

Referee Review for EGU Sphere-2026-3113

Manuscript: Is Life in Academia Attractive to Women in the Geosciences?

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Overall: This is an interesting and timely qualitative study addressing an important question regarding the attractiveness and sustainability of academic careers for women in the geosciences. The participant accounts are compelling and the manuscript provides a useful contribution beyond conventional “leaky pipeline” explanations. My comments primarily relate to methodological transparency, interpretation and opportunities to strengthen the discussion.

Sampling and scope: The focus-group sample comprises 19 participants, of whom 15 are employed on temporary contracts and the majority are postdoctoral researchers. This composition should be more explicitly acknowledged when interpreting the findings. In particular, it may be difficult to separate experiences associated specifically with gender from those associated with early-career academic precarity. A dedicated limitations section addressing sample composition, geographical scope and transferability would strengthen the manuscript.

Research population: At line 73, the research question refers specifically to “young women”, whereas the title and wider manuscript concern women generally. Unless age is an explicit component of the sampling and analysis, “young” should be removed or justified.

Recruitment and potential self-selection: Participants were recruited through institutional contacts. The authors should acknowledge the potential for self-selection, particularly as individuals with stronger experiences of precarity, discrimination or dissatisfaction may have been more likely to participate.

Greater methodological detail is needed: The manuscript would benefit from inclusion of the focus-group questions/topic guide, together with information on the number and size of focus groups, duration, format, facilitation, recording/transcription and how the exploratory survey and workshop(s) informed subsequent data collection. This would allow readers to better assess how the findings and themes emerged.

Thematic analysis: More detail should be provided on the analytical process, including whether coding was undertaken by one or both authors and how themes were developed and refined. The manuscript describes the analysis as inductive while also explaining that it was informed by a feminist/critical framework, the concept of attractiveness and the authors' own experiences. Clarifying the analytical approach would strengthen methodological transparency.

Survey, workshop and focus-group relationship: The study draws on an exploratory survey (n=58), workshop (n=10) and subsequent focus groups. It would be useful to clarify the analytical status of each stage and more clearly explain how findings from one informed the next.

Word-cloud analysis: The use of word frequency/word clouds requires further justification. Absence or frequency of individual words does not necessarily correspond to the importance of the underlying concept. Language, cultural context and social norms may also influence how participants articulate similar experiences or concepts, particularly across different national contexts. This should be

acknowledged when interpreting and comparing word frequencies. Furthermore, different minimum-word-frequency thresholds are used across groups, potentially limiting direct comparison. Simple frequency information and/or further explanation of the analytical rationale would improve these figures.

Evidence supporting themes: Without compromising participant confidentiality, the manuscript could provide a clearer indication of the prevalence and distribution of major themes. For example, whether an experience was raised across focus groups, predominantly by temporary staff, mothers/non-mothers, or participants within one national context. Additional illustrative quotations may also be useful where substantial conclusions are drawn from limited examples.

Intersectionality: The manuscript would benefit from explicit acknowledgement that other dimensions of intersectionality - including race/ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic background, nationality/migration status and sexual orientation - cannot be examined from the reported dataset. This is particularly relevant where the discussion recognises geoscience as historically associated with white, able-bodied masculinity.

Ireland/Germany comparison: As participants were recruited across Ireland and Germany, it would be useful to clarify whether national context is analytically significant. Differences in academic employment structures, childcare, parental leave and cultural expectations may influence participants' experiences. If comparative analysis is outside the study's scope, this should be acknowledged.

Exclusivity of motherhood lens: The manuscript gives considerable attention to children and caregiving, appropriately reflecting the data, but 10 of the 19 participants did not have children. It would be interesting to consider whether participants without children also rejected expectations of perpetual availability in favour of relationships, geographical stability, leisure or simply a sustainable life outside work. This could broaden the concept of "attractiveness" beyond motherhood.

Financial considerations: Financial disparity does not emerge strongly as a theme outside issues associated with maternity, temporary contracts and part-time work. It would be useful to clarify whether remuneration, gender pay disparities or financial security arose more clearly in the data and, if not, whether this absence is itself noteworthy.

Positive experiences and solutions: Much of the analysis understandably focuses on barriers. However, given that the central concept is attractiveness, were participants also asked what makes academia attractive, what encourages them to remain, or what positive practices they have experienced? Examples of supportive supervisors, departments, allies, institutional interventions or effective equality initiatives could provide valuable evidence for the recommendations of best practice.

Gender-equality labour: The finding that women undertake mentoring, outreach and equality work that is largely unrewarded is important. It may be valuable to explore whether participants also described women supporting other women, effective allyship, or conversely resistance to women's advancement, subject to data availability. This could provide additional nuance to the discussion of who carries responsibility for institutional change.

Strength of conclusions: Some conclusions move from participants' accounts to broader statements about women in geosciences. Given the qualitative design and composition of the sample, wording

should consistently distinguish between what participants in this study perceived/experienced and what can be concluded about women in geosciences more generally.

Ethical approval: The manuscript states that formal institutional ethical approval was not sought because the study was considered low risk. Given that participants discuss potentially sensitive experiences including discrimination, sexism, pregnancy and employment insecurity within relatively small professional communities, clarification of the institutional basis for this exemption/determination would be helpful.

Broader theoretical context: Claudia Goldin's work on "greedy work" may provide a useful wider labour-market framework for the findings around perpetual availability, productivity and inflexible working expectations. This could help situate academia within a broader structural problem rather than treating these conditions as unique to the sector. The manuscript already draws on the related concept of the "greedy institution."

Representation versus retention: Work by Professor Michelle Ryan and colleagues, including research associated with the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, may also strengthen the discussion around why increasing numerical representation does not necessarily result in inclusion, retention or sustainable progression. This appears particularly relevant to the manuscript's attempt to move beyond the "leaky pipeline" model.

Minor editorial points:

- Full stop required on line 23
- Should "illustrates" be past tense on line 43?
- Review wording/formatting on line 48