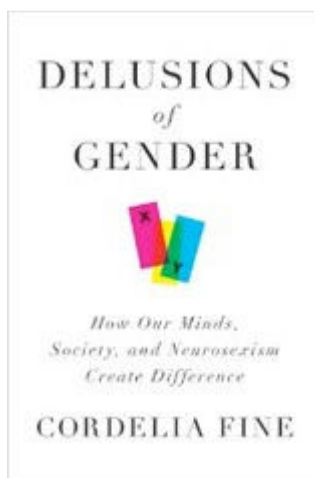




'Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference'



by [Jessica Bennett](#) September 01, 2010



Cordelia Fine

327 pages | [Buy this book](#)

So you thought sexism was a thing of the past? Not so much, says Cordelia Fine. A growing number of Americans believe there's an "immutable" biological difference between the male and female brain. But brain differences are no explanations for why so few women are engineers and so few men go into nursing. Fine says old myths dressed up with new science are propagating dangerous new conventional wisdom, and when it comes down to it, she argues, all that science just doesn't add up.

What's the Big Deal?

Everyone, it seems, is pointing out the innate differences between men and women lately: Louann Brizendine's *The Male Brain* purports that men are simply [less emotional than women](#); Leonard Sax has led increased calls for single-sex education to better cater to the different [needs of girls and boys](#); even the World Economic Forum recently suggested that corporations are [failing to capitalize](#) on distinctly female talents. But isn't that all just an excuse to keep inequities in tact? Perhaps. Because if men and women truly have different brains, shouldn't we all just accept that it's men who are hard-wired for jobs in engineering, politics, and science, and that women should—as Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen has put it—accept their place in the world of primary-school teachers, nurses, and social workers? Actually, no. Fine links brain psychology to persistent [workplace inequities](#), which show what all this skewed thinking is costing women today.



Buzz Rating: Hum

The New York Times reviewed the book [last week](#), and the feminist blogosphere is sure to take the buzz up a notch.



One-Breath Author Bio

A research fellow at the University of Melbourne, Australia, Fine is also the author of *A Mind of Its Own*, about how the brain distorts and deceives. She has a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience from University College, London.

In Her Own Words

“Is it realistic . . . to expect two kinds of people with such different brains to ever have similar values, abilities, achievements, lives? If it’s our differently wired brains that make us different, maybe we can sit back and relax. If you want the answer to persistent gender inequalities, stop peering suspiciously at society and take a look right over here, please, at this brain scan. If only it were that simple.”

Don’t Miss These Bits

1. Brain differences may be the product of junk science, but single-sex education isn’t necessarily a bad thing. One study found that the longer female students are enrolled in same-sex colleges, the more likely they are to associate women with leadership—probably a result of having more exposure to female faculty. Female students at coed colleges, meanwhile, became less inclined to associate women with positions of power the longer they remained in school.
2. Our brains are like plastic—they adapt. So, sure, there may be slight variations between male and female wiring, but for the most part, the things that hold women back at work are culturally ingrained.
3. It may not be socially acceptable to discriminate anymore, but evidence suggests that if a woman were to disguise herself as a man, she’d [probably fare better](#). As Fine puts it, those who’ve transformed themselves in this way—namely, female-to-male transexuals—report “decidedly beneficial consequences at work.” Zing!

Add This to Your Vocab

Neurosexism—it's sexism that's disguised in neuroscience that reflects and reinforces cultural beliefs about gender.

Gradebook

A-

Idea: As Fine herself explains, the amount of popular writing, research, and reference to brain differences has made a book like hers timely and unique.

A

Evidence: Packed with rich scientific detail—evidenced by 82 pages of footnotes—Fine's argument is solid, tracing the literature on brain differences from the 1700s to today.

C

Prose: Don't think this will fulfill your final beach read of the summer—Fine's prose is highly sourced, and heavy. It's more work than fun.