



**Women's Science: Learning from the Margins.** Margaret A. Eisenhart and Elizabeth Finkel, with Linda Behm, Nancy Lawrence, and Karen Tonso. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 272 pp.

**KATHRYN BORMAN**, *University of South Florida*

*borman@tempest.coedu.usf.edu*

In their study of women learning and practicing science, Eisenhart and Finkel argue that defying norms of gender neutrality, avoiding the pitfalls of romance, and overcoming the association of "real science" with masculinist orientations often leave talented women exhausted and determined to abandon the field. Eisenhart and Finkel's account of science teaching, learning, and practice examines how this occurs at various junctures in the life course for women. The result is that *Women's Science* is not so much a study of women scientists as it is a series of case studies of secondary and postsecondary science teaching and work and occupations. This is both a strength of the book and a possible weakness. By detailing the kinds of experiences women undergo in sexist classrooms and workplaces, the authors provide a provocative and convincing argument for gender-sensitive (as opposed to gender-neutral) instructional and workplace strategies. However, because classrooms and workplaces examined in the inquiry are not interrelated, it is difficult to understand the cumulative effect on women's lives of these kinds of experiences.

The cases presented in the volume include studies of an innovative advanced placement high school science class, a college class requiring students to design engineering projects for customers, an environmental action group employing individuals to solicit contributions door to door, and a conservationist organization staffed by highly educated (but poorly paid) scientists. Eisenhart and Finkel's research in an innovative engineering design course, as an example, focuses on instructional style, curricular content, and women's achievement in the course. Through her observations, Finkel learns that a male instructor routinely uses offensive language, discounts the experiences of women, and fails to recognize women's particular strengths in carrying out key assignments for the class. The authors conclude that these tactics (mindlessly employed by the insensitive instructor) ultimately discourage women from pursuing careers in science.

I found myself more persuaded of subtle but devastating impacts on women's involvement in science by the accounts of women's lives in the two businesses examined in the book. In these chapters the authors rely more on an organizational and cultural analysis than one traceable to sexist pedagogy and individual action. The



Environmental Action Group (ELAC) is a firm that requires its employees to do door-to-door solicitation for financial contribution supporting the organization's mission. As in the engineering design class, safety is an important issue to many women workers who risk being left stranded in unfamiliar neighborhoods by the onset of inclement weather. Furthermore, much like telemarketing, work in ELAC is characterized by low wages, little opportunity for promotion, and the stressful pressure to meet quotas. Even in the seemingly supportive organizational milieu offered by the firm dedicated to water conservation issues, Conservation Corporation, women scientists were disadvantaged by the expectation that women and men alike would take on similar responsibilities at all times despite women's family responsibilities—responsibilities their male partners were unwilling to assume.

While the volume presents case studies demonstrating the difficulties, setbacks, and blatant forms of sexism that go unchallenged in schools and workplaces, the authors do not document how these kinds of experiences affect women over the course of their careers as students and science workers—the point I made earlier in this review. Because the volume does not present longitudinal data for a cohort of women, it is impossible to know how resilient women, women with particularly sensitive mentors, and women with other types of support overcome obstacles similar to those described by Eisenhart and Finkel. Conversely, we have no way of knowing which experiences are *most* devastating—sexual innuendo, slight attention to women's safety concerns, low pay, or the other problems described by the authors. Despite these shortcomings, the volume stands as an important contribution because the authors' account takes gender seriously in connection with a critically important career option: science work.

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