

Notes taken by students

International Symposium

Education and Gender Equality

Wellesley College, October 20 & 21, 2017

Panel Discussion – Friday, 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. – Gender Bias in Science?

Chair:

- Emily Buchholz, Professor of Biological Sciences at Wellesley

Speakers:

- Claudine Hermann, Honorary Professor at Ecole Polytechnique
- Zohra Ben Lakhdar, Physicist and Physics Professor at the Tunis Faculty of Science
- Catherine Vidal, Neurobiologist and Honorary Research Director at the Pasteur Institute in Paris
- Julia DiCorleto, Director of Saint-Gobain's R&D Center in Northboro, MA

Moderator:

- Min-Hà Pham, Counselor for Science and Technology at Embassy of France in Washington

Main points:

- In France, only 17% of science professors are women, and only 34% of researchers at the CNRS are women.
- To improve women's situation in science, structural change is necessary, and we need more women in decision-making.
- There are no gender differences in the brain: women and men share the same cerebral capacities. The difference lies in stereotypes and preconceived notions of boys' and girls' capacities in science. However, since our brains have high plasticity, our environments shape our development. Therefore, we need to create a culture of science and take a critical look at institutions.
- We can improve women's representations and participation in science-based companies by hiring and recruiting more women on both sides, applicants and interviewers.
- We also need to create a culture that integrates women instead of expecting them to adjust to a male standard. This includes work-life balance and encouraging risk-taking. We must prepare young girls for the outside world before society convinces them that they are not capable.
- Fair selection is not the only solution — we need diversity of opinions, traits, perspectives, experiences, etc. in order to properly conduct ourselves in the world at large.

Best practices evoked regarding public policies, corporate actions, civil society or academic initiatives:

- Encourage young girls to study science and give them the support they need to pursue careers in these fields.
- Include women in hiring practices.
- Holding the public sector accountable through greater HR and anti-sexual harassment initiatives.
- Evaluate scientific research on the basis of quality and the capabilities of the scientist producing it, instead of their gender.
- Raise children as feminists, to realize that all people, regardless of gender, are capable of producing the same quality work.