Gender Inequalities in Academia: Multiple Approaches to Closing the Gap

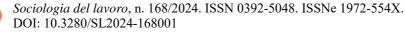*Emanuela Lombardo*, Manuela Naldini**, Barbara Poggio****

This special issue aims to contribute to the debate on gender inequalities in academia and the gender equality policies that address them. In this introduction we offer an overview of the debate and of the main research issues and theoretical perspectives, showing how a multiplicity of approaches are needed for both understanding and transforming higher education institutions. Macro, meso and micro level approaches illuminate the gendered individual, cultural and institutional factors that constrain and enable academic life, with special attention paid to how the neoliberal turn, and its organizational consequences, exacerbates gender inequalities. Women, gender, care, and intersectionality approaches allow scholars to focus on the different gendered or intersectional relationships within academia. Policy-oriented approaches allow us to analyse and assess progress in institutional efforts to close the gap on gender inequalities in academia. Actor-centred studies expose the power struggles between actors that oppose or promote gender equality policies in academia.

Keywords: gender inequalities; academic careers; higher education; work inequalities; organizational change; gender equality policies

Introduction

Gender inequality in academia is a global phenomenon, although its causes and consequences vary among different national contexts (OECD, 2017). Despite the progress that has been made in recent years and the

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increasing attention paid to the issue – for instance in Europe with the creation of the *European Research Area* in 2000 – achieving gender equality in academia remains a major challenge. While female university students perform better than their male counterparts, the situation suddenly changes in postdoctoral fellowship positions, and it worsens further throughout the subsequent stages of academic careers. In Italy, for instance, similarly to other countries, women remain significantly underrepresented not only in early career stages but also in full professorships and in leadership positions (Checchi, Cicognani and Kulic, 2018; Picardi, 2019; Gaiaschi and Musumeci, 2020). These phenomena are known as the 'leaky pipeline' and/or 'glass door' (regarding women being more likely to leave their academic careers and less likely to obtain tenured positions), and as the 'glass ceiling' (women being less likely to achieve full professorships). Notwithstanding the growing feminization of the academic professions, universities are still the domain of persistent gender gaps stemming from gender stereotypes and inequality practices (van den Brink and Benschop, 2011). These gaps have been reinforced by the growing hegemony of neoliberal models applied to practices of science production and evaluation of scientific performance and excellence, as well as to work arrangements in scientific organizations that promote academic precarity, competition, and exploitation (Murgia and Poggio, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic further contributed to exacerbating gender inequality in academia, especially for those in the most precarious posts (Pereira, 2021; King and Frederickson, 2020; Douglas et al., 2022; Docka-Filipek and Stone, 2021; Carreri, Naldini and Tuselli, forthcoming).

The debate on the barriers to women's full participation, and on the main factors accounting for gender inequality in academia, is still open. Scholars debate whether this is due to overt gender discrimination, unconscious gender bias, a gender gap in scientific productivity, or resistance to the implementation of gender equality policies in higher education institutions. Demand-side explanations of the gender gap in academia are particularly insightful for understanding reasons for gender imbalance in academic and research contexts (Carriero and Naldini, 2022; Cois, Naldini and Solera, 2023). Supply-side explanations, that attribute the disadvantaged position of women in academia to 'individual self-selection' mechanisms, are limited as they tend to individualize the problem of gender inequalities (and its eventual solution). By contrast, demand-side explanations address the structural dimensions of the problem and call for structural changes in academic organizations. Demand-side approaches are based on the idea that gender inequalities in academia are based on organizational gender bias and

discriminatory behaviour in recruitment and promotions, and on cultural and institutional barriers, including resistance to the adoption and implementation of gender equality policies in academic institutions.

Cultural and organizational barriers reveal enduring gender bias and stereotypes about the definition of masculinity/femininity in recruitment procedures, career promotions, and the way in which scientific 'excellence' is constructed (Addis and Villa, 2003; Addis, 2008; van den Brink and Benshop, 2011). Gender biases are at work in the perceived importance of the various components of academic work (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012): their attribution seems to reproduce a sexual division of labour whereby women tend to be more involved in teaching than men and to devote more time to student support and less prestigious management work – a pattern known as 'academic housework' (Heijstra et al., 2017; Minello and Russo, 2021) or 'academic housekeeping' (Castaño, Vázquez and Martínez, 2019). However, in academic evaluation criteria, 'excellence' in research – measured predominantly in terms of scientific output, i.e. publications – takes precedence over teaching in all scientific fields (Garforth and Kerr, 2009). Gender inequalities in academia are also affected by the structural and normative opportunities that characterize different national contexts, as in the case of the welfare system (Musselin, 2005), the varieties of gender regimes and gender equality policies and institutions (Alonso, Ciccia and Lombardo, 2023).

Scholarly work is increasingly analysing the role of gender equality policies in transforming inequalities in universities, as well as in removing the resistance to policy implementation by actors seeking to maintain the unequal status quo (Bustelo, 2023; Lombardo and Bustelo, 2021). This literature has also explored the agency of individual and institutional feminist actors in countering such resistance and effectively implementing gender equality policies in universities (Verge, 2021; Tildesley, Lombardo and Verge, 2022). Scholars have also highlighted the emergence of new inequalities due to the affirmation of the neoliberal agenda and to the consequent redefinition of organizational practices and processes, all of which have remarkable gender implications (Bozzon, Murgia and Poggio, 2018; Poggio, 2018; Naldini and Poggio, 2023).

The aim of this special issue is to contribute to the debate on gender inequalities in academia and gender equality policies adopted in universities to address such inequalities. The questions that the contributions address include the following: How are gender inequalities (re)produced in academic careers? How are they connected to the structural and cultural factors that operate at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels? Which theoretical approaches and methodological tools can be adopted in order to

grasp the multidimensionality of the phenomenon and its pervasiveness in academia? What is the role of public policies and institutions in promoting change and enhancing equity? What are their limitations and areas for improvement? The argument developed in this introduction and illustrated in the contributions to this special issue is that, given the multiple interconnected dimensions of the problem of gender inequalities in academia, multiple approaches are needed for both understanding and transforming higher education institutions.

1.Theoretical approaches to gender inequalities in academia

The variety of theoretical approaches employed in scholarly debates on gender (in)equality in academia provides helpful analytical lenses for understanding the multiple dimensions of the problem. Some approaches allow us to disentangle the complex interactions between the micro level (individual attitudes, preferences, and decisions), the meso level (organizational practices, cultures and processes), and the macro level (institutional settings and national regulations and policies). Some perspectives enhance our understanding of the extent to which approaches that focus on women, on gender – and gendered care – or on intersectionality are transformative of existing inequalities. Other lenses offer us the possibility of assessing the role of gender equality policies in higher education and actors' dynamics of resistance and counter-resistances around such policies in advancing gender equality in academia.

1.1 Macro, meso, and micro levels

One approach that has proved fruitful in analysing gender inequalities in academic contexts is the one that looks at these phenomena as the result of material, cultural and institutional processes (Risman and Davis, 2013). According to this perspective, based on the theory of gender as structure (Risman, 2004), gender differentially constrains and enables people at micro, meso, and macro levels. These respectively correspond to three main societal levels: individual, cultural, and institutional. From this perspective, gender disparities in academic careers are not only the result of processes that create advantages or disadvantages accumulating at different stages of working and family life, but are multidimensional in nature, because they are intertwined. Cultural dimensions of the problem of gender inequalities in academia concern

the values of female workers and the values of care, gender norms, preferences and stereotypes that shape organizational cultures, work practices and leadership styles. Structural dimensions include the salaries and time resources of individuals and their families; human, economic and social capital; as well as working hours and work organization. Institutional dimensions entail the rules governing recruitment and stabilization processes, and labour, family, and gender-based violence policies at the local, regional, national, and supranational levels. All these dimensions of inequalities do not act independently in society and the academy, but rather they are highly interdependent, gendering both opportunities and barriers in academia.

1.2 Gender, organizational change, and the neoliberal model in universities

Over recent years, a growing debate has developed aimed at understanding the implications of the significant transformations of the production models and practices of science that have characterized academia, and consequently the experiences of those working within it. We refer in particular to the establishment of a neoliberal agenda in higher education, characterized by a progressive decrease in public funds and a growing marketization of scientific institutions. This academic model increasingly upholds norms and practices such as managerialism, entrepreneurialism, performance, excellence, and competition between and within the organizations (Connell 2015, Waite and Waite 2021). Neoliberal academia not only affects the production of knowledge, for instance by pushing researchers to prioritize topics that are more 'publishable', but has also a relevant impact on working conditions and careers (Gill, 2009), as shown in the increase in labour instability and precariousness especially of early career researchers (Murgia and Poggio, 2019).

These transformations have had gendered consequences at the various levels mentioned above: from the macro level of the more general academic system and market, to organizational practices and processes, to the subjective and experiential dimension of those working within academic contexts (Bozzon, Murgia and Poggio, 2019; Naldini and Poggio, 2023).

Looking, in particular, at the gender implications at the organizational level of universities and departments, we notice how the adoption of managerial and entrepreneurial methods and logics that is typical of the private sector, and mainly oriented towards productivity and competition, has reconfigured the dominant 'ideal academic' model (Lund, 2015). This has generated an intensification of work and an increasing demand for time,

with significant gender implications at different levels. One important gender consequence of applying the neoliberal entrepreneurial model to the academy is the penalisation of people with family care commitments (Carreri, Naldini and Tuselli, 2024, forthcoming). Another gender effect is the intensification of the division of tasks and activities within academic structures. The less prestigious and career-enhancing activities, such as teaching and administrative tasks fall more on the shoulders of women. The more productive and career-enhancing activities, such as research and leadership tasks, are carried out to a greater extent by men. The fact that the construct of 'excellence', so central to the neo-liberal model and to the definition of opportunities for access and advancement within academic contexts, is very much flattened on the male norm and activities, creates disadvantages for women in both material and symbolic terms, as highlighted by several studies (see Addis, 2008; den Brink and Benshop, 2011).

1.3 Women, gender, care and intersectionality approaches

Another group of approaches captures the extent to which analyses focus on women, gender, care and intersectionality (Tildesley, La Barbera and Lombardo, 2023; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). The 'women approach' focuses on women as being disadvantaged compared to men. It highlights women's exclusion from the labour market, politics, and decision-making and studies measures to minimize discrimination such as gender quotas and work-life balance policies (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). While it draws attention to the situation and experiences of women in academia, this approach fails to address underlying social structures (La Barbera, 2017) and tends to address inequalities in academia with a focus on 'fixing the women' (Schiebinger, 2021) rather than challenging discriminatory norms and social practices.

In contrast, the 'gender approach' centres the analysis on institutional structures and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality. It allows an analysis of organizational change by addressing issues such as biases in recruitment and promotion, the role of men in relation to women in academia, and gender mainstreaming policies. This orients research towards how to 'fix the institution' rather than 'fixing the women' (Schiebinger, 2021). One of the main obstacles to gender equity is related to care, since, as feminists have argued (Tronto, 1993; Leira, 1994; Johansson et al., 2024), the concept of care as well as activities related to care continue to be highly gendered (Leira and Saraceno, 2002). In the neoliberal era, within an academic environment increasingly pervaded by the myth of merit and 'excellence', care is made

invisible, and academics face many challenges when they become parents or new care needs emerge. Therefore, it is not surprising to find amongst academics more family formation deferral strategies than in the general population (De Paola et al., 2022; Gorodetskaya et al., 2023). Moreover, fathers' participation in care work among academics remains limited. Naldini and Poggio (2023) have shown that in an Italian context heavily based on the "unconditional male worker," and characterized by poor family policies and limited development of childcare services, motherhood and all caring experiences (even illness), from "caring for" to "caring about" (Waerness, 1987), trigger a "motherhood penalization" (Lutter and Schröder, 2019) when the experience of being an academic mother is compared with that of men and women without caring responsibilities (Kasimova et al., 2021; Minello et al., 2021). In the Italian context, family formation postponement strategies are recalled by many academics, especially by those who experience situations of job uncertainty, which tends to extend well beyond the threshold of the age of biological reproduction. This results in a more or less unconscious sacrificing of parenthood among those who most strongly adhere to the 'model of the ideal worker' with unlimited job availability (the 24/7 model) (Naldini, Santero and Tuselli, 2023).

Caring work in academia is a barrier to gender equality not only when it is related to the amount of care performed outside of university, but also because of the persistence inside the academy of another gender division identified as 'academic housework' (Heijstra et al., 2017). The emergence of new lines of division between production and reproduction activities within academic disciplines and organizations, also because of the consolidation of neoliberal models, have strongly changed academic work. They have contributed to redefining the division of labour between the various university components and the allocation of academic activities themselves. Research, teaching, third mission, managerial management of projects, and internationalization are gendered and stratified in both STEM and SSH, as women tend to spend more time in teaching, tutorials, and bureaucratic work and less on career-rewarding activities (Cannito, Naldini and Santero, 2023).

Finally, the 'lens of care' can help us to distance ourselves from a vision of academic work based only on individual merit and excellence – which continues to marginalize women's participation and limit their potential – by introducing feminist values such as relationality and care. The new academic practices of 'Feminist Caring Collaborations' (Johansson et al., 2024), as a bottom-up feminist strategy that emphasizes connection, caring practices, co-learning and solidarity, move in this direction. Introducing care into academia as a concept and as a practice can help not only to counterbalance

the growing individualistic and competitive culture in academic labour, but also to 'fix knowledge' by introducing 'care' as a critical concept and dimension of society and promoting 'care thinking' in which knowledge is seen not as an individual advancement but as a collective effort.

While the gender approach pays attention to how the gender status quo is challenged only to a limited extent due to the existence of 'caring work' and the persistence of the production/reproduction dichotomy inside and outside the academy, it overlooks the intersecting inequalities between women and men in academia. The 'intersectionality approach' expands on the gender approach by addressing gender inequality in conjunction with other forms of inequality such as race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, and disability (Crenshaw, 1989). The intersectionality approach allows us to grasp how various factors related to people's multiple identities combine and create specific forms of interrelated discriminations, going beyond the analysis of any single category or even the mere sum of several categories (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2000, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). Regarding the analysis of gender (in)equality in academia, this perspective is interesting insofar as it prompts research to 'fix the knowledge' (Schiebinger, 2021) by integrating not only sex and gender but also multi-layered identities and discriminations (La Barbera, 2017) into the analysis of academic inequalities and university policies that tackle multiple factors of oppression simultaneously. Limitations in applying this approach in analysis include conceptual confusion (Tildesley et al., 2023) that sometimes conflates the concept with multiple discrimination, where inequalities are addressed as parallel strands rather than mutually constituted (Christoffersen, 2021). Yet, this approach includes a potential for transformative analyses that are inclusive of the multiplicity of intersecting factors that affect people's lives within academia. The intersectional perspective is key to considering how various and multiple people's identity factors are interconnected at both the individual (micro) and institutional/social/cultural (macro) levels (Castro and Holvino, 2016).

1.4 The adoption and implementation of gender equality policies

Although academia is still pervaded by gender and intersecting inequalities, universities have also addressed the problem through the adoption and implementation of a variety of gender equality policies, thus performing a crucial role in the promotion of gender equality and inclusion in both higher education and society (Rosa and Clavero, 2022).

Approaches focused on policy adoption and implementation are thus paramount for analysing and assessing progress in gender equality policies in academia. Gender equality plans, protocols against sexual, sexist, racist and LGBTI-phobic harassment and discrimination, work-life balance measures, gender mainstreaming in teaching and research, collection of data and monitoring of gender gaps, as well as gender quotas or incentives to increase the presence of women in underrepresented academic and decision-making positions are some of the policies adopted in higher education institutions in Europe and other regions of the world (Bustelo, 2023; Azzolina, Naldini and Poggio, 2023; Clavero and Galligan, 2020; Lombardo and Bustelo, 2021). The European Union has been a key actor in the promotion and implementation of gender equality policies in both science and university. It has adopted policy programmes and actions to increase the presence of women in science, as well as to mainstream gender into research content, fund research on gender equality and intersectionality, support women's research careers, and promote structural change within higher education institutions (Rosa and Clavero, 2021; Cannito, Poggio and Tuselli, 2023). The EU enforcement of gender equality plans since 2022 as an eligibility requirement for higher education institutions to participate in European Commission calls for research funding programmes such as Horizon, and the policy recommendations of the European Institute for Gender Equality for developing and evaluating a gender equality plan, illustrating the pivotal role of the EU in the promotion of gender equality in science and universities in member states. Studying how gender equality policies in higher education institutions are framed, in terms of women, gender and intersectionality, how transformative they are of the unequal status quo, the extent to which they are implemented, and the factors that enable and hinder their implementation is of great relevance for understanding how the problem of gender inequalities in academia is addressed, and what challenges and obstacles these policies face.

1.5 Actors' dynamics: power struggles between resistances and counter-resistances

Approaches that centre on actors' dynamics bring issues of power, resistance to gender equality policies in universities, and counter-resistance to the forefront (Tildesley, Lombardo and Verge, 2022; Verge, 2020). Studies of the implementation of gender equality policies in higher education institutions find that the academic space is not an exception in the resistances

that these policies must face when promoting actors seek to apply them (Verge, Ferrer-Fons and González, 2018; van der Brink and Benschop, 2012). The analytical framework of 'power struggles' between status quo and gender equality actors employed by Tildesley, Lombardo and Verge (2022) illuminates both the resistance that hinders gender reform efforts in higher education institutions and the counter-action strategies that seek to drive implementation forward and transform universities. A multi-sided concept of power that encompasses both domination and individual and collective empowerment (Allen, 1999) alerts researchers working on inequalities in academia not only to the action of resistance against gender equality policies that perpetuates power inequalities in university settings, but also to the possibilities of a feminist politics of counter-resistance by gender equality actors.

Tildesley and colleagues' (2022) study of power struggles in the implementation of gender equality policies in Spanish universities identifies various forms of resistance, including 'refusal to take responsibility to act' in applying gender equality policies by underfunding and understaffing university equality units, trivialization of policies, and 'denial of the need for gender change' by denying the empirical evidence of inequalities. These resistances tend to perpetuate male privilege and undermine women's roles in academia. Looking at dynamics of equality policy implementation through the lenses of power struggles allows us to capture the agency of gender equality actors within universities that develop feminist counter-resistance to implementing gender equality policies. Actions of counter-resistance include individual efforts of directors of university equality units, who have become the main drivers of policy change in relation to gender equality, especially in Europe. Equality unit directors, in their responsibility for steering the implementation of gender equality plans and other gender mainstreaming measures, strive to strengthen equality units through negotiating with university managers for more funding and staff for these institutions, or by articulating discursive strategies that connect academic excellence and gender equality. Collective actors also mobilize to challenge power dynamics in higher education institutions by, for example, building alliances with actors within and outside the university (Tildesley et al., 2022). These networks have several purposes, from empowering actors that advocate for gender equality in academia, to sharing knowledge about existing inequalities and the policies the university has adopted to address them, such as gender equality plans or protocols against sexual harassment, to supporting the equality unit in the implementation of such measures (Tildesley et al., 2022; Verge, 2020).

2. This special issue

The multidimensional nature of gender inequalities and the various types of policies to promote greater gender equality in academic environments represent two of the main issues addressed in this issue of *Sociologia del Lavoro*. Our starting point for understanding, on the one hand, the main factors that contribute to producing and reproducing gender inequalities in the university and, on the other, how to transform universities, is to look at the combination and interaction of factors and policies at three different levels: micro, meso, and macro.

Over recent decades and under the pressure of the 'neoliberal turn', as seen in other contexts, the Italian academy has witnessed a profound transformation towards a managerial and market-oriented academic system (Bozzon, Murgia and Poggio, 2018; Naldini and Poggio, 2023). These macro-level changes have increased pressure on researchers toward greater productivity (i.e. publication) and pushed them towards an 'overwork culture'. By using an original web-survey of academics from four Italian universities, Giulia Tattarini, Renzo Carriero and Cristina Solera's article investigates, in the new era based on 'overtime culture', gender differences in workaholic behaviour (i.e., working at night, on Sundays, etc.) and their link with how researchers perceive recruitment processes and gender disparities. The authors found that women are more workaholic than male academics, and this is explained by perceptions of gender (in)equality in their working environment. Women perceive that they "have to perform better than men to be considered good at their job". Hence, academic women are more workaholic than men because this perception of building their careers in such a penalizing environment pushes them into workaholism.

The impact of the macro-level shift in Italian academia and its implication on the meaning of the micro-level daily practices of research and life is the topic of Davide Filippi's article, which critically analyses the dynamics that reproduce gender inequalities. By giving voice to women engaged in the academic world, the article demonstrates how daily life in classrooms and departments is structurally supported by gender-discriminatory social practices. Different tasks, allusions to bodies, and stereotypes that reproduce these power imbalances are dimensions that all the women involved in research have highlighted. Furthermore, within a professional environment where devotion is considered one of the most important values, it is seen as a betrayal of necessary loyalty to aspire to career advancement in the academic field. However, the area in which these disparities emerge most clearly is related to parenthood or, more precisely, motherhood.

The role of parenthood, particularly related to care, is the topic of both Clare Matysova's and Maddalena Cannito and Arianna Santero's articles. Matysova's contribution presents the results of a study focusing on how employers' normative context in academia shapes parents' decision-making. Drawing on a two-stated multimethod qualitative approach (based both on online discussion and interviews and on thematic and dialogical narrative analysis) and adopting the Capability Approach, combined with a discursive conceptualisation of gender as an interpretive frame, the research highlights the inconsistency between the gender justice strategies of academic organizations, embodied in EDI (Equality Diversity and Inclusion) policies. It is also noted that within the currently dominant gender equity discourse in UK universities there does not seem to be a shared view on the issue of parental leave. Moreover, the invisibility of fathers and a default positioning of mothers as primary carers is reconfirmed and the presence of visions of academic work based on individualisation and personal responsibility, typical of the postfeminist narrative, is highlighted.

A specific consideration of the practices and representations of fatherhood in academic contexts can be found in the article by Cannito and Santero. Through the analysis of 64 semi-structured interviews conducted with associate professors and postdocs from various Italian universities, the authors show how men in the early stages of their careers, similarly to women, tend to postpone decisions on parenthood. Among those who do have children, different models of fatherhood are found, ranging from the 'absent father' and the 'negotiating father' to the 'present father'. However, there are still few fathers who are heavily involved in childcare and who report penalties and stress in relation to work. Finally, some policy suggestions to promote greater sharing of parenting tasks by men working in universities are provided.

The fourth contribution hosted in the monographic section broadens the gaze to a non-European context, that of the Southern Cone of Latin America, and introduces an intersectional perspective into the debate. The research, conducted by Susana Riquelme Parra and Lucía Miranda Leibe, concentrates on situations of discrimination impacting on the academic trajectories of women from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, analysed through a survey involving 453 female academics. The analysis sheds light on the systematic nature of sexist, racist, classist, xenophobic and homophobic practices, which are transversal to all the territories included in the survey, albeit with varying degrees of severity. At the same time, however, it is also noted how the risk of exposure to discriminatory practices increases somewhat significantly, but also how it is mainly female academics

who identify when racial dimensions, migrant status, and identification as a woman overlap.

Gender equality policies, such as plans and protocols against sexual, sexist, racist and LGBTI-phobic harassment, and gender mainstreaming tools for monitoring progress in gender equality, are all crucial for changing higher education institutions into more inclusive and democratic spaces. Ainhoa Novo, María Silvestre, Eva Martínez and Arantxa Elizondo address the relevance and type of gender equality criteria for assessing the quality of universities in global rankings. By comparing different ways of conceptualizing and measuring gender equality in calculations used in two ranking systems to classify universities – the *Center of Excellence Women and Science* (CEWS) and the *Times Higher Education* (THE) rankings – in the case of Spain, they show that criteria based on different approaches that measure either parity or equity provide different results in the classification of universities. The article supports the integration of gender equality indicators in university rankings with the idea that measuring gender inclusion is important to assess the quality of universities. It promotes a reflection on the strengths and limitations of existing criteria and tools for collecting information and for assessing gender equality in universities. The policy recommendation of the study for rankings that integrate gender equality criteria is to go beyond the mere collection of data on the presence of women among faculty and students, by including an assessment of the objectives and actions of gender equality plans and other gender mainstreaming measures adopted in universities. This will allow for a comparison of the quality of universities in relation to both progress in women's representation and the policies implemented to transform the universities into more gender equal spaces.

3. Future lines of research

The study of gender inequalities in academia is a vibrant field of research. While studies are needed to continue the assessment of the evolution of gender gaps in science and universities, the gender and intersectional effects of neoliberal academia on people's lives in terms of precarity, exploitation, or impact on maternity and paternity, or the changes in academic organizations due to gender equality policies, are new challenges that require researchers' attention. Issues include the effects of crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic on exacerbating existing inequalities in academic work, as the unequal gender distribution of time and type of work during lockdowns showed, with men

engaging more in research and publication work, and women more in teaching and management work.

Future lines of research also need to address what resistance is articulated against academic knowledge and freedom, particularly critical gender, queer and race studies, by so-called anti-gender actors that actively oppose such knowledge, and attack scholars working on these subjects (Paternotte and Verloo, 2020; Ahrens et al., 2021). In an increasingly challenging context for gender studies and academic freedom, research on the counter-resistances on the part of university community, academics and management, to support gender and intersectionality studies and scholars, and construct a more democratic and violence-free university are of utmost relevance.

Studies that monitor and assess gender-based violence in academia, the effectiveness of policies adopted to address cases of sexual, sexist, racist and LGBTI-phobic harassment, and the dynamics of mobilization of students, faculty, and society to denounce such violence and build a violence-free university are much needed. Finally, practices that challenge competitive, neoliberal, productivity-oriented academia through experiences of feminist caring and collaborative research highlight the transformative role of nurturing positive emotions of joy, friendship, and pleasure in the knowledge process, as in Johansson and colleagues' (2024) account. They provide hope in the possibility to construct an alternative, inclusive and joyful academy, where reflexive collective learning becomes more important than individualistic academic performance, and power inequalities are counteracted, opening the way to theories and practices of feminist academia.

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