

# Chapter 1

## Invisible Barriers, Undeclared Wars: Subtle Resistances to Women's Leadership in Academia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Despite the indisputable progress of gender equality in academia in recent decades, the relative stagnancy of women's participation in decision making and resource distribution remains a global issue. There is growing evidence that a large part of gender inequality in higher education and research cannot be explained by explicit measurable factors. Male bias is encoded in societal and academic culture and to a significant extent determines subconscious choices and decisions benefiting men. This chapter analyses cultural reasons behind gender inequality and typifies them in a form of a matrix based on gendered attitudes to women's leadership in academia. The analysis of typical resistances reveals psychological and social mechanisms of subtle gender discrimination and is followed by a set of proposed preventive measures.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In a recent publication, the authors have investigated challenges and deficits in global education with regard to gender inequality (Kurchenko et al., 2021). The study has revealed that, in spite of indisputable steady progress of women's representation in higher education and research, the stagnancy of women's participation in decision-making and resource distribution in academia largely persists worldwide. Though gender equality policy increasingly gets a routine in modern democratic states and institutions, the world still has many years to go to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, which

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7379-2.ch001

is the goal #5 agreed by all UN member states within 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

There is growing evidence that a large part of gender inequality in education and research cannot be explained by explicit and measurable factors (Carnevale et al., 2018). That means that male bias is encoded in societal and academic culture and continues dictating conscious and, moreover, subconscious choices and decisions that benefit men in academia (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Player et al., 2019; Project Implicit, 2020).

In this chapter, the author investigates cultural reasons – both external and internalized – behind gender worldwide inequality among academic staff in the 21st century. The mission of the study is, firstly, to visualize, by means of facts and figures, the existing gender inequality in the sphere of knowledge production and distribution and, secondly, to provide a systematized overview of culture elements discriminating academic women as compared to men. After providing evidence of gender discrimination in the discussed field, the author suggests a solution by displaying successful policies and best practices of overcoming gender inequality in educational and research-performing institutions (RPOs) in West European and North American countries with developed research culture.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Before dealing with cultural reasons of gender discrimination in academia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have to shed some light on the historic origins of such inequality. It occurs only natural today that any interested woman without severe mental or material limitations can opt for higher education (HE) and an academic career. However, this situation should not be taken for granted – it results from women's struggle for the right to receive, produce and share knowledge since the beginning of academia in Europe.

### **First Women in Western European Higher Education in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

*Laura Bassi (1711-1778)*, an Italian woman philosopher and scientist, benchmarked the sensational entrance of women into the male university world in 1732 when the title of 'dottoressa', a teaching position at the Bologna University and honorary membership in the Academy of Sciences of Bologna were conferred on her. Although she had a medieval female degree-holding predecessor Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia, who graduated in philosophy in Padua in 1678, Laura Bassi, according to Cavazza (2016), was the first woman scientist to get a permanent university lecturership – largely due to support of Pope Benedict XIV, who happened to be on her first examination commission. Laura held courses on experimental physics at home for 30 years and was occasionally allowed to lecture at the university on special order of the Bologna Senate. In 1739, she married Doctor of Medicine Giuseppe Veratti. The couple founded a well-equipped laboratory in order to experiment on therapeutic use and atmospheric characteristics of electricity, where i.a. their common student Luigi Galvani, the discoverer of animal electricity, was educated. A mother of five children, Laura Bassi took in 1776 the post of professor of experimental physics at the Bologna Institute of Sciences, where her husband was appointed an assistant. She was considered the first woman, whose professorship is documentary proven (Bassi-Veratti Collection, n.d.).

A daughter of an obscure lawyer, Laura Bassi was an exception among the few women scholars of the Enlightenment era due to her ordinary social origin. Otherwise, entrance into the scientific world

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