

AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENDER ISSUES AND CANCEL CULTURE

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between gender issues and the phenomenon of cancel culture. To this end, an integrative literature review was conducted to synthesize the available knowledge on the topic. The search for articles was carried out in the PubMed, Google Scholar, and CAPES Journal Portal databases. The selection and organization of studies followed the PRISMA flow guidelines. Initially, 172 articles were identified. After the removal of duplicates, 168 studies were retained for screening. Of these, 30 were assessed for eligibility, resulting in the inclusion of 8 articles in the qualitative synthesis. The analysis revealed that debates surrounding gender and sexuality constitute a significant factor in the emergence and intensification of cancel culture. This complex scenario has important implications for freedom of expression and for the production of knowledge in academic settings.

Keywords: Cancel Culture; Gender; Integrative Review

REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA DAS INTER-RELAÇÕES ENTRE QUESTÕES DE GÊNERO E CULTURA DO CANCELAMENTO

Resumo

da cultura do cancelamento. Para isso, foi realizada uma revisão integrativa da literatura com o objetivo de sintetizar o conhecimento disponível sobre o tema. A busca por artigos foi conduzida nas bases de dados PubMed, Google Acadêmico e no Portal de Periódicos da CAPES. A seleção e organização dos estudos seguiram as diretrizes do fluxograma PRISMA. Inicialmente, foram identificados 172 artigos. Após a remoção de duplicatas, 168 estudos foram mantidos para triagem. Desse total, 30 foram avaliados para elegibilidade, resultando na seleção de 8 artigos para compor a síntese qualitativa. A análise qualitativa revelou que debates sobre gênero e sexualidade são um fator significativo para o surgimento e a intensificação do cancelamento. Esse cenário complexo traz

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implicações importantes para a liberdade de expressão e para a produção de conhecimento no ambiente acadêmico.

Palavras-chave: Cultura do Cancelamento; Gênero; Revisão Integrativa de Literatura

REVISIÓN INTEGRATIVA DE LAS INTERRELACIONES ENTRE CUESTIONES DE GÉNERO Y CULTURA DE LA CANCELACIÓN

Resumen

Este estudio buscó examinar la relación entre las cuestiones de género y el fenómeno de la cultura de la cancelación. Para ello, se realizó una revisión integradora de la literatura con el objetivo de sintetizar el conocimiento disponible sobre el tema. La búsqueda de artículos se llevó a cabo en las bases de datos PubMed, Google Académico y el Portal de Periódicos de la CAPES. La selección y organización de los estudios siguieron las directrices del flujograma PRISMA. Inicialmente, se identificaron 172 artículos. Después de eliminar los duplicados, se mantuvieron 168 estudios para la selección. De este total, se evaluaron 30 para elegibilidad, lo que resultó en la selección de 8 artículos para conformar la síntesis cualitativa. El análisis cualitativo reveló que los debates sobre género y sexualidad son un factor significativo para el surgimiento y la intensificación de la cancelación. Este escenario complejo conlleva importantes implicaciones para la libertad de expresión y para la producción de conocimiento en el entorno académico.

Palabras clave: Cultura de la Cancelación; Género; Revisión Integrativa de la Literatura.

1. Introduction

In the Brazilian academic and political landscape, disputes surrounding gender issues have become increasingly intense and, at times, polarized. In his studies, Miskolci (2021) argues that these conflicts — characterized by the author as moral battles within a techno-mediated public sphere — cut across both so-called conservative sectors, which oppose what they term “gender ideology” and progressive sectors, which resort to practices of “canceling” and publicly denouncing researchers and scholars who are critical of certain epistemologies or theoretical approaches within gender studies.

In a recent example, Miskolci (2025, p. 8) illustrates this scenario: the researcher himself was declared *persona non grata* by trans movement activists after criticizing the term “cisgenderness” and its variations on different

occasions. According to him, this and other recent cases reveal a dispute within the field of gender studies characterized by “a struggle for authority over a subject in order to ensure control and monopoly over it”.

Previously, Pelúcio and Duque (2020) had already discussed how the so-called “cancel culture”, originating in digital environments, affects gender studies in Brazil, consolidating itself as a tool for regulating behavior and ideas within academia, but also beyond it.

From a similar perspective, Roldan, Ong, and Tomas (2024) argue that, by failing to foster dialogue or self-reflection, cancel culture fuels polarization, hindering the resolution of complex problems and preventing genuine development or reconciliation. In addition to its limited effectiveness in producing structural change, cancel culture may function merely as an immediate emotional release for those who engage in it.

According to Balieiro (2025, p. 3), episodes of canceling can be understood as moral disputes arising from a contemporary communicational order shaped by the internet. As such, they “are part of strategies aimed at persistently making social issues visible in digital media; however, this occurs in a way that simplifies such issues, reducing them to the personification of social inequalities and oppressions”.

Thus, the digital environment constitutes a fertile ground for the dynamics of cancel culture. According to Miskolci (2021, p. 21), digital platforms encourage the public expression of opinions on topics relevant to public debate within a logic in which the relevance of content is defined “based on attention metrics such as views, likes, and shares”. As a result, controversies involving gender and sexuality are often amplified in these environments, transforming debates into veritable moral battles.

Based on this understanding, cancel culture is defined here as a contemporary phenomenon with authoritarian characteristics, in which individuals or groups mobilize on digital media to denounce and defame people whose actions or statements are deemed morally unacceptable. Given that those targeted are often public figures or individuals with considerable prestige, social accountability may lead to the withdrawal of support, visibility, and opportunities, resulting in concrete consequences ranging from professional losses to psychological harm.

The collective sanctions characteristic of this phenomenon often occurs without mediation by formal justice institutions and are based on immediate moral judgments driven by an excessive emphasis on identity categories such as race, sexuality, and gender. In such cases, there must always be a “victim” — an individual whose personal and subjective identity is perceived as socially subordinated — since “being a victim grants prestige, demands recognition, promises and fosters acknowledgment, activates a powerful generator of identity, rights, and self-esteem. It immunizes against any criticism” (Giglioli, 2020, p. 11).

Roldan, Ong, and Tomas (2024) point to the lack of consistent evidence that this practice leads to positive and widespread transformation. On the contrary, cancel culture may produce a reactive effect, encouraging those who are “canceled” to reaffirm their positions and defend themselves vehemently in order to safeguard their social identity. By failing to promote dialogue or self-reflection, cancel culture fuels political polarization in contemporary society, making it more difficult to address complex problems. Moreover, beyond its limited effectiveness in generating deep change, it may be interpreted as an immediate emotional release for those who engage in it, without necessarily producing meaningful transformations.

Although often associated with digital environments, cancel culture is not restricted to social media and can also be reproduced in offline contexts. Such dynamics may emerge in various institutions, including those that promote critical thinking and theoretical debate, such as universities. Academic environments — marked by symbolic disputes, ideological tensions, and intellectual confrontations — may become spaces for silencing, exposure, and exclusion of their members (Pelúcio; Duque, 2020; Miskolci, 2025).

Empirical data also point to the centrality of gender-related issues in contemporary academic controversies. A recent study on freedom of expression in Brazilian universities indicates that discussions related to gender and sexuality are among those that most generate discomfort, conflict, or fear of expression among students and faculty. These findings reinforce the hypothesis that disputes involving such themes occupy a central position in discursive conflicts within academic spaces, helping to explain their frequent presence in episodes associated with so-called cancel culture (Instituto Sivis, 2025).

In line with Scott (1986), “gender” is understood as an analytical category that enables the comprehension of the organization of male power in society. Thus, gender can be understood simultaneously as a form of social organization of sexual differences and as a primary way of giving meaning to power relations, structuring cultural symbols, institutional norms, social organizations, and subjective identities.

Given this context, the objective of the present study is to conduct an integrative literature review of scientific articles that establish a relationship between discussions on gender issues and the phenomenon of cancel culture. Additionally, this study seeks to answer the following question: are issues related to gender a factor that fuels cancel culture?

This study aims to fill a gap by investigating how conceptual and political disputes surrounding gender issues manifest, intensify, and operate as drivers of cancellation episodes within academia. Unlike the review by Mancoso, Caldas, and Lycarião (2023), which provides a broad mapping of national and international production on cancel culture, the present study seeks to critically engage the debate by focusing specifically on the intersections between cancel culture and gender issues. Furthermore, the justification for this research is grounded in the growing relevance and complexity of the phenomenon in the global digital and academic context.

2. Methodology

To conduct this study, we drew on the contributions of Botelho, Cunha, and Macedo (2011) regarding integrative literature reviews. According to the authors, such reviews must follow a rigorous methodological process composed of six stages: (1) identification of the theme and selection of the research question; (2) establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (3) identification of pre-selected and selected studies; (4) categorization of the selected studies; (5) analysis and interpretation of results; and (6) synthesis of knowledge.

Following these assumptions, the present review began with the identification of the theme and the formulation of the research question, as presented in the title and introduction. Subsequently, during the stage of defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, the following parameters were established for article selection:

Table 1 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the integrative literature review
Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals.	Works such as monographs, dissertations, theses, book chapters, book reviews, or conference proceedings.
Articles written in Portuguese or English.	Articles written in languages other than Portuguese or English.
Studies published between 2015 and 2024.	Studies published before 2015 or after 2024.
Articles that establish a relationship between cancel culture and debates or conflicts involving gender issues within academia.	Studies addressing cancel culture in other social fields, such as media, entertainment, the cultural industry, or social media in general.
Scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals.	—

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

The exclusion of theses, dissertations, and monographs is justified by the aim of ensuring greater comparability among the analyzed studies. Book chapters and reviews were excluded because they generally do not provide the same level of methodological detail required of scientific articles and are not necessarily subject to double-blind peer review. The time frame was defined to encompass recent publications, considering that the academic debate on cancel

culture has gained greater visibility since the 2020s (Mancoso; Caldas; Lycarião, 2023).

For the identification of studies, a search was conducted in the CAPES Journal Portal, SciELO, PubMed, and Google Scholar, using the descriptors and Boolean operators “cultura do cancelamento” AND “gênero” for searches in Portuguese and “cancel culture” AND “gender” for searches in English. Despite conducting searches in Portuguese, studies written in this language did not meet the eligibility criteria and were therefore not included in the qualitative synthesis.

In the categorization stage, the selected studies were organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet containing information such as title, abstract, and access link. Subsequently, the stages of data analysis, interpretation, and knowledge synthesis were carried out through careful reading of the texts by more than one researcher independently, and any disagreements were resolved by consensus.

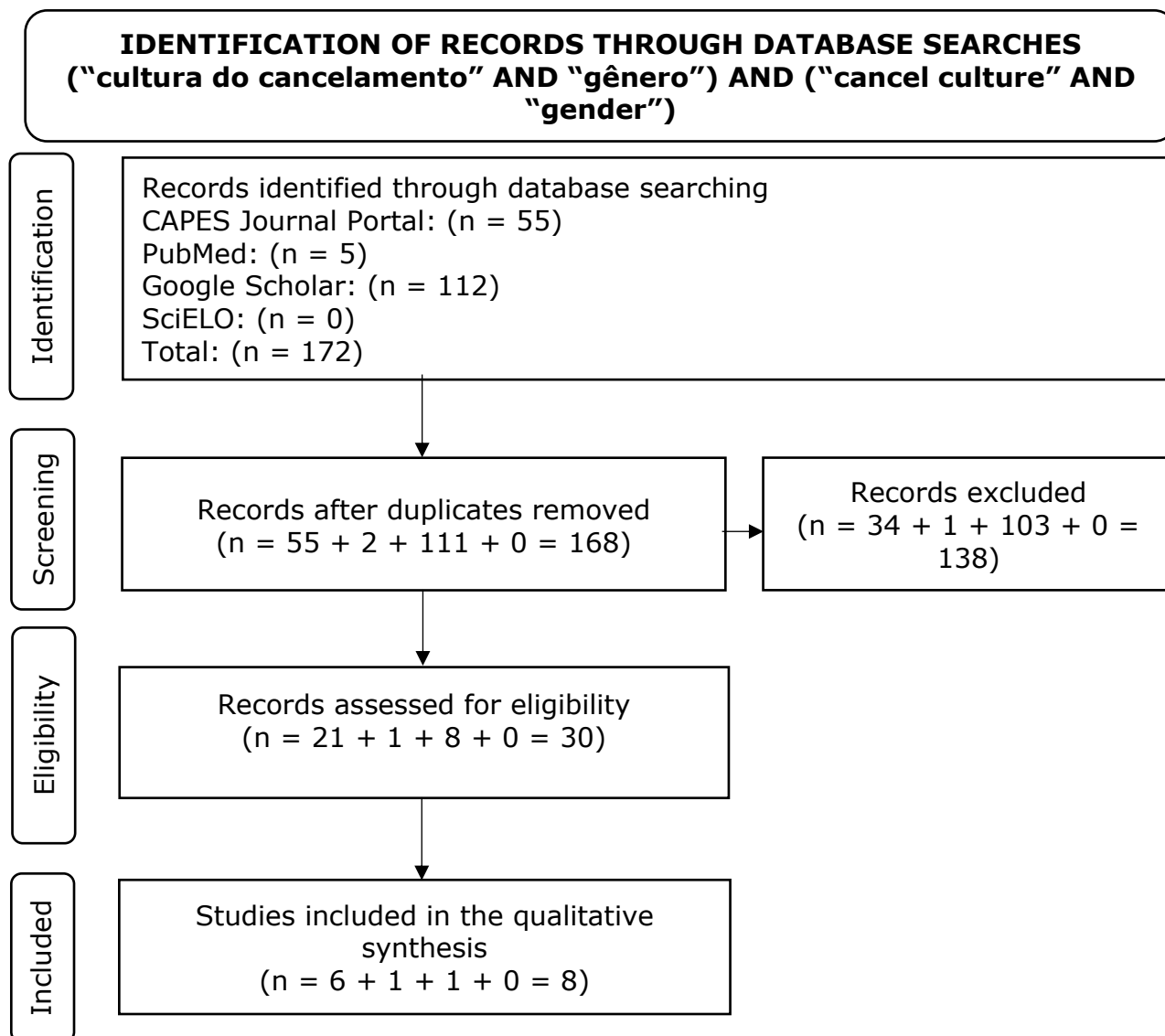
The definition of the articles included in the qualitative synthesis was guided by thematic relevance criteria. Initially, other studies addressing cancel culture in different social fields — such as media, entertainment, and digital culture — were identified. However, for the purposes of this study, only articles that explicitly discussed episodes of canceling related to debates on gender within the academic context were selected.

Thus, studies whose focus lay on other social fields were excluded, even when they tangentially mentioned gender issues. Based on this selection, texts that demonstrated greater alignment with the research objective were included, as they directly addressed conflicts involving gender and practices of cancel culture in university settings or in academic production.

To ensure methodological rigor and transparency in the study selection process, this review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, adapted from Page et al. (2021). PRISMA is an evidence-based set of guidelines developed to improve the reporting of reviews by proposing a structured flow for the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies.

In this study, the PRISMA framework was applied in four main stages: (1) identification of records through database searches; (2) screening of titles and abstracts, with the removal of duplicates and clearly irrelevant studies; (3) assessment of full-text articles for eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria; and (4) inclusion of studies that met all criteria in the qualitative synthesis. This process is illustrated below:

Figure 1 - Adaptation of the PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source: Adapted from Page *et al.* (2021).

3. Results

After a careful and critical reading of the 30 articles assessed for eligibility, 8 studies were selected to compose the qualitative synthesis. All analyzed texts were written in English and were grouped into a single thematic category: cancel culture in relation to gender issues within academia and/or the context of scientific research.

The following table presents the studies included in the qualitative synthesis:

Table 2 - Studies included in the review

Author(s) and year	Country of publication	Study design	Main findings
Pfaus (2023)	United States	Theoretical essay	Interprets cancel culture as a contemporary form of censorship in sexual and gender science, comparing it to "sexual McCarthyism" promoted by both conservative sectors and progressive activists, leading to the punishment of researchers for views considered "incorrect" or even criminal.
Hooven (2023)	United States	Theoretical essay	Argues that increasing hostility toward scientific discourse on sex and gender is driven by the perception that discussing biological facts is morally problematic, with critics favoring personal attacks and moral outrage over open scientific debate.
Lowrey (2023)	United States	Theoretical essay	Argues that "gender identity ideology" has become consolidated within academia, leading anthropology to move away from empirical rigor in favor of a perspective that prioritizes indeterminacy and challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge, based on the assumption that biological sex is a cultural construct.
Norris (2024)	United Kingdom	Mixed-methods (survey research)	Concludes that cancel culture fosters self-censorship and that, in Western academic contexts, researchers with conservative views are more likely to refrain from participating in debates on gender and sexuality due to fear of social isolation (spiral of silence).
Paché (2022)	United States	Theoretical essay	Argues that so-called "woke culture" may compromise scientific rigor even in fields traditionally considered

			politically neutral, such as management and logistics, leading to the marginalization of valid methodologies and limiting the understanding of complex social phenomena.
Teixeira da Silva (2021)	Netherlands	Theoretical essay	Argues that the retraction of opinion articles on gender issues — particularly under public pressure — undermines the scientific process by replacing reasoned critique with silencing, and suggests that counterarguments should be encouraged to sustain open and constructive debate.
Cassel e Maurana (2024)	United States	Theoretical essay	Acknowledges the polarizing effects of cancel culture but advocates for institutional initiatives that promote civil dialogue and open inquiry as alternatives to censorship, fostering respectful and constructive engagement.
Thomas, Bancel e Blanchard (2023)	France	Theoretical essay	Offers a distinct perspective, arguing that cancel culture operates as a politically mobilized discursive resource — particularly among conservative sectors — to reinforce narratives of threat to science and democracy, functioning as a mechanism of power.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

4. Discussion

This section presents the qualitative synthesis of the selected studies that establish interrelationships between cancel culture and gender issues within academia, encompassing teaching, research, and extension activities. Most of the analyzed articles adopt a critical stance toward cancel culture in university settings (Pfaus, 2023; Hooven, 2023; Lowrey, 2023; Teixeira da Silva, 2021; Norris, 2024; Cassel & Maurana, 2024; Paché, 2022). It is important to note, however, the existence of a divergent study (Thomas, Bancel, & Blanchard, 2023), which will be explored as a counterpoint at the end of this section.

The works of Pfaus (2023), Hooven (2023), and Lowrey (2023), which open this discussion, are part of the special section entitled “Cancel culture”: its impact on sex/gender teaching, clinical practice, and research, published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, affiliated with the International Academy of Sex Research.

Pfaus (2023) interprets cancel culture as a contemporary manifestation of a historical pattern of censorship in sexual and gender science, comparing the phenomenon to the destruction of the German Institute for Sexual Research by the Nazis in 1933. The author conceptualizes this contemporary dynamic as “sexual McCarthyism” — a term used to describe the politicization and attack on scientific findings related to sex and gender — arguing that it is promoted by both conservative sectors and a new generation of progressive activists, with gender and sexuality at the epicenter of conflict. In this sense, “sexual McCarthyism” occurs when research findings are labeled as “correct” or “incorrect” based on ideological perspectives of social justice, leading to the punishment of researchers for their views and attempts to “cancel” their academic careers.

Hooven (2023), in turn, describes a situation in which her public statements affirming that sex is binary — made during an interview on the program “Fox and Friends” to promote her book on testosterone — generated controversy. In response, she was publicly accused of transphobia on social media, and, according to the author, the widespread circulation of these accusations resulted in the creation of a hostile work environment. This, in turn, negatively affected her ability to teach and conduct research in her field of expertise, ultimately leading her to step down from her academic position.

In her analysis, Hooven (2023) further argues that the growing hostility toward scientific discourse on sex and gender is driven by the perception that discussing biological facts is morally problematic. According to the author, rather than engaging in scientific debate, critics tend to resort to personal attacks, using moral purity as a means of signaling loyalty to historically marginalized social groups.

Similarly, Lowrey (2023) argues that “gender identity ideology” has become a dominant force within academia, particularly in anthropology. According to the author, its proponents do not perceive this shift as detrimental but rather as a legitimate transformation aligned with what they consider sound anthropological practice. This perspective, however, involves moving away from empirical rigor in favor of an approach that prioritizes uncertainty and indeterminacy.

Taken together, these three studies converge in offering a historical-theoretical analysis, a personal case study, and a disciplinary critique of cancel culture, respectively. In all cases, the phenomenon is characterized as a form of ideological censorship commonly associated with debates on gender and sexuality, which undermines the principles of academic freedom. Pfaus (2023), Lowrey (2023), and Hooven (2023) highlight the role of social media activism, the instrumentalization of concerns with “social justice,” and the complacent —

or even complicit — role of university administrators, who, out of fear of controversy and reputational damage, allow the erosion of plural academic debate.

From a similar perspective, Norris (2024), based on a study involving nearly 2,000 political scientists across approximately 100 countries, concludes that in Western academic environments dominated by liberal values, researchers holding conservative views are more likely to remain silent in debates on gender and sexuality. This dynamic is interpreted through the lens of Noelle-Neumann's (1974; 1977; 1984) spiral of silence theory, suggesting that fear of isolation and social ostracism fosters a climate of conformity that inhibits the expression of divergent ideas in academic settings.

Meanwhile, Paché (2022) argues that so-called “woke culture” may compromise scientific rigor even in fields traditionally considered politically neutral, such as management and logistics. According to the author, research on topics such as prostitution and pornography, for instance, may be accused of implicitly endorsing oppression, even when conducted using robust methodologies and subjected to peer review. The author further suggests that this dynamic is particularly prevalent in North America, a finding that aligns with the results discussed in the previous paragraph.

Analyzing cancel culture within the editorial context of academic publishing, Teixeira da Silva (2021) argues that the retraction of opinion articles addressing gender issues — especially under public pressure, including those concerning transgender rights — undermines the scientific process. According to the author, this practice replaces reasoned critique with silencing and reflects the growing influence of social media pressures on editorial decision-making, signaling that opinions must be moderated to align with a publishing market increasingly guided by moral rather than academic criteria. The author contends that, within academia, theoretical disagreements should be addressed through refutations and critical debate in scientific publications, as freedom of expression must remain a cornerstone of scholarly discourse, even when views are controversial.

Cassel and Maurana (2024) examine the phenomenon of cancel culture within the context of medical education, particularly in the field of reproductive health, where issues of gender identity and sexuality are often present. While acknowledging the polarizing effects of cancel culture, the authors advocate for institutional programs that promote civil dialogue and open inquiry as alternatives to censorship, thereby preserving the academic commitment to pluralism. They argue that overcoming polarization requires equipping students and professionals with the tools necessary to engage in respectful and constructive debate, in line with the core mission of academia.

Finally, Thomas, Bancel, and Blanchard (2023) offer a distinct interpretation: rather than understanding cancel culture solely as a form of censorship, they argue that it also functions as a discursive resource politically mobilized — particularly by conservative sectors — to reinforce narratives of threat to science and democracy. In this sense, the concept operates as a

mechanism of power used to construct common enemies and legitimize reactionary ideological projects.

Thus, while much of the reviewed literature frames cancel culture as a threat to academic freedom, Thomas, Bancel, and Blanchard (2023) demonstrate that the concept itself remains contested, serving both to describe exclusionary practices and to be strategically mobilized in broader political disputes. This tension reveals that the debate surrounding cancel culture extends beyond its immediate effects, encompassing the historical and discursive conditions under which the concept is produced, appropriated, and mobilized.

5. Final Considerations

This study aimed to conduct an integrative literature review of scientific articles that establish a relationship between discussions on gender issues and the phenomenon of cancel culture. Based on the analysis of the selected studies, it can be concluded that gender and sexuality constitute central factors that both shape and intensify this phenomenon, configuring a multifaceted scenario with direct implications for freedom of expression and the production of academic knowledge.

A significant portion of the reviewed literature interprets cancel culture as a form of ideological censorship, manifested through attacks on researchers, self-censorship, editorial retractions, and professional sanctions. However, counterarguments suggest that the very rhetoric of cancel culture may be politically instrumentalized, functioning as a discursive device to mobilize collective outrage and justify the exclusion of certain fields of knowledge. Thus, the main contribution of this study lies in constructing a state of the art regarding the interrelationships between gender issues and cancel culture.

Nevertheless, this review presents some limitations. All included articles were published in English, which restricts the cultural and temporal scope of the findings. This concentration reflects a trend in the available literature but does not represent a definitive consensus in the field, highlighting the need to expand the debate beyond the Anglo-Saxon axis. The absence of studies in Portuguese reveals a gap that should be addressed by future research capable of analyzing the dynamics of self-censorship and the instrumentalization of cancel culture across different sociocultural contexts.

Future investigations could also explore the role of social media in intensifying cancel culture, as well as examine the specificities of academic self-censorship in non-Western contexts. Such studies are essential for enabling academia to uphold its core mission: to sustain plural and critical debate in an increasingly polarized global context.

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Editorial Responsibility: Célia Regina de Carvalho.
Received on: March 4, 2026.
Accepted on: March 25, 2026.
Published on: June, 24 2026.