

Women After All

This is the review that inspired taking time to put my catalog of book reviews in order. It gives far too much attention to a rather uninspired book, but it gave me a chance to collect my thoughts.

Melvin Konner is woman's strongest advocate. Some balance is called for.

Women After All showed up in an Amazon search for books on the evolution of the difference between the sexes. It was endorsed by many authors I like – Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Steven Pinker and Jared Diamond.

Author Melvin Konner cites Ashley Montagu's 1952 "The Natural Superiority of Women" as one of his inspirations. The authors have a lot in common. They write well, they know the literature and the substance of their fields fairly well, and they have feminist agendas that transcend the pure pursuit of knowledge.

Most people are all of a piece politically. A statement from Konner's website having absolutely nothing to do with the subject at hand somehow tells you everything you need to know: "I said I was done with coddling and cajoling the anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers and I called for urgent widespread mandates and shaming." He is an advocate.

Konner has produced an amalgam of two books. The first is factual – useful accounts of the evolution of the mating strategies of a wide range of animals. He demonstrates the phenomenal diversity among successful strategies. The second is polemical. Following in the Montagu's footsteps, he presents the strongest possible argument in support of Montagu's "Natural Superiority of Women." It is a moralistic argument – what ought to be, as much as what is.

Two books from long ago entitled *Evolution and Ethics*, by Thomas Henry Huxley in 1893 and Sir Arthur Keith in 1947 make the point that Konner willfully overlooks – that evolution is an amoral process. Evolution does not care a whit about fairness. As Konner himself notes, it works for black widow spiders and praying mantises that the females eat the males just after copulation. To ask whether it is fair is irrelevant.

He gets moralistic when it comes to people. Nobody can question that the social order – patriarchy – which came to being with the advent of agriculture has been vastly successful. *Homo sapiens'* numbers increased from an estimated 10,000 at the time we were migrating north out of Africa to something in the hundreds of thousands at the dawn of agriculture to one billion at the time of the Industrial Revolution and eight billion today. Successful though it may have been, Konner condemns it as having been unfair to women. He celebrates the fact that women are now free to assume just about every role formerly restricted to men. Blithely noting that women now have the choice of career or family, he overlooks the stark reality of plunging birth rates. He celebrates the success of women without addressing the collapse of the species to which women belong.

There are contradictions. Konner believes that a woman's body is sacrosanct, but (per the above) forcing vaccines on everybody is OK. He does not recognize that history is equally replete with histories of torture, rape, mutilation, and murder of men. Per Roy Baumeister, 80% of women ever born had children vs. 40% of men. It begs the question whether it is better to bear a child with an unwanted partner or none at all?

Here's a brief Cliff Notes style, chapter by chapter analysis.

Introduction: "Stronger Than All Besides"

His first sentence is unambiguous. “This is a book with a very simple argument: women are not equal to men; they are superior in many ways, and in most ways that will count in the future.” He addresses, chapter by chapter, systematic differences between males and females.

Chapter 1: Diverge, Say the Cells

This chapter is on the biology of sex. Human females have two X chromosomes, males have an X and a Y chromosome. The Y chromosome being much smaller than the X chromosome confers some disadvantages on male children. Whereas a female who inherits a defective X chromosome gene from one parent is most likely to have inherited a good one from the second, and hence suffered no damage, male children do not have this backup. As a result a great many disorders are more common among male offspring than females. They include hemophilia, autism, color blindness and many others.

He goes a bit overboard in claiming that “A thirty-six-year-old father passes on twice as many [deleterious mutations] as a twenty-year-old; a seventy-year-old, eight times as many.” Not quite. Per [Crumbling Genome: The Impact of Deleterious Mutations on Humans](#) the statement applies to de novo mutations – the current generation. Most of a person’s deleterious mutations are inherited from prior generations.

The chapter includes a lot of information on relatively rare sexual ambiguities – hermaphrodites and the like – while emphasizing that the vast majority of individuals are biologically either male or female. This includes most who consider themselves homosexual and transsexual. While Konner had the utmost sympathy for people who felt they were in the wrong body, at least in 2015 he held an orthodox view of the biology of their situation.

Konner addresses the systematic differences between men and women in terms of violence, libido, assertiveness and other characteristics. While some may be cultural, a lot is clearly genetic.

Chapter 2: Hidden in Darkness

This chapter is on the amazing diversity of sex differences in practices within the animal world. Some animals are able to reproduce without sex, others are able to change their sex, and yet the others have both sexes. Evolution has led to a huge number of successful strategies for perpetuating a species.

Chapter 3: Picky Females, Easy Males

Konner puts forth the general principle that the female of the species controls the mating process, selecting from available mates. This is true even among species like the cassowary, hyena and bonobo in which the females are dominant.

The underscores the evolutionary truth that all that matters is what works. There are advantages and disadvantages to different mating strategies. Monogamy, polyandry and polygyny would be three. There are two indistinguishable species of voles, living not terribly far from one another, one of which is resolutely monogamous and the other resolutely promiscuous. There are advantages to both approaches. Polygyny allows the alpha males to most widely disseminate their superior seed. Monogamy provides the best protection for the young.

In species such as the peacock the male invests most of his sexual energy in elaborate displays for the female and makes no contribution to bringing up the chicks. Among penguins and seahorses it is the opposite – the male is at least as involved as the female in helping the offspring reach adulthood.

Sexual selection is a broad theme. See [The Evolution of Beauty](#). Konner could do a better job of explaining it. Men select for large breasts. Our ape cousins show that they are not necessary for nursing children. Both

men and women select for verbal intelligence. Singing ability does not appear to have been selected for any purpose other than sexual attraction.

Chapter 4: Primate Possibilities

Konner gives a survey of the relation between the sexes among primate groups. We learned that the most primitive primates are lemurs, which gave way to more advanced primate such as monkeys everywhere in the world except the isolated island of Madagascar.

He contends that the females dominate in all species of lemurs. Konner is fond of the word “dominate,” no doubt building to his thesis that men have always dominated women. He assesses every primate species, judging which of the sexes dominates the other. This falsely reduces domination to a one dimensional metric. Whatever the relationship, the sexes always cooperate well enough to propagate the species.

Certain factors are consistent throughout primate species. It is most frequently the females who choose with whom to mate, even to the point of mating with aggressive males who have recently killed their infants. Males generally display the greatest degrees of aggression, to the point of infanticide, although there are exceptions.

Konner has interesting observations on the way females fight back. They will defend their infants against more powerful aggressive males. They will steal a tryst out from under the eyes of the powerful male who would like to dominate them. Domination, by whatever dimension is being measured, is never complete. Konner appropriately cites Robert Trivers’ analysis that every member of a family – father, mother, individual and siblings – has different and somewhat conflicting interests.

Climbing the evolutionary ladder, more intelligent apes learn to form coalitions to advance their evolutionary interests. It becomes a coalition of males who dominate the mating opportunities within a troop, apportioning sexual opportunities among themselves, and coalitions of females who defend their infants against marauding males. Females can use sex to solicit males to defend them and their offspring against other males. Some prostitute themselves, trading sex for meat.

The behavior of bonobos differs radically from that of chimpanzees, from which they split two million years ago. Male chimpanzees are more aggressive with their partners; the sisterhood among the bonobos quite successfully keeps the males in their place. The bonds of the sisterhood are strengthened by sexual relations with each other, although Konner does not mention exclusive homosexuality.

Konner marvels that such differences in sexual behavior could have evolved over a mere two million years. I refer the reader to J Philippe Rushton’s analysis of the significant differences in sexual behavior among human races that diverged only 30,000 to 70,000 years ago. See [Race, Evolution and Behavior](#).

Chapter 5: Equal Origins?

Konner begins this chapter by going to the heart of his argument: “When we consider the change since the emergence of what we like to call civilization, the contrast is greater, and when we consider the last few centuries, greater still. As we’ll see, these changes were not all for the better, and one of the worst was what happened to relations between the sexes. For most of the history of our species, women were in a stronger position than they have been since—stronger, at least, than in almost all subsequent cultures until the last few decades in some postindustrial states.”

Women and men specialized more as society became more highly structured. Greater material abundance supported constant growth in populations. Larger polities and stored wealth meant that there was more incentive for war. Women suffered rape, slavery and concubinage. Men suffered death, castration and slavery. Konner considers the women’s fate to be worse than that of the men. Roy Baumeister writes in [Is](#)

[There Anything Good About Men?](#): How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men that whereas 80% of women have, only 40% of the men who have ever lived have left offspring.

The children born of a woman may not have been sired by the man of their choosing, but at least the women did not disappear from the gene pool as men did. And, as Konner notes, it is the women who do the choosing. The offspring men leave are usually not by women who would have been their first choice. Though they may have been different, both women and men suffered hardships throughout history.

As Frank Salter writes in [On Genetic Interests](#) Family, Ethnicity and Humanity in an Age of Mass Migration, the deepest interest of human beings, like every form of animal and plant, is passing on our genome. In those terms women have been twice as well favored as men. Here is a [video expanding](#) on the theme.

Chapter 6: Cultivating Dominance

As society became more complex, the affairs of state became farther removed from the household. Since women were tied to the household, governance became more exclusively a male domain. This is of course a matter of degree. The big decisions among the Stone Age Kayapo Indians of Brazil are made in the men's house.

As society became more complex, violence became more organized. Reading parties evolved into standing armies. Nonetheless, as Steven Pinker notes in a book that Konner often cites, [The Better Angels of our Nature](#), despite the increasingly organized nature of violence the proportion of people who die violent deaths at the hands of their conspecifics has continually decreased over evolutionary history.

The decrease in the level of violence of course took place primarily during the epoch of patriarchy. It is true that warfare among developed nations has been at a historical low since the Second World War, the period in which women have attained ascendancy in the political realm. This has not been so on city streets. The feel-good policies espoused disproportionately by women of not institutionalizing criminals and the mentally ill in the big cities of America and Europe has made them more dangerous, especially for women.

Chapter 7: Samson's Haircut, Achilles' Heel

In this chapter Konner addresses the rights of women as individuals. Under patriarchy, prior to the Enlightenment, the man was indeed the head of the household and the ultimate decision-maker. At that time family was the primary economic unit of society. As it had been stipulated in the Bible, the man was the external face of the family.

Konner gives an accurate account of the gradual enfranchisement of women over the past three centuries, being granted the right to own property, vote, initiate divorces and so on. These rights were accorded them by men, who were in charge, in recognition of the economic and social changes taking place. Just like the end of child labor, the emancipation of the slaves in the end of colonialism, they were ideas whose time had come and which at the time they were enacted had widespread support among men as well as women.

Chapter 8: The Trouble with Men

Konner pounds home his major point which echoes Ashley Montagu's "Natural Superiority of Women." He notes that women CEOs run "General Motors, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Archer Daniels Midland, Lockheed Martin, DuPont, General Dynamics, Oil States International, Xerox, Duke Energy, Gannett Company, Yahoo, Alliant Energy, Schnitzer Steel, ITT, International Game Technology, Clearwater Paper, and Benchmark Electronics."

Eight years later we don't remember the names of many of these women. We remember that Carlie Fiorina at Hewlett-Packard, Melissa Meyer at Yahoo and Ginny Rometty at IBM didn't accomplish much and are gone. Mary Barra remains at the helm of General Motors, the stock price of which has surged from \$35 to \$36 in her nine years of leadership.

The most dynamic business leaders of the past few decades, for better or worse, have all been men, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Jack Welch, Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison and Jeff Bezos just to name a few. It is not just American culture – the same has been true in China, Japan and throughout Western Europe.

Why not? Men have to be good for something. Quite a bit, in fact. Fans of Konner should read Roy Baumeister's [Is There Anything Good About Men?: How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men](#) as a counterbalance. Whereas Konner would deny that men are good for much of anything, Baumeister modestly gives women credit where it is due. The sexes are different. The species would not survive without both of them. Vive la différence.

Our concepts of our own genders are formed by a combination of genetics and culture. Media has a big influence. Little kids are exposed all day long to TV and other electronic devices.

Konner notes that big increases in fathers' involvement with children in the West in the past few decades and the success of parenting-education programs for fathers point the same way, as do experiments showing that even male monkeys can become more nurturing as they gain experience with infants.

Konner claims that female brains are proportionally larger than men's, and that the sexes are of equal intelligence. Researchers agree with him that the sexes excel in different areas of intelligence. Women more in verbal, men in mathematical and spatial. The consensus of experts at this writing is that the sexes test equally until they reach college age, but men's brains continue to grow in size, and test results to increase, until their mid 20s. See Sex Differences in Intelligence, [The g Factor: The Science of Mental Ability \(Human Evolution, Behavior, and Intelligence\)](#), and [Race and Sex Differences in Intelligence and Personality: A Tribute to Richard Lynn at 80](#).

He says "Ashley Montagu cataloged many ways in which women are biologically more robust and resilient; the complementary statement is that men must be biologically more frail and vulnerable." Montagu, like Konner, is an advocate. Each sex enjoys advantages. Roy Baumeister's [Is There Anything Good About Men?: How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men](#) notes several differences that favor men. We have less osteoporosis, better late-life strength. As we saw in chapter 1, physical aggression, however measured, is greater in males than females.

Men are indeed more aggressive than women. Aggression drives evolution. We are descended of survivors of competition with other ape-men and our conspecifics in other tribes. This is the same in all male animals. It is a feature, not a bug. Konner would deny the function of evolution. Sir Charles Sherrington summed it up a century ago in an epigram: Nature represents in the case of man a revulsion of the product against the process." Sir Arthur Keith explains that "Here product stands for modern or evolved man; the process for the means used by Nature in his creation."

Konner notes that "white women expressed more negative opinions of black men when their fertility risk was high. In fact, the monthly curves for racial bias and conception risk were almost identical." Absolutely. This is an evolutionary adaptation.

Sexuality is different between men and women, as it is in every mammalian species. The males are driven to sex by their hormones. Konner overlooks the fact that it is only since the 1960s that we even imagine it might be different. He spends several pages describing women's disappointment with the hookup culture, one night stands and so on. It makes total sense – women evolved, and certainly not just since the emergence of the patriarchy, to be the picky choosers.

Konner says that women do not pay for sex or use pornography. While this is generally true, there are exceptions. [Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity](#) discusses the ways in which professional white women enjoy sex tourism in the Caribbean. As a landlord I noticed that my tenants read lesbian pornography.

Konner does not mention the high numbers of Chinese, Japanese and Korean women who are totally uninterested in sex. [Race, Evolution and Behavior](#) says this is an evolved characteristic. In those societies cultural mechanisms displaced hormones as a means to ensure reproduction. Those cultural elements were lost in the move to the cities.

Konner is right that women are more emotional than men. Making decisions on the basis of emotions rather than logic can have negative consequences. Women are more inclined to avoid problems rather than grapple with them. Angela Merkel's admission of a million immigrants to Germany is a case in point. Abandoning capital punishment, largely at the insistence of women, has left more criminals on the streets and decreased public safety. Free speech and the resultant arguments is a centerpiece of democracy. Women are [inclined to stifle it](#).

Chapter 9: Developing Daughters

Konner uses this chapter to advocate for the removal of the "glass ceiling", as if the only thing preventing equal representation in every sphere of life were residual discrimination.

He discusses the rapid declines in birth rates in countries in which female literacy in the standards of living have grown. He also credits the improvements in mother and child care and the decrease in mortality during childbirth.

Konner goes on at length about how AIDS affects both sexes equally. This has not happened. It still mainly affects homosexual men. Though it is a very complex situation, [Inventing the AIDS Virus](#) makes a strong case to be made that it is predominantly a lifestyle disease. Celia Farber's [Serious Adverse Events: An Uncensored History of AIDS](#) describes the politics of characterizing it as a heterosexual disease.

Konner describes female circumcision, rape and other abuses that women suffer in the Third World. His observations are accurate. Whether we in his reading audience are in a position to do anything about it is a good question.

Chapter 10: Billions Rising

Women have done all right in the world of business. As per this title, they are [The Richer Sex](#). For better or worse, America and the west are experiencing [Sexual Utopia In Power](#)

Women are in control. Konner's writes "Women are more in favor of government - sponsored social programs and more opposed to war but less in favor of marijuana ; they are more in favor of equality for gays and lesbians but less in favor of sexual liberation generally . Marriage , motherhood , divorce , labor participation , socioeconomic status , and other factors contribute to women's voting patterns."

He writes as well "...it seems likely that future increases in women's influence on women (among other things) will expand government programs that provide jobs and increase equality."

Both are true. Politicians pay a great deal of attention to the woman's vote and less to traditional conservative notions such as a balanced budget. One could attribute the burgeoning deficits and the demographic collapse to these tendencies.

There is a nagging question as to whether women are being used. The WEF agenda of climate change, pollution, gender dysphoria, surgery, sustainable development, eating bugs, covid shots and vaccines is pushed by men. Voted in by women. Women, even as heads of corporations and governments, appear to be being exploited. They still aren't up there with the big boys like Klaus Schwab, George Soros and Bill Gates.

Reviewer Summary

Per Estelle Freedman, author of [The Essential Feminist Reader](#) there is [No Turning Back](#). However, as Konner should know, evolution never stops. That is a good thing. Just as certainly as it now appears pointed to a total collapse, as women devote themselves to everything but their traditional role of childbearing and child rearing, it is certain to change again. For the future of the race, let's hope it is a change back.