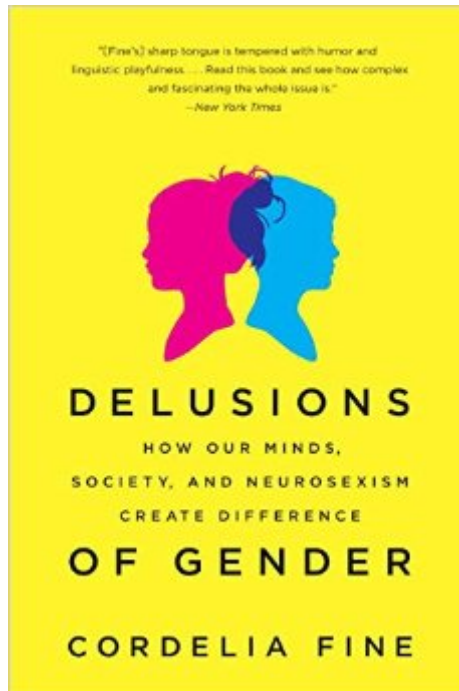


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Delusions Of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, And Neurosexism Create Difference



Synopsis

â œ[Fineâ ™s] sharp tongue is tempered with humor. . . . Read this book and see how complex and fascinating the whole issue is.â •â •The New York Times Itâ ™s the twenty-first century, and although we tried to rear unisex childrenâ •boys who play with dolls and girls who like trucksâ •we failed. Even though the glass ceiling is cracked, most women stay comfortably beneath it. And everywhere we hear about vitally important â œhardwiredâ • differences between male and female brains. The neuroscience that we read about in magazines, newspaper articles, books, and sometimes even scientific journals increasingly tells a tale of two brains, and the result is more often than not a validation of the status quo. Women, it seems, are just too intuitive for math; men too focused for housework. Drawing on the latest research in neuroscience and psychology, Cordelia Fine debunks the myth of hardwired differences between menâ ™s and womenâ ™s brains, unraveling the evidence behind such claims as menâ ™s brains arenâ ™t wired for empathy and womenâ ™s brains arenâ ™t made to fix cars. She then goes one step further, offering a very different explanation of the dissimilarities between menâ ™s and womenâ ™s behavior. Instead of a â œmale brainâ • and a â œfemale brain,â • Fine gives us a glimpse of plastic, mutable minds that are continuously influenced by cultural assumptions about gender. Passionately argued and unfailingly astute, *Delusions of Gender* provides us with a much-needed corrective to the belief that menâ ™s and womenâ ™s brains are intrinsically differentâ •a belief that, as Fine shows with insight and humor, all too often works to the detriment of ourselves and our society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent book. It is witty and absorbing and just about impossible to put down. It is packed with the results of a multitude of studies. It is a myth-busting, incisive, mind-changing delight. It deals with the "delusions" that many people have concerning gender differences, and how these delusions have a powerful (though often unconscious) effect on people's lives. The central myth that the author confronts is that men and women have widely different sets of ability that are mostly innate, hard-wired, and unchangeable. The author argues that this has not been demonstrated. In fact, it is not even clear that these differences in ability exist. Take empathy. If you test people's empathy by asking them how empathetic they think they are (and yes, some scientists actually do this), then women test much higher than men. But if you actually test their abilities (by, for instance, asking what emotions are being expressed in a particular face), women do only a tiny bit better than men. And if you design the study to get rid of gender biases (the author shows how researchers do this), then women do no better than men. Or take the ability to mentally rotate objects in space which, for a long time, has been considered to be necessary for success in math and engineering. Usually men do better than women. But if you fib and tell a group of test-takers that "women perform better than men in this test, usually for genetic reasons," then women perform as well as the men. And on it goes. The author shows how subtle cues in our environment affect our identities and thus our behaviors and thus our life course. And how our implicit beliefs are often diametrically opposed to our explicit beliefs and how this can wreak havoc in our societies.

Below is an excerpt from a forthcoming review in *Skeptical Inquirer*. I am a philosopher of science and former evolutionary biologist, and I highly recommend this book to anyone seriously interested in the biology and social science of gender. It is nowadays commonly accepted knowledge that there are profound innate differences between genders. I'm not talking about the obvious anatomical ones, but about the allegedly (radically) different ways in which male and female brains work. It seems that at every corner we hear statements to the effect that gender XX or XY is better or more capable or more attracted to a litany of tasks and behaviors, from spatial abilities to mathematics, from aptitude toward science to liking the color pink. When prominent figures -- like former Harvard President Larry Summers -- get in trouble for talking about behavioral gender differences as if they were established facts backed by the power of evolutionary and neuro-biology, a chorus of defenders rises up to decry political correctness and to present the Summers of the day as a valiant fighter for rationality in the face of relativism and demagoguery. Not so fast, says Cordelia Fine in her *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*. Fine is an

academic psychologist and freelance writer, and her book ought to be kept side by side with the likes of the (antithetical) *The Blank Slate* by Steven Pinker, to provide a bit of balance to what has become common and yet largely unfounded knowledge about gender differences. Let us be clear at the outset that nobody is seriously suggesting that genetics and evolution have nothing to do with human behavior, including gendered differences.

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