

DOES RECENT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH OVERTURN THE CLAIMS OF RADICAL FEMINISM AND SUPPORT THE BIBLICAL NORMS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY?

Robert D. Culver*

Only recently have I become aware of the enormous scientific literature on the subject of biological causes for differences in normal behavior of male and female human beings. The subject itself has been stimulated in part by the feminist movement of the past twenty years. Hundreds of articles, research abstracts and summaries are now available. Much of it is readable by nonspecialists. The summaries of even technical articles are understandable to all industrious investigators. The sources consulted in preparation for this essay include reports of primary researches in biological anthropology, psychobiology, social psychology, genetics and social anthropology, summaries and analyses of large numbers of researches on aspects of the disciplines, and books covering the whole subject of biological causes of human behavior. This literature cites hundreds of literary sources.

I. OBSERVED COMMON SEXUAL ROLES ACROSS CULTURES

Beatrix A. Hamburg, director of the child psychiatry clinic at Stanford University School of Medicine, states:

There has been remarkable similarity in fundamental cultural patterns across human societies. Cross-cultural differences reflect not basic divergence but rather the influence of learning and environment on the expression of basic biologic heritage.

To date, the most comprehensive review and analysis of cross-cultural data on sex role behavior . . . reported on data from many anthropologists and covered over 600 societies in terms of male-female division of labor, ascription of social status, patterns of interpersonal behavior, and definitions of gender identity. On the basis of the available data he concludes that, although the behavioristic details are not universal, there are modal patterns of sex-role typing and behaviors that are strikingly widespread. The prevalent finding is that males are more sexually active, more dominant, more deferred to, less responsible, less nurturant, and less emotionally expressive than females. Women almost universally were given child-rearing roles. Division of labor by sexes was also almost universal. In general, male occupations tended to involve behavior that was strenuous, cooperative, and tended to require long periods of travel. . . . The making of tools and weapons appears to be an activity that is assumed by men because of their direct relationship with activities defined as masculine. Women have major responsibility for gathering fuel, water and foods. They manufacture and

*Robert Culver, lecturer and author, lives in Houston, Minnesota.

repair clothing. In agricultural societies, often men and women work together in the fields.¹

Hamburg goes on to say that "in general, cultures are organized around males rather than females"²—that is, maleness and femaleness in all cultures have been used as a basis for organizing social institutions, assigning occupational tasks, and the like. The work of R. G. D'Andrade, which Hamburg employs, "points out that the institutional subordination of women is more pervasive and complete than can be explained solely on overt differences in dominance or aggression"³—that is, there must be a biological basis. D'Andrade even "describes the most universal learning of appropriate sex-role identity, and individuals seem to learn to want to occupy their assigned sex status."⁴

"This apparently means that these sex-assigned sex roles are not merely prevalent in our own society but in nearly all societies. That they are widely associated with each sex in our society has been well documented."⁵

That the social phenomenology of sex in the Bible is about the same as that observed by the social scientists in the world at large is obvious to most people who read the Bible. I know that a few vigorously assert that this is incorrect, but the vast consensus is against them. One might read Genesis 1—2 and Numbers 30 with Paul's arguments based on them in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and in 1 Timothy 2. I suggest, however, that the consensus of Bible-oriented people is rooted more in what they find in the descriptions of domestic and public life from the beginning to the end of the Bible rather than in any formal prescriptions of Genesis, Numbers or the epistles of Paul. Bible life moves in the same social channels of human life as life everywhere does. Sarah's domestic relation to Abraham's household and his to hers is not materially different from that of George and Martha Washington or John and Jane Doe. Miriam treats her parents and brothers Aaron and Moses, and they her, as in families of all times and places.

II. THE NEW FEMINIST DOMESTIC SEX-ROLE IDEAL

It is important, however, that the sources cited above (and implicitly the very numerous researches summarized in these sources) are fifteen or twenty years old or older. The torrent of feminist publicity and propaganda has been fruitful of re-examination of the data and new directions in research. The "stereotype" model of masculine and feminine dimorphism as denoting two "sex-linked dimensions" might have served the preindustrial age well before do-

¹B. A. Hamburg, "The Psychobiology of Sex Differences: An Evolutionary Perspective," in *Sex Differences in Behavior* (ed. R. C. Friedman, R. M. Richart and R. L. VandeWiele; Huntington: R. E. Krieger, 1978) 389.

²*Ibid.*, p. 380.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁵*Ibid.*

mestic chores were assigned to machines. Evolution had provided a workable model for at least a moderately well-ordered scheme for perpetuation of the 40,000-year-long career of *homo sapiens*, but it is not adequate for life today. Besides, said the feminists, the scientists may have been prisoners of their own cultural conditioning and misread the evidence. This is a simplified description of how a well-publicized part of the scientific sisterhood changed its approach to the question of sexuality and of sex "roles" in society.

My first introduction to the change came in the mid-60s when I was teaching systematic theology at a denominational seminary. It came in the form of an exasperated rebuke from the pastoral psychology professor who stated flatly that all of us are both male and female gender with differing concentrations. And the professor had something more in mind than the mere presence of some male hormones circulating in the blood vessels of females and female hormones in males. I mumbled something about those license applications that require an X in either the male or female box, not part of an X in each one. I did not know it then, but I had run up against a new idea in psychobiology, which would soon be named after an ancient Greek word: *androgyny*. A more widely understood synonym is *hermaphrodite*, another Greek word. As a proper name, Androgyne was first given the son of Hermes and the goddess Aphrodite. (He became united with the nymph Salmacis while bathing in her fountain.) Both words in English, borrowed from Greek, mean "bearing both male and female." One is applied to certain kinds of plants having staminate and pistillate flowers in the same inflorescence. The central idea of this myth, transported into modern psychobiology, was a classic case of an old idea whose time had come.

Ellen Piel Cook, however, has shown that in our society the characteristics historically and universally associated with male and female still prevail. After citing numerous scholars from the period 1968–1979 she presents this summary of the common view of public perception of male-female characteristics:

Men (Masculinity)—aggressive, independent, unemotional, objective, dominant, competitive, logical/rational, adventurous, decisive, self-confident, ambitious, worldly, act as a leader, assertive, analytical, strong, sexual, knowledgeable, physical, successful, good in mathematics and science, and the reverse of the feminine characteristics listed below.

Women (Femininity)—emotional, sensitive, expressive, aware of others' feelings, tactful, gentle, security-oriented, quiet, nurturing, tender, cooperative, interested in pleasing others, interdependent, sympathetic, helpful, warm, interested in personal appearance and beauty in general, intuitive, focused on home and family, sensual, good in art and literature, and the reverse of masculine characteristics above.⁶

Cook says of her lists that they are "characteristics stereotypically associated with each sex's traditional role . . . and are available in a number of sources."⁷

These lists, or others like them, can be used to allege that androgyny is necessary to a balanced personality. The value of Cook's discussion is to show that as far as the public is concerned the scholars still think the alleged my-

⁶E. P. Cook, *Psychological Androgyny* (New York: Pergamon, 1985).

⁷Ibid., p. 4.

thology of traditional thinking has not gone away.

The feminist contentions are so strident and well-advertised that they scarcely need statement and documentation. Feminist dogma, however, took the appearance of scientific certainty, even while it was developing in the technical literature of sociobiology and psychobiology. The basic affirmation is that except for differences in reproductive organs in male and female, differences in size and strength and functions in procreation of children, men and women are the same. The perceived differences are all said to be culturally induced. Little girls play with dolls and little boys with toy cars and guns only because culture, beginning with the home, teaches them to behave that way. It is not nature but nurture that is to blame. Truly authentic humanity will appear only when ideals held before children and inculcated in culture are wholly undifferentiated sexually. This ideal is the new androgyny. We cannot now pursue this either, but some leading feminists go so far as to assert (in print) that this androgynous ideal can be achieved only as procreation is separated from marriage and family. Technically trained experts in androgyny must take over the nurture of children. Destruction of sexual "stereotypes," obliteration of the family and of all capitalistic processes and institutions, and installation of technocratic socialism are not imaginary. It was not a long step from *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* of twenty-five years ago to Shulamith Firestone's radical, revolutionary thought in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* in 1970. Androgyny is a venerable, quasi-religious, classical term (now thoroughly secularized like the Christian words *charismatic* and *messianic*), adopted to give a bit of class to an otherwise very bizarre notion.

Allan Carlson has pointed out how successful the feminists have been in selling their revolutionary package to large portions of organized society. He documents his statements as follows: (1) "As of 1980, 72 percent of the mental health professionals . . . described a healthy, mature, socially competent adult as androgynous." (2) School textbooks have absorbed the feminist revolution and promote the androgynous ideal. (3) Theologians in the mainline Protestant denominations now identify with androgyny. Leading feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther advocates this boldly in *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. For years now the sectional gatherings of the Society of Biblical Literature have devoted many of their scholarly papers to promotion of aspects of feminism as androgyny. (4) Androgyny has now made some headway in corporate management and even in our military services.⁸

III. WHAT THE SCIENTISTS HAVE TO SAY

"The awful truth of the androgyny revolution, though, is that it is theoretically and scientifically unsound. Honest research over the last decade has

⁸A. Carlson, "The Androgyny Hoax: On the Blending of Men and Women and the Corruption of Science by Ideology," in *Persuasion at Work* (Rockford: Rockford Institute, 1986). Carlson's article alerted me to the great amount of literature of the androgyny movement and served as an initial guide to reading the scientific literature on the subject.

shown conclusively that psychological androgyny is a hoax."⁹

Carlson's persuasive essay in support of that devastating assessment is supported by rather fully documented scientific sources. These research reports, articles, summaries, abstracts, "summaries of summaries" and what one author calls "meta-analysis" are available in any good university library. They in turn lead to a plethora of literature, much of it very specialized. Some of it strains the capacity of nonspecialists. I shall refer now to some of the findings and quote from some pertinent summaries and conclusions.

Melvin Konner has given us the most complete treatment of the general subject for lay reading available. He writes out of comprehensive knowledge of general literature (including the Bible) as well as of his own and related sciences, and he does so with a literary flair. Since he writes as a convinced evolutionist, sympathetic with feminist aspirations, his reports and comments have rather special relevance and inadvertent, unintended support for the thesis of this essay. For Konner the forces that in the last resort control the actions of human beings are the same ones that rust iron and erode mountainsides. His only ultimate moral principle appears to be "human decency."¹⁰

Konner lists the names of eleven "distinguished women scientists who devote their lives to the study of brain, hormones or behavior, human and animal":

Each within her discipline has a reputation for tough-mindedness. All have in common that they have given considerable attention . . . to the question of whether sex differences in behavior each has observed—in the field, in the clinic, and in the laboratory—have a basis that is in part biological. Without exception they have answered this question in the affirmative.¹¹

These women are or were to some degree involved in the feminist movement on the level of scholarly research. Margaret Mead was mother to all of them. Yet they, as scientists, honestly deal with their data in controlled situations where both data and conclusions can be judged by others. They do a much better job in this regard than our evangelical feminists do with Biblical and historical and theological data open to us all.

Having stated that all these female scientists "without exception" agree that "sex differences in behavior" have been demonstrated to "have a basis that is in part biological," Konner comments at great length:

Without exception, they have answered this question in the affirmative. One cannot imagine that they did so without difficulty. Each has suffered, personally and professionally, from the ubiquitous discrimination against women that is common outside the academy and within it. Each has worked with some man who has envisioned her—in his heart of hearts—barefoot, meek, pregnant, and in the kitchen. Each has sacrificed more than the average brilliant man to get into position to work on a problem that troubles her intellectually, and the pay-

⁹Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰M. Konner, *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1982).

¹¹Ibid., p. 106.

ment of that sort of price *makes the truth more compelling than comfortable* [italics mine]. Nevertheless, each is wise enough to know that over the long course of time, the very sorts of oppression she has experienced are bulwarked and bastioned by theories of “natural” gender differences.

These women are doing a balancing act of formidable proportions. They continue to struggle, in private and in public, for equal rights and equal treatment for people of both sexes; at the same time, they uncover and report evidence that the sexes are irremediably different—that after sexism is wholly stripped away, after differences in training have gone the way of the whalebone corset, there will still be *something* [italics his] different, something that is grounded in biology.¹²

It will be apparent that if these female scientists are correct, then fairness and equality of treatment of both men and women will involve differences in treatment: relationships of leadership by men (on average) in some areas and of women (on average) in others. Human nature then provides differences between the sexes that go far beyond physique and procreative function. Human nature is God’s creation and is the way he wants it. We did not need to wait on science to find the differences. Both the *consensus gentium* and the Scriptures tell us some things. The race is a fallen one, and it should not surprise us that some near-universal habits of treatment of women by men and men by women need correction in the direction of Biblical ideals. Nevertheless there will be some unmovable and necessary differences. In a similar manner children must obey parents according to the Fifth Commandment. If they do not the parents are thereby injured and the children fail to receive the “promise” of life in the land. Parents on the other hand must correct children, not the other way around. It will be no less true that there are diverse mutual obligations between the sexes that must be observed if each is to receive no injury. And in the Church the prescriptions of the NT about male leadership in family and church offices should be studied, understood and applied. Church history has not erred in this matter.

Specifically, what have the biologists, psychologists and anthropologists found? As stated earlier, the data lie in hundreds or research abstracts, articles and books. Some extracts and summaries follow. Anyone who has desire and strength to do so and does not mind passing over technical statistical notes and charts to read the summaries can soon become familiar with the territory. He (generic pronoun, of course) will not, I think, reverse Konner’s assessment. The decisive discoveries are only two.

(1) The hormones produced by endocrine glands in men and women differ sufficiently to produce dissimilarities in affective (emotional) life, cognitive competence (interests and learning), and actions that result from feeling and thinking.

The idea that humoral factors secreted by reproductive organs influence gender differences in behavior is very old; castration has long been used in attempts to reduce aggressiveness in animals and men, and systematic experimental work demonstrating that this works has been available since 1849. By the present time so many studies have been done in so many species of animals—including hu-

¹²Ibid., pp. 106–107.

mans—that to call the case convincing is to put the matter mildly. The question is no longer whether hormones secreted by the testes promote or enable aggressive behavior, but *how*, and also: What else goes on in a like manner?¹³

The chief gonads are ovaries in females, testes in males. They secrete the chief sex-related hormones. In mammals the chief male hormone is *testosterone*. In females they are *estradiol* and *progesterone* which in turn are regulated by pituitary hormones. These hormones not only, as drugs and diet, have direct influence on neural activity, but in combination with other molecules, directly influence the DNA, altering its patterns and thereby basic functions of the cells.¹⁴

The sex hormones selectively make passage from blood to brain and only to selected parts of the brain. The concentrations are highest in the hypothalamus . . . and in other regions of the limbic system (the “emotional brain”) . . . Concentrations occur in brain regions that play an important role in courtship, sex, maternal behavior, and violence—just the behaviors in which the sexes most differ and the ones most subject to influence by testosterone, estradiol, and progesterone.¹⁵

(2) “We have overwhelming evidence that the sexes differ in their behavior long before puberty when there are not enough of the distinctly sex hormones in their systems to account for the differences.”¹⁶ The reasons “may lie deep in the brain.”¹⁷ It was first shown in 1973 that male and female brains differ in structure. In the hypothalamus, the innermost nucleus of the brain, male mammals differ in the density of synaptic connections among local neurons. Very detailed reports of these experiments show the actual counts and patterns. It has been established that the original pattern of both males and females is at first the same. The female pattern does not change, but with the circulation of testosterone later the pattern is augmented to make a distinctly male pattern.

These discoveries have been accepted by neuroscientists. Even though they rocked the neuroscience community, most of the vocal advocates of radical feminism have either ignored the findings or have not yet learned of them. That the latter may be the case is supported by the fact that few conservative theologians and Bible scholars have responded to the findings either. It is a fact of record that science has known since 1973 that the brains of the sexes differ, that sex hormones circulating at birth can and do change the brains of male infants from being the same as the brains of female infants to what may rather crudely be called a masculine brain.¹⁸

For purposes of this essay the facts already reported will have to suffice. I

¹³Ibid., p. 115 (italics his).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 116 (italics his).

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 117, 118–120, 472.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 120–126, 472–474.

list now some further data bearing on the subject in support of the conviction that the differences between men and women described in all parts of the Bible and prescribed in legal, archetypal (Genesis 1—3) and didactic portions of it are not special laws imposed by an arbitrary God for whom divine will alone is sufficient explanation of Biblical law. Biblical law is certainly congruent with the very world, including man, that God created.

(1) The feminist ideal of androgyny (that a balance between male and female characteristics is necessary for best mental health) has been found false when the facts were examined. Many whom the new Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) labeled androgynous turn out not to be very different from other people as persons and parents. Findings of the most comprehensive study show that androgynous women differ very little from other women, but androgynous men behave more like androgynous women as parents than like masculine men.¹⁹ Many androgynes turn out to be misfits and ineffectual. Since coherent behavioral data have not been accumulated to support their claims, Diana Baumrind has concluded that "androgyny researchers should refrain from promoting the androgyne as the new American ideal."²⁰

(2) Research on androgyny with positive results has been shown to be seriously flawed or insufficiently informed. The people rated in the experiments had all been college students. When samples from among the general population were taken by other researchers, results were reversed.²¹

(3) Research in newborn infants has shown that infant females act and respond as females and males as males. This is before nurture or training in a controlled situation could affect behavior. Baby girls, for example, are more responsive to the cry of another infant than boy babies, and so they apparently remain until as mothers they respond to infant cries while fathers sleep.²²

These are only important examples of numerous researches and experiments tending to similar conclusions. I add only one more.

On January 29, 1977, Helen Block Lewis addressed a conference of leading feminist scholars and others at the New York Academy of Sciences. Among other things, she said:

I am aware that the notion of genetically determined differences between the sexes is not fashionable, especially since the differences are . . . used to promote the subjugation of women. But it also seems to me useless to make the mistake of ignoring genetics just because their import has been distorted. I, for example, used to believe that it was impossible in the present climate of women's social inferiority to obtain any meaningful results about genetically determined be-

¹⁹D. Baumrind, "Are Androgynous Individuals More Effective Persons and Parents?," *Child Development* 53 (1982) 44-75.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 44-46.

²¹J. J. Ray and F. H. Lovejoy, "The Great Androgyny Myth: Sex Roles and Mental Health in the Community at Large," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 124 (1984) 237-246.

²²M. L. Simner, "Newborn's Response to the Cry of Another Infant," *Developmental Psychology* 5/1 (1971) 136-150.

havior differences between the sexes, just as it is impossible to obtain any meaningful findings on the genetic determination of black-white differences in intelligence. After doing the research for my book, I changed my mind about the analogy between sex differences and black-white differences. The reason is this: in the case of differences between blacks and whites, there were no clearly differentiated gene pools. But when it comes to the difference between the sexes, the difference between having an XX or an XY as the 23rd pair of chromosomes is tremendously powerful. Not that males and females cannot have the same genes, derived from the other 22 pairs of chromosomes. But the difference between having an XX and XY is enormous, that is, having a reproductive system to bear children and nurse them in contrast to a system with a penis and testicles.²³

The atmosphere in which that conference address was presented is conveyed by noting that the speech came after one by arch-feminist Anne Briscoe, who therein defined "chauvinist" as follows: "Chauvinist—short for male chauvinist. In modern usage, a person who opposes the feminist movement; an advocate of the cause of male supremacy in society and its institutions. An acquired characteristic."²⁴ Lewis' speech must have been electric if not devastating.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that there is a clear answer to the question that forms the title of this essay. That answer is yes.

²³H. B. Lewis, "Psychology and Gender," in *Genes and Gender* (ed. E. Tobach and B. Rosoff; New York: Gordian, 1978) 63–73 (italics hers).

²⁴In *Genes* (ed. Tobach and Rosoff) 46.