

## Sheila Tobias Biography from the Harvard University Library

Sheila Tobias was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 26, 1935. She received a B.A. in history and literature from Radcliffe College in 1957, and an M.A. and M. Phil. in history from Columbia University in 1961 and 1974, respectively. (She has also received a number of honorary degrees.) After working as a journalist and publicist in West Germany, and as a television journalist in the United States and Great Britain, Tobias began working in academia, first as a lecturer at the City College of New York. From 1967 to 1970 she served as assistant to Cornell University's Vice President for Academic Affairs and in 1969 organized a feminist conference at Cornell; this conference raised questions concerning the exclusion of material on women from traditional academic programming and led to the development of Cornell's Female Studies (later Women's Studies) program.

In 1970 she became associate provost at Wesleyan University, with responsibilities for academic policy, affirmative action, and women's studies. During this time, she became aware of students' fears of mathematics, and began her work on math anxiety, arguing that math avoidance results from lack of confidence rather than lack of ability. She also co-founded a "math clinic" to help students overcome their anxiety; additional clinics were developed at other universities. In 1978 she wrote *Overcoming Math Anxiety*, in which she addressed gendered attitudes towards math, such as the belief that boys are more skilled at math than girls, and offered techniques for understanding and enjoying math. Other books built on this, as Tobias studied the ways in which math and science are taught and learned, and why the subjects are feared and avoided. In 1994 a new edition of *Overcoming Math Anxiety* was published, updated to include research showing the lack of actual knowledge of sex differences in brain organization and function.

Since 1978, she has worked as an educational consultant, serving as project director on math anxiety-related projects for the Institute for the Study of Anxiety in Learning, and engaging in a research and writing assignment for the Research Corporation. This project resulted in three books aimed at advancing education and research in the physical sciences: *They're Not Dumb, They're Different: Stalking the Second Tier*, *Revitalizing Undergraduate Science: Why Some Things Work and Most Don't*, and *Rethinking Science as a Career: Perceptions and Realities in the Physical Sciences*. Tobias also developed a program called *Peer Perspectives*, in which professors in fields other than math and science were taught these subjects by their colleagues and then provided feedback both on lecture style and on the concepts being presented. Other projects include work for the Sloan Foundation in its development of the professional science master's degree, intended to prepare students for careers outside academia, and a long term association with the Universities of Leiden and Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

In addition to demystifying math and science, Tobias has written extensively on issues such as military spending and weaponry, and has long been an active feminist. She is involved with *Veteran Feminists of America*, serving as executive vice president, and has written a book about the feminist movement entitled *Faces of Feminism: An Activist's Reflections on the Women's Movement*. She also teaches courses on gender studies.

Tobias has lived in Tucson, Arizona, since 1982, and has been married three times, most recently to Carl Tomizuka, whom she married in 1987, and with whom she co-wrote *Breaking the Science Barrier: How to Explore and Understand the Sciences*. The Newcomb College Center for Research on Women at Tulane University also holds a collection of Sheila Tobias papers, which overlaps with this one.