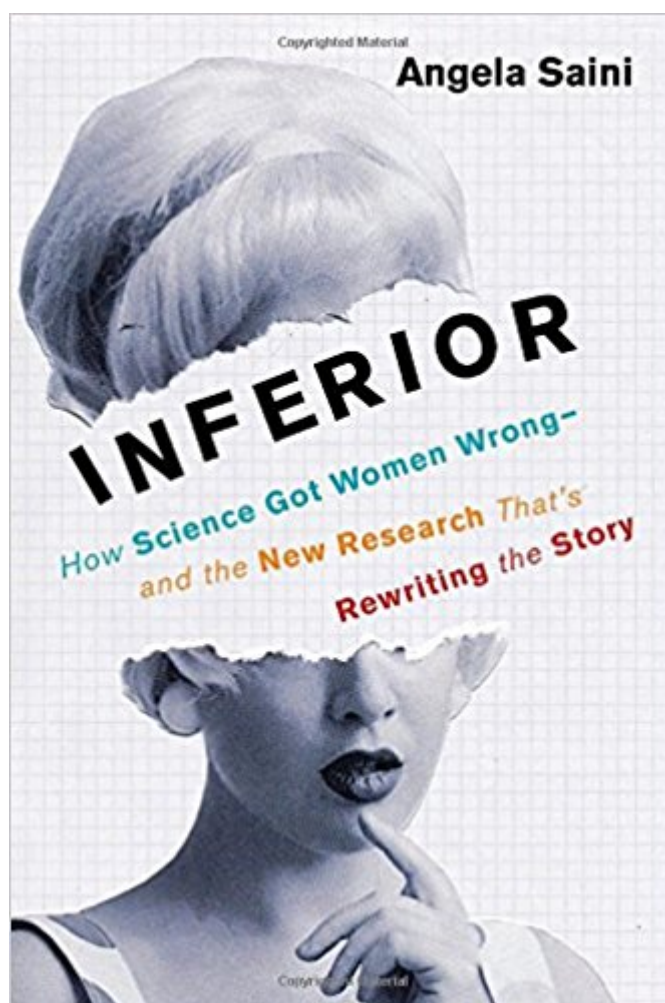


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# Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong—and The New Research That's Rewriting The Story



## Synopsis

What science has gotten so shamefully wrong about women, and the fight, by both female and male scientists, to rewrite what we thought we knew. For hundreds of years it was common sense: women were the inferior sex. Their bodies were weaker, their minds feebler, their role subservient. No less a scientist than Charles Darwin asserted that women were at a lower stage of evolution, and for decades, scientists—most of them male, of course—claimed to find evidence to support this. Whether looking at intelligence or emotion, cognition or behavior, science has continued to tell us that men and women are fundamentally different. Biologists claim that women are better suited to raising families or are, more gently, uniquely empathetic. Men, on the other hand, continue to be described as excelling at tasks that require logic, spatial reasoning, and motor skills. But a huge wave of research is now revealing an alternative version of what we thought we knew. The new woman revealed by this scientific data is as strong, strategic, and smart as anyone else. In *Inferior*, acclaimed science writer Angela Saini weaves together a fascinating—and sorely necessary—new science of women. As Saini takes readers on a journey to uncover science's failure to understand women, she finds that we're still living with the legacy of an establishment that's just beginning to recover from centuries of entrenched exclusion and prejudice. Sexist assumptions are stubbornly persistent: even in recent years, researchers have insisted that women are choosy and monogamous while men are naturally promiscuous, or that the way men's and women's brains are wired confirms long-discredited gender stereotypes. As Saini reveals, however, groundbreaking research is finally rediscovering women's bodies and minds. *Inferior* investigates the gender wars in biology, psychology, and anthropology, and delves into cutting-edge scientific studies to uncover a fascinating new portrait of women's brains, bodies, and role in human evolution.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A brilliant approach to a long overlooked topic, *Inferior* is impossible to ignore and invaluable.” —Booklist “The Enlightenment brought revolutions in science, philosophy and art while ushering in respect for human reason over religious faith. But the era also created a narrative about women—that they are intellectually inferior to men. Indeed, science itself is an establishment rooted in exclusion, writes science journalist Saini, citing a long history of unrecognized achievement by women scientists: Lise Meitner, Rosalind Franklin and Emmy Noether, to name a few. The process of science is also riddled with inherent biases that have done nothing to improve society’s views of women. Neurosexism, for example, is a term that describes scientific studies that fall back on gender stereotypes. New science and awareness are overturning a great deal of flawed thinking, as Saini shows, but there is still a long way to go.” —Andrea Gawrylewski, *Scientific American* “In this smart, balanced, and wonderfully readable book, Angela Saini breaks the vicious cycle by which women, having been excluded from the sciences by men who assumed them to be inferior, were judged by those same male scientists to be inferior. Study by study, she objectively reexamines what we think we know about the supposed differences between the sexes. If you have ever been shouted down by a male colleague who insists that science has proven women to be biologically inferior to men, here are the arguments you need to demonstrate that he doesn’t know what he is talking about.” —Eileen Pollack, author of *The Only Woman in the Room* “Angela Saini’s *Inferior* proves the opposite of its title. It is a lively, well-written, informed account of women’s proven powers. She shows that science, long used as a weapon against women, is today an ally in their steady advance. *Inferior* is another nail in the coffin of male supremacy.” —Melvin Konner, author of *Women After All* “This is an important book that I hope will be widely read. Any time biases are identified and corrected for, it is science and policymaking rather than feminism or any particular ideology that comes out ahead.” —Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, author of *The Woman That Never Evolved, Mother Nature, and Mothers and Others*

Angela Saini is an award-winning science journalist whose print and broadcast work has appeared on the BBC and in the *Guardian*, *New Scientist*, *Wired*, the *Economist*, and *Science*. A former Knight Science Journalism Fellow at MIT, she won the American Association for the Advancement

of Science's Kavli Science Journalism gold award in 2015. Saini has a master's in engineering from Oxford University, and she is the author of *Geek Nation: How Indian Science Is Taking Over the World*.

As a female scientist, I was intrigued by the premise of this book. I often have conversations about the role of woman in science and how modern science techniques and findings can sometimes reflect male bias. However, I was a little disappointed in *Inferior*. The organization was lacking, and it jumped from topic to topic without really focusing enough on any individual situation or fact to drive home the points the author tried to make. A lot of the information was very intriguing, but there was never enough depth to truly explore anything, and it seemed like some of the author's arguments reflected her own biases in the same way she was arguing that western science is male biased. *Inferior* is worth reading if you're very interested in the topic, especially because it offers a lengthy list of examples and references that you can follow up on yourself if you want to uncover the full story.

Enjoyed the book. An early section on health and disease was weak mainly due to the fact that the diseases the author writes about have been shown to be lifestyle diseases. Would have been interesting to see data on recovery from acute trauma vs. the chronic disease she focused on. Fascinating to read about evolutionary biology's bias from Darwin coming forward. Always nice to see author's integrating a wider portrayal of our primate cousins than simply focusing on the one or two that back up a hypothesis. As a male reader, I did not find the author advocating for female superiority. I think she makes that quite clear. Rather she is bringing up a wide range of studies that indicate a wide crossover between males and females... and that culture plays a huge role in shaping whatever differences exist in any given group. Separating biology from cultural development is complicated to the point of impossible. As the father of a son and daughter, one who cares deeply about his children and wants both of them to have the freedom to explore their passions, the book was a great reminder of what's available for the female and that a lot of the headwinds are cultural. As the husband of my wife, so nice to see reminders of hunter-gatherer societies where egalitarianism was the rule and women had sexual freedom without fear of violence. "Mate guarding" behavior may make sense for many when we are in our procreative years actively having children. However, once passed this stage it makes little sense to persist in treating women like property. It harms both sexes. Our culture in the West asserts this as normal, even God given, but it's nothing short of madness.

This book. My goodness, how *INFERIOR: HOW SCIENCE GOT WOMEN WRONG* has made itself difficult to review. But in a good way. First, I found it stimulating. Revisiting the old science and the new scientific discoveries got me thinking down dozens of different lines. I really enjoyed the research on Bonobos and other primates that I wasn't familiar with. Very interesting. And then there was the new research on human brains and hormones and theories of behavior. For a short book, Saini manages to accommodate a lot of facts and information. And one of the aspects I really enjoyed is that she didn't water it all down to pabulum. Though everything was easy to understand, she never the less didn't cut corners and just give you her opinion. No, she gives the Reader the opinions of experts in the field on different sides of the debate. Debate, because it's not over yet. Besides the scientific tracks, I also found myself revisiting the past decades and recent events. In some ways little has changed. The white men in science, like history, still rule the roost -- which is why much of the old science and the new science is wrong. By being unaware of their own inner thought processes, they bring bias to their experiments. And anyone who has trained in History can probably lecture you over a beer about the dangers of such ignorance. (For brief and interesting reading, pick up Marc Bloch's *THE HISTORIANS CRAFT*. It should be mandatory reading for anyone in the sciences and pseudo-sciences.) In any case, that last paragraph comes from me and not the author. She does her best to provide the best data and interpretation. There are short sections of the book where I think she gets sidetracked but overall, this is a fascinating book. Recommend. I like the author's conversational style.

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