

Article

# Organized Dogmatism Controls the Message about Gender Bias in the Academy

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**Abstract:** The “dominant gender narrative” in science holds that bias against women is pervasive and occurs in every domain, including tenure-track hiring, letters of recommendation, awards, grants, journal publications, authorship assignment, citations, salaries, promotions, and teaching evaluations. Many of these claims are repeatedly broadcast despite their *nullification by larger, stronger studies and meta-analyses that do not find gender bias*. Because these stronger studies are cited less often, there exists a false belief among many faculty that gender bias is omnipresent in the tenure-track academy. As an example of this false belief, 248 U.S. faculty were surveyed about their beliefs regarding gender bias. They overestimated the extent of such bias in every domain. We illustrate this misalignment of beliefs by focusing on just one of the many domains in which bias against women is alleged but has been nullified by stronger studies: tenure-track hiring. We show that the dominant narrative of pervasive bias in favor of hiring men is not supported by the evidence. The reality is the opposite of what is believed, with women preferred over comparable men: multiple sources of evidence demonstrate that in tenure-track hiring in the United States and many European countries, women have an advantage over equally-accomplished men. Yet, the claim of bias against hiring women faculty continues to be widely cited in the premier science media. Challenging the gender narrative should be part of normal scientific discourse; however, doing so often evokes a backlash—as documented in testimonials by researchers who have been attacked.

**Keywords:** censorship in science; misaligned faculty beliefs; gender bias; academic hiring; organized dogmatism

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## 1. Introduction

A popular claim in both the North American and European academies is that women face unique and pervasive hurdles at nearly every stage of professorial life. As we show below, it is alleged that women are discriminated against when it comes to: (a) getting strong letters of recommendation when they apply for tenure-track (permanent) professorial positions; (b) being hired for tenure-track (permanent) faculty positions; (c) receiving tenure and their subsequent rate of promotion; (d) receiving grant funding; (e) having their papers accepted by journals; (f) being financially remunerated; (g) receiving prestigious scientific awards such as membership in the National Academy of Sciences; (h) receiving fair teaching evaluations by students; (i) being cited; and (j) being awarded authorship for participating in team science.

In view of these claims of gender bias across all the above domains, it might seem surprising that large numbers of women nevertheless seem to thrive in faculty positions—and for the past 15 years in the U.S., women have earned more advanced degrees (master's and doctoral degrees) than men. However, as we show below, claims of pervasive gender bias are often not aligned with the totality of empirical evidence, which often—though not always—reveals gender parity or even a pro-woman bias. Why has this mismatch occurred? We argue that the phenomenon of *organized dogmatism* is creating a schism between researchers engaging in the scientific method—in which empiricism and skepticism undergird discourse—and researchers engaging in a politically- and personally-motivated persuasion campaign designed to recruit adherents to their closely-held beliefs, with little regard for scientific evidence. *Our controversial idea is that people's understanding of sexism against women in academic science is being deliberately controlled and molded by those with a political and personal stake in the narrative.*<sup>1</sup> This possibility should concern us all, because if women believe the dominant narrative in the media, they may self-select out of scientific careers due to fear of bias. In reality, women in academic science are experiencing many advantages today, along with some disadvantages that we must work to rectify. But we can only rectify *actual* meaningful disadvantages if we know what they are, and stating that the entire enterprise is biased serves to scatter resources rather than targeting them appropriately.

Elsewhere, researchers have examined claims of gender bias in all of the domains just mentioned, finding support for some of these claims, but not for most. Because of length constraints, in this paper we focus on one of the particularly important domains listed above, that of tenure-track hiring. We summarize the evidence supporting our argument of gender parity or, more commonly, pro-woman bias in tenure-track hiring. We then describe recently published analyses addressing the questionable validity of claims of bias against hiring women for permanent faculty positions. We conclude by discussing

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<sup>1</sup> Although this paper is focused on the academy, examples of a similar controlled manipulation exist outside the academy. A reviewer of this paper provided one such example. “In the first paragraph of the foreword of the report *Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition: Statistics and Trends*,” produced by FAO, the United Nations, and others, the following assertion is prominent: “Millions are expected to be at risk of worsening hunger in the near future.... In this context, social and gender inequalities are also on the rise, with women and girls being among the most affected by these shocks.” This bold statement highlights the vulnerability of girls and women. There is indeed striking and persistent nutritional disparity between the sexes—except it runs in the completely opposite direction to that stated: boys are more stunted than girls.”

examples of the negative reaction to those who question claims of bias against women, and the often substantial consequences borne by these researchers.

The background and data supporting our argument that anti-woman gender bias in tenure-track hiring is false come from a 5-year adversarial collaboration by a team of researchers who endeavored to reconcile their disparate views about bias against women faculty, as well as an ongoing international collaboration of 22 scholars from the U.S., Sweden, France, Malaysia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada, Italy, and Singapore demonstrating a misalignment of *faculty beliefs about gender bias* with *actual empirical findings* related to gender bias (Ceci et al., 2023, 2026, in prep).

## 2. A Five-Year Adversarial Collaboration

In a 5-year investigation, three researchers with differing views collaborated in an effort to resolve their long-standing disagreements regarding gender bias in six academic domains (Ceci et al., 2023). By the end of this five-year effort, these researchers arrived at an agreement on a number of issues that had previously divided them. In the preface to their adversarial collaboration, they explained that the reason it took them five years to finish the project is that both sides were convinced that their previous positions were correct, and they were thus reluctant to accept evidence that undermined their prior claims. This reluctance to abandon previous positions existed on both sides. Achieving a resolution to their differing positions required incessant back-and-forth between the two sides, new analyses and meta-analyses, and critiques of former analyses. These researchers stated that it was the most difficult research project they ever undertook in their long careers as active researchers. Each side was eventually persuaded by the totality of evidence to modify some of its prior positions. The result should be embraced as a rare demonstration of successful adversarial collaboration (Ceci et al., 2023), even if it does not please partisans on each side who disagree with some of the concessions their side made.

In the published abstract to this lengthy adversarial report (57 pages in the journal plus two online series of meta-analyses), the authors summarized their findings as follows:

We synthesized the vast, contradictory scholarly literature on gender bias in academic science from 2000 to 2020. ...Our approach relied on a combination of meta-analysis and analytic dissection. We evaluated the empirical evidence for gender bias in six key contexts in the tenure-track academy: (a) tenure-track hiring, (b) grant funding, (c) teaching ratings, (d) journal acceptances, (e) salary, and (f) recommendation letters. We also explored the gender gap in a seventh area, (g) journal productivity, because it can moderate bias in other contexts. Contrary to omnipresent claims of sexism in these domains appearing in top journals, we found that tenure-track women are at parity with men in three domains (grant funding, journal acceptances, and recommendation letters) and are advantaged over men in the fourth domain of hiring. For teaching ratings and salary, we found evidence of bias against women, although gaps in salary were much smaller than often claimed .... Given the substantial resources directed at reducing gender bias in science, it is imperative to develop a clear understanding of where such efforts are justified, and of how resources can best be directed to mitigate sexism when and where it exists.” (Ceci et al., 2023)

In sum, this 5-year adversarial collaboration found evidence of bias in teaching evaluations of women—which contained more negative terms such as “disorganized” and “bossy.” Also, in one experiment, U.S. researchers found that when women gave the same lecture as men, the women were rated lower (although a larger Swedish study with a sample of economics students did not replicate this finding). The U.S. researchers also found evidence of bias in salaries, with women earning less than their male counterparts, although the magnitude of this gap was much smaller than the often-claimed statement that female faculty are paid only 82 cents on every dollar earned by male faculty. (Specifically, after including controls and moderators for rank, age, discipline, etc., the gender pay gap was 3.6% rather than the 18% customarily reported in annual salary surveys.) For example, men are more likely to be older and hence to be full professors than women are, and controlling for age/rank alone reduces the gender pay gap from \$13,000 to \$5400, leading Kim et al. to conclude from their analyses, “This finding indicates that the primary factor contributing to the lower base pay of women faculty compared to men is their lower representation in higher faculty ranks.” This is a form of Simpson’s Paradox, which Ceci et al. (2026, in prep) point out has figured prominently in gender bias court cases:

In the 1970s, UC Berkeley was sued for sex discrimination because only 35% of women were admitted to its graduate schools, whereas 44% of men were admitted. However, Berkeley ultimately won the lawsuit by showing that women were as or more likely than men to be admitted to more than half the departments; the gap occurred because women disproportionately applied to programs with lower acceptance rates. When analyses focused on within-program admissions rather than between program ones, there was even statistically significant evidence of a small bias favoring women overall. (Bickel et al., 1975)

Thus, the frequently cited 18% gender pay gap is due to a form of Simpson’s Paradox—aggregating men’s and women’s salaries across fields in which different proportions of men and women are employed, with men employed more often in fields that pay more (e.g., engineering, finance) and women employed more often in lower-paying fields, such as education and social work. However, when the salaries are disaggregated it can be seen that men and women are similarly remunerated in both high-paying and lower-paying fields, particularly when productivity, experience, and type of institution are taken into account.

Regarding the other four domains studied, the researchers found no gender differences in three of them (grants, journals, and letters of recommendation), and a sizable advantage that favored women in one domain: being hired on tenure track. Thus, they found bias against women in only two of the six domains that were studied, and they found bias against men in the important domain of tenure-track hiring. Other researchers analyzed additional domains and found some instances of bias in favor of men (being invited to join authorship teams; citations) and some instances of bias in favor of women, such as being recipients of prestigious scientific awards (Card et al., 2022, 2023). Prior to 1990, women’s chance of being inducted into the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences was lower than men’s, but beginning around 1990, women’s chance was greater than men’s, and in the past decade or so *women have been 2 to 15 times more likely* to be inducted into these prestigious organizations than men with similar publications and citations.

In what follows, we reprise the claim of pervasive gender bias, and we extend it by describing additional evidence. We do not argue that bias against women never occurred in the past in the academy (it surely did, as has been pointed out by Ceci et al., 2023, 2026 in prep, and others), nor do we argue that gender bias may have formerly existed but is completely absent today. We fully acknowledge that bias existed in the past (as one of many examples of bias, there was a time when women were not granted paid maternity leaves after giving birth). We also acknowledge that bias continues to exist in some forms today, as shown by the 3.6% salary gap, which despite being much smaller than the 18% that has been claimed, is nevertheless damaging because even a small recurrent pay gap can accumulate into a substantial difference over a forty-year career.

Despite these instances of past and present bias, we show that many current claims of bias are not supported by the full corpus of scientific evidence, and furthermore, they have not been supported by the evidence for at least several decades. In view of the extensive analyses that support this statement, it should not be a controversial conclusion. In fact, it ought to be embraced as evidence of important progress toward gender equity. However, proponents of this anti-bias position have consistently been attacked for espousing it. As we show, they have been referred to as “right-wing misogynists” intent on setting back progress by promoting “toxic myths” and have been likened to tobacco researchers whose denial of its carcinogenic properties resulted in millions of deaths. We provide empirical evidence for these claims, focusing on the domain of tenure-track hiring. This focus on hiring is warranted for three reasons: (1) length considerations limit the number of domains that can be addressed here; (2) others already have provided extensive evidence of gender equity for the other domains (e.g., Ceci et al., 2023, 2026 in prep); and (3) tenure-track hiring is the most important and well-researched domain because it leads to a lifetime appointment, and bias in hiring is a prerequisite to detecting bias in other domains such as salary, journal publications, grants, awards, etc.

Before reviewing evidence against the claim of bias in hiring women, it is important to underscore that the conclusions we draw in this paper are supported by the above-mentioned Ceci et al. (2023) adversarial collaboration and by the large-scale transnational study by Ceci et al. (2026, in prep). The former was a team of colleagues who had a history of publishing opposing claims. As noted above, the following conclusions were endorsed by both sides of this collaboration; two domains (teaching and salary) exhibited bias against women faculty, the former with only modest confidence; and both sides agreed that there was no bias in three other domains (grants,<sup>2</sup> journals, and letters of recommendation). Finally, both sides agreed that women had a significant advantage in tenure-track hiring. In their follow-up study, Ceci et al. (2026, in prep) extended this evidence by conducting a series of new meta-analyses that underscored the gender neutrality in the academy. This should have ended partisan debate, but it has not.

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<sup>2</sup> Kahn et al.'s (2022a) series of meta-analyses found no evidence that women's grants fared worse than men's in the United States, which was the source for over 80% of their grant data. However, they did find some signs of gender bias in European grants, especially in older studies.

### 3. The Dominant Narrative Regarding Gender Bias

We begin with what is termed the “dominant narrative” regarding gender bias. It can be summarized as the claim that discrimination against women is omnipresent in the tenure-track academy. Specifically, it is frequently alleged that bias against women exists in all of the following domains: (a) letters of recommendation, (b) tenure-track hiring, (c) tenure and promotion, (d) grant awards, (e) journal reviews, (f) salaries, (f) prestigious awards, (g) teaching evaluations, (h) citations, and (i) authorship credit. In addition to the above-cited adversarial collaboration, there have been numerous meta-analyses showing no gender bias in grants (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022a; Schmaling & Gallo, 2023; Rissler et al., 2020), journal publications (Kahn et al., 2022b), and letters of reference (e.g., Bernstein et al., 2022).

### 4. Claims of Bias against Women in Tenure-Track Hiring

Claims about biased tenure-track hiring are pervasive and repeatedly echoed in the prestigious science media. Here are eight such claims (we could provide many more, but we think readers will get the point from these eight examples). They reflect widespread claims of gender bias in hiring, most of which appeared in the elite media and prestige science outlets:

“Studies have shown that people rate men’s competence more highly than women’s when assessing identical job applications.” (*Nature*, 7 March, 2024, Editorial)

“It has been shown that the same academic CV may earn a job candidate significantly worse evaluations on mentorability, competence, and hireability if it is signed with a female name instead of a male one.” (Malecki et al., 2024, *Science Education*, p. 3)

“Implicit bias is pervasive. Men are preferred to women even if they have the same accomplishments. Psychologists have shown this by testing scientists’ responses to fictitious CVs that are identical other than coming from ‘John’ or ‘Jennifer.’” (Witze, 2020, *Nature*, p. 583)

“Researchers in recent years have found that women are less likely than men to be hired and promoted, and face greater barriers to getting their work published.” (Casselman, 2021, *New York Times*)

“Women ... are penalized in hiring decisions when compared with equally qualified men.” (Fortunato et al., 2018, *Science*)

“When fictitious or real people are presented as women in randomized experiments, they receive lower ratings of competence from scientists.” (Witteaman et al., 2019, *The Lancet*, p. 531)

“Considerable research has shown...evaluation criteria contain arbitrary and subjective components that disadvantage women faculty.” (National Academy of Sciences, 2007, pp. 4–5)

“Research has pointed to bias in peer review and hiring...a female applicant had to...publish at least three more papers in a prestigious science journal or an additional

20 papers in lesser-known specialty journals to be judged as productive as a male applicant.” (Hill et al., 2010, p. 24)

On the basis of such statements, one might assume that the evidence for bias against hiring women over comparable men would be both strong and convincing. However, it is not. In fact, as we will show, the evidence supports the opposite conclusion: women who apply for tenure-track positions usually have a significant advantage over equally-accomplished men. Three sources of data support this claim of pro-female hiring bias. We will describe two of these sources here. The first is referred to as vignette-matching (or CV-matching) experiments. In these studies, faculty are asked to rate hypothetical CVs or vignettes that are identical except for one feature: one CV has a woman’s name on it and the other has a man’s name. All else is identical in these CVs/vignettes (journal publications, teaching experience, awards, degree-granting institution, etc.).

## 5. Matched-CV Experiments

There have been seven published studies of matched CVs or matched vignettes, the first appearing in 1999 and the most recent appearing in 2025.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 lists these seven studies and their sample sizes. In each experiment, faculty members were asked to rate CVs or vignettes that were identical except for gender. In some experiments, faculty members were asked to rank CVs in order of preference for hiring (so-called hirability ratings), while in other experiments faculty were asked to rate the overall strength of the CVs and how much salary they would recommend if the person was hired, and/or how willing they would be to mentor the applicant if hired. Most of these experiments are between-subjects, meaning one group of faculty rated the female CV and a different group of faculty rated the male version of the same CV, and their ratings were then compared.

**Table 1:** Seven matched-CV or matched-vignette experiments in which the credentials of hypothetical male and female applicants for tenure-track positions were held constant. (See footnote 3 for an 8<sup>th</sup> experiment that is unpublished.)

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Steinpreis et al. (1999) (N = 238)
Carey et al. (2020) (N = 896)
Carlsson et al. (2020) (N = 775)
Williams and Ceci (2015) (N = 871)
Henningsen et al. (2021) (N = 481)
Solga et al. (2023) (N = 1,688)
Solga et al. (2025) (N = 1,882)

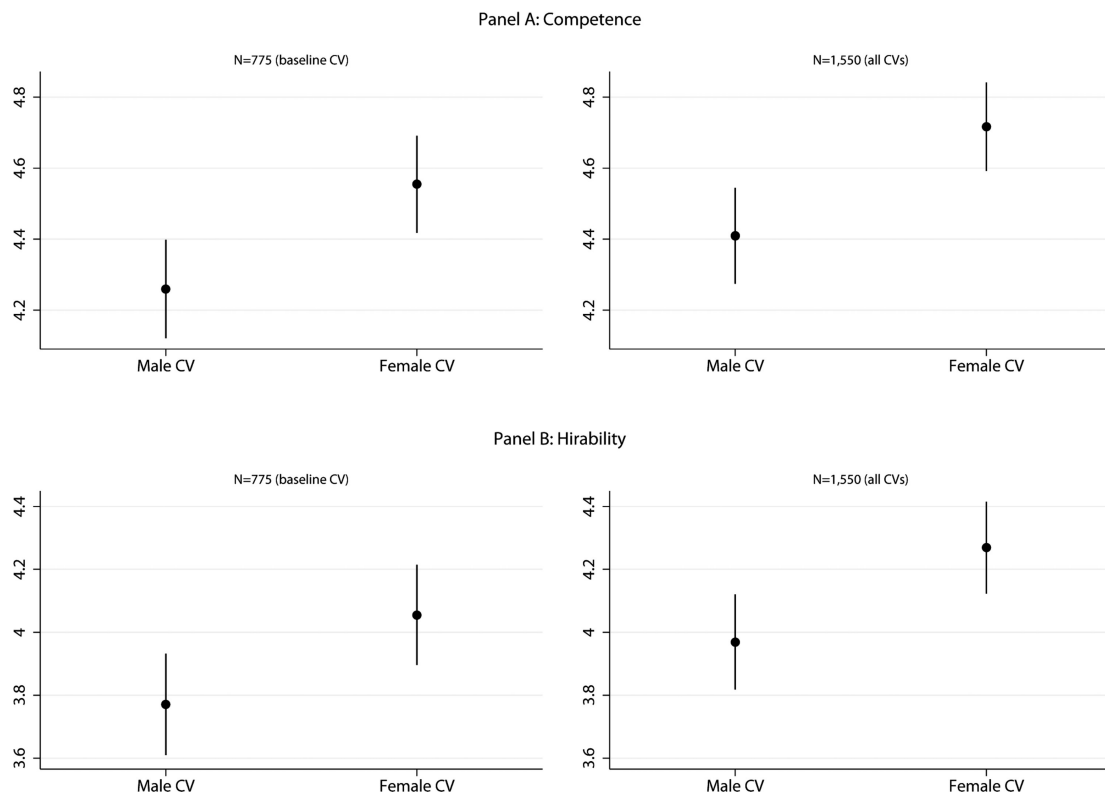
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Six out of these seven matched-CV experiments found that a CV with a woman’s name was preferentially evaluated. Faculty across North America and Europe rated the women

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<sup>3</sup> Since we initially wrote this paper an eighth matched-CV study has been conducted with 796 biology and chemistry professors, which found a significant pro-female tenure/promotion bias ([link to the article](#)).

as stronger than the men, even though their CVs were identical. The sole exception was the smallest and oldest of the seven studies, [Steinpreis et al. \(1999\)](#) (N = 238). (It is also the most cited study, which cannot be simply due to it being the oldest, because it continues to be cited today more often than all but one of the subsequent studies.) The female advantage in the six studies is often quite large; women are preferred over men between 56% and 75% of the time (these are large effects). Below are two examples of female preferences in tenure-track hiring, one from data in Scandinavia by [Carlsson et al. \(2020\)](#) (Figure 1) and one from the United States by [Williams and Ceci \(2015\)](#) (Figure 2).

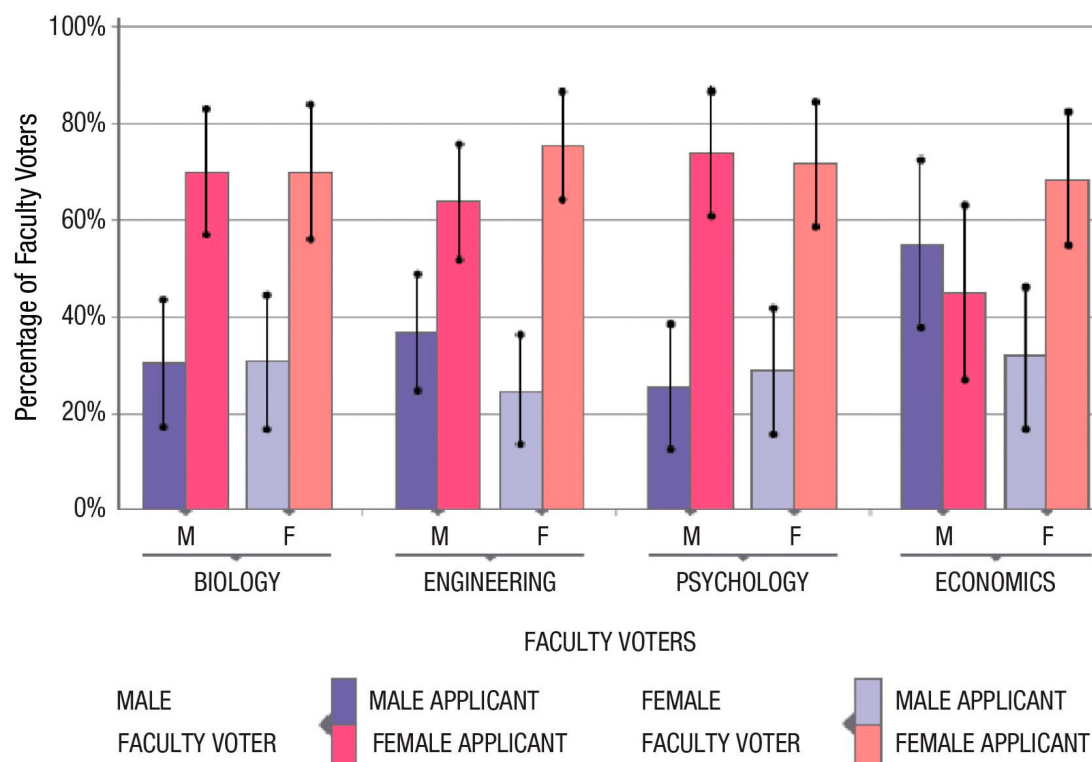


**Figure 1:** Ratings of CVs for male and female candidates. (Panel A: Competence; Panel B: Hirability.) Note: the gender difference in each graph is statistically significant.

Carlsson et al. were surprised by their findings; they expected the opposite results:

“We expected our survey experiment to reveal a male advantage.... We also expected female candidates to have a lower return to children and strong CVs than males.... Contrary to our main hypothesis, however...female candidates are perceived as both more competent and hireable compared to equally qualified male candidates.” ([Carlsson et al., 2020](#))

As can be seen in Figure 2, [Williams and Ceci \(2015\)](#) also found consistent preference for the hypothetical female job applicant over the identically-accomplished male applicant. In their words: “Contrary to prevailing assumptions, men and women faculty from all four fields preferred female applicants 2-to-1 over identically-qualified males with matching lifestyles (both single, married, divorced), except male economists who showed no gender preference” ([Williams & Ceci, 2015](#)).



**Figure 2:** Ratings of the identical CVs by faculty in four disciplines. Both male and female faculty in three of the disciplines strongly favored the CV that had a woman’s name on it over the one with a man’s name. The only exception were male economists who rated both CVs similarly.

The largest female advantage in matched-CV experiments was reported by Henningsen et al. (2021) who found that German, Swiss, and Austrian women were preferred 75% of the time (i.e., 3 out of 4) over identically-accomplished men.

It is unclear why the Steinpreiss et al. study found a preference for male CVs. Perhaps it reflected a pro-male bias that existed when the data were collected (mid-to-late 1990s), but ceased to exist in more recent times as equal opportunity became more meaningfully implemented. On the other hand, when the Steinpreiss et al. data were collected, there was already a pro-female advantage in *actual real-world* tenure-track hiring. We turn to this evidence next.

## 6. Analyses of Actual Tenure-Track Hiring

Actual hiring data (i.e., not hypothetical matched-CV experiments but, rather, actual tenure-track hiring for real jobs) show a similar pro-female hiring advantage. In their 2023 adversarial collaboration, Ceci et al. reviewed a number of analyses demonstrating this hiring advantage for women. Importantly, there were no studies demonstrating a pro-male hiring advantage. In the past, critics of the finding of pro-female hiring advantage argued that women were bypassed in favor of men, and that this is the source of the repeated media claims above. As can be seen in the actual hiring data reported by the National Research Council (NRC), women were less likely to apply for tenure-track jobs than men, *but when women did apply they were hired more often than men*. And this was true for every discipline studied by the NRC (Figure 3).

Many other studies, both in the U.S. and Europe, reveal similar pro-women hiring biases. For example, an analysis of professorial hires between 2007 to 2017 at the largest Norwegian university found that women were slightly more successful than men (Moratti, 2020). And as seen below, on a national level, pro-female hiring occurs in North American computer science where the female advantage is very large. Once again, if women applied for professorial positions, they were usually more successful in getting hired than men. The problem is that women are not as likely to apply, and that this is true in most countries.

Field	Transitions for PhD-to-tenure-track positions by field at the research institutions surveyed			
	Doctoral pool	Pools for tenure-track positions		
	Percentage of female PhDs (1999–2003)	Mean percentage of female applicants	Mean percentage of female applicants invited to interview	Mean percentage of first offers that went to women
Biology	45	26	28	34
Chemistry	32	18	25	29
Civil engineering	18	16	30	32
Electrical engineering	12	11	19	32
Mathematics	25	20	28	32
Physics	14	12	19	20

Note: Data were obtained from National Research Council (2010, Table S-2, p. 7).

**Figure 3:** Fraction of female applicants for tenure track positions invited to interview and offered positions at 89 U. S research universities. (National Research Council, 2010, p. 8, Findings 3-10, 3-13.)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe additional evidence for the pro-female hiring advantage; however, others have already done so. (See Ceci et al., 2026 for a review of other studies that accord with this conclusion, including large national studies as well as institutional hiring data.) There are no studies reporting the opposite (a pro-male hiring advantage), despite the frequent media claims that women must publish much more than men to be equally competitive for tenure-track jobs.

None of this means that women do not face significant hurdles in the academy. A number of barriers have been documented. For example, women are more likely to drop out at every rank in the academy, including when they reach the rank of full professor. And as already noted, women are paid ~3.6% less than men, which is not as great a difference as the 18% that has repeatedly been alleged (see Ceci et al., 2023 for numerous claims to this effect), but which can nevertheless accumulate into very large sums over the course of a career. Women are also less likely to apply for tenure-track positions than their male counterparts, controlling for the different numbers of men and women who receive PhDs. For example, in the U.S., 45% of PhDs in biology go to women, but only 26% of applications for tenure-track jobs in biology come from women. (Yet, 34% of offers go to women, which is disproportionately more than their 26% of applications.) In chemistry, 32% of PhDs are awarded to women but only 18% of applicants are women. (Once again, women are more likely to get offers—29%.) This same pro-female advantage exists in all fields in which women are underrepresented (civil engineering, electrical engineering, physics, and mathematics; data from National Research Council (2010) table S-2, p. 7).

Myriad reasons influence a woman’s decision not to compete for tenure-track jobs. A big factor appears to be plans to form a family. In her survey of 1,300 National Institutes of

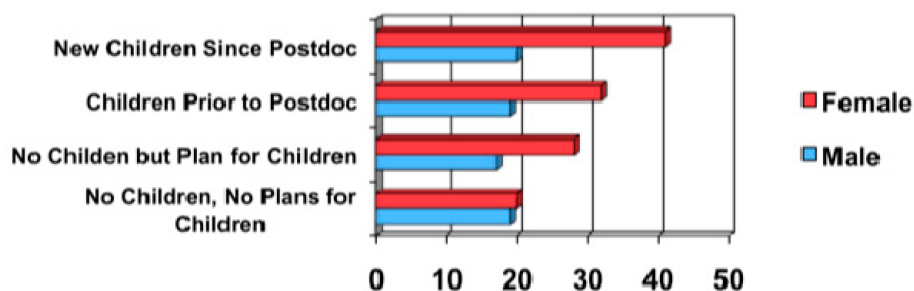
Health postdocs, [Martinez et al. \(2007\)](#) found that 21% of women vs. only 7% of men said that plans to have children (or more children) were “extremely important” in choosing a career in academic research. Similarly, a survey of 3455 scientists at top-20 departments reported that female postdocs were 50% more likely to report that they were worried a science career would keep them from having a family. And in their survey of postdoctoral fellows, [Goulden et al. \(2011; Goulden & Mason, 2006\)](#) were the first (but not last) to report that family formation plans were disproportionately associated with women-PhDs’ life trajectories in the large University of California (UC) system, shifting their goals away from obtaining faculty research positions in science (Figure 4). In their words:

“The issue of children is quite dramatic in influencing UC postdoctoral women’s decisions to abandon professorial career goals with research emphasis. Among postdoctoral scholars with no children and no future plans to have them, women and men are essentially equally likely to indicate that they shifted their career goal away from professor with research emphasis, with roughly one in five doing so (see Figure 4). Future plans to have children, however, affect female and male postdoctoral scholars differently, with women more likely to shift their career goal (28% of women vs. 17% of men). Having children prior to entering a postdoctoral position in the UC system and having a new child since entering the position appear to ratchet up the pressure further on women to drop their professor with research emphasis career goal, but does not do so for men. Women postdoctoral scholars who had children after they became a postdoctoral scholar in the UC system were twice as likely as men who experienced a similar life-changing event to change their career goal (41% vs. 20%) and twice as likely to do so as women with no children and no future plans to have children (41% vs. 20%).”

Relatedly, successful job candidates are increasingly expected to have completed two to three postdoctoral fellowships before being hired for a tenure-track position. This means that a woman who is in her late 20s when she finishes her PhD will be nearing age 40 before she could expect to be tenured. Men planning families are less affected by their biological clock. This is another example of structural barriers that impede some women from applying for permanent (tenure-track) jobs. Having said this, one of the reviewers of this manuscript took issue with our claim of a structural barrier, arguing that elite performance in any domain (not just in the academy) usually requires extreme dedication and long working hours.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the reviewer’s words: “People embrace opportunities to develop cutting-edge expertise with different degrees of enthusiasm, based in part on their individuality. This even distinguishes elite STEM doctoral students trained in the best universities in the world who subsequently go on to become distinguished STEM leaders relative to their graduate student peers who pursue more typical STEM careers or other endeavors in life ([McCabe et al., 2020](#)). Elite STEM graduate students bring personal attributes to elite STEM graduate training programs that differentiate their accomplishments decades later. They are “super typical” on the attributes that distinguish STEM professionals from the general population. And in general, *even among ideal conditions and job positions*, just as there are individual differences in the extent to which people are willing to invest time in their careers, there are also gender differences, which are merely aggregated individual differences ([Ceci et al., 2021; Lubinski et al., 2023](#), Figure 2c, p. 289). While individual differences between groups always pale in comparison to individual differences within all demographic groupings (which is one reason why equal opportunity is so important), surely these robust empirical findings should be in the mix when evaluating the efficacy of “equal opportunity” ([Lubinski et al.,](#)



**Figure 4:** Willingness to apply for a faculty research position as a function of plans for future family formation.

The collision between women’s biological clocks and the demands and timing of tenure decisions results in a regrettable loss of talent that society should strenuously endeavor to remedy. Many innovations have been tried and some could be adopted broadly, such as making the tenure schedule more family-friendly. But it is essential to distinguish this source of women’s underrepresentation from the claim that women are underrepresented in the tenure-track academy because of evaluative bias—such as the claim that faculty prefer to hire men over identically-accomplished women, or the claim that women applicants must have published significantly more than their male counterparts, or have published in more esteemed journals, or be cited more than their male counterparts. As we have shown, none of this is true. The NRC hiring data as well as many other sources of data (for additional evidence see, e.g., [Ceci et al., 2023](#)) all show that *if a woman does apply for a tenure-track position, her chances of being hired exceed those of her male counterparts*. And this is particularly true in the fields in which women are most underrepresented, such as mathematics, engineering, physics, computer science, and chemistry. As one of many forms of evidence, a national audit of North American computer science hiring found that women PhDs applied to fewer faculty jobs than men: women applied to 6 positions while men applied to 25 positions. Despite this, women applicants were offered twice as many interviews per application (0.77, whereas men received only 0.37 interviews). Further, women received 0.55 job offers per application, whereas men received only 0.19, leading the authors of this national analysis to conclude, “Obviously women were much more selective in where they applied, and also much more successful in the application process” ([Stankovic & Aspray, 2003](#), p. 31).

Thus, it is important when searching for sources of women’s underrepresentation in the tenure-track academy to distinguish between *bias that leads to a preference to hire, fund, publish, and remunerate men over equally competent women (i.e., evaluative bias)* versus *cultural, social, biological, and systemic influences that may diminish women’s participation in the academy for reasons other than blatant male preferences*. For example, [Diekman et al. \(2011\)](#) have shown that female students are more likely to work in a computer science lab that has walls adorned with posters of nature scenes rather than Star Wars. Such cultural or social factors may result in women’s underrepresentation, but this is not the result of blatant anti-female hiring. The same is true of many other forms of cultural and social biases, such as women being stereotypically less self-promotional than

2023, Conclusion, p. 296). They set base rate expectations for what is likely to happen under equal opportunity circumstances for individuals and aggregates of individuals who share a common feature.”

males, which could result in men being paid more and promoted earlier (Ceci et al., 2023).<sup>5</sup> And, of course, many women have surmounted such cultural factors and, conversely, not all men have benefitted from them. Although removing such defaults could increase the representation of women, they do not penalize one gender over another when they exhibit the identical behavior (i.e., apply for jobs), as illustrated by the false claims that faculty evaluate the CV of a man as being superior to the identical CV when it bears a woman's name.

## 7. Push-Back against People Who Challenge the Dominant Narrative

Above we noted that women face barriers in the academy (for example, concerning salary and teaching evaluations), and they are also less likely to apply for tenure-track positions due to a variety of reasons, the foremost of which appear to be related to family-formation plans. It is our belief that women continue to face these barriers even if actual hiring, grant funding, and journal publishing are gender-equitable. However, we have argued that the barriers women face are not evaluative biases of the kind that are repeatedly asserted in the premier science media, such as claims that women's CVs, grants, and journal submissions are rated lower than identical CVs, grants, and journal submissions by men. Compelling evidence shows such claims of evaluative bias are unsupported. As seen in the NRC findings above and in the matched-CV-experiment results, there are even some domains in which women are actually advantaged over comparable men. And large-scale meta-analyses have repeatedly shown that grants and journal acceptances are also not biased against women (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022a, 2022b). Instead, the barriers women face are cultural, systemic, and biological, such as the need to complete two or more postdocs to be competitive for a tenure-track position, which means that women desiring to have children will be in their early 40s with rapidly-declining fertility before gaining job security.

A sadly common reaction to those who question claims about evaluative gender bias is to dismiss them as inept, corrupt, right-wing, misogynist, or to refer to their beliefs as "manufactured myths" (e.g., Reichs & Richardson, 2020) or the product of research incompetence. An example of the latter is a biologist and blogger who wrote about our 2015 findings published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (which had undergone seven reviews):

"Two crustaceans claim that women have an advantage of 2-to-1 over men in academic hiring.... I do not believe a word of what passes as experimental research in psychology. I believe that the vast majority of psychologists and that vast {sic} majority of crustacean species have the same qualification to design experiments, the same ability to carry out research, and the same training in statistics to properly analyze the data. Psychology is not a science; it has never developed an ethos of repeatability, falsifiability, and honesty, and most research in psychology is about as scientific as the research conducted by Pentecostal theologians." ([link to the article](#), Accessed 3/2/26).

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, Ceci et al. (2026, in prep) meta-analyzed the data pertaining to rate of tenure and promotion, and found no support for the claim that men were promoted faster.

Some researchers have been threatened with retraction, sanctions, and occasionally even job termination. To give readers a sense of the phenomenology, below we provide examples of such harsh reactions, which can have significant negative consequences for scientific progress and for personal as well as professional well-being. Many, if not most, gender researchers who have published findings that undermined the gender bias narrative have been pursued with ad hominem attacks and threats of retraction due to claims of having committed ethical and, at times, legal improprieties.

When findings that challenge the dominant narrative are discouraged—or worse, suppressed—entire bodies of research may promote false conclusions (Clark et al., 2023). This is already happening in the domain of gender bias, as can be seen by the sample quotes appearing in the mainstream science media presented in the introduction to this paper. And the repercussions can be and frequently are felt by researchers who have challenged the dominant narrative.

We conducted an informal non-scientific email survey of 40 active gender researchers who were cited in various articles. We asked them what happened when they attempted to publish their findings, and to provide examples. Twenty-one gender researchers responded, eighteen of whom described various threats and harassments they encountered as a direct result of their findings refuting the dominant narrative. As can be seen, they perceive dangers facing those whose research does not support the dominant narrative. A number of them indicated that they are considering no longer doing gender research, and stated that they discourage their graduate students and early-career colleagues from working on questions that challenge the dominant gender narrative, out of fear that this could lead to negative consequences in publishing, receiving funding, and being hired. (If true, this sorry state of affairs undermines core tenets of science, such as skepticism.)

Here are some of the responses we received, edited for length and clarity:

*Regarding referrals for DEI violations and popular-course shut-downs for political reasons:* “I’ve always tried to write carefully and sensitively on this subject, but I’ve still managed to accumulate some war stories. For example, an academic paper I wrote...sparked a minor online controversy and got me reported to my university’s diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) administrators.... Shortly after that kerfuffle, a course on human nature and politics, which showcased work by myself, David Buss, Nicholas Christakis, Jonathan Haidt, Steven Pinker, Michael Shermer, and many others, was cancelled after a small number of students complained (most apparently loved it). I know I’m not alone among sex-differences researchers in wondering sometimes whether I should have stuck to a less controversial topic.... If we want to make the world a better place, we need good science—but that’s impossible if scientists are afraid to diverge from the pre-specified conclusions of a political monoculture.”

*Regarding the (mis)use of IRBs to shut down research that some people found politically unappealing:* “Some participants complained to my IRB about the study, and we got jammed up with some unpleasant IRB audits. Additionally, from what I can gather, a professor also reported me to their campus police department. I was contacted by a police detective at the university who was forwarded my name and email and wanted to ‘ask a few questions’ about my research.”

“I was reported to the IRB when I conducted a study, which included a few questions about gender differences. Luckily, the IRB sided with me and confirmed I did nothing wrong. But I can imagine that at some institutions, the IRBs are more cautious and almost always side with the person filing the complaint.”

*Regarding attempts to limit the career development of an eminent senior woman:* “I have been black-balled from receiving several awards. I also was about to receive a job offer to become a provost when it was pulled back due to left-wing attacks.... The Left also tried to stop my selection to the National Science Board through a letter writing campaign and pressure on a high-ranking politician not to confirm my appointment. I managed to work through it. Through a letter writing campaign, etc., they tried to get me removed from the National Advisory Panel. It did not succeed.”

*Regarding a personal history reflecting decades of marginalization:* “I’ve faced some irritation from colleagues and students; received some bad press in feminist websites; was called sexist in a department meeting once; and suspect (without proof) that my research on sex differences has contributed to me not getting a couple of potential jobs. Also, a colleague on a mailing list got really angry and wrote that she felt bad for my female students, and there have been complaints to my department and to the university equity office about my teaching a biological basis to sex differences. My chair told me recently that I’m being “targeted” by a group of female faculty and graduate students for my teaching on this and related topics. I’ve also been asked to never again offer a graduate survey course that I’ve taught for the last 35 years, because it includes topics on behavior genetics, evolutionary developmental psychology, and sex differences...overall, I’m isolated and treated like a pariah.”

*Regarding ongoing, organized attempts to derail the career of a woman first-time author:* “In response to publishing my findings that undermined claims of gender bias, we were described as ‘beloved of right-wing columnists. We need to approach their work with skepticism, as commentators have largely done.’ It was also claimed that our findings were ‘fatally flawed,’ despite no evidence being provided. We were accused in print of ‘harboring right-wing patriarchal fantasies.’ Two philosophers of science called for our published work to be retracted because ‘Denying gender bias in academia is socially and epistemically detrimental, paralleled to denying anthropogenic climate change, operating similarly to climate change denial...denial of gender bias in academia is epistemically problematic given current societal conditions.’ And, allowing our gender findings to appear in journals was likened to publishing research claiming that tobacco is harmless: ‘the consequences of not doing so (i.e., disqualifying our research) may be even more dangerous...illustrated by the tobacco industry whose dissenting campaign led to the deaths of millions of people worldwide.’”

*Regarding mocking of a researcher’s competence:* A hormone researcher reported that her research on ovulatory cycles and women’s mating desires “has been mocked quite a bit. Replication concerns in some of the work have been used to hand-wave away any concern that hormones might affect women’s behavior. It’s been frustrating. I am often heard saying, “did they even read the paper?” I did grueling detail work to address criticisms and, in my view and that of colleagues, we nailed it. But critics

still reflexively cite my work alongside clearly flawed papers claiming to debunk the work. This is nothing like the horrors others have faced. But the sad outcome here is that little progress gets made (and, ironically, in areas in which women's health and well-being has been ignored)."

*Regarding not-so-veiled threats:* One researcher recounted an audience reaction when a group of women faculty on her campus invited her to discuss her findings that ran counter to the dominant gender narrative. One professor in the audience told her that she hoped the researcher's own children (who attended the same university as the professor in question) never ended up in any of the professor's classes, because "they would not have an easy time there."

Finally, we received a summary about the current state of affairs by Steve Stewart-Williams, an evolutionary scientist who conducts research on gender (Stewart-Williams, *in press*), that is worth repeating here:

"A vocal minority see positing sex differences as more than a mere social faux pas or difference of opinion, and view it instead as a moral transgression. For individuals in this camp, the idea that the sexes are naturally identical has become a sacred belief. Disagreement is seen not as an honest mistake or interesting challenge to be evaluated, but as sacrilege. And the typical response to sacrilege isn't a tolerant appreciation of the wonderful diversity of human lifeways: 'Well, I'm not *personally* into sacrilege, but if other people are, who am I to judge?' Instead, the typical response is to censor, to silence, to cancel, punish, and shun."

## 8. Conclusions

Challenging claims of gender bias should not be controversial, but it is. Sadly, many who have challenged the dominant gender narrative have become the object of campaigns to nullify their research and ostracize them from professional societies (or worse). The Mertonian norm of organized skepticism is fundamentally central if science is to resist the counter-norm of organized dogmatism; skepticism has historically played an important role in debunking what were later shown to be myths. From a philosophy-of-science perspective, "a core strength of science is commitment to self-scrutiny; trust in science is earned by accumulating evidence with an unrelenting commitment to getting it right. This means welcoming doubt, encouraging dissent" (Nosek, 2025).

Today, however, efforts to punish dissenters appear to be limiting the willingness of scholars to challenge claims that support the dominant gender narrative. An organizational response to this is provided by Bloom (2024): the journal *Nature Communications* shepherded the retraction of an article that presented data contradicting the claim that young female scholars fared better if their mentors were women as opposed to men. This analysis by AlShebli et al. (2020) showed that young women actually had fewer publications and citations when their mentors were women. A lengthy campaign by proponents of the dominant gender narrative resulted in the journal retracting this study. (See Bloom (2024) for details of the campaign that culminated in its retraction.) In the aftermath of this campaign, the editors at *Nature Communications* added explicit harm-avoidance "guidance" for future authors, addressing the need to "ensure that the review process takes into account the dimension of potential harm, and that claims

are moderated by a consideration of limitations when conclusions have potential policy implications. We will keep developing our guidelines for manuscripts with sensitive research in the social and behavioral sciences, and in areas with significant societal and public policy impact.”

For researchers who may have considered challenging the data and assumptions surrounding the dominant gender narrative, the *Nature Communications* editorial and explicit author guidelines can be viewed as a veiled warning against even attempting to publish findings that portray women in a negative light. In surveys of psychology professors by Clark and her colleagues (Clark et al., 2024), many reported that in any domain in which men perform better than women, gender discrimination is the only explanation viewed as acceptable. This survey revealed that faculty believed it is unacceptable to explain gender gaps (e.g., in mathematical performance) in any way other than as the result of discrimination against women. Similarly, in surveys of eminent social psychologists, a majority reported that they felt it would be harmful to their careers to report evidence of a genetic contribution to sex differences (von Hippel & Buss, 2017). This suggests an abandonment of Merton’s principle of *organized skepticism*, the norm that scientists should consider all new evidence and theories and be willing to vigorously challenge their own findings (Koppel et al., 2025). When scientists and editorial gatekeepers predetermine what can and cannot be investigated and published on the basis of sociopolitical considerations, they implicitly endorse the counter-norm of organized dogmatism. And in doing so, they shape the scientific literature and workforce in ways that may be decidedly nonoptimal.

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