

# THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY AND ITS (IN)ABILITY TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

## LA UNIVERSIDAD NEOLIBERAL Y SU (IN)CAPACIDAD PARA LOGRAR LA IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO

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### Resumen

La persistencia de las desigualdades de género es una llamada a realizar esta reflexión en las instituciones públicas dedicadas a la generación y enseñanza del conocimiento. **Objetivo:** comprender la responsabilidad de la academia universitaria en el avance de la igualdad entre hombres y mujeres. **Método:** realizar una reflexión crítica a partir de bibliografía especializada, así como de informes recientes que permitan profundizar en las causas estructurales que puedan ser origen de tal persistencia de la desigualdad. **Discusión:** se propone el uso del concepto de capitalismo académico para advertir cómo las universidades pueden estar sufriendo un acoso neoliberal. En este panorama el avance en igualdad no sólo estará comprometido, sino que pasará a ser un mero programa superficial, sin capacidad transformadora de la sociedad y de los avances en igualdad. **Conclusión:** lograr la igualdad social, más en un momento donde la regresión en derechos está mostrando su cara más temible, es una responsabilidad institucional que las universidades no pueden obviar. Es, por tanto, imperativo, una nueva conceptualización de la igualdad en la academia que permita trascender los constreñimientos del capitalismo académico.

**Palabras claves:** Capitalismo académico, igualdad de género, universidad neoliberal, el rol de la universidad.

### Abstract

The pervasiveness of gender inequalities necessitates a critical examination within public institutions dedicated to the generation and dissemination of knowledge. **Objective:** To elucidate the responsibility of the university academy in promoting equality between men and women. **Method:** To carry out a critical reflection informed by a specialized bibliography and recent reports, facilitating an in-depth exploration of the structural causes that perpetuate inequality. **Discussion:** The concept of academic capitalism is proposed as a means of highlighting the potential for neoliberal influences to compromise the progress of universities towards equality. It is argued that, in such a scenario, progress in equality becomes superficial and incapable of effecting societal transformation. **Conclusion:** The responsibility of universities to achieve social equality, particularly in a period characterised by a regression in rights, cannot be disregarded. It is therefore imperative that a new conceptualisation of equality in the academy transcends the constraints of academic capitalism.

**Keywords:** Academic capitalism, gender equality, neoliberal university, university's role.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Since the 1990s, we as feminists have been asking ourselves why inequality continues. Indeed, in her book *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Evans, 2017), feminist theorist Mary Evans reflects on this as one of the biggest issues that feminist theory needs to address in order to move forward. It is rather shocking to note that the World Economic Forum's 2020 report states the following in its cover letter: "None of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, nor will many of our children. That's the sobering conclusion of the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be achieved for 99.5 years" (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020).

The report confirms that the situation has improved in all 149 countries that took part in the study. However, progress is slow. This would explain the subtitle of the report, *Mind the 100 years gap*. But as the report points out: Equality will be achieved in a hundred years' time, provided that efforts and funding for equality are maintained. Otherwise, as the report states, the gap could persist for as long as 257 years.

In the 1990s we attributed the persistence of inequality to the need for a transformation of society in order to make reality not just legal but real. In other words, the diagnosis of the causes and the awareness of the need to put an end to inequality were clear, although it was still necessary to activate effective actions to transform reality. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) was a turning point for the global agenda on gender equality. The main reason is that it introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming to propose a new way of doing public policy to end inequality.

Almost 30 years have passed since the first women's conference in Beijing. However, progress and consolidation of the 1995 goals are still considered uneven. Commenting on the 25th anniversary in 2020, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of United Nations Women, said:

The commitments and actions that Member States agreed upon in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that year are still forming the most integral and transformative agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, when assessing its progress, it is clear that the implementation of this agenda falls way short of its initial pledge (United Nations Women, 2020, p.1).

Against this backdrop, we keep asking ourselves the following questions: ¿Why, after more than two decades since the Beijing conference, does inequality persist and even increase in some areas? ¿What has happened in these decades of intense feminist political agendas and dishonest efforts to introduce the 'gender perspective' at all institutional levels and in civil society? ¿Why does the 'gender perspective' seem able to coexist with inequality between men and women?

In response to these questions, I would like to say that the introduction of the gender perspective alone - even with the mainstreaming strategy (which is proposed as a generalisation and extension of the gender perspective to all areas) - is in no way sufficient to achieve real equality between men and women. More is needed.

A feminist transformation is needed, of which the gender perspective is only a small part. In fact, the transformative power of this part has been reduced because it has been co-opted by the institutions.

From different standpoints of feminist theory, we can briefly identify some issues that have been used to deactivate most of the transformative power that feminism has sought to achieve through the strategy of gender mainstreaming. ¿But what is it that deactivates the transformative power of feminism? My answer is that the interests of the neoliberal system developed under globalisation are the main obstacle to achieving equality. Neoliberalism has been constructed as a system that organises life by turning everything into capital and commodities. In doing so, neoliberalism has co-opted the gender equality agenda by weakening its political potential to transform social structures. We could say that the co-optation of the gender perspective by neoliberal institutions has depoliticised the feminist

struggle, turning feminist goals into a mere question of 'gender management'. Feminism, reconverted into a 'gender perspective', does not seem to have finally unsettled neoliberalism and its predatory ways with life. Rather, it has joined its team, as Nancy Fraser denounces in her book *Fortunes of Feminism* (Fraser, 2013).

## **¿WHAT CAN WE, FEMINISTS, DO?**

First of all, I strongly believe that gender equality is one of the most important challenges we face today as a global society. If we look at the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), number 5 has this specific goal: gender equality. However, it articulates many around it, especially goal number 4, quality education (United Nations [UN], 2015). Global development towards a sustainable present and future should be articulated around goals that, for decades, the feminist agenda has conceived as interrelated. This demonstrates the need not only to continue the struggle but to enhance it by activating new frameworks that can help us move forward.

It is widely accepted that challenging and changing gender stereotypes and prejudices through education is the most powerful tool for achieving equality between men and women. Not only do we have classic studies in feminist theory, such as those of Wollstonecraft (2009), Mill (1869) and Beauvoir (1949), but recently the role of education in overcoming gender inequality has also been demonstrated in neuroscientific studies (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010; Rippon, 2019). The reason is clear. Education is one of the institutions that teach the principles and values that will form the basis of our development as individuals and as a community throughout our lives, as we know from Plato's *Republic* (Plato, 1943) to John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916). Therefore, the impact of education spills over into other areas of human life, and its footprint lives on for generations. This is what happens with equality. Its effects spill over into other areas and produce a series of outcomes that strengthen democracy.

The main objective of this paper is to critically analyse the role of the university, as an educational institution, with the possibility and responsibility to significantly advance gender equality.

## **METHOD**

The method used for the proposed reflection is an analysis of the critical literature, with sources chosen that are directly related to the question that forms the starting point for the critical reflection presented here, namely the reasons for the persistence of inequality in universities. Priority was given to publications that focus on the neoliberal drift of academia, pressured as it is by the so-called 'New Management'. This enables us to understand the proposal of the concept of 'academic capitalism' as the foundation and support for the current inequality in universities during the reflective process. As support material for this reflection, we have used recent reports from various state agencies that report data on the current situation of inequality in academia.

The research is further enriched by the subjective and intersubjective experience of three decades in academia, encompassing fifteen research stays in public and private universities across the American and European continents, in addition to academic management positions directly related to university policies concerning the equality of women and men.

## **THE ROLE OF ACADEMIA IN THE STRUGGLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

For decades, the university has been regarded as the optimal institution for the rigorous and successful implementation of gender-equality policies. The history of feminism, particularly in the wake of the second wave in the 1970s, demonstrates the pivotal role of academia and higher education institutions in advancing and disseminating the feminist agenda on an international scale (David, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2022).

Consequently, the university represents an appropriate setting for the implementation of a novel institutional governance structure that is predicated on comprehensive equality at all levels, with a particular focus on gender. The concepts of patriarchy, colonialism, and other forms of domination and subjugation are now subject to critical scrutiny within the context of higher education. This has led to the formulation of regulations and legislation designed to ensure the practical realisation of equality. The legislative measures enacted at the regional, national, and international levels to regulate and promote a future of equality are extensive.

Moreover, academia is one of the institutions undergoing significant transformation due to the introduction of new assessment regulations. These regulations are a consequence of the social and economic globalisation that is, in turn, influenced by processes of digitalisation, datafication, and artificial intelligence. This trend necessitates the attainment of production levels that are contingent upon the utilisation of measuring instruments imposed by technologies of the digital and data economy. This is concomitant with a novel approach to knowledge management (which, in the contemporary era, must also encompass innovation), namely the so-called new public management (Rose, 1999), which is also being applied to academic work. The objective is to codify and standardise all work in order to facilitate measurement and control in the name of efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Veijola and Jokinen, 2018). The standardisation of academic disciplines, qualifications, and assessment procedures facilitates the transfer and mobility of knowledge, students, educators, and innovation. This is a key aspect of what is known as academic capitalism.

The term academic capitalism denotes one of the most significant challenges currently facing universities. Higher education has become a crucial instrument for financial and social mobility on a global scale. Consequently, it is subject to the application of productivity and efficiency rules by the prevailing capitalist system (Teelken and Deem, 2013).

Slaughter and Leslie (1999, 2001) proposed the

concept of academic capitalism to describe the transformation of universities over the previous two decades. This transformation has involved the codification of assignments, standardisation of processes, internationalisation demands, quantified productivity standards, and impact measurements. These processes have resulted in a shift towards a neoliberal indoctrination of universities, which has superseded the classical liberal humanistic scheme that was in place in the 20th century. This is the distinction made by Ferree and Zippel (2015) between the liberal model and the neoliberal model. The authors argue that both models exhibit gender inequality at various levels.

Nevertheless, the distinction lies in the fact that currently, as the neoliberal model gains traction, it coexists with legal, economic, and social demands for equality between men and women. This renders the neoliberal model difficult to circumvent, as the new managerial jargon entails the application of an 'objective' model to measure what is taught, researched, produced, and even what is expected of professionals. This apparent objectivity makes it more challenging to discern the underlying practices and assumptions that may not be evident in the data. In contrast to the liberal university, which espouses individualism, autonomy, democracy, and humanism, the neoliberal university reframes these values as productivity, efficiency, management, and discipline without negating them.

As feminists, we are monitoring the process of transformation from the liberal (and patriarchal) university to the neoliberal (and patriarchal) university with a critical eye. In other words, it can be observed that both models are based on a common premise, namely the maintenance of advantages for men. As Ferree and Zippel (2015, p. 561) observe:

Academic capitalism', the shift towards managerial authority, accountability to economic productivity standards, and quantitative performance auditing, has introduced norms and values that disrupt those of the classic liberal-humanistic university, including its elitist professional authority relations, 'old boy' networks, and internalized disciplinary standards.



The neoliberal model posits the university as a commercial entity, whereby the production of knowledge and skills is viewed as a form of merchandise that must subsequently be codified and measured. The attainment of gender equality, a goal universally acknowledged, represents a demand that the neoliberal university is obliged to meet. In official argumentations, the rationale for gender equality is frequently based on the perceived social and economic benefits. In other words, the pursuit of gender equality is presented as a business-oriented objective. This argument has been employed by international agencies and institutions as a principal foundation for the formulation of equality and diversity policies (Bustelo et al., 2016; Prugl and True, 2014). Nevertheless, those with a feminist perspective must consider that the concept of equality is not contingent upon its perceived utility. While equality may have utilitarian value, it is not merely a means to an end; rather, it is a fundamental moral principle that should be upheld and pursued regardless of its perceived benefits to business.

The European Union has employed this neoliberal approach to disseminate the discourse on gender equality within academic institutions (Woodward, 2012). Furthermore, institutional discourses and publications by the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) employ the argument of empowering women, which is also understood from a neoliberal perspective as the capacity and right to choose. In both instances, a neoliberal interpretation is posited: equality is beneficial because it is advantageous for business, and the empowerment of women is beneficial because it enables them to exercise choice in the market. This interpretation espouses an institutional view of the feminist struggle, which may be designated as institutional feminism (Reverter-Bañón, 2011), market feminism, or neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018).

Furthermore, the arguments of social utility and women's 'empowerment' have been pivotal in the implementation of regulations and policies within the strategy of introducing gender mainstreaming into academia. It is therefore crucial to gain insight into how gender is conceptualised and represented. In other words, ¿What is the function of gender as a

codifiable identifier? ¿What forms and meanings does it assume? The logic of neoliberal management is to assess and evaluate according to codes that are solvent for the benefit of capital. These codes must promote the market and the merchandise.

The question thus arises as to what can be measured and codified. Data can be defined as any information that can be objectified. This transforms the new economy of data-driven decision-making and, consequently, the generation of knowledge and the role of universities into an economy based on objective criteria. As is often the case in patriarchal systems, tasks, activities, and work that cannot be quantified are once again undervalued. This entails the logic of the objective, which can be described as the performativity of code (Mackenzie and Vurdubakis, 2011). This logic dictates that some actions are valued while others are not, that some professions are rewarded while others are not, and that some individuals are privileged while others are not.

In their study (Veijola and Jokinen, 2018), the researchers examine how the logic of work codification excludes academic works produced primarily by women, which are mainly classified as relational work. As Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2024) make clear, the concept of relational work in academia refers to work that requires a commitment to service, usually linked to collective rather than individual interests. In universities, it would be mainly related to what has also been called academic housework, which would be mainly student relation work and teaching management. In other words, any academic work that does not really have merit, in the sense that it translates into a clear professional advantage. For example, the mentoring of students, the administration of seminars, the organisation of conferences, and the participation in local or in other committees.

This dynamic of measuring everything and considering only that which can be codified as work leads to the exploitation and underestimation of the work of women. Consequently, women are compelled to undertake a greater proportion of unpaid work, given that it is non-codifiable, as relational work defined above. This work cannot be used to promote or raise

salaries, as these can only be measured with respect to codifiable activities. At universities, this dynamic impedes the attainment of equality between men and women. Universities that espouse the tenets of new capitalism, from their own vantage point of awareness and knowledge of inequality, may initially appear to be ideal institutions for fostering equality. However, they can ultimately become sites that perpetuate significant obstacles to this goal. As the authors themselves assert:

Academic work is first decollectivised, then the decodings and recordings of the apparently objective data are executed, after which the results of this operation are made public as objective evaluations of individual and institutional academic performance serving science and the wider society (Veijola and Jokinen, 2018, p. 538).

This may provide an explanation for the phenomenon of women occupying fewer senior positions in academia, despite the fact that there are more female students and young female academics. It can therefore be concluded that the existing hierarchical structure continues to favour men. It can be concluded that “Coding capitalism does not seem to change the imbalance; instead, it seems to strengthen gender as a social organiser” (Veijola and Jokinen 2018, p. 538).

A number of actions are required in order to gain a deeper understanding of and to organise the work and production processes at universities. A key priority is to recognise that, regardless of whether the work is codifiable, it exists within a network of relationships that render the concept of autonomy and individual accountability in academic work untenable.

The academic practices in question are conducted within a hybrid network. Such actions are performed within a complex network of relationships between individuals. The aforementioned factors render the codification of this phenomenon a challenging endeavour. Therefore, linking productivity to codifiable elements alone risks excluding factors that contribute to academic excellence. In order to accurately assess academic productivity, it is essential to consider the sexual division of academic work while maintaining an

understanding of the creative and collaborative aspects inherent to research and teaching at universities. The application of the concept of new management to universities may have a detrimental impact, potentially transforming them into corporate entities when they are not and should not be so (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2017). This could result in a deviation from the original purpose of universities, which encompasses teaching, researching, and learning with the aim of expanding the boundaries of knowledge to transform the world into a more harmonious and just society (Drew and Canavan, 2021)

The practice of ranking universities is becoming increasingly prevalent, with the results and processes involved being codified and evaluated through the use of algorithms. However, these are not definitive objectives, as they are contingent upon the decisions made regarding the codifiability of the variables in question and the manner of their codification.

For instance, World Rankings have become a crucial aspect of higher education institutions’ operations, serving not only to promote themselves as global leaders in excellence but also to compete with their domestic counterparts. One might posit that world rankings have effectively transformed the social construct of universities, influencing the governance, management, and assessment systems that have hitherto been in place.

The recent challenge for these rankings has been to assess the extent of compliance of universities with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda. As Torabian (2019) asserts, measuring the SDGs should nevertheless overcome the obstacles inherent to highly homogenised, standardised global indices. Failure to undertake this action carries the risk of failing to achieve the desired outcome.

The manner in which academic capitalism exerts influence over the governance of universities gives rise to the implementation of systems designed to assess accountability with regard to the fulfilment of these goals. For this reason, as previously stated, codes and measurements are established to facilitate the reporting of this information. As Prugl (2011) notes, rankings are employed as a means of quantifying results on

a global scale, thereby facilitating the governance of universities. Such rankings permit a comparison of the same university over time or a comparison between universities. From the perspective of managerial logic, this serves two distinct purposes: firstly, as a means of ensuring awareness of compliance, and secondly, as a disciplinary measure in the event of non-compliance.

The quantification and homogenisation of merits facilitate the identification of disparities between men and women in the academic domain, exemplified by the metaphorical ‘glass ceiling’ in the promotion hierarchy of faculty. However, it is also employed to implement corrective measures aimed at addressing such inequalities without modifying the underlying structures, but rather focusing on the specific figures that the system prescribes as benchmarks for measurement. The objectivity of rankings is not absolute, even when they measure and quantify, as the reliability of the results depends on the criteria used for measurement and quantification. The introduction of ‘best practices’ to improve indices may be beneficial, but it is essential to critically examine whether these indices truly reflect the concept of gender equality.

As Ferree and Zippel (2015, p. 572) observe “These for-profit ranking systems define the merit of universities, disciplines, and individual scholars, becoming institutionalized as the common sense of academic evaluation on which scholars are encouraged to rely rather than on the local, contextualized knowledge of their disciplines”. A hegemonic narrative is thus constructed, which assesses the merits of academic institutions based on a range of quantitative indicators, including the number of citations, quartiles, impact factor, number of graduates, number of senior faculty, and number of doctoral theses. While this approach has its merits in providing insights into the academic landscape, it is important to exercise caution and critically examine the limitations of such a narrative. However, without a critical examination of this ranking-based academic management, we risk concealing important facts, such as the dominance of specific journal publishing platforms, the primacy of the English language in publications, and the undocumented promotion mechanisms for faculty

members. The academic elite has not undergone a significant transformation as a result of these new methods of university governance, as they continue to define and determine how gender equality is measured and counted.

It is therefore concerning to observe the potential for the gender perspective to be introduced into universities without due consideration of the underlying structures of academic life. This includes the processes by which project leaders are selected, the decision-making procedures surrounding the order of signatures on articles, and the choice of teachers for specific subjects. While increasing the number of women in decision-making roles may appear to be a means of promoting gender equality, this approach does not necessarily lead to a more equitable and egalitarian academic field. Instead, it perpetuates a top-down structure and potentially unfair hierarchies. While increasing the representation of women may improve a field’s ranking, it does not necessarily guarantee excellence, including in terms of gender equality. As Ferree and Zippel (2015, p. 574) affirm “These strategies widen the definition of excellence to include more diversity of gender and nation, but rarely speak critically about hierarchies of knowers or the place of universities in a global knowledge order”.

It may be reasonably inferred that the advancement of the question of gender equality in the rankings is merely a matter of time. From this perspective, greater female access to the academic world will facilitate greater female access to higher levels, thus facilitating the dissolution of the glass ceiling. Nevertheless, if indirect discriminatory practices are to persist, they will not be rectified over time (Heijstra et al., 2013).

In order to effect change that may comply with SDG 5 – the gender equality goal – it is necessary to measure more things and integrate aspects that cannot be measured. Academic tasks associated with values such as commitment, engagement, care, loyalty, collegiality and benevolence (Macfarlane, 2007; Nørgård & Bengtsen, 2016). As Beatson et al (2022 p.2) clarify with examples, all these tasks imply service activities such as “peer review of manuscripts, guest editorships, mentoring of junior colleagues, student consultations, engaging and

developing links with industry and professional bodies, undertaking leadership positions and participating in committees within the university”.

Therefore, when utilising indices to codify and measure gender equality, it is essential to consider that, in addition to relying on ‘objective’ indices, as is typical of rankings, subjective measurements pertaining to how women perceive different situations within the academic realm must also be considered. In this regard, Kurzman et al. (2019) posit that there may be notable discrepancies between the responses women provide regarding their experiences and the indices employed to assess gender equality. This should serve as a cautionary note regarding the complexity of measuring gender equality in higher education using solely aggregate indices. It would be beneficial to integrate more experiential questions and questions relating to subjective opinions in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. However, in light of the comparison intended by overall rankings, this would be almost impossible. The technique of the New Public Management cannot be fully instrumental unless it standardises the work at universities. This obliges us to prioritise standardisation and measurement in the race that universities seem to have started or are on the verge of commencing, which is a commitment to the SDGs that will lead to a transformation of the world and a transformation of the universities and of the way in which we understand their excellence.

## DISCUSSION

The initial premise of this article was to investigate the rationale behind the continued prevalence of gender inequality, despite the abundance of knowledge and awareness that exists in the present era. A substantial corpus of legislation, regulations, and rules has been enacted to ensure that processes in all areas of collective life are conducted in a manner that is equitable. Nevertheless, the prevailing reality continues to exhibit unacceptable degrees of inequality. Given their role as institutions of critical thought, freedom, and autonomy of reason, universities are well placed to

drive change and foster the development of egalitarian societies.

It thus follows that one of the principal conclusions to be drawn from this critical examination is that universities are firmly committed to achieving full gender equality in the academic world, a goal which they recognise as being a significant challenge. Inequality operates in a perverse manner, and there is often a lack of clarity regarding the most effective strategies for promoting non-discriminatory practices in the academic realm. The issue of gender inequality can be conceptualised as a ‘wicked problem’, which is a term used to describe a systemic, complex, conflictive, and sometimes ambiguous problem (Eden and Wagstaff, 2020).

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations (United Nations [UN], 2015) proclaimed the Millennium Goals for Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). This represents a commitment that states and institutions are adopting in a responsible manner. In numerous regions across the globe, academic institutions are spearheading the implementation of strategies designed to achieve these objectives. It is crucial that they engage with younger individuals who are either pursuing or embarking upon their academic endeavours. This bodes well for the future. Nevertheless, it is also evident that, nine years after the SDGs were declared and with five years remaining until a progress report is due, there are indications that these goals will not be met. The potential causes for this are a lack of financial resources and commitment on the part of governments, as asserted by Nature journal in its January 2020 issue (Nature, 2020).

However, there are also more profound and challenging reasons, given that these goals are complex in conceptual terms and cannot be transformed into measurable indicators (Breuer et al., 2019). As previously stated, these issues are particularly challenging to address, as evidenced by the observations of Eden and Wagstaff (2020). The growing practice of public management and academic capitalism is hindered by these obstacles, which have become more significant in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The consequences



of this will be far-reaching, with potential ramifications for the progress of the SDGs (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2020).

In order for global university rankings to prove relevant for the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, significant modifications must be made. As Torabian (2019, p. 168) asserts, “The GURs (global university rankings) represent the conventional perspectives that the world decided to abandon in 2015 due to their inability to ensure equity, equality, and social justice for all.” The data used to calculate the rankings is not only irrelevant in some cases, but it also has the unintended consequence of imposing a particular set of values rather than measuring them. The pressure to progress in these rankings may lead universities to implement policies and set goals in line with the rankings’ codified and measured criteria.

This danger is a tangible and documented phenomenon, as evidenced by reports from numerous educational organisations (Altbach and Hazelkorn, 2018). This results in the transfer of political regulatory power over universities to the companies that manage these rankings. It is therefore imperative that indicators, codes, metrics, algorithms, and methodologies be revised. This must be done with a new conceptual framework that prioritises sustainable development commitments and aligns all aforementioned elements with these goals, rather than the other way around. To effectively address inequality within the academic field, it is essential to develop a comprehensive, global perspective that can uncover the underlying mechanisms that cannot be fully quantified by any single index.

It is evident that a wicked problem, such as gender inequality, cannot be effectively addressed through the utilisation of conventional management strategies. These strategies often entail adjustments to organisational structures and common organisational schemes, as elucidated by Eden and Wagstaff (2020). In order to adequately address this issue, it is imperative that the responses employed are novel, transformative, and ambitious. Nevertheless, the recognition that gender inequality is a social construct should provide the impetus to address it and to cease constructing

gender relationships on an unequal footing. It has taken many decades of study and feminist theory to gain an understanding of this issue. However, it can be asserted that the very structures and relationships that perpetuate gender inequality can be dismantled, given that such inequality is not an inherent or immutable aspect of human nature. This is a challenging undertaking. It is for this reason that SDG 5 is closely related to other SDGs, particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). Therefore, joint strategies must be employed in order to advance all the SDGs.

As indicated in the most recent report from the Observatorio de Mujeres, Ciencia e Innovación (2020), a system must be devised for the evaluation and monitoring of the role of women in innovation processes. Nevertheless, this necessitates, initially, an examination of the overarching conceptualisation of innovation, entrepreneurship and economic activity (2020, p. 21):

Por todo lo anterior, el futuro diseño de un sistema de monitorización del papel de las mujeres en los procesos de innovación en España requiere, en primer lugar, un ejercicio de reflexión acerca de cómo se conciben la innovación, el emprendimiento y la actividad económica en general y, en segundo lugar, el desarrollo sistemático de una batería de indicadores que sea coherente con el marco propuesto. La introducción en este marco de elementos sistémicos, institucionales y culturales, tan importantes para entender las dinámicas de género, plantea retos innegables a la tarea de medición y monitorización, pero sin duda vale la pena abordarlos para una mejor comprensión de nuestra realidad social y económica<sup>2</sup>

The recent report on Gender Gaps in Higher Education 2023 of the Chilean Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación [MINEDUC], 2024) also reveals gender gaps at all levels. Although in the last decade at the level of student body and access to enrolment is balanced,

2 My own translation: “For all of the above reasons, the future design of a system for monitoring the role of women in innovation processes in Spain requires, firstly, an exercise in reflection on how innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic activity in general are conceived and, secondly, the systematic development of a battery of indicators that is consistent with the proposed framework. The introduction into this framework of systemic, institutional, and cultural elements, so important for understanding gender dynamics, poses undeniable challenges to the task of measurement and monitoring, but they are certainly worth addressing for a better understanding of our social and economic reality.”

in some areas, such as STEM, inequality persists in a highly unbalanced way. The report by Aparicio et al. (2023) on inequality in Chilean academia is conclusive with respect to the employment situation linked to research and management positions, in which there is a clear inequality: “it is necessary to move from the comprehensive-reflective process to a transforming action within the university institutions, which generates changes that are formally installed in the different areas of development of the work of the houses of higher education” (Aparicio et al., 2023, p. 78).

## CONCLUSION

It is imperative that we reflect on the conceptualisation of equality. A significant number of universities rely on the expertise of prominent feminist research centres, which can provide invaluable insights and guidance in developing effective strategies to advance the equality agenda. In the case of Spain, for instance, the Equality Departments at universities, which have their origins in the legislative framework that governs equality, universities and science, have been for more than a decade engaged in the constant study of gender inequality at every university with a view to creating and implementing specific actions designed to transform this reality and achieve full equality. Their role is of great importance, and their achievements are evident today in processes that are becoming more egalitarian. It is imperative that the collective efforts of these research groups on gender equality be given due consideration in order to facilitate advancement.

As Teresa de Lauretis (Lauretis, 2000) posited, gender is not merely a product; it is a process. The primary objective of patriarchy is to refine the processes of gender production in order to maintain and perpetuate the existing inequalities between men and women. This is not, however, its sole objective. In the process of creating and maintaining inequality between the sexes, the patriarchy also produces and perpetuates other forms of social and cultural differentiation that intersect with gender. It is therefore evident that this problem requires an approach that is not only multidisciplinary but also goes beyond the scope of the capacities of

the new public management and its corporate vision, which is based on data, indices, and measurement codes. New strategies must be implemented that employ a more comprehensive and systemic approach to comprehending the complex and pervasive issue of gender inequality. Universities possess the human resources necessary to provide such an approach, as they must transcend the constraints of academic capitalism.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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