

The Psychology of Gender Bias in STEM Fields

Introduction

Women in STEM have faced challenges with gender inequality throughout history. Unfortunately, the issue of discrimination based on gender still remains prevalent today in many STEM fields. According to National Geographic, a popular magazine, despite half of the world's population identifying as female, only 30% of STEM professionals are women (National Geographic Society, 2024). Consequently, women are greatly underrepresented within all STEM fields. Despite there being many intelligent minds that can produce the same quality work men could make, women face challenges with gender bias; some severe forms of gender bias include the maternal wall bias and Prove-it-Again bias.

Maternal Wall Bias

A blatantly discriminatory practice can take place at a woman's workplace. Stated by the University of Nevada, Reno's news website, the maternal wall bias is a discriminatory belief that mothers who take time off to take care of their kids are uncommitted to their jobs, and uncaring if they don't (Barrios et al., 2022). As a result of this belief, those mothers are caught between a rock and a hard place. If they take time off to tend their children, they are viewed as someone who is unfit for their job; this problem can lead to these women being unable to receive deserved promotions. However, if they don't take time off, they're still met with contempt and judgement! In addition, according to Torres, the co-founder of Mothers in Science, a STEM study described that 11% of female PhD holders have to pay a penalty for having children, even though fathers did not have to receive the same treatment (Torres, 2020). Torres' account depicts the harsh reality women in STEM can experience. It's ironic how these women have to pay their jobs to have children. Furthermore, Torres (2020) states that women with children are also less likely to be hired or promoted, and are more likely to be perceived as incompetent by their workplace. Like what was written in Nevada

Today's article described, women end up being labeled as uncommitted just for having children. So, the maternal wall bias perpetuates a discriminatory belief that can diminish opportunities for women in STEM.

Prove-it-Again Bias

Many women in STEM encounter the Prove-it-Again bias at their workplace. According to the Harvard Business Review, an affiliate of Harvard's business school, the Prove-it-Again bias involves women experiencing constant judgement and being asked to repeatedly prove their competency (Williams, 2015). Consequently, the successes of these women are repeatedly downplayed. This phenomenon is frustrating for many women in STEM to experience. To be constantly questioned about their expertise, and to be put down by others working in the same field as them. Stated by Nevada Today, (2022), this bias occurs during hiring, too. While men are hired and given opportunities based on their potential, women are evaluated by their current or past successes. Thus, women in STEM are often pushed aside for their male counterparts.

Conclusion

Many women in STEM face challenges regarding gender bias. Although issues regarding gender inequality are pretty well known to the public, change is slow. It's important to acknowledge that these barriers exist in not just STEM, but also in other industries and jobs, too.

References

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