The Quantum Revolution and Gender Division of Labor in Sustainable Materials R&D: A Mathematical Framework with Assessment Indicators

Daniela Carolina Vargas Silva*
Independent Researcher

Mariana Lucía Herrera Parra
Independent Researcher

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Abstract

This article develops a theoretical-mathematical framework to analyze the potential impact of quantum technologies on the gender division of labor in research and development of sustainable materials. We construct an optimization model that captures labor allocation dynamics between genders across different stages of quantum R&D, incorporating barriers to entry, skill acquisition costs, and network externalities. Our analysis reveals that without proactive policy interventions, quantum technologies may exacerbate existing gender disparities through path-dependent skill accumulation and differential access to quantum computing infrastructure. We propose five comprehensive indicators to assess gender equity in quantum innovation ecosystems: the Gender Quantum Readiness Index, Quantum Innovation Gender Gap, Sustainable Materials R&D Gender Parity Index, Quantum Skills Gender Accessibility Index, and Gender-Inclusive Quantum Workforce Index. The model demonstrates that optimal social welfare requires coordinated interventions addressing both supply-side constraints and demand-side factors. Our theoretical predictions suggest that early-stage interventions yield higher returns in terms of long-term gender parity compared to corrective measures implemented after technological lock-in occurs.

Keywords: Quantum technologies, Gender division of labor, Sustainable materials, R&D optimization, Innovation indicators
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1 Introduction

The emergence of quantum technologies represents a fundamental shift in computational capabilities with profound implications for scientific research and development (Troyer

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*Corresponding author: info@amlentia.org

et al., 2024; Möller and Vuik, 2017). Quantum computing offers exponential advantages in solving complex optimization problems, simulating molecular interactions, and discovering novel materials for sustainability applications (Ajagekar and You, 2022; Paudel et al., 2022). In the context of sustainable materials research and development, quantum algorithms promise to accelerate the discovery of carbon capture materials, advanced battery technologies, and renewable energy solutions (Ricciardi Celsi and Ricciardi Celsi, 2024; Ashwani et al., 2024).

However, the quantum revolution unfolds within existing socioeconomic structures characterized by persistent gender disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (Wolbring, 2022; Seskir et al., 2023). The gender division of labor in research and development remains marked by vertical segregation, with women underrepresented in senior research positions and leadership roles, and horizontal segregation, with differential participation across scientific disciplines (Ebua, 2023). As quantum technologies reshape research methodologies and infrastructure requirements, understanding their gendered impacts becomes critical for ensuring inclusive innovation ecosystems.

This article addresses a fundamental question: how will the quantum revolution affect the gender division of labor in sustainable materials research and development, and what mechanisms can promote gender equity in this emerging technological frontier? We develop a theoretical-mathematical framework that models labor allocation decisions between genders across different stages of quantum-enabled research. Our approach combines insights from labor economics, innovation studies, and quantum technology assessment to construct an optimization model that captures key dynamics including skill acquisition costs, infrastructure access barriers, network externalities, and path-dependent career trajectories.

The analysis reveals several critical mechanisms through which quantum technologies may influence gender disparities. First, the high capital intensity of quantum computing infrastructure creates potential access barriers that may disproportionately affect researchers in institutions with limited resources, where women are overrepresented (de Jong, 2022). Second, the rapid pace of technological change requires continuous skill updating, and differential access to training opportunities may amplify existing gender gaps (Raja and Christiaensen, 2017). Third, network effects in quantum research communities can create self-reinforcing patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Possati, 2024).

Our mathematical model demonstrates that socially optimal outcomes require coordinated interventions addressing both supply-side constraints and demand-side factors. We show that market equilibria without intervention tend to perpetuate or exacerbate gender disparities through multiple channels. The model identifies critical intervention points and quantifies the relative effectiveness of different policy instruments.

A key contribution of this article is the development of five comprehensive indicators designed to assess gender equity in quantum innovation ecosystems. These indicators span different dimensions of participation, from foundational education and skill acquisition to research output and leadership representation. The proposed metrics provide actionable tools for policymakers, research institutions, and funding agencies to monitor progress toward gender-inclusive quantum innovation.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework linking quantum technologies, sustainable materials research and development, and gender division of labor. Section 3 develops the mathematical model of labor allocation with optimization analysis. Section 4 presents the proposed assessment indicators with formal definitions and measurement protocols. Section 5 discusses policy implications and comparative statics results. Section 6 concludes with directions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

The gender division of labor in research and development reflects complex interactions between historical patterns, institutional structures, and individual choices constrained by social norms and economic incentives (Damayanti, 2024; Kiesow Cortez et al., 2023). In the context of emerging quantum technologies for sustainable materials research, three theoretical perspectives inform our analysis.

First, human capital theory suggests that gender disparities in research and development participation arise from differential investments in education and training (Lee, 2001). The quantum revolution introduces new skill requirements including quantum mechanics, quantum algorithms, and quantum computing platforms. Access to quantum education remains highly concentrated in elite institutions in high-income countries, creating potential barriers for underrepresented groups (Nita et al., 2021; Arrow et al., 2023).

Second, institutional economics emphasizes how organizational structures and norms shape labor market outcomes (Gu, 1999). Research institutions developing quantum capabilities face decisions about resource allocation, hiring priorities, and research agendas. These decisions occur within contexts of existing gender imbalances and may inadvertently reproduce historical patterns (Coenen et al., 2022). The capital-intensive nature of quantum infrastructure creates dependencies that can reinforce existing power structures.

Third, innovation systems theory highlights the importance of networks, knowledge flows, and complementary assets (López-Claros, 2011; Kop, 2023). Quantum innovation ecosystems require coordination across multiple actors including universities, national laboratories, technology companies, and funding agencies. Network effects can create self-reinforcing advantages for groups with existing connections, potentially excluding newcomers (Vermaas, 2017).

The sustainable materials focus adds additional complexity. Research and development in this domain addresses critical challenges including climate change mitigation, resource efficiency, and environmental protection (Priyanka et al., 2024; Ho et al., 2024). The urgency of sustainability transitions creates strong incentives for rapid quantum technology deployment. However, speed-focused approaches risk bypassing equity considerations (Arora and Kumar, 2024).

We conceptualize the gender division of labor in quantum-enabled sustainable materials research and development as emerging from interactions across three levels. At the micro level, individual researchers make education and career decisions based on expected returns, perceived barriers, and personal preferences influenced by social norms. At the meso level, research institutions allocate resources, design training programs, and establish hiring practices that shape opportunity structures. At the macro level, national quantum strategies, funding priorities, and infrastructure investments create enabling environments that may be more or less inclusive (Troyer et al., 2024).

Our mathematical model formalizes these multilevel interactions through an optimization framework. We model researchers as utility-maximizing agents choosing between investing in quantum skills versus alternative research approaches. Research institutions maximize output subject to budget constraints and available talent pools. Social planners optimize aggregate welfare considering both efficiency and equity objectives.

3 Mathematical Model

We develop a dynamic model of labor allocation in sustainable materials research and development as quantum technologies become available. Consider a research economy with two periods and two genders representing female and male researchers. Let N_F and N_M denote the initial populations of female and male researchers respectively.

3.1 Individual Decision Problem

Each researcher chooses between investing in quantum computing skills or remaining with traditional computational methods. The utility function for a researcher of gender g is:

$$U_g(s) = w_g(s) - \theta_g(s) \tag{1}$$

where $w_g(s)$ is the wage associated with skill choice s and $\theta_g(s)$ represents the total cost of acquiring and maintaining skill s.

The cost structure incorporates multiple components:

$$\theta_g(q) = \theta_g^{edu} + \theta_g^{infra} + \theta_g^{network} + \theta_g^{barrier} \tag{2}$$

where θ_g^{edu} is education cost, θ_g^{infra} is infrastructure access cost, $\theta_g^{network}$ captures network externality losses, and $\theta_g^{barrier}$ represents gender-specific barriers. We assume:

$$\theta_F^{barrier} \geq \theta_M^{barrier} \tag{3}$$

reflecting empirical evidence of higher barriers for women in emerging technology fields (Wolbring, 2022; Seskir et al., 2023).

3.2 Production Technology

Research output in sustainable materials depends on the composition of the research workforce. Let L_g^q denote the number of gender g researchers with quantum skills, and L_g^c those with traditional skills. Aggregate output is:

$$Y = A_q \left(\sum_g L_g^q \right)^\alpha + A_c \left(\sum_g L_g^c \right)^\beta \tag{4}$$

where $A_q > A_c$ reflects quantum advantage for complex materials simulations, and $\alpha, \beta < 1$ capture diminishing returns.

The quantum productivity advantage depends on the share of researchers with quantum skills:

$$A_q = \bar{A}_q \left(\frac{\sum_g L_g^q}{\sum_g (L_g^q + L_g^c)} \right)^\gamma \tag{5}$$

where $\gamma > 0$ captures complementarities and network effects.

3.3 Wage Determination

Wages are determined by marginal productivity:

$$w^q = \frac{\partial Y}{\partial L^q} = \alpha A_q \left(\sum_g L_g^q \right)^{\alpha - 1} \tag{6}$$

$$w^c = \frac{\partial Y}{\partial L^c} = \beta A_c \left(\sum_g L_g^c \right)^{\beta - 1} \tag{7}$$

3.4 Market Equilibrium

In market equilibrium, each researcher chooses the skill that maximizes utility. The share of gender g researchers choosing quantum skills, denoted λ_g, satisfies equilibrium conditions.

Lemma 1. *If $\theta_F^{barrier} > \theta_M^{barrier}$ and network costs are increasing in adoption, then market equilibrium exhibits $\lambda_F < \lambda_M$.*

Proof: The higher barrier cost directly reduces the net return to quantum skills for female researchers. Additionally, if fewer women initially adopt quantum skills due to barriers, network externalities create self-reinforcing disadvantages, further discouraging adoption. This creates a feedback loop resulting in persistently lower female adoption rates. □

3.5 Social Optimum

A social planner maximizes aggregate welfare subject to equity constraints. The social welfare function is:

$$W = Y + \phi G \tag{8}$$

where Y is total output and G measures gender equity in quantum research participation:

$$G = - \left| \frac{\lambda_F N_F}{\lambda_F N_F + \lambda_M N_M} - \frac{N_F}{N_F + N_M} \right| \tag{9}$$

The parameter $\phi \geq 0$ represents society's valuation of equity.

Proposition 1. *The socially optimal allocation satisfies:*

$$\frac{\partial Y}{\partial \lambda_g} = \theta_g'(q) - \theta_g'(c) - \phi \frac{\partial G}{\partial \lambda_g} \tag{10}$$

for each gender g.

Proof: Taking first-order conditions of the social welfare function with respect to adoption rates and rearranging yields the stated condition. The marginal social benefit of increasing quantum skill adoption equals the marginal private cost adjusted for equity considerations. □

Theorem 1 (Market Inefficiency). *When* $\theta_F^{barrier} > \theta_M^{barrier}$ *and* $\phi > 0$, *market equilibrium is inefficient with lower female adoption rates than socially optimal and reduced total welfare.*

Proof: Market equilibrium does not internalize the social value of equity. Female researchers face higher barriers but the market does not compensate for these. Since the social optimum accounts for equity value, it prescribes higher female adoption than market equilibrium. The welfare gap is positive when barriers are asymmetric and equity has positive social value. □

4 Optimization Framework for Policy Interventions

We extend the model to incorporate policy interventions designed to reduce gender gaps. Consider a policy maker who can invest in three types of interventions: education programs that reduce education costs, infrastructure investments that reduce access costs, and barrier reduction initiatives that reduce gender-specific barriers.

Let I_e, I_i, and I_b denote investment levels in each intervention type, with total budget B. The optimization problem is:

$$\max_{I_e, I_i, I_b} W(\lambda_F(I_e, I_i, I_b), \lambda_M(I_e, I_i, I_b)) \tag{11}$$

subject to:

$$I_e + I_i + I_b \leq B \tag{12}$$

The effectiveness functions capture how investments reduce costs:

$$\theta_g^{edu}(I_e) = \bar{\theta}_g^{edu} e^{-\delta_e I_e} \tag{13}$$

$$\theta_g^{infra}(I_i) = \bar{\theta}_g^{infra} e^{-\delta_i I_i} \tag{14}$$

$$\theta_F^{barrier}(I_b) = \bar{\theta}_F^{barrier} e^{-\delta_b I_b} \tag{15}$$

where effectiveness parameters are positive.

Proposition 2 (Optimal Policy Mix). *The optimal investment allocation satisfies equalized marginal returns across intervention types.*

Proof: First-order conditions from the Lagrangian yield equal marginal welfare gains per dollar spent across all intervention types at the optimum. Using the chain rule with exponential cost functions establishes the result. □

4.1 Dynamic Extension

In the dynamic version, researchers accumulate experience and skills over time. Let h_{gt} denote the human capital of gender g researchers in period t, evolving according to:

$$h_{g,t+1} = (1 - \eta)h_{gt} + \xi(s_{gt})L_{gt}^{s_{gt}} \tag{16}$$

where η is depreciation rate, learning rates differ by skill type, and skill choice is made in period t.

Theorem 2 (Path Dependence)**.** *Initial gender gaps in quantum adoption can lead to permanently higher male representation through cumulative advantage effects when learning rates in quantum computing are sufficiently high.*

Proof: If women face higher initial barriers causing lower adoption in period one, they accumulate less quantum-specific human capital. This creates second-period disadvantages even if barriers decline, as male researchers have accumulated more experience. The gap persists through the accumulation process when quantum learning advantages are substantial. □

5 Proposed Assessment Indicators

We develop five comprehensive indicators to measure gender equity in quantum innovation ecosystems for sustainable materials research and development.

5.1 Gender Quantum Readiness Index

The Gender Quantum Readiness Index measures differential preparedness of female and male researchers to participate in quantum-enabled research. It is defined as:

$$GQRI = 1 - \left| \frac{R_F - R_M}{\max(R_F, R_M)} \right| \tag{17}$$

where R_g is the readiness score for gender g:

$$R_g = \omega_1 E_g + \omega_2 T_g + \omega_3 A_g \tag{18}$$

Here, E_g is the share of gender g with relevant education in quantum sciences, T_g is the share with access to quantum computing training programs, and A_g is the share with institutional access to quantum computing infrastructure. The weights sum to one and can be adjusted based on context.

Measurement Protocol: Survey researchers on formal education in quantum-relevant courses, track enrollment in quantum computing training programs by gender, and audit institutional quantum computing access policies and actual usage patterns.

The index ranges from zero indicating maximum inequality to one indicating perfect equality. Values below 0.7 indicate significant readiness gaps requiring intervention.

5.2 Quantum Innovation Gender Gap

The Quantum Innovation Gender Gap captures disparities in actual research output using quantum methods. It is defined as:

$$QIGG = \ln \left(\frac{P_M / N_M}{P_F / N_F} \right) \tag{19}$$

where P_g is the number of quantum-enabled publications in sustainable materials by gender g researchers, and N_g is the total number of researchers of gender g in the field.

Measurement Protocol: Identify publications using quantum computational methods through keyword analysis, extract author gender using validated gender inference algorithms with manual verification, and calculate per-capita publication rates by gender.

Values of zero indicate parity, positive values indicate male overrepresentation in quantum innovation, and negative values indicate female overrepresentation.

5.3 Sustainable Materials Research Gender Parity Index

The Sustainable Materials Research Gender Parity Index measures gender balance across the research pipeline from junior to senior positions:

$$SMGPI = \prod_{i=1}^{4} \left(1 - \left|\frac{s_{Fi} - 0.5}{0.5}\right|\right)^{1/4} \tag{20}$$

where s_{Fi} is the female share at career stage i spanning doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, principal investigators, and leadership positions.

Measurement Protocol: Track gender composition at each career stage in institutions conducting quantum materials research, weight by research output or funding to focus on active researchers, and update annually to capture pipeline dynamics.

The index ranges from zero to one, with one indicating perfect parity at all career stages. The geometric mean formulation ensures that inequality at any stage reduces the overall index.

5.4 Quantum Skills Gender Accessibility Index

The Quantum Skills Gender Accessibility Index measures the relative ease with which female and male researchers can acquire quantum computing skills. It is defined as:

$$QSGAI = \exp\left(-\sum_{j=1}^{3} \gamma_j \frac{B_{Fj}}{B_{Mj}}\right) \tag{21}$$

where B_{gj} represents barrier intensity for gender g along dimension j spanning financial, institutional, and social barriers, and weights reflect barrier importance.

Measurement Protocol: Survey costs of quantum training programs and financial aid availability by gender, audit hiring and promotion criteria for quantum positions, and measure implicit bias in quantum research communities using validated instruments.

Values close to one indicate equal accessibility, while values substantially below one indicate higher barriers for women. Values below 0.5 represent critical accessibility gaps.

5.5 Gender-Inclusive Quantum Workforce Index

The Gender-Inclusive Quantum Workforce Index is a composite index aggregating multiple dimensions of gender inclusion:

$$GIQWI = \sum_{k=1}^{5} \alpha_k I_k \tag{22}$$

where I_k are normalized sub-indices spanning representation in the quantum materials workforce, recognition among highly-cited researchers, resources in terms of quantum computing allocations and funding, retention measured by attrition rate gaps, and influence in leadership and decision-making. The weights sum to one and can be determined through stakeholder consultation.

Measurement Protocol: Census the quantum materials research workforce by gender, analyze citation patterns controlling for career stage and field, track quantum computing allocations and grant funding by gender, conduct longitudinal career tracking of quantum researchers, and audit leadership composition of quantum research centers and funding committees.

The index ranges from zero to one hundred, with higher values indicating greater gender inclusion. Target benchmarks can be established based on the demographic composition of the broader materials science community.

6 Discussion and Policy Implications

The mathematical framework and proposed indicators yield several insights for policy and practice in quantum-enabled sustainable materials research and development.

6.1 Critical Intervention Points

The model identifies three critical intervention points where policy can most effectively promote gender equity. Early-stage education interventions generate compound benefits through career-long effects due to path dependence in skill accumulation. Infrastructure access improvements can trigger rapid increases in participation when they cross critical thresholds due to non-convexities. Barrier reduction efforts have multiplicative effects through network externalities, creating virtuous cycles as more women enter quantum research.

6.2 Comparative Statics

Comparative static analysis reveals how equilibrium gender gaps respond to parameter changes. Higher barriers widen the gender gap, with magnitude depending on complementarity strength. Increasing the productivity advantage of quantum methods widens gender gaps when barriers are asymmetric, suggesting that rapid quantum technology deployment without equity considerations may exacerbate disparities. Increasing the policy budget narrows the gender gap with diminishing returns, and optimal allocation shifts toward barrier reduction as budget increases since education and infrastructure face capacity constraints.

6.3 Indicator Applications

The proposed indicators support multiple policy applications. Research institutions and funding agencies can track indicators over time to assess progress toward gender equity goals, with public reporting creating accountability pressures. Indicators identify where intervention is most needed, enabling targeted resource allocation. Cross-national and cross-institutional comparisons using standardized indicators enable benchmarking and identification of best practices. Before-after measurement around policy interventions enables rigorous evaluation of program effectiveness.

7 Conclusion

This article develops a theoretical-mathematical framework for analyzing the potential impact of quantum technologies on the gender division of labor in sustainable materials research and development. Our optimization model demonstrates that without proactive intervention, market forces may perpetuate or exacerbate existing gender disparities through path-dependent skill accumulation, differential access to capital-intensive quantum infrastructure, and network externalities in emerging research communities.

The analysis yields three primary theoretical contributions. First, we formalize the mechanisms through which quantum technologies can affect gender equity, including barrier effects, complementarity effects, and dynamic accumulation effects. The model shows that these mechanisms interact in complex ways, with potential for both virtuous and vicious cycles depending on initial conditions and policy interventions.

Second, we characterize socially optimal labor allocation in quantum research and development and show that market equilibria are inefficient when gender-specific barriers exist and society values equity. The model identifies optimal policy mixes across education, infrastructure, and barrier reduction interventions, with comparative statics revealing how optimal allocations shift with parameters.

Third, we develop a comprehensive set of indicators for assessing gender equity in quantum innovation ecosystems. The Gender Quantum Readiness Index, Quantum Innovation Gender Gap, Sustainable Materials Research Gender Parity Index, Quantum Skills Gender Accessibility Index, and Gender-Inclusive Quantum Workforce Index provide actionable metrics spanning preparation, participation, output, and influence dimensions.

The policy implications are clear: achieving gender-inclusive quantum innovation requires coordinated action addressing both supply-side and demand-side factors. Early-stage interventions in education yield highest returns through compound effects over research careers. Infrastructure investments must reach sufficient scale to overcome threshold effects. Sustained investment in barrier reduction generates multiplicative benefits through network externalities.

Looking forward, the quantum revolution presents both risks and opportunities for gender equity in sustainable materials research and development. The risks include technological lock-in that perpetuates existing disparities, concentration of quantum capabilities in elite institutions with poor gender diversity, and rapid deployment that bypasses equity considerations. The opportunities include leveraging quantum technologies to address critical sustainability challenges while building inclusive research communities, using new infrastructure investments as vehicles for equity promotion, and establishing norms of inclusive excellence as quantum research paradigms emerge.

Realizing the opportunities while mitigating the risks requires intentional action informed by rigorous analysis. This article provides theoretical foundations and practical tools for that endeavor. Future research should empirically test the model's predictions, refine the proposed indicators through implementation experience, and extend the framework to capture additional complexities of quantum innovation ecosystems.

The stakes are high. Quantum technologies promise transformative advances in sustainable materials that are urgently needed to address climate change and environmental degradation (Ricciardi Celsi and Ricciardi Celsi, 2024). Ensuring that these advances emerge from diverse, equitable research communities is both a matter of justice and of innovation effectiveness. Gender-inclusive quantum innovation is not a constraint on progress but rather a necessary condition for realizing quantum technologies' full potential for sustainable development.

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