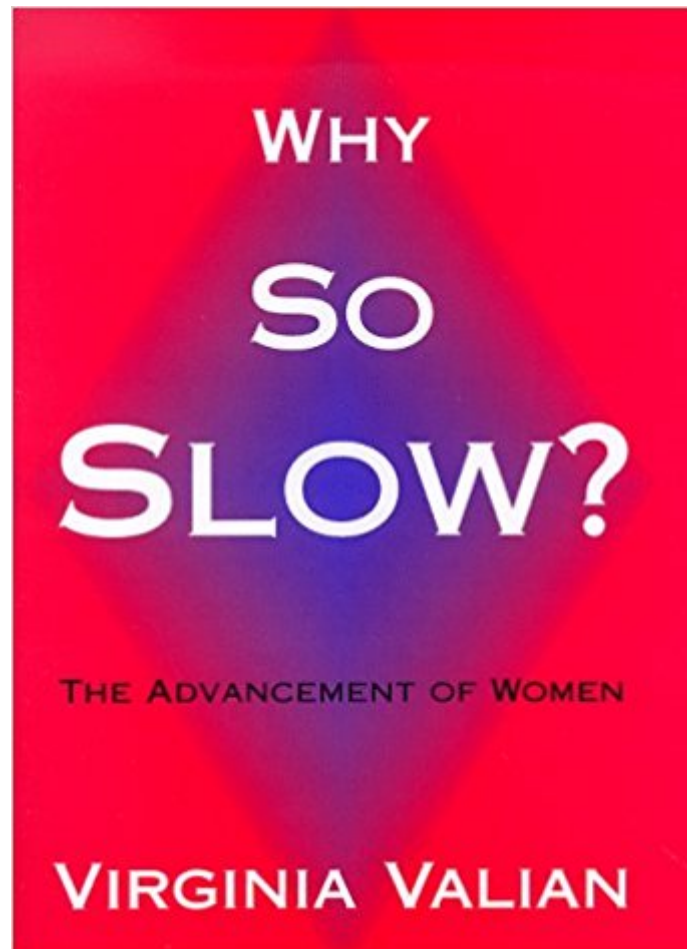




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Why So Slow?: The Advancement Of Women



Synopsis

Why do so few women occupy positions of power and prestige? Virginia Valian uses concepts and data from psychology, sociology, economics, and biology to explain the disparity in the professional advancement of men and women. According to Valian, men and women alike have implicit hypotheses about gender differences - gender schemas - that create small sex differences in characteristics, behaviours, perceptions, and evaluations of men and women. These small imbalances accumulate to advantage men and disadvantage women. The most important consequence of gender schemas for professional life is that men tend to be overrated and women underrated. Although most men and women in the professions sincerely hold egalitarian beliefs, those beliefs alone cannot guarantee impartial evaluation and treatment of others. Only by understanding how our perceptions are skewed by gender schemas can we begin to perceive ourselves and others accurately. Valian's goal is to make the invisible factors that retard women's progress visible so that fair treatment of men and women will be possible. The book makes its case with experimental and observational data from laboratory and field studies of children and adults, and with statistical documentation on men and women in the professions. The anecdotal examples throughout provide a lively counterpoint.

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Customer Reviews

A scholarly and convincing explanation of women's slow progress in the professions. Whether in business, law, medicine, or academia, women are not advancing at the same rate as men. They're

not paid as well, they occupy less-powerful positions, and they are not as respected. In this copiously researched book, Valian (Psychology and Linguistics/Hunter Coll.) attempts to explain why. She argues that we all have unarticulated, often subconscious ideas about gender that affect both our behavior and, perhaps even more importantly, our evaluations of one another. For instance, we think men are logical, women are social; men are competent, women are flaky. As a result, men are consistently overrated and women underrated by coworkers, bosses--and themselves. The resulting advantages and disadvantages may be small, but they accrue over time to create large gaps in advancement. Valian reviews numerous studies, enlivens her material with personal anecdotes, and offers both personal and societal solutions. She looks not only at the workplace, but at its context--data on how girls and boys are raised and educated differently and the extremely inconclusive biological research on men and women's "inherent" differences (she has a refreshingly balanced take on the latter, noting that there may be a few differences, but they don't justify our discriminatory assumptions and practices). Throughout much of the book, Valian is in effect synthesizing the work of other researchers--but her take on the material, which draws richly on a linguist's sensitivity to nuances of verbal exchanges, is fresh, and it's worth doing, since few readers will ever see the obscure studies she cites. Probably too academic in tone for most readers, but for anyone concerned about gender inequality--or perhaps even more importantly, readers who think they aren't--it's worth a look. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Why So Slow? is a breakthrough in the discourse on gender and has great potential to move the women's movement to a new, more productive phase. (Publisher's Weekly) --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

As has been indicated in the Kirkus review, this may be a bit too academic for many readers, as a great part of it consists of research studies. However, as academic books go, this one is readable, especially for those with an interest in this subject, as I daresay most women would be advised to have. In this day and age of "rape culture" and the explosion of domestic violence as the backlash to the women's movement reaches new heights (or depths), including the political, all women need to start taking account of their potential to support themselves financially. Women need to understand that, more and more, for them, there are no real workable alternatives to thinking as seriously about their earning potential as men do. And this book shows the VERY real pitfalls that women will encounter on this path. The book takes us on a journey through the lives of women, beginning at

birth, when parents are happiest when the new infant turns out to be male; that early, baby girls begin to accumulate the small increments of disadvantage. One of the most highly significant developments occurs in the toddler stage, as little girls are given for objects of play and enjoyment dolls and housework items, which function to develop interest in domestic servitude. Boys are given objects of an entirely different nature such as sports and action figures, playthings which teach the boys they are going to be full members of the economic world (and the world of military violence) and are also destined for a lifetime of play in the world of organized sports, either playing or watching. Girls and boys are guided along gender-specific tracks from the beginning and, true to expectation, as adults, it is most women who do the bulk of the drudge work, both in industry and in the home, while most men go on to become the leaders in industry while maintaining a lifetime childhood playtime enjoying their sports, made possible by women doing the housework. But the question must arise what do these schemas really signify and how did they develop in the first place? A reading of the Bible shows in Genesis that the female gender is made the scapegoat for the fall of man from his original paradise. The earlier Pandora myth reached the same conclusion. Men have used many forms of attack on women, from witch-burning to religious mythological systems that include supernatural explanations for why women are to be kept in second-class status using every means including the legal. Misogynism is the oldest and most persistent prejudice. As Valian points out, it is so pervasive that the supporting schemas are acted out without much conscious thought. We don't just study illness without inquiry into its causes. The explanation is not complex and reaches into the sociological and psychological. It is repetition of behavior that accounts for the strength of habit. Tavis has explained this mechanism in her work on Anger, but the principle holds true for any behavior. Men have, traditionally from the beginning, been the warriors, meaning, killers, and men became very practiced in this. It was inevitable that the behavior was also directed to the opposite gender and they were made the enemy. A lot of the behavior men direct towards women fits on the spectrum, not of nurturance, but of warmaking, and this includes the making war on women's ambition and equality and the further fashioning of women into servants and sexual playthings which are attacks on their humanity. It is also why "men are from Mars and women are from Venus". This is the short story of what happened, and this fascinating story of the genders is a field that is wide-open for research.

"Why So Slow" is the most useful book I've ever read on gender issues. It is packed with evidence from psychology and sociology of the ways in which gender affects the way we judge and the way we're evaluated. I took an entire course on the sociology of gender, I found Valian's book more

thorough and detailed. And while readable, it's meticulously credible, including citations for every fact. There's no soapboxing or ranting -- just reason and data. I read the book 5 years ago, ended using it heavily for a thesis I wrote, and still end up referring back to the book every 6 months or so to retell some particularly interesting fact or study to others I know.

Virginia Valian is an outstanding researcher in the area of women's status in prestigious professions. Her analyses are concise and accurate. She has the gift of asking important questions and not biasing her answers with any specific opinions of her own. Her documentation is thorough and includes current thought when it is relevant. If you are interested in issues of women in academia and the work place, you need to read this book!

Loved it!

I think this book is a must-read for everyone--collects the data on gender schema and accumulation of disadvantage. When we say there's some discrimination going on, it's often poo-pooed, and folks say "I'm not discriminating," but the data Valian reviews show both men and women do discriminate ****on average****--not every time, but systematically, in one direction. The net effect is the slowing of women's advancement ****on average****. And because this systematic disadvantage accumulates, it results in the very negative effects on women's careers (think compound interest, but in a negative sense). And it is not much of a jump to say that these to effects are present in the careers of other underrepresented groups as well. What can we do about it? Awareness of the mechanism is the start.

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