidence” of harm all illustrate how academic cultures prioritize their stability over justice for marginalized individuals. This aligns with the queer feminist critique of power: institutions are not neutral; they are shaped by and invested in maintaining existing hierarchies.

A transformative approach, as advocated by queer feminist studies, involves rethinking the epistemologies and methodologies through which we study and address gender violence. Participatory and ethnographic methods that center the voices of marginalized groups—particularly women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racialized academics—can provide deeper insights into the lived realities of violence. Additionally, integrating non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems can challenge dominant frameworks and offer alternative pathways to justice.

In conclusion, addressing gender violence in higher education requires a profound cultural and structural shift. Policies and interventions must move beyond surface-level solutions, such as awareness campaigns, to confront the power dynamics that perpetuate violence directly. By embracing the tenets of queer feminist studies—challenging binaries, recognizing intersectionality, and critiquing institutional neutrality—academia can begin to dismantle the structures that sustain gender violence and create inclusive environments that prioritize equity and justice for all.

4. Discussion and Some Implications for Research and Policymaking

The purpose of this review has been to show the gap that exists between studies continuing to address the “gender problem” by focusing on gender biases versus those addressing gender violence in the academic setting. This is relevant given that these experiences more strongly affect women, mainly those from minority groups, people from the LGBTQ+ population, and younger or more precarious academics (Banner et al. 2022). While we have only made the distinction between gender bias and gender violence for analytical purposes, we understand that they co-exist with each other. Our objective has been to show how the literature reviewed reports research that tends to focus on issues of bias and roles seeking to explain the systemic discrimination of women and vulnerable communities in the academic space. However, our approach indicates that supporting explanations of institutional discrimination based on biases or stereotypes has not led us to the expected solutions and transformations. As mentioned in the introduction, the large number of years left to reduce the gender gap indicates that this problem extends beyond biases and stereotypes. Instead, it concerns how the binary gender order is maintained precisely due to less political conceptualizations, such as gender biases and stereotypes (Matus 2023). For example, as this review shows, research on gender violence in academic establishments tends to be less frequent because it is easier to talk about biases than systematic violence. This presents a significant problem in transforming institutional cultures,

mainly because there is little research accounting for processes—such as ethnographic research—to understand where to focus institutional efforts in more detail.

This review highlights the urgency of questioning how research and policymaking conceptualize gender, particularly when the default conceptualization is the binary thinking of gender. Using gender as an assumption or a hypothesis (Sanz 2017) critically impacts the conclusions and recommendations made to policy on gender dynamics in higher education institutions. To assume gender as a binary reinforces gender inequality. By defining gender strictly as male or female, binary thinking perpetuates power imbalances that affect employment, education, healthcare, and social participation. These rigid gender roles are often used to justify discrimination, including unequal pay, violence, and limited access to resources. For instance, the emphasis on “gender bias” rather than “gender violence” reinforces the gender binary system by focusing on differences and roles rather than challenging the very structure that underpins inequality. By prioritizing “bias”, it perpetuates the idea of two distinct and opposing categories, which obscures the complexity of gendered experiences and minimizes the most extreme forms of inequality. To separate “bias” from “violence” makes us look at binary gender as a different phenomenon. But the truth is that they are not; on the contrary, they both are effects of the operations of the binary gender norm. For instance, when research talks about “gender bias” as “obstacles” to the advancement of women in academia or the unconsciousness of biases, policymakers should be more careful when considering this as evidence to produce policies to transform higher education institutions into more just places. If it is so, it means that we have to assume that the binary thinking of gender is real; therefore, institutions do not need to invest huge efforts to transform themselves, given the fact that unconscious biases are located “inside” the subject.

In conclusion, this review underscores the significant gap in academic literature between research that addresses gender bias and that which explores the more severe issue of gender violence in higher education. While gender bias has been the focal point of much scholarship, it is crucial to recognize that both gender bias and gender violence are rooted in and perpetuated by the binary gender system. The continued focus on gender bias, while important, risks overlooking the more destructive forms of inequality and violence that often affect marginalized groups, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and precariously employed academics. The binary gender framework not only sustains these inequalities but also limits the scope of research and policy interventions. By treating gender bias as a discrete issue, policymakers risk misunderstanding the deeper structural problems at play, which include gender violence and institutionalized discrimination. Therefore, it is vital to reconsider how gender is conceptualized in research and policy, recognizing that both bias and violence are manifestations of a broader, systemic issue that requires a more profound transformation of academic cultures and institutional practices. This review calls for a more comprehensive critical approach to gender in academia, one that challenges binary thinking and fosters policies that can address both gender bias and violence more effectively.

5. Implications for Policymakers

The following outlines two critical implications for policymaking derived from our analysis:

1. Policy should address gender bias and gender violence as interconnected issues. The current policy emphasis on gender bias as the primary obstacle in higher education overlooks the more severe and pervasive issue of gender-based violence. Since gender bias and violence co-exist and are both symptoms of the deeper issue of binary gender norms, policy should move beyond focusing solely on biases and stereotypes. We sustain that policymakers should develop comprehensive critical approaches that problematize the notion of unconscious gender biases and address both issues as the effects of the operations of a powerful binary system to produce differences between men and women. This would require institutional efforts to change cultures and

power structures, making gender violence and bias part of the same conversation rather than treating them separately.

2. We must move beyond binary gender assumptions in research and policy frameworks. The default conceptualization of gender as binary (male/female) restricts the scope of research and policy recommendations, ultimately perpetuating gender inequality. This conceptualization affects not only the interpretation of issues like bias and violence but also limits institutional responses to gender diversity. We state that policies and research frameworks should be reoriented to challenge binary assumptions, recognizing the diversity of gender identities beyond male and female. This would involve creating gender-inclusive policies that account for non-binary, transgender, and other gender-nonconforming individuals in higher education, ensuring that the lived experiences of all gender identities are considered in institutional reforms.

These two implications urge a shift in policy and research toward more critical, comprehensive approaches to gender equality in higher education, recognizing that both bias and violence are interconnected and rooted in the binary conceptualization of gender.

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