

Pride 2026

New Questions

A History of Women in Science



AWIS

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE



CHICAGO

Written by Kathryn Zamiela

"We've tended to forget
that no computer will
ever ask a new
question."

– Grace Hopper, Computer Scientist
and United States Navy Rear Admiral

This zine is dedicated to every woman
who has ever asked a question
and been told that the answer didn't matter.

"The women did what
they were told to do.
They didn't ask
questions or take the
task any further. I
asked questions; I
wanted to know why."

– Katherine Johnson,
NASA Mathematician

Neena Schwartz: Fast Facts

Era: 1926-2018

Nationality: American

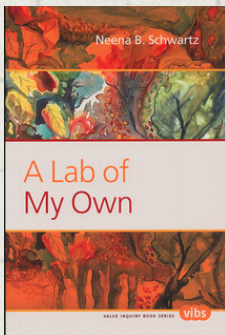
Science: Endocrinology

Known For: Discovery of inhibin, founding member of AWIS and Women in Endocrinology, creator of the Center for Reproductive Science at Northwestern University



in 1974, AWIS sued the NIH to stop all appointments to study section until more women were given tenure-track positions

Received the Mentor Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Association for the Advancement of Science for her research and mentorship



Came out as a lesbian in her autobiography and encouraged queer people to persevere in science

Neena Schwartz: Career Journey



I948	Receives bachelor's degree from Goucher College (a women's college)
I953	Graduates from Northwestern University with a PhD in physiology, only woman PhD student at the time Thesis title: "The Influence of Thyroid Hormone on Skeletal Muscle Function"
I954-I956	Assistant professor of physiology at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago
I957	Director of biological laboratories for Michael Reese Hospital's Institute for Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Research and Training
I96I	Professor of physiology, assistant dean of faculty affairs, and professor of neuroendocrinology at the University of Illinois College of Medicine
I973	Joins Northwestern University, named Deering Professor and chair of the Department of Biological Sciences in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences the next year
I980	Founds Northwestern's Program for Reproductive Research (now the Center for Reproductive Science)
I992	Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Neena Schwartz: Opinion piece

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Jack O'Dowd / Director of University Relations

October 17, 1979

DISTORTION OF HORMONE DATA DISCRIMINATES AGAINST WOMEN, SAYS NU PROF

Are women really unfit for leadership positions because of behavior which may accompany "raging hormonal imbalances?"

No more unfit than men, who may go through even more hormone changes, according to Neena B. Schwartz, Ph.D., Deering Professor of Biological Sciences at Northwestern University.

Prof. Schwartz, a specialist in reproductive biology, spoke Wednesday, October 17, at the 15th Annual NU-Day, sponsored by The Alumnae of Northwestern.

According to Prof. Schwartz, women have been subjected to myths about their ability to function in the workplace because of hormone changes which occur during pregnancy, menstruation and menopause.

However, recent studies have shown that luteinizing hormone, the pituitary hormone that causes ovulation in women, is secreted in men in periodic bursts every hour of every day, Prof. Schwartz said.

Furthermore, a number of studies in men have shown that the average level of blood testosterone (the male sex hormone) peaks every morning and then drops steadily during the day, Prof. Schwartz said.

"Both men and women experience shifts in hormone levels from hour to hour, from day to day, and during the life cycle from birth to old age. There is no more evidence that these shifts limit the capacity of women to work well and feel well than there is that they limit the capacity of males," Prof. Schwartz said.

Hormone data are often misinterpreted by those who could gain money or power through misinformation, according to Prof. Schwartz. Some differences between the sexes which have been confirmed by controlled experiments are attributed solely to hormone differences without adequate study, she said.

Neena Schwartz: Quotes

"I was the only woman getting my PhD in the department of physiology at Northwestern. At my first job at the University of Illinois, the chairman of the department asked me to pour the tea. 'Sure,' I said, 'but maybe someone else can pour it next time.' Nobody ever asked me again."

"The downside to being lesbian with regard to my professional life, is that my support network - my partner - was never formally recognized by the external world until I was in the dean's office at the end of my career... When things went wrong in my personal life, I could not look to my colleagues for support and this was very hard. I was reminded of this when one of the men in my department went through two serious illnesses with two family members within a few years. The rest of us were quick to help fund his lab or do some teaching for him. But years ago, when [my partner] Jan had breast cancer surgery, I kept right on working and did my grieving alone at home."



Neena Schwartz and her long-time partner Claire Wadeson

Further Reading

Mayo, K. (2021, June 30). Remembering Neena Schwartz, a Pioneer and Advocate for Women in Science - Society for the Study of Reproduction. Ssr.org; Society for the Study of Reproduction. <https://ssr.org/blog/remembering-neena-schwartz-a-pioneer-and-advocate-for-women-in-science/>

Neena B. Schwartz, PhD: Hidden No More - Northwestern University. (2018). Northwestern.edu; Northwestern. <https://www.northwestern.edu/hidden-no-more/faculty-profiles/neena-b.-schwartz.html>

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<https://awis.org/historical-women/neena-schwartz/>

Newman, M. (2023, March 28). Women in Endocrinology: A 20th Century Retrospective - Endocrine News. Endocrine News. <https://endocrinenews.endocrine.org/women-in-endocrinology-a-20th-century-retrospective/>

Read her research: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2CI4&q=neena+schwartz&btnG=