Is There Gender Bias In Journal Refereeing?

Among her recent research projects, Margaret Landman of the Department of Economics has conducted a comparative study of the effects of journal refereeing practices on the publication rates of female economists and sociologists. There are two main types of processes used: non-blind refereeing, where the reviewers know the identity of the author, and blind refereeing, where the reviewers do not. In economics, most of the top journals employ non-blind refereeing, but in some other academic disciplines, including sociology, the best journals use blind refereeing. There is some concern that the former policy may allow bias against women. In order to study this question, Dr. Landman conducted a cross-disciplinary analysis of publication rates, because data on submission and acceptance rates by gender are generally not made available by journals. By focusing on women in different disciplines, who in many ways face the same types of handicaps relative to men in their fields (additional family responsibilities, geographic immobility, etc.), Dr. Landman could better separate the effects of the reviewing process from real productivity differences. After adjustments are made for the different percentages of women in each field, she found that female sociologists are significantly more successful in publishing articles in prestigious journals than female economists. It is interesting to note that one of the two economics journals in this study announced in December 1991 that it would be changing to a blind refereeing policy. Dr. Landman hopes other economics journals will follow this lead in making the publication process fairer for economists.

The Iconoclast Controversy

The manipulation of religious issues in the political arena is not a situation unique to the modern age. Iconoclast Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries appears on the surface to have been a theological and disciplinary dispute related to the abolishment or at least the acceptable usage of various types of sacred images in church adornment and services. But the issue was used by ambitious individuals in both western Europe and the Byzantine world as a means of gaining political and military support. A difference of opinion between scholars at the Carolingian court in Aix-la-Chapelle and the papacy played an important role in the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome in 800. Unscrupulous individuals seeking to gain the imperial throne in Constantinople either through intrigue or military power, curried favor among either the iconoclasts or their opponents, the iconodules, depending in some cases on their own personal beliefs but often relating to the potential support to be gained by advocating one policy or another. History professor Donald Keay in his book Political and Religious Schism: The Iconoclast Controversy, presents a history of the contemporary secular repercussions of the theological issue and an analysis of the more permanent political and religious consequences resulting from the conflict.