

# Gender bias in commenting poses barriers to women scholars

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Women academics are less likely than men to comment on published research, limiting scholarly debate, a new study co-authored by York University sociologist Professor Cary Wu, shows. According to the study, women are also relatively less likely to comment on their male counterparts, published research.

"Gendered patterns in academic commenting could impede scholarly exchange between men and women and further marginalize women within the [scientific community](#)," cautioned Wu, of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies. "And [gender inequality](#) is still deeply felt, despite the welcoming atmosphere today for women in academia."

Wu and his co-authors Professors Sylvia Fuller (University of British Columbia); Zhilei Shi (Zhongnan University of Economics and Law in Beijing, China); and Rima Wilkes (University of British Columbia), reviewed comments in two major scientific journals for this study.

They collected and hand coded author information from all comment letters and corresponding science and social science research articles published over the past 16 years in reputable scientific journals—*Science* and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*.

"Though time-consuming, this method allows for more accurate coding of gender information for the authors," said Wu, adding that the team also searched authors' profiles online to obtain images for the gender variable.

Published in *PLOS ONE*, the study supports the theory that [women](#) are disadvantaged across the stages of academic publishing, including collaboration, peer-reviewing, readership, citation and in media coverage.

**More information:** Cary Wu et al, The gender gap in commenting: Women are less likely than men to comment on (men's) published research, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0230043](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230043)

Provided by York University

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