Book Reviews

Breaking into the Lab: Engineering Progress for Women in Science

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Rosser, Sue V. *Breaking into the lab: engineering progress for women in science.* New York: NYU Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0814776452. $35.00

The importance of getting to know your user community is a common mantra heard in library schools around the world but often we librarians become so mired in the day-to-day work of science librarianship that we forget this central tenet. An easy way to solve this problem for science librarians is to read one of the growing numbers of books on the nature of scientific practice. The challenge then becomes which book to choose. It has to be a substantial work that includes references to current research, along with a detailed history of the topic, and an easy-to-read, pleasant writing style. The topic must also be of primary interest to science librarians. Well, seek no more, for Sue Rosser's monograph, *Breaking into the Lab: Engineering Progress for Women in Science* meets -- and exceeds -- these requirements. Most academic libraries should already have this book on their shelves, as it was published in 2012 and four reviews have already been written concerning it. Therefore, this review is not meant to convince you to purchase the book for your library, but rather to review the value of reading this work to help STEM librarians understand a significant portion of their user community and their experiences as scientists -- that is, women scientists. If you only read one book on the topic of women in STEM, this is the one to read.

Rosser is a well-known and highly-published author of several monographs and many journal articles. *Breaking into the Lab* is the culmination of a lifetime of work on the plight of women in science and engineering. It leaves the author and the reader to work around the problem of why the dire situation of women in science still has not been solved after so many decades of effort put forth by the feminist and academic communities. Rosser's personalized touch -- the books includes anecdotes from her own experiences as a young scientist -- adds an exciting element of voyeurism. The situations she and others encountered in the past are so outrageous that the reader may very well gasp out loud. For instance, early on in her career, the author's supervisor suggested that she abort her fetus because the pregnancy was not taking place at a time that was good for their research! Rosser includes cases and anecdotes from women in STEM throughout the book; these experiences range from those of the beginning scientist in the lab to seasoned, senior women holding significant positions in academia.

Without revealing Rosser's conclusions on why the situation for women in science is still so dire, several major themes appear in her book. She examines the problem of why there are so few women scientists at top positions in universities, the importance of male and female mentors for new and mature female scientists, and how the problems are not as outwardly apparent as they were in the early decades of the women's movement, but are marked by a series of "micro-inequities." Each chapter concludes with a series of recommendations for female scientists and for others involved, such as senior administrators, to follow; for instance, one of her suggestions is that the culture of science itself needs to change so that not everyone feels that they need to be in the lab all the time. She also points to the changing nature of science and its move toward patenting and commercialisation as yet another area where women are excluded.

Rosser's book does not constantly focus on the plight of women in science and has other valuable information as well, specifically background information that provides context for the situation of women in STEM. For instance, Rosser includes material on how the laboratory environment works, provides ideas on what constitutes a well-run institution, and describes how scientists move throughout the different sectors of academia, government, and industry throughout their careers. STEM librarians should have a basic knowledge of these inner workings and Rosser's precise account will be either a good review for seasoned librarians or an excellent starting point for those new to the field. In addition, her jargon-free treatment of the history of women's studies and the various theories that women's studies scholars rely upon is an excellent introduction to that field; with more and more science librarians obtaining undergraduate degrees in the sciences rather than the humanities or social sciences, having this background will fill in gaps in educational training.

One of the criticisms of Rosser's book is that it is too focused on the situation in the United States, even though science is widely acknowledged as an international endeavor. However, Rosser does include some results on studies of women in science from countries around the world, such as Sweden, India, and Japan. And it is perhaps because she lives and works in the United States that she is well-entitled to focus on the problems there. One of the main problems she cites is the lack of maternity leave in the United States, which in this area is ranked among the lowest countries. Perhaps, then, a book of this nature is especially needed to focus on the United States, if the situation there for new mothers is among the poorest in the world. Also, her sources of information are not always U.S.-centric. She is incredibly well-rounded in her sources, with references to news stories, interviews, scholarly research articles, and government statistics. The reference list at the end of the book is valuable in and of itself -- it is nearly 14 pages and is a compendium of potentially useful web sites, scholarly works, policy, and more.

As Rosser concludes, the truth of the matter is that without women in science, society is deprived. For librarians, understanding a key, underprivileged group will go far in advancing their cause. The library is a place where women scientists can go to feel welcomed and supported. This book is essential reading by science librarians who wish to create such a place.