
New Book On Gender Differences

Feminist and Gender theorists claim that males and females are interchangeable in family structures, but Taking Sex Differences Seriously suggests otherwise.

Reviewed by Frank York

University of Virginia Professor Steve Rhoads has taught public policy studies for more than 30 years.

In writing *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, Rhoads challenges numerous claims about gender and sexual issues promoted by academics who consider themselves gender or feminist theorists.

In his introduction, Professor Rhoads begins his discussion of the scientific realities of maleness and femaleness by describing the tragic case of "David," the young man who became a science experiment for Dr. John Money after a botched circumcision which left the infant without a penis. Dr. Money persuaded his par-

ents to rear him as a girl, whom they called Brenda.



Dr. Money developed a national reputation as an expert on transgenderism as a result of this case and when Brenda was 12, he announced to the world that "she" was well adjusted. The truth, however, was entirely different. David had always acted like a boy. At age 14, he had decided to live as a boy and at 15, he was told the truth—that he had been born a boy.

Rhoad's book was obviously published before David had committed suicide in May, 2004. An article in the *Winnipeg Sun* (May 10, 2004) noted that David's parents were still angered that Dr. Money had convinced them to raise

David as a girl. David's story was also told by John Colapinto in *As Nature Made Him: the Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*.

Beginning with this troublesome story, Rhoads states the major premise of his book: "It argues that sex differences are large, deeply root and consequential. Men and women still have different natures, and, generally speaking, different preferences, talents and interests. The book presents evidence that these differences can be explained in part by hormones and other physiological and chemical distinctions between men and women. Thus they won't disappear unless we tinker with our fundamental biological natures."

Gender/Feminist Theorists Deny Biological Realities

Professor Rhoads describes both the feminist and gender theorist belief that while males and females have different genitalia—which they describe as "sex differences," there are "gender differences," which are imposed upon men and women by culture, parenting, and conditioning.

In feminist/gender theorist thinking, being masculine or feminine are social constructions, not biological realities. Feminist/Transgender theorist Anne Fausto Sterling, for example, says that being male or female is a "social decision" not a fact of biology.

Rhoads notes that there has been such pressure within the social science community from feminist or gender theorists that many reputable researchers fear doing studies on sex differences—or can't get funding to conduct such research. A form of political correctness has effectively stifled legitimate research into male and female differences.

Gender Differences Between Males And Females

Rhoads notes that research already done on the differences between men and women shows that the brains of males and females function differently. The female brain appears to be more networked than the male brain, which is compartmentalized. PET brain scans reveal that women use more neurons in almost every activity tested compared to males.

In addition, there appears to be two kinds of women and only one kind of man—due to the influence of testosterone in the system. Some women have more testosterone than other women—and these women are typically found in the business world. Men, have variations in testosterone as well, but according to Rhoads, these differences are superficial, not fundamental. Even the low testosterone man is "almost always masculine. As a boy, he may not like to play rough sports, but he does not share the interests of girls his age. ... Even the low-testosterone man is usually competitive with his male peers." He may choose the study of mathematics or computer science over sports, but he is still competing in the world of men.

Sexual desire is also different in men and women, as most married couples already know. In a 2003 survey of 16,000 men and women worldwide, researchers found that over a 30-day period, 25% of the men on average wanted more than one sexual partner, compared to 3-7% of women. In a separate study, men said they thought about sex 3-5 times a day compared to several times a week or month for women.

Professor Rhoads also notes the stark differences between the sexual desires of heterosexual and homosexual men and women. One study showed that both heterosexual and homosexual males have a desire for uncommitted sex. Among married men, 7% have had sex with more than 20 partners compared to homosexual couples. Among these couples, 43% had sex with more than 20 partners. Among lesbian couples, only 1% had sex with more than 20 partners. Lesbians have slightly less desire for sex than do heterosexual women.

Gender Differences Appear To Impact The Traditional Family

Researchers have discovered in their study of fatherlessness on children that an absent father has a far greater impact on boys than on girls. Rhoads notes that boys reared without fathers are more likely to exhibit delinquent and criminal behavior and are twice as likely to have committed a crime than boys reared in a two-parent home.

Boys also experience more severe mental health and substance abuse problems and are more likely to divorce themselves when adults.

The father also has an important impact on girls. Fathers serve a protective function to protect females from sexual exploitation by other males. In addition, stepfathers are frequently the predators in sexually abusing their stepdaughters.

A lesser known impact of a biological father in the home is that girls in mother-only homes appear to become sexually mature at younger ages. Studies in the mid-90s of black and white girls in single parent homes showed that 48% of black girls and 15% of white girls began sexually maturing at age 8. Today, girls in single parent homes appear to be developing at ages 6 and 7.

Rhoads also cites a study of the impact that stepfathers have on the sexual development of stepdaughters. A study published in 2000 found that the longer a stepfather is in the home, the earlier pubertal development occurs.

As a result of this early sexual development without a biological father, these girls are also at higher risk for early pregnancies.

Rhoads observes: "Evolutionists relate this phenomenon to strategies that are likely to enhance survival." When a bio-

logical father is in the home, the girl feels secure and expects to wait for a suitable mate in marriage. If the biological father is absent, girls are likely to adopt a short-sighted mating strategy and become promiscuous.

Gender Differences And The Pill

One of the many fascinating portions of this book is Professor Rhoad's discussion of the impact that the birth control pill may be having on women and their choice of suitable mates for long-term marriage.

Rhoads notes that some research studies show that the pill may actually block sexual pleasure and diminish the capacity of a woman to find a suitable life-long mate.

He notes that the birth control pill may interfere with a "deep, unconscious mechanism involving the sense of smell by which women have ensured that the partners they choose can help them produce healthy offspring."

Rhoads says that a woman who mates with a man who has an immune system different from hers is more likely to produce stronger offspring. This choice of a male is due, in part, to her sense of smell. The birth control pill, however, reverses this sense of smell, according to Deborah Blum in *Sex on the Brain*. As a result, women prefer the smell of men whose immune systems are more like theirs.

According to Rhoads, "Scientists are beginning to wonder if the birth control pill has led to a whole generation of marriages that have had more difficulty producing offspring, or that have produced more vulnerable offspring." The pill has also dampened sexual pleasure in women.

Gender Differences In Strength And Aggression

Chapter 6, "Aggression, Dominance And Competition," is a fascinating look at the significant differences in men and women when it comes to sheer physical strength and aggressiveness.

After noting the obvious that men are far more violent than women in all cultures, Rhoads points out that in industrialized societies, this aggressive behavior is also channeled into the business world where a man attains status by gaining power over his competitors.

The violence and aggression in men is attributable to testosterone. One study of 4,462 Army veterans found that men with high testosterone levels were more than twice as likely as their counterparts to have been delinquents and hard users of drugs. Prison populations are also filled with high testosterone males.

The male brain also shows a greater use of the "old limbic system," which is an area associated with aggressive behavior.

As far as strength is concerned, feminists have long argued that if women are given the same strength training as men,

they will equal them in strength and endurance. However, at West Point, intensive weight training for both men and women led to an increased differential in strength between the men and women. After eight weeks of training, male cadets showed a 270% increase in bench press power than women who went through the same training. Only 5-7% of women are as strong as men.

Gender Differences And The Nurturing Of Children

Women have hormones that are ideally suited for the nurturing of infants and children. One of these hormones is oxytocin, which is released in large quantities during pregnancy and breastfeeding. It promotes a relaxed state and helps in the bonding process.

In addition, prolactin also surges during pregnancy and breastfeeding. This hormone and oxytocin apparently help a mother tolerate routine and monotony. One author notes that oxytocin is "the kindest of natural opiates."

The oxytocin also reaches the infant through breastfeeding and produces a mutually pleasurable experience and increases attachment between mother and child.

Studies have also shown that testosterone levels in fathers actually decrease when an infant enters the family unit and this facilitates nurturance.

Professor Rhoads quotes from feminist author Naomi Wolf, who described her changed outlook on life during and after giving birth. Wolf observed: "The ways in which the hormones of pregnancy affected me called into question my entire belief system about 'the social construction of gender.'" She admitted that she felt clingier, weepier, "stupidly domestic," that the "kind of sap that fills women's magazines" became comprehensible to her.

The Conclusion

Professor Rhoads concludes his book by urging both religious and secular institutions to challenge both men and women to consider the important roles each of them have in the family unit and the development of healthy children.

He suggests that men in families should adopt the "soft patriarch" or "servant leader" model in leading the home.

He observes: "If we took sex differences seriously, we would not be looking for new ways to weaken the historic role of men in the family. By challenging the titular familial leadership of the male and undermining the centrality of his role as provider for his family, modernity has reduced the number of men to whom marriage seems desirable."

"Civilization," concludes Rhoads, "needs family-oriented men."

Steven Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, (San Francisco, CA; Encounter Books, 2004; 374 pages; \$19.56.