Reflections on the History of Women Physicians in the United States: What Difference Does Gender Make?

This lecture explores the question of whether women physicians have made a distinctive contribution to medicine in the United States from their entrance into the field in 1849 to the present, and if so, why? I begin by presenting the initial rationale for women to enter medicine in the context of 19th century ideas of gender. My analysis then moves forward to our current context. While gender ideology evolved significantly in the US from the late 19th through the 20th centuries, the issue of whether women physicians practice differently from men and make a special contribution to clinical medicine continues as a subject of debate.