

As an Asian woman and a first-generation graduate student, my experience has provided me with first-hand experience of the obstacles faced by women and other minorities. Over the years, I have become determined to fight against explicit and implicit biases and take action to promote equity and diversity in universities. In this statement, I will first present my own experience of overcoming such obstacles, then describe my ongoing efforts to help others and how my research contributes to diversity, and conclude with a future action plan.

My experience

Challenges faced by women and minorities are both institutional and cultural. Born and raised in a landlocked and underdeveloped province in China, I became aware of gender inequality at a young age when my uncle told me to work less hard in school because “good grades are not important for girls”. Such gender stereotypes sound absurd today, but they were popular and entrenched in the beliefs of many parents and even teachers at that time. As I came to realize in high school, these beliefs often create great structural barriers throughout the life of women and minorities, generating unequal access to resources and opportunities, and leading to a self-reinforcing cycle. To prove them wrong, I could only work even harder in my studies. With the efforts I made and the unconditional support of my parents, I achieved success in the college entrance examination and I was the only student admitted into Peking University—the top university in our country—from our county that year. Later on, many girls of younger age told me that my story inspired them to become more determined in their academic pursuits. This experience has led me to believe in the power of role models in overcoming the obstacles faced by women and other underrepresented minorities.

Helping others

In college, I realized that there are so many other practices and activities that I can do to promote equity and diversity. I have formed strong friendships with fellow students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. I joined a student-led volunteer group that aims at contributing to the development of my hometown province by distributing school supplies to children in need. I also participated in a language program to help international students learn Chinese and adjust to their new cultural surroundings.

At the University of Pennsylvania, my mindful awareness of diversity has played an important role in shaping my teaching methods and style. I seek to foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment in my classroom. Often, I find that female students tend to ask fewer questions and with less confidence than their male peers even in classes with a balanced gender composition. To make sure no students are left behind, I encourage all students to speak up in class, call on female and male students equally, and acknowledge every question by providing positive feedback. I foster collaboration among students by encouraging them to work in pairs in class or form study groups after class. I also make effort to create gender balance in the pronouns I use for problem sets and exams. Besides teaching, I have also taken courses on discrimination and closely tracked relevant economic research. I participated in the Women in Economic Theory Conference in 2022

at the University of Chicago, where I served as a presenter and a discussant of the work of a fellow female economist.

My Research

Belief-based discrimination has been empirically documented as an important source of discriminatory behavior in many markets. Recent developments in the literature have shown that inaccurate beliefs (e.g. stereotypes) about the productivity distribution or link between productivity and observed signals for particular groups can drive such belief-based discrimination (Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli, and Shleifer 2016; Bohren, Imas, and Rosenberg 2020). My job market paper studies why and when such incorrect models can persist even when decision makers are aware of the possibility that their beliefs may be inaccurate. Such foundational research strengthens our understanding of the roots of systemic biases and their potential impact in important areas such as discrimination. My paper "Over and Underreaction to Information: A Unified Approach" (joint with Aislinn Bohren and Alex Imas) furthers this understanding by theoretically and empirically exploring the key features of the decision environment that influence whether two commonly observed biases—under- and overreaction—emerge. These results can be applied to discrimination settings to provide insight into how to design decision environments that minimize the scope for bias.

Future Plan

I believe that all people should be provided with equal opportunities to thrive, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. But I am fully aware that there is a long way to go in my field of microeconomic theory (e.g., the Journal of Economic Theory reports that only around 4% of its editors are women). In my future role as a faculty member, I will build on my previous experiences to contribute to campus diversity in research, teaching, and service. First, I will strive to become a positive role model as a woman economist. Second, I will continue to collaborate with researchers from different backgrounds and fields. Third, I aim at making my classroom and office a welcoming and safe space, open to all students with questions, needs, and struggles. Finally, as a department citizen, I plan to take an active role in activities such as organizing inclusive conferences and seminars and mentoring students of underrepresented groups.