



Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out

Emily Monosson

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About half of the undergraduate and roughly 40 percent of graduate degree recipients in science and engineering are women. As increasing numbers of these women pursue research careers in science, many who choose to have children discover the unique difficulties of balancing a professional life in these highly competitive (and often male-dominated) fields with the demands of motherhood. Although this issue directly affects the career advancement of women scientists, it is rarely discussed as a professional concern, leaving individuals to face the dilemma on their own. To address this obvious but unacknowledged crisis—the elephant in the laboratory, according to one scientist—Emily Monosson, an independent toxicologist, has brought together 34 women scientists from overlapping generations and several fields of research—including physics, chemistry, geography, paleontology, and ecology, among others—to share their experiences. From women who began their careers in the 1970s and brought their newborns to work, breastfeeding them under ponchos, to graduate students today, the authors of the candid essays written for this groundbreaking volume reveal a range of career choices: the authors work part-time and full-time; they opt out and then opt back in; they become entrepreneurs and job share; they teach high school and have achieved tenure. The personal stories that comprise *Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory* not only show the many ways in which women can successfully combine motherhood and a career in science but also address and redefine what it means to be a successful scientist. These valuable narratives encourage institutions of higher education and scientific research to accommodate the needs of scientists who decide to have children.

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