For the Handbook of Gender and Experimental Economics (Edward Elgar)

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Section 3. Discrimination, Affirmative Action, Norms, and Identity

1. Experiments on Labor Market Discrimination

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1. Introduction

We provide an overview of the experimental literature on gender discrimination in the labor market. Gender discrimination refers to systematic differences in the treatment of individuals based on their gender. Discrimination can stem from biased beliefs (about characteristics or behavior of a certain group of individuals) or taste (revealing preference for a certain group of individuals). Differential treatment of individuals often leads to disadvantages in opportunities, resources, and outcomes for the discriminated group and can ultimately result in inefficient and sub-optimal outcomes in markets and organizations. For efficiency and fairness considerations, it is essential to identify and understand gender discrimination in the labor market to be able to address and overcome it.

We synthesize the experimental literature by revising gender discrimination in labor markets from a diversity and from an inclusion angle. In terms of diversity, gender discrimination acts as a barrier to entry – who gets hired, selected or promoted. Biases in hiring and promotion decisions, and labor segregation affect the composition of the workforce, resulting in a biased representation of certain gender groups in the labor market. In terms of inclusion, gender discrimination pertains to the treatment of individuals once they are part of an organization. The experiences and dynamics within the organization can affect individuals' opportunities to thrive. Gender discrimination at the workplace can take the form of biased evaluations, work group exclusion, discriminatory dynamics between leaders and workers, and individuals may experience disadvantages due to household-related factors. Lastly, we discuss some promising future research avenues.

Our review focuses on experimental studies addressing explicitly *gender* discrimination in the labor market.[4] For statistical reasons, most experimental studies employ a binary comparison of men and women.[5] Experiments allow researchers to disentangle the effect of gender from other factors that may explain differential treatment and outcomes on the labor market (e.g.,

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[4] We exclude experimental studies that examine discrimination unrelated to gender identity. For example, Bertrand and Duflo (2017); Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004).

[5] Throughout the chapter we use the terms 'female' and 'woman' as well as 'male' and 'man' interchangeably though gender identity and biological sex do not need to be the same. Most of the experimental studies use self-reported gender identity.

ability, education, race), thereby enabling a more precise investigation of the mechanisms underlying gender discrimination.

2. Gender Discrimination and Diversity

Gender diversity is shaped by decisions about who enters and advances in organizations. Experimental research shows that assessments, hiring and promotion decisions can systematically disadvantage one gender, thereby affecting the composition of the workforce. Discrimination can stem from biased and stereotyped beliefs or preference-based animus. Identifying underlying mechanisms is essential to explain persistent gender imbalances in the labor market.

2.1. Assessments and Standards

A pre-requisite for any hiring decision is an assessment and evaluation of the candidate's abilities, attitudes, or effort. Increasing evidence suggests that evaluations are often gender biased. On the one hand, gendered evaluations may arise because men's and women's performances are perceived differently even when their performances or outcomes are *objectively the same*. On the other hand, evaluators may apply different standards, evaluation criteria, and expectations depending on the gender of the individual being assessed. Kübler et al. (2018) conduct a vignette experiment with a nationally representative sample of German firms to measure the extent of gender discrimination in hiring. HR professionals from various industries are asked to rate CVs of fictitious candidates for an apprenticeship position. Female candidates are evaluated worse than males, even after controlling for individual characteristics. The female penalty is equivalent to a lower GPA of one point. The extent of gender discrimination varies across industries. Interestingly, after controlling for industry and firm related covariates, only the share of women in the industry explains the biased evaluation. This result suggests that the prevalence of gendered evaluations is strongly correlated with gender diversity, with discrimination against women being higher in male-dominated industries.

Gendered evaluations are not limited to perceptions of competence or performance but also extend to the standards by which men and women are judged, and social penalties for identical behavior. An important instance and determinant of labor market outcomes are wage negotiations (e.g., Exley et al. 2020). Chotiputsilp et al. (2024) examine whether salary negotiations produce different outcomes depending on the negotiator's gender. In a field experiment, HR professionals in the US and Canada rate fictitious CVs, evaluate candidates and give advice on competitive offers. They find no gender discrimination in candidate evaluations overall. However, female candidates who negotiate their wage are 2.7 percentage points more likely to have their job application rejected than male candidates who do the same, and 3.4 percentage points less likely to be recommended for a senior position. This implies that negotiations backfire for women, while they pay off for men because their negotiation partner associates men's negotiation engagement more favorably with skills. Similar backfiring effects from encouraging women to 'lean in' are found both in the lab (Exley et al. 2020) and the field (Chotiputsilp and Kim 2021).

Beyond individual evaluations, institutional design can shape evaluations and hiring outcomes. Jain and Miller (2025) study committee hiring decisions in a laboratory experiment that varies whether decisions are made by majority voting, unanimous voting, or by a single leader (either randomly selected or self-selected). Compared to unanimous voting, the majority rule leads to

greater discrimination against female candidates. Discrimination is further intensified when decisions are made by self-selected (volunteer) leaders with ultimate authority. Although both male and female volunteer leaders are more likely to hire men, the gender hiring gap appears smaller under female leadership. These findings suggest that discrimination arises not only from biased evaluations but also from decision processes.

2.2. Hiring and Promotion Biases

A large stream of the experimental literature on gender discrimination addresses hiring and promotion decisions. Experiments often feature a situation that resembles an interaction where a manager is matched with at least two workers and must hire or promote one.

Discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions can be driven by differential beliefs and/ or preferences. While the former arises from information asymmetry regarding the worker's productivity (Arrow 1973; Phelps 1972), the latter stems from animus towards workers from a specific group (Becker 1957). When hiring or promoting a worker, the manager commonly does not observe important characteristics of the worker - most notably ability. Given incomplete information, the manager must form beliefs about a worker's ability, possibly using prior expectations, non-binding communication (e.g., cheap-talk promises), credible signals (e.g., credentials), and observable characteristics (e.g., gender) to infer the worker's *unobservable type*. In such a context, the manager may be more likely to hire candidates from one gender because they believe that candidates from that gender are *on average* more productive than those from another gender. This is known as belief-based or statistical (gender) discrimination. Note that the unobservable type can but does not need to be correlated with the observable characteristic; that is, gendered beliefs about ability can be biased.

Several studies underpin the prevalence of belief-based gender discrimination in the labor market. Coffman et al. (2021) use a series of online experiments to understand why women are discriminated in hiring and promotions by isolating beliefs as driver. In seed sessions, participants perform male-typed quizzes. The main experiment employs a design that isolates the sources of gender discrimination. Managers make incentivized hiring decisions between two candidate pools: one consisting of female workers born in even-numbered months and the other of male workers born in odd-numbered months. In one treatment, the pools are labelled as male and female candidates, while in the other, the labels refer to the even or odd birth-month. While managers prefer to hire male over female candidates, it is not specific to *gender* because a similar hiring pattern emerges in the birth-month treatment. The hiring pattern is consistent with statistical discrimination because managers select candidates from the pool they believe to be of higher ability. While taste-based gender discrimination may exist to some degree, beliefs about average group differences (e.g., stereotypical beliefs) play an important role in discriminatory hiring decisions.

Barron et al. (2024) examine different *types* of belief-based gender discrimination in hiring. If a manager must decide between hiring a male or a female candidate and receives equal ability signals, expressing a preference for one gender could potentially reveal the manager's gender-biased beliefs (*explicit* belief-based gender discrimination). On the other hand, if the ability signals of the two candidates are different, the *true* reason underlying a biased hiring decision becomes obscure allowing biased choices to be masked by other observable characteristics (*implicit* belief-based gender discrimination). To detect these behaviors, Barron et al. (2024) design an experiment in which managers make repeated hiring decisions between pairs of CVs.

Managers are incentivized to hire the candidate who performed better in a logic task in a seed session. A job candidate's CV indicates however only the candidate's gender and selectively provided ability signals about a knowledge quiz and a word search task performed in the same seed session. Because only positive ability information appears – while missing information can be interpreted negatively - the design mimics real-world CVs. This variation allows the authors to observe within-subject hiring choices when evaluating candidates in same- or mixed-gender pairs with equal or unequal ability signals. Around 40% of managers engage in explicit gender discrimination, discriminating about twice as often against women (25.8%) than men (12.9%). Surprisingly, managers who *explicitly* discriminate against either gender *implicitly* discriminate only against women. They interpret the prevalence of implicit belief-based discrimination as an aversion to openly display discriminatory behavior and/or reliance on gender stereotypes.

Statistical discrimination can be based on actual (average) characteristics of groups, accurate beliefs, or inaccurate beliefs. Bohren et al. (2023) investigate what they call *inaccurate statistical discrimination*. They argue that disentangling the sources of belief-based discrimination is necessary to avoid attributing the unexplained part of discrimination wrongly to 'taste.' Using a stylized hiring experiment, they find that men outperform women in a logic task and are offered a higher wage on average. Importantly, the gender gap in performance is larger than the gender gap in wage offered (3 points vs. 1 point, both in favor of men). Assuming that beliefs about the gender gap in performance are accurate, the entire wage disparity can be attributed to statistical discrimination. But because the gap in performance is not fully represented in the wage disparity, the residual (i.e., about 2 points) can be attributed to taste-based discrimination *against* men (as their wage falls short of their outperformance). The interpretation changes if managers' beliefs are inaccurate. Indeed, they find that managers believe that men outperform women by about 2 points, which is inaccurate and lower than the actual gap in performance (i.e., 3 points). Using the managers' belief, most of the wage disparity comes from inaccurate beliefs, while the residual attributed to taste-based discrimination becomes marginal.

The findings by Bohren et al. (2023) underscore the importance of inaccurate beliefs. If individuals form inaccurate beliefs and fail to correct them, gender discrimination can persist. Experimental evidence corroborates this pattern even in settings without gender differences in performance. Feld et al. (2022) conduct a field experiment with programmers in the US. They find that despite a lacking gender gap in candidates' programming skills, employers' beliefs are largely biased against female programmers and are strongest among female employers. Providing additional information about candidate's aptitude or personality closes the misperception gap, suggesting that beliefs can be de-biased.

Lepage (2024) models how an employer's experience affects belief formation and discrimination and tests the theoretical model with experiments. When hiring from two equally productive groups, a positive hiring experience leads to self-correction of beliefs driven by more future hiring and learning about the specific pool of candidates. Past negative hiring experience leads to discrimination against that specific pool. In other words, a bad hiring experience can prevent employers from correcting biased beliefs about a group of candidates leading to persistent discrimination. Campos-Mercade and Mengel (2024) show that a failure to rationally update beliefs can perpetuate gender discrimination due to anchoring to one's conservative prior. In a stylized hiring experiment, managers evaluate two equally qualified

male and female candidates in a math task. Despite informative signals about candidates' ability, managers neglect information and remain conservative in their belief updating. This leads to a low posterior belief about female candidates' ability, which explains a persistent gender gap in hiring decision.

Stereotypes are one type of inaccurate or biased beliefs and play an important role for belief-based gender discrimination in the labor market. They are distorted probability distributions about the type(s) of individuals from a particular group stemming from specific, rigid, and overgeneralized assumptions about that group (see Bordalo et al. 2016). Among the target group and compared to a reference group, decision-makers overweight the probability of the type that is most aligned with their assumptions. While stereotypes can have a "kernel of truth", they exaggerate group differences, resulting in inaccurate beliefs about different groups. A classic example is how the ability of men and women is perceived to differ in STEM fields. Therefore, even if the true gender gaps in ability are small or non-existent, stereotypes can sustain or even amplify gender discrimination by distorting employers' belief when making hiring and promotion decisions (see also Heilman 2012).

Reuben et al. (2014) show in a lab experiment how gender stereotypes about ability can affect discrimination. When managers do not have information about workers' ability in a male-typed task, they prefer to hire men over women despite the absence of a gender gap in performance. Strikingly, the hiring gap is reduced, but not eliminated, when managers receive information about performance. Implicit stereotypes (see Bertrand et al. 2005) explain why discrimination remains: Managers whose initial beliefs are more stereotypical are less likely to update their belief about women's ability as shown by the Implicit Association Test (IAT). Stereotypes act as an anchor, leading to suboptimal belief updating.

Beyond the direct influence on hiring decisions, stereotypes can affect the amount of information managers acquire about the candidate. Coffman et al. (2024) show how endogenous information acquisition amplifies discriminatory outcomes. The authors create pools of candidates that differ in the proportion of above-the-bar candidates in a math and science test, and in the gender (male or female) having a relative performance advantage (or not). Evaluators are informed about the pool composition (proportion of above-the-bar candidates, and shares of women and men above the bar) and evaluate randomly selected candidates on their likelihood of being above-the-bar. The treatments vary the evaluator's ability to endogenously acquire a costly but informative signal about the candidate being above-the-bar. Candidates in the pool with relative performance advantage receive significantly better evaluations than those in the pool without performance advantage. This effect is amplified under endogenous information acquisition because evaluators under-acquire information about the candidate, are less likely to accurately identify below-the-bar candidates from the advantaged pool, while missing out on above-the-bar candidates from the disadvantaged pool. Their results highlight how endogenous information search reinforces stereotypical judgement as it exacerbates the over-selection of high-prior candidates and the under-selection of low-prior candidates.

Lastly, inaccurate beliefs can be about the preferences of other decision-makers in the hiring process. Hirmas and Hausfeld (2024) show that labor market intermediaries who preselect candidates for hiring managers form beliefs that these managers prefer candidates of the same gender, consistent with in-group favoritism. Importantly, these beliefs need not reflect

managers' true preferences. When intermediaries act on such perceived taste-based preferences, they may disproportionately preselect male candidates in male-dominated committees and industries. This mechanism reveals a novel source of discrimination: even in the absence of preferential treatment on the part of hiring managers, intermediaries' inaccurate beliefs about such preferences can generate discriminatory outcomes.

Turning to preference-based discrimination, the idea originates from Becker (1957). This form of discrimination arises from individual tastes, which are typically modelled as animus towards members of certain groups. In the context of gender, managers may engage in preference-based discrimination if they have a distaste for individuals of a particular gender. As a result, managers are willing to incur a cost to avoid interactions because they generate disutility. The same logic applies in the case of a positive preference – managers may demonstrate favoritism and be willing to engage with individuals from a certain group despite some costs.

Experimental studies typically aim to isolate different mechanisms and the unexplained part of gender discrimination after accounting for the role of beliefs is usually attributed to preference. For instance, Coffman et al. (2021) provide evidence that discrimination against female candidates is largely attributed to beliefs about gender differences in ability and do not find support for taste-based discrimination against women. However, they note that preference-based discrimination, if any, works *in favor* of women in their setting: female candidates are more likely to be hired when the candidate pool is labelled by *female* rather than *birth-month*. Similarly, Lozano (2025) shows that, when gender is revealed, managers are more likely to hire women after male and female candidates can attribute a task success or failure to themselves or others. Lozano (2025) attributes this to taste-based discrimination rather than beliefs about gender differences in attribution. Favorable hiring of women could however arise due to image concerns such as fear of appearing sexist. Gioia and Immordino (2024) replicate the results of Coffman et al. (2021) and show that preference-based discrimination disappears when managers' incentive to employ productive workers increases.

2.3. Anticipated Discrimination and Segregation

Gender discrimination in hiring and promotion directly affects the gender composition of the workforce in an industry or organization (demand side). However, its prevalence can further deter entry into study majors and the labor market if individuals anticipate discrimination (supply side). This can cause segregation on the education and labor market and exacerbate gender inequality in labor market outcomes.

Anticipated discrimination can significantly influence individuals' education and work-related choices. This is particularly relevant for (male-stereotypical) STEM fields. There is mounting evidence that differences in ability cannot account for the observed degree of gender segregation. Reuben et al. (2026) study specialization and hiring decisions in a labor market experiment where employers cannot observe the workers' abilities in two tasks but can infer them through the workers' specialization decision and their gender. The lab setting allows to observe innate abilities and to induce arbitrary gender stereotypes; both are usually not feasible in the field. In a neutral treatment, workers specialize according to their innate abilities and employers hire according to the workers' specialization decisions. With gender stereotypes, (inefficient) gender segregation in specialization and hiring decisions occurs and gender stereotypes become self-fulfilling. Once in place, stereotypes continue to drive specialization

and hiring decisions even after it is common knowledge that there are no gender differences in innate abilities.

Lepage et al. (2025) examine the extent to which anticipated discrimination determines study choices at a university in the US. Using administrative data and a survey experiment, they show that women avoid majoring in STEM because they anticipate discrimination, yet participants expect that those with high ability can overcome discrimination by working hard. While women anticipate discrimination during their STEM studies, they anticipate even more discrimination in the labor market. Higher anticipated discrimination in the labor market decreases the likelihood of women intending to major in STEM fields by about 9 percentage points, after controlling for differences in characteristics and interests. In their setting, a one standard deviation increase in anticipated discrimination is associated with a 10% lower share of STEM courses taken by women, with very little impact on men.

Anticipated discrimination can also negatively affect job candidates' willingness to apply for positions. Goldin and Rouse (2000) find that blinding gender information from the application increases diversity of job applicants, suggesting that applicants respond to expectations about how candidates will be evaluated. Boring et al. (2025) focus on the effect of gender-blind application processes on applicants' self-selection into the applicant pool. They show that women are less likely to apply for a job than men with the same resume when the hiring process is non-blind (consistent with anticipated discrimination), while blinding increases the rate at which counter-stereotypical candidates apply. Rejection under a blind regime has a larger impact on future applications than non-blind rejections, likely because the latter is perceived as more discriminatory while the former is perceived as more objective and fairer. Lastly, Avery et al. (2024) use field experiments in the US to show that the use of AI in recruitment closes the gender gap in job applications in the tech by increasing the rates at which high-ability female applicants apply. This evidence suggests applicants anticipate discrimination by human evaluators.

Anticipated discrimination can lead individuals to (strategically) conceal or alter identity signals to avoid unfavorable treatment. Importantly, the effect of anticipated discrimination can arise regardless of the actual prevalence if individuals *expect* that they will be discriminated against (see Fiorin et al., 2025). Charness et al. (2020) examine whether individuals react to potential future discrimination in the labor market using a laboratory experiment. Participants assigned to the role of the firm decide to hire workers to perform a real-effort task that varies in gender stereotypes. The only information firms have about workers is their gender, revealed through an avatar selected by each worker. When the task is male-typed, female workers react to the potential discrimination by disguising as male. Relatedly, Charness et al. (2025) find in a Uruguayan field experiment that revealing applicants' names leads women to request wages about half those of men. Gender-blind applications cut this gap by 52%, and information about merit-based evaluations removes it entirely. The results suggest women strategically lower wage demands due to expected discrimination, supported by women's belief that equally qualified men are favored in hiring when requesting identical wages. Driven by anticipated gender discrimination, women are also more likely to hide their gender identity in a prosocial allocation setting (Aksoy et al., 2023) while men are more likely to select a female avatar in the trust game (Abraham et al., 2023).

3. Gender Discrimination and Inclusion

Efforts to increase gender diversity in organizations may not be sufficient if the workplace climate is not inclusive, and underrepresented talent leaves the organization at disproportionate rates. Micro- and macro-level work environments matter to make individuals feel included. This includes providing equal opportunities to perform, contribute to teams, participate in decision-making, and thrive within the organization. Failure to ensure a gender balance in feelings of inclusion and fair treatment at the workplace can be considered a form of gender discrimination.

3.1. Performance and Evaluations

Gagnon et al. (2025) study the causal impact of gender discrimination on performance and disentangle the inequality effect caused by differing wages from that of gender discrimination. In their online experiments, participants individually perform a real-effort task (entering lines of random characters) under piece-rate incentives. Workers have autonomy over the level of effort to exert. The key experimental variation manipulates the way wage inequality is introduced. Workers are informed about their own piece-rate wage and that of another co-participant. The wage differences, if any, are either gender neutral (no reason provided for lower wage) or *explicitly* gender discriminatory (lower wage due to gender). This design feature isolates the pure effect of gender discrimination from the effect of wage inequality. The gender discrimination component alone reduces labor supply by about 0.17 standard deviations and the total negative impact of gender discrimination (i.e., wage inequality effect *and* gender discrimination) reduces labor supply by 0.22 standard deviations mainly driven by women: women working under the gender discrimination scheme reduce their labor supply by 0.27 standard deviations compared to those working under an inequality scheme without discrimination. Additionally, Gagnon et al. (2025) show that beliefs are an important driver of labor supply. In an *implicit* gender discrimination treatment, lower-wage workers are informed of the matched participant's gender (always opposite gender), but not of the fact that wage disparity is based on gender. Particularly women believe they face negative discrimination, supply less effort and earn lower wages, which may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Relatedly, Ruebeck (2024) investigate the consequences of perceived discrimination in two large-scale online experiments. Knowing that managers have mostly promoted white men in the past affects female workers' retention and performance negatively.

Gender norms shape social judgments about effort and deservingness, which can legitimize unequal labor market outcomes. Cappelen et al. (2025) study fairness judgement towards those who fall behind. Using a large-scale experiment with more than 35,000 Americans, they find that individuals are more accepting of men falling behind than women and are less supportive of government policies targeting disadvantaged men. They coin this phenomenon 'statistical fairness discrimination' because it is driven by the belief that disadvantaged men have exerted lower effort than women and therefore are less deserving of societal support. Such biased views may hinder policy and institutional interventions in the education and labor market (e.g., low-performing students, low-performing employees, or unemployed individuals).

Feelings of inclusion may be undermined by a systematically biased recognition system. Experimental evidence shows that women in male-dominated fields are held to a higher standard and are evaluated through a gender-stereotypical lens (see Boring 2017; Colo, et al. 2025; Krawczyk and Smyk 2016; Mengel et al. 2019). This bias against women could

potentially be reversed with a public demonstration of competence: Bohren et al. (2019) conduct a large field experiment on an online STEM Q&A forum. They find that while posts by a female account receive significantly more negative evaluations than those by a male account, the discrimination pattern is reversed among experienced users. Posts by a high-reputation female account (signalled by past positive evaluations) are favored over those by a male account. These results are consistent with gender discrimination driven by biased beliefs.

3.2. Teams and Work Group Dynamics

Teamwork and group dynamics can give the floor to gender discrimination in the form of systematically disadvantaging a gender group of employees. Evidence points to a lower influence of women in team settings. Hardt et al. (2024) examine the impact of gender composition on team interactions and performances. In an online experiment, university students in Germany are assigned to a group of four (either gender-homogenous or gender-mixed team). The key design feature is that the task (solving a business case) is team-based, requiring team members to communicate via an audio chat. In a mixed gender environment, men dominate the conversation with about 70% more words, and 50% more turns than women. Conditional on individual ability (proxied by GPA retrieved from the university's administration), low-ability men talk more than high-ability women. Additional lab and field experiments demonstrate similar exclusion patterns in teams. Guo and Recalde (2023) find in a lab experiment that women are more likely to be overridden than men in voicing disagreement, while Karpowitz et al. (2024) find in two field experiments that women in male-majority teams are rated as less influential in team deliberation and are less likely to be chosen as the spokesperson than in female-majority teams. The effect is mitigated by appointing a female leader.

Gender discrimination can also lurk in credit attribution in team settings where team outcomes are publicly observed but individual contributions are obscure. Under information asymmetry, the attribution of success or failure to team members can be biased. Sarsons et al. (2021) provide evidence of gendered attribution bias in academia. Using observational data, they find that male economists' tenure prospects are unaffected by co-authorship while female economists who co-author with male colleagues are penalized. Two laboratory experiments suggest that this penalty gap is driven by stereotypes in male-typed tasks, leading evaluators—particularly male—to disproportionately attribute credit to men. In line, Wang et al. (2024) show that in team production, women receive poorer evaluation than men when teams succeed and women are the minority. Relatedly, Lozano (2025) shows that men in teams are more inclined to claim successes and blame others for failures than women. This translates into a biased recognition and reward because employers favor those who shift blame and take credit.

Besides team contributions and attributions, homophily and exclusive "clubs" contribute to social exclusion at work. Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) investigate how informal interactions at work contribute to the gender pay gap through promotions. They exploit the quasi-random variation induced by manager rotation at a large financial institution in Southeast Asia. Increased social interaction with managers during smoke breaks leads to an increase in promotions. This exclusively male-to-male advantage accounts for one-third of the gender gap in promotions in the firm. Deng and Lu (2024) report a similar finding: following the introduction of an anti-corruption campaign in China that prohibits alcohol drinking (a male-dominant networking opportunity), board gender diversity in Chinese listed firms increases.

This is consistent with male-dominant social clubs being an additional hurdle for qualified women.

Lastly, evidence documents the prevalence of workplace sexism and its effect on inclusion. Boring and Delfgaauw (2024) conduct survey experiments in male-dominated industries in France and the US. They document widespread social desirability bias in attitudes towards sexism and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies. Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion and to combat sexism may be well-received publicly yet remain ineffective due to actual resistance that remains unexpressed because of social desirability. This hidden resistance is consequential given that hostile working environments can generate segregation and persistent gender inequality. Using administrative data from Sweden and a survey experiment, Folke and Rickne (2022) find a large negative valuation of workplaces where sexual harassment occurs, requiring a compensation of about 10% higher wages to accept such environments.

3.3. Leadership and Advising

Leadership and leader perceptions are another important inclusion dimension. While diverse leaders have already overcome several barriers, they are not necessarily immune to discrimination by their subordinates. Such 'discrimination from below' typically takes the form of biased leader evaluation. Gangadharan et al. (2016) conduct an artefactual field experiment in India to examine behavioral responses to female leadership. The study exploits a unique natural affirmative action policy that introduces quotas for women in village headship positions. They conduct the experiment in 40 villages of which about 60% had female leaders in the previous three village council elections. The experiment features a one-shot public goods game between two men and two women, one of whom is randomly selected as leader. Before making an actual contribution, the leader proposes a non-binding contribution to the group. By revealing the leader's gender, the experiment identifies the impact of female leaders on citizens' contributions. The exogenous variation in exposure to female village heads further isolates the effect of preconceptions and prejudices about female leadership. Men contribute significantly less to the group when the group leader is female compared to male – confirming male backlash against female leaders. The effect exists only in female-headed villages and is largely linked to social norms regarding male identity. Survey responses indicate that men perceive female village heads as 'a violation of a social norm' associating leadership with men. Cooperating less with female leaders than male leaders is thus perceived as less socially inappropriate.

Abel (2024) similarly shows how social gender expectations influence reactions to leaders. Using an online experiment with MTurkers in the US, the author investigates gig workers discrimination against female bosses. The experiment varies the gender of a fictitious manager who gives performance feedback (praise or criticism compared to median performance) midway of the experiment. While praise has no effect, criticism negatively impacts workers' job satisfaction and their perception of task importance. This negative effect is 100% larger with female managers. The author rules out implicit discrimination and provides evidence supporting gendered expectations about feedback – workers associate praise and positive feedback with female managers, and criticisms with male managers.

Erkal et al. (2023) study gender attribution biases in a prosocial setting. In their lab experiment, leaders make an unobserved investment decision that affects the payoffs of group members. A high investment is costly to the leader but increases the chance of investment success. Given

information asymmetry, success (failure) can be attributed to the leader's altruistic (selfish) choice or good (bad) luck. There is no gender attribution bias for successful outcomes, but evaluators attribute failure to male leaders' selfish choices and female leaders' bad luck. In another study, Erkal et al. (2024) examine a gender criteria gap in leadership evaluation. They find that evaluators weigh beliefs versus outcomes differently depending on the leader's gender. A male leader is rewarded for a good or bad outcome if evaluators hold good beliefs about them. This does not apply for women who are rewarded only when the outcome is good independent of beliefs.

Subordinates' gender discrimination against leaders can also take the form of ignoring their advice. Such resistance may undermine the effectiveness of leaders. In laboratory experiments across Europe, Brandts and Rott (2021), Heikensten and Isaksson (2019), and Heursen et al. (2024) do not find support for gender-discriminatory advice following in different decision environments. However, Ayalew et al. (2021) do find support for discrimination against female leaders in a lab-in-the-field experiment in Ethiopia where a highly educated sample of university employees receives advice on how to play a game. The experimental manipulation varies the leader's gender who otherwise gives the same advice. Participants are 10% less likely to follow the advice of a female leader compared to a male leader. This pattern of discrimination is reversed with high ability signals – the return from signaling ability is higher for female than male leaders. This finding is consistent with statistical discrimination against female leaders based on perceived competence.

Lastly, Abel et al. (2024) examine the effect of gender discrimination against female financial advisors and whether they receive more blame when the advice fails. In an online experiment on Prolific, participants receive financial advice from actual experts regarding an investment in real start-up companies. In four investment rounds, participants observe the advice, decide whether to invest or not and learn the outcome of the investment. They find no initial gender discrimination in terms of following recommendations made by male or female advisors. Nonetheless, discrimination against female advisors emerges when the advice proves to be incorrect. After an incorrect advice, male participants invest 47% less in the subsequent recommendation of a female advisor compared to a male advisor. It seems that female experts are punished more than their male colleagues for incorrect advice.

3.3. Household-Related Factors

Gender discrimination in the labor market related to household decisions has long been an interest to economists. This concerns perceptions (and effects) of child rearing and house chore allocation decisions. Earlier experimental work focuses on how pregnancy and childrearing expectations affect hiring decisions, thus access to the labor market. For instance, Duguet and Petit (2005), and Petit (2007) show that female candidates who are expected to bear children face hiring discrimination in the financial sector in France. Similarly, Correll et al. (2007) find that women with childrearing responsibilities in the US are penalized. Parenthood can also be a source of discrimination in the workplace. This implies that institutional practices and social gender expectations, particularly regarding family roles and caretaking duties, play an important role for performance and opportunities at work.

Buzard et al. (2024) examine whether external demands for parental involvement in education cause gender inequality at work due to consequences on time allocation between work and non-work domains. If the school needs to discuss child-related matters with parents, whom do they

call? Are mothers more likely to be contacted than fathers? The large-scale field experiment involves approximately 80,000 school principals across the US. Each principal receives an email from two fictitious heterosexual parents with a general school-related inquiry and request to be contacted by phone. Treatments vary which parent sends the email and both parents' availabilities. Without information about availability and conditional on call back, mothers are called first 1.4 times more often than fathers. This is indicative of principals' expectation that mothers are more available and more responsive than fathers. The availability signal reduces the gender gap but fails to close it: 85-90% of more available mothers receive calls vs. 70-74% of more available fathers. Using a complementary survey with parents and data from the American Time Use Survey, Buzard et al. (2024) demonstrate that mothers report significantly more negative impacts on careers than fathers (e.g., promotions), and more household related interruptions during work, which are associated with a significant wage decline.

Besides institutional factors, the findings of Buzard et al. (2024) hint at gender norms being one of the drivers behind the observed inequality in parental involvement. Barigozzi et al.(2024) investigate how long-standing gender norms in households can constrain female labor participation implementing an incentivized vignette experiment with a representative sample in Italy. Using a coordination game, they elicit social appropriateness around house chore divisions among a heterosexual couple and find a rigid gender norm where a woman's proposal of an unequal allocation (benefiting herself) is judged as less appropriate than the same proposal by the male partner. These gendered views are primarily prevalent among older generations and are negatively correlated with female labor market participation on the region level.

Norms and fairness perceptions have tangible consequences on productivity and career outcomes for parents. Notably, imbalances in domestic responsibilities can hamper female work output because mental preoccupations about house chores and child rearing may asymmetrically and negatively affect women's productivity but not men's (see Barigozzi et al. 2025; Vitellozzi et al. 2025). The role of beliefs about social norms for reduced labor supply is also documented in Bursztyn et al. (2020) who find that men largely underestimate the societal support for women working outside their homes in Saudi Arabia, which in turn prevents women from applying to jobs.

4. Future research avenues

The previous sections of this chapter provide a (non-exhaustive) overview of important and insightful economic experiments on gender discrimination in the labor market focusing both on *participation* in the labor market (diversity) and the *ability to thrive* in the workplace (inclusion). In this section, we discuss some promising future avenues of experimental research on gender discrimination in the labor market.

The existing literature largely focuses on binary gender. There is some experimental evidence on discrimination, biased perceptions, and stereotypical beliefs against non-binary, transgender, or non-bi-sexually oriented individuals (e.g., Aksoy et al. 2025; Coffman et al. 2025; Drydakis 2009; Eames 2025; Granberg et al. 2020; Listo et al. 2025; Martínez-Alfaro et al. 2024; Weichselbaumer 2003). Although recruiting non-binary participants for experimental studies is challenging, advancements in technology and research methods – such as online experiments – contribute to increased feasibility of conducting experiments with sufficient statistical power. Depending on the development of societal recognition of non-binary gender

across countries, the distribution of self-identified gender may change in the future providing room for new research avenues.

Identifying gender discrimination in the workplace and exploring interventions that increase gender inclusion are important avenues for future research. One stream of literature investigates task allocations in the workplace and finds that women volunteer more often and are expected to accept requests to perform non-promotable tasks (Babcock et al. 2017a; 2017b). This can have negative consequences for career advancement. Combined with existing evidence on the evaluation of promotable task performance, hiring and promotion decisions, gender stereotypes about ability cause gendered task segregation (see e.g., Fischbacher et al. 2024). Implying that women in male-typed professions may face hurdles at both margins of task allocation. Additionally, Gihleb et al. (2025) show that those who are stuck with non-promotable tasks lose negotiation power. Identifying conditions under which gender imbalances occur and ways to overcome unequal assignments of (non-)promotable tasks call for explorations. A starting point could be the interesting discrepancy between gendered attributions of success and failure to effort (Cappelen et al., 2025) versus skills (Lozano 2025; Sarsons et al. 2021): While the attribution to effort is more favorable for women, the attribution to skills is more favorable for men, which might impact task allocations in the workplace. Generally, exploring ways of creating inclusive work environments where all employees feel welcome to bring in their skills and ideas is an important research avenue.

Household and parenthood penalties explain a large part of gender differences in work performance, wages, and leadership representation. Their "causal" role is less understood because most studies use observational data. Creative experimental designs may contribute significantly to their understanding and interplay with labor market perceptions, decisions, and outcomes. Lastly, many economic experiments on gender discrimination focuses on behavioral and institutional barriers faced by women. Less attention has been given to (informal) gender norms that shape men's behavior and constrain men's economic decisions in the labor market (see Matavelli et al. 2025). Integrating male workers' perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender norms shape labor market outcomes for *both* men and women.

Finally, advancements of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies provide excellent research opportunities for novel research questions, designs, and analyses. Procedures and institutions in organizations are being adopted to incorporate AI tools, which will change interactions, decisions, and processes in the workplace fundamentally and open new research questions. AI tools are particularly interesting regarding (more complex) dynamics in the workplace, the analysis of (free-form) communication, (informal) information sharing, (verbal and non-verbal) feedback, evaluations, and learning. AI and related tools (e.g., LLMs or NLP technologies) can be, for instance, incorporated in experimental research to enhance our understanding of gender-discriminatory communication in the labor market. An example of such an approach is Bohren et al. (2025) who use LLM-generated recommendation letters to investigate systemic discrimination; that is, how (direct) discrimination at one decision node *indirectly* creates discriminatory outcomes at another decision node. Economic research to date has largely focused on decisions and less on discriminatory communication, which is an intriguing aspect of gender discrimination in the labor market.

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