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**Sex or Gender – Part II**

**By Sam Vaknin**

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The Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 edition describes the formation of ovaries and testes thus:

"In the young embryo a pair of gonads develop that are indifferent or neutral, showing no indication whether they are destined to develop into testes or ovaries. There are also two different duct systems, one of which can develop into the female system of oviducts and related apparatus and the other into the male sperm duct system. As development of the embryo proceeds, either the male or the female reproductive tissue differentiates in the originally neutral gonad of the mammal."

Yet, sexual preferences, genitalia and even secondary sex characteristics, such as facial and pubic hair are first order phenomena. Can genetics and biology account for male and female behavior patterns and social interactions ("gender identity")? Can the multi-tiered complexity and richness of human masculinity and femininity arise from simpler, deterministic, building blocks?

Sociobiologists would have us think so.

For instance: the fact that we are mammals is astonishingly often overlooked. Most mammalian families are composed of mother and offspring. Males are peripatetic absentees. Arguably, high rates of divorce and birth out of wedlock coupled with rising promiscuity merely reinstate this natural "default mode", observes Lionel Tiger, a professor of anthropology at Rutgers University in New Jersey. That three quarters of all divorces are initiated by women tends to support this view.

Furthermore, gender identity is determined during gestation, claim some scholars.

Milton Diamond of the University of Hawaii and Dr. Keith Sigmundson, a practicing psychiatrist, studied the much-celebrated John/Joan case. An accidentally castrated normal male was surgically modified to look female, and raised as a girl but to no avail. He reverted to being a male at puberty.

His gender identity seems to have been inborn (assuming he was not subjected to conflicting cues from his human environment). The case is extensively described in John Colapinto's tome "As Nature

Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl".

HealthScoutNews cited a study published in the November 2002 issue of "Child Development". The researchers, from City University of London, found that the level of maternal testosterone during pregnancy affects the behavior of neonatal girls and renders it more masculine. "High testosterone" girls "enjoy activities typically considered male behavior, like playing with trucks or guns". Boys' behavior remains unaltered, according to the study.

Yet, other scholars, like John Money, insist that newborns are a "blank slate" as far as their gender identity is concerned. This is also the prevailing view. Gender and sex–role identities, we are taught, are fully formed in a process of socialization which ends by the third year of life. The Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 edition sums it up thus:

"Like an individual's concept of his or her sex role, gender identity develops by means of parental example, social reinforcement, and language. Parents teach sex–appropriate behavior to their children from an early age, and this behavior is reinforced as the child grows older and enters a wider social world. As the child acquires language, he also learns very early the distinction between "he" and "she" and understands which pertains to him– or herself."

So, which is it – nature or nurture? There is no disputing the fact that our sexual physiology and, in all probability, our sexual preferences are determined in the womb. Men and women are different – physiologically and, as a result, also psychologically.

Society, through its agents – foremost amongst which are family, peers, and teachers – represses or encourages these genetic propensities. It does so by propagating "gender roles" – gender–specific lists of alleged traits, permissible behavior patterns, and prescriptive morals and norms. Our "gender identity" or "sex role" is shorthand for the way we make use of our natural genotypic–phenotypic endowments in conformity with social–cultural "gender roles".

Inevitably as the composition and bias of these lists change, so does the meaning of being "male" or "female". Gender roles are constantly redefined by tectonic shifts in the definition and functioning of basic social units, such as the nuclear family and the workplace. The cross–fertilization of gender–related cultural memes renders "masculinity" and "femininity" fluid concepts.

One's sex equals one's bodily equipment, an objective, finite, and, usually, immutable inventory. But our endowments can be put to many uses, in different cognitive and affective contexts, and subject to varying exegetic frameworks. As opposed to "sex" – "gender" is, therefore, a socio–cultural narrative. Both heterosexual and homosexual men ejaculate. Both straight and lesbian women climax. What distinguishes them from each other are subjective introjects of socio–cultural conventions, not objective, immutable "facts".

In "The New Gender Wars", published in the November/December 2000 issue of "Psychology Today", Sarah Blustein sums up the "bio–social" model proposed by Mice Eagly, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University and a former student of his, Wendy Wood, now a professor at the Texas A&M University:

"Like (the evolutionary psychologists), Eagly and Wood reject social constructionist notions that all gender differences are created by culture. But to the question of where they come from, they answer differently: not our genes but our roles in society. This narrative focuses on how societies respond to the basic biological differences – men's strength and women's reproductive capabilities – and how they encourage men and women to follow certain patterns.

'If you're spending a lot of time nursing your kid', explains Wood, 'then you don't have the opportunity to devote large amounts of time to developing specialized skills and engaging tasks outside of the home'. And, adds Eagly, 'if women are charged with caring for infants, what happens is that women are more nurturing. Societies have to make the adult system work [so] socialization of girls is arranged to give them experience in nurturing'.

According to this interpretation, as the environment changes, so will the range and texture of gender differences. At a time in Western countries when female reproduction is extremely low, nursing is totally optional, childcare alternatives are many, and mechanization lessens the importance of male size and strength, women are no longer restricted as much by their smaller size and by child-bearing.

That means, argue Eagly and Wood, that role structures for men and women will change and, not surprisingly, the way we socialize people in these new roles will change too. (Indeed, says Wood, 'sex differences seem to be reduced in societies where men and women have similar status,' she says. If you're looking to live in more gender-neutral environment, try Scandinavia.)"

Sam Vaknin is the author of *Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited* and *After the Rain – How the West Lost the East*. He is a columnist for *Central Europe Review*, *PopMatters*, and *eBookWeb*, a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in *The Open Directory* *Bellaonline*, and *Suite101*. Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

## **One Important Reason Why you should Consider Choosing the Sex of your Baby**

**By Panikkarson**

All of us have at some point in our lives wished that we could decide with some certainty that we would have the boy or girl of our choice. Gender selection of offspring has been a quest of mankind for ages, not just from the time of the Greeks and the Romans.

Western countries are believed to have spent over a billion dollars in research of this kind. Old wives' tales and folklore have thrived on our desire to have the baby of our choice. The ancient Chinese are reported to have devised a system that was some 65 percent accurate.

But first, why would anyone want to choose the gender of one's baby?

Any baby, boy or girl, is a gift of nature, and should be welcome as such?

## Sex or Gender – Part II

Over the years, different reasons have been given for preferring a baby of a particular gender.

The most important reason, and the one which I strongly support, for trying to influence the gender of your baby at the time of conception, is medical. Many disabilities are now known to be transmitted across generations through genes. Many of these disabilities are gender specific. For example, a woman herself may not suffer from a gene-linked illness, but she will convey the disease-causing gene to her male children who will then be affected by the disease.

There are about 350-plus X-linked disorders (diseases that only male children inherit), some of them fatal, such as hemophilia, muscular dystrophy and X-linked hydrocephalus, and gender selection is almost a compulsion for such families. If the woman is a known carrier of an X-linked disorder, sex selection is the one way to try and prevent passing on the disease to a male child.

Some may accuse these couples of playing God. But couples attempting gender selection usually have practical reasons for doing so. Quality of life becomes an issue for both parents and child. For instance, will the child be so handicapped that he is in perpetual discomfort? What will happen to this child if the parents are no longer able to care for him? Can the parents' marriage weather the stress of raising a boy who will need constant nursing and who will never live a normal life?

The same argument of "playing God" can be used against contraceptives and abortion?

One must make the choices in life that one believes are necessary. Sometimes gender selection, attempting to improve the odds in favour of conceiving a boy or girl as desired, is a choice one must make.

Panikkarson likes to observe people make difficult life choices, moral and ethical. Read how you can influence the sex of the baby to be conceived at



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