CHAPTER 11

PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

A catalog of beliefs and perceptions: male scientists' views of female scientists; female scientists' views of other female scientists; male administrators' views of women scientists; female administrators' views of female scientists; female scientists' views of administrators; graduate students' views of female scientists; public perceptions of women scientists.

Our perceptions influence our attitudes and actions, and nowhere in human history is this more evident than in how men view and treat women. Aristotle wrote in the fourth century BC that "the female condition must be looked upon as a deformity. . . ." Pericles' ideal woman was " . . . she who is least talked of among men, whether for good or bad." What has happened in the intervening centuries? Has some evolution in thinking taken place?

Differences between perceptions and realities sometimes become extremely fuzzy, even in books like this one that
purport to have some factual base. If we accept this possibility, it seems fitting at this point in our narrative to review the whole matter of perceptions of the role of women in science, beyond the limited and usually chauvinistic listings given in the introductory sections of some of the chapters. To make some sense of the topic, we have subdivided it into seven principal sections:

1. Male scientists’ perceptions of females in science
2. Women scientists’ perceptions of other females in science
3. Male administrators’ views of women scientists
4. Female administrators’ views of women scientists
5. Female scientists’ views of administrators
6. Graduate students’ perceptions of women scientists
7. Public perceptions of women scientists

With so much of the text behind us, we should have acquired by this time some perspective, some understanding, and maybe even a few insights about the realities of careers in science for women—at least enough to begin sorting out and discarding the mythical elements.

Early in this consideration of perceptions, we have to address some fundamental questions, such as, “Are there biological, intellectual, or behavioral differences between males and females that might account for some of the perceived differences in performance in science?” Simplistic answers would be “No” for intellectual differences and “Yes” for biological and behavioral differences. These answers must be abundantly qualified because of high degrees of