
This chapter is concerned with describing and critically evaluating the literature on the existence of and explanations for gender imbalances in higher education (HE) focusing particularly on girls’ increasing access to HE, and women’s limited access to senior positions there. As gender is socially constructed and multi-level, explanations for girls increasing access to HE and women’s limited access to senior positions in HE, are located at several levels: the individual (e.g. socialisation; entitlement); the interactional (e.g. ‘Othering’; patronising); the organisational (e.g. structure and culture); the systemic (e.g. the relationship with the state); and the wider institutional cultural level (e.g. cultural stereotypes). The attention is mainly focused on European countries with broadly similar HE systems and patterns of student participation, but with rather different patterns as regards the proportion of women in senior positions (i.e. Norway, Ireland and Portugal).