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Has Feminism Changed Science?



Synopsis

Do women do science differently? And how about feminists--male or female? The answer to this fraught question, carefully set out in this provocative book, will startle and enlighten every faction in the "science wars." *Has Feminism Changed Science?* is at once a history of women in science and a frank assessment of the role of gender in shaping scientific knowledge. Science is both a profession and a body of knowledge, and Londa Schiebinger looks at how women have fared and performed in both instances. She first considers the lives of women scientists, past and present: How many are there? What sciences do they choose--or have chosen for them? Is the professional culture of science gendered? And is there something uniquely feminine about the science women do? Schiebinger debunks the myth that women scientists--because they are women--are somehow more holistic and integrative and create more cooperative scientific communities. At the same time, she details the considerable practical difficulties that beset women in science, where domestic partnerships, children, and other demanding concerns can put women's (and increasingly men's) careers at risk. But what about the content of science, the heart of Schiebinger's subject? Have feminist perspectives brought any positive changes to scientific knowledge? Schiebinger provides a subtle and nuanced gender analysis of the physical sciences, medicine, archaeology, evolutionary biology, primatology, and developmental biology. She also shows that feminist scientists have developed new theories, asked new questions, and opened new fields in many of these areas.

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Customer Reviews

"Has Feminism Changed Science?" I think the first response to this question is How could it, followed by Why should it? Doesn't this resemble the sort of postmodernist chatter about science that led to the Alan Sokal hoax? Londa Schiebinger's book is not the most interesting in the world, which could raise inaccurate fears that it is cursed with academic jargon. However, her work is valuable in it shows that in fact feminism does have something valuable to say about the development of science. Schiebinger starts off by stating that she does not particularly believe in difference feminism. Nor does she support the idea that stereotypically feminine qualities can provide insights that are unavailable to mere mortal men. She also wisely points out that "It is not obvious that gender has a stronger influence on science than do other political and cultural divides in North American society, such as class or ethnicity." She then starts off with a history of women in science, working on her previous book "The Mind Has No Sex?" and about the somewhat unpleasant consequences of the Enlightenment in the spread of female scientists. The next chapter looks at differences and possible discrimination against women scientists, the possibility of women's indigenous knowledge (mostly in agriculture), and a nuanced and somewhat inconclusive account of publication records and citation counts. The, more interesting, remainder of the book can be divided into two sections: features of the culture of science that unfairly hamper women, and aspects of science that could be improved by looking at gender questions. Schiebinger starts off with how children's toys at a very early age reinforce gender stereotypes, as well as educational software that emphasizes wargame elements more attractive to boys.

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