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The Only Woman in the Room: Why Science Is Still a Boys' Club

Eileen Pollack

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The Only Woman in the Room: Why Science Is Still a Boys' Club Eileen Pollack
Named one of the notable nonfiction books of 2015 by *The Washington Post*

A bracingly honest exploration of why there are still so few women in the hard sciences, mathematics, engineering, and computer science

In 2005, when Lawrence Summers, then president of Harvard, asked why so few women, even today, achieve tenured positions in the hard sciences, Eileen Pollack set out to find the answer. A successful fiction writer, Pollack had grown up in the 1960s and ’70s dreaming of a career as a theoretical astrophysicist. Denied the chance to take advanced courses in science and math, she nonetheless made her way to Yale. There, despite finding herself far behind the men in her classes, she went on to graduate summa cum laude, with honors, as one of the university’s first two women to earn a bachelor of science degree in physics. And yet, isolated, lacking in confidence, starved for encouragement, she abandoned her ambition to become a physicist.

Years later, spurred by the suggestion that innate differences in scientific and mathematical aptitude might account for the dearth of tenured female faculty at Summer’s institution, Pollack thought back on her own experiences and wondered what, if anything, had changed in the intervening decades.

Based on six years interviewing her former teachers and classmates, as well as dozens of other women who had dropped out before completing their degrees in science or found their careers less rewarding than they had hoped, *The Only Woman in the Room* is a bracingly honest, no-holds-barred examination of the social, interpersonal, and institutional barriers confronting women—and minorities—in the STEM fields. This frankly personal and informed book reflects on women’s experiences in a way that simple data can’t, documenting not only the more blatant bias of another era but all the subtle disincentives women in the sciences still face.

The Only Woman in the Room shows us the struggles women in the sciences have been hesitant to admit, and provides hope for changing attitudes and behaviors in ways that could bring far more women into fields in which even today they remain seriously underrepresented.

From the Hardcover edition.

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