

Sex Differences: Nature's Signposts to a Good Marriage

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Although my topic is marriage, I want to look first at infancy and childhood. At those stages of life we can observe male and female differences before socialization may have created them, and thus we get some sense of what differences are innate. These deep-rooted differences will in turn reveal issues in marriage.

Now, in what I say I'm going to focus on most girls and most women, most boys and most men. There are, of course, exceptions to my generalizations. An important theme of my book is that the exceptions are particularly important for understanding females.

Compared to most women, a minority of women is more ambitious about careers, more assertive, less interested in babies. They are more interested in sex. On average this group of women have been exposed to higher than average amounts of testosterone *en utero*, and they have higher levels of testosterone as adults as well (Rhoads, 29-32). The very assertiveness of this subgroup of women gives them disproportionate influence in public debates about what women want. But in this paper they must remain in the background. I will focus here on what most women and men are like and on how it affects marriage.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

In his book, *The Essential Difference* Simon Baron-Cohen notes that one-day old baby girls look longer at a picture of a human face, whereas boys look longer at an oval shape with weird alien-like features. Similarly, day old female infants cry longer than male infants when they hear the sound of other crying infants (Rhoads, 197). Cohen marshals many other kinds of evidence suggesting that females have an empathizing brain. They are more attuned to other people. To take another example, at just 12 months baby girls "respond more empathetically to the distress of other people, showing greater concern for others through more sad looks, sympathetic vocalizations, and comforting behavior" (Baron-Cohen, 31). Grown women also comfort strangers more and are more likely than men to report that they share the emotional distress of friends.

Girls like cooperation more than boys do and like competition less. They care about playmates' feelings more than boys do, and they can read others' emotions better than boys. Girls like one-on-one relationships, and they say sweet, affirming things to

friends and put their arms around them. They bond through confiding talk. Girls play house, and their pretend play involves “more cooperative role playing” (Baron-Cohen, 46)--for example, with one person playing the mommy and the other the child. Their fantasy play often involves being a bride (Rhoads, 21).

Boys are more self-centered—for example, they have a harder time learning to share, and they act up more and are less likely to be team players in school. Boys’ develop strong passions for particular things, and the passions seem to arise out of nowhere. They are not necessarily based at all on parents’ interests-- and they change through time. A boy might be unable to get enough of cars, trucks or tractors and then of dinosaurs and then of soccer, then music, then computers. A boy might learn the names of and collect cars and tractors and then pore over all the minutiae of soccer or baseball statistics and then begin to compile pop music charts (Baron-Cohen, chs. 2, 4, 6).

Boys’ interactions with others are based on activities that each values. They travel in packs, and there are frequently attempts to assert dominance. Boys have a clearer idea of who is dominant in their group. In summer camp, boys who would be leaders will often jump on and insult other boys right away to assert dominance. Girls at summer camp will build friendships for a week before subtly asserting dominance by verbal put downs. Though social dominance is a goal for girls, it’s not allowed to get in the way of intimacy with friends. Boys’ dominance hierarchies tend to last all summer whereas girls are more fluid, with girls often breaking up into groups of two or three who talk among themselves in an intimate way (Baron-Cohen, 38-42).

When boys and girls reach puberty, they begin to interact more, and the sex differences in mixed groups become less apparent. Boys for example learn that girls don’t like to trade insults in the way that boys do, so in mixed company sex differences can be hidden. After all, we men don’t get to see how all female groups interact, nor do women get to see how all male groups behave. But scholars can observe and compare, and the differences can be striking. Whenever researchers separate the sexes, the differences become starker. For example, male prisons tend to develop “hierarchies of power and coercion,” while in female prisons the women often form make believe families in which prisoners are designated father, mother, aunt, daughter, son and the like (Rasche, 46; Mishra; Dabbs and Dabbs, 79). This is a particularly striking example of the female need for bonding and connection.

Surveys also show the female desire for connection and intimacy. When you ask *unmarried, childless* women what is most important to their happiness, they are five times more likely to cite personal relationships with their mothers (31%) or friends

(24%) than they are to cite their careers (11%)(Pew Research Center Survey, Bowman, 24).

When you put it all together, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that females care most about emotionally close relationships (Baron-Cohen, 38-42).

SEX

When boys and girls start to interact more after puberty, they have very different orientations. Increases in estrogen and other female hormones make girls more social. They begin to spend more time with other people. On the other hand, Theresa Crenshaw, coauthor of a leading text on sexual pharmacology says that testosterone has a "loner profile." As boys reach puberty, they begin to spend more time alone (Rhoads, 50).

When girls go through puberty, the combination of hormones and their long-standing desire for strong intimate relationships often leads them to be boy crazy. As preteens, girls often spend hours reading romantic fiction or playing board games about dating and boys.

The girls are interested in relationships that may lead to physical contact whereas boys are more interested in sex and frequently sex with a variety of partners. They are less interested in relationships and commitment.

The analysis to this point is more than sufficient to suggest that pubescent girls should be taught to be wary about boys' intentions. Several studies have noted the precipitous rise in depression rates in young teenage females. Research suggests that the depression is often preceded by the break up of a sexual relationship that the girl, at least, saw as romantic (Joyner and Udry; Meier).

Sexual restraint protects pubescent girls from depression, but it is also self protective for young teens and women in their twenties and thirties. College coeds may experiment with casual sex these days, but despite their sexually liberated *attitudes*, in time they almost always find that their emotions make casual sex unattractive. They come to feel used, hurt and demeaned after sleeping with men uninterested in relationships (Rhoads, 102-105).

Women who cohabit are also vulnerable. For example, one study reveals that "women tend to see [living together] as a step toward marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment" (Rhoads, 112-113).

When teenage girls come to realize that what they thought were relationships were for boys just sexual opportunities, and when twenty-something women go through cohabitations that don't lead to the expected marriages, they become hardened. In my book I discuss evidence for the proposition that since the sexual revolution women are more likely to think poorly of men (Rhoads, 118-120). These changes in women's outlook and attitudes will have an impact on marriage. Women loaded with this kind of emotional *baggage* are not so likely to become loving wives.

And there is a more important reason why female sexual restraint can make stronger marriages. Premarital restraint builds trust, and the old fashioned courtship dance involves a pledge of mutual fidelity. Writer Mary Elizabeth Podles explains this well:

In serious courtship, a man conveys to a woman that if she is worth all this trouble to court, she must be worth more than any other mate in the world, and shall henceforth be The One Woman. On her part, the woman promises that if she was this hard for him to get, surely she will, as his wife, be impossible for others to get. The courtship dance is the unspoken pledge of future fidelity—the best of all bases for a happy marriage (Podles; Buss, 116).

THE PROBLEMS SEX DIFFERENCES POSE FOR MARRIAGE

OK, marriage, then, brings together two very different kinds of creatures. Young woman really “get” marriage. They have always been more attracted to people than to things. They love strong, long-term relationships. The marital ideal—one man and one woman bound in body and soul—sharing, comforting, communicating through good times and bad is very appealing. This vision includes romantic and committed sex along with children, to whom most women have been drawn since childhood and who seem even more precious once pregnancy and breastfeeding bathe women in hormonal pleasure (Rhoads, chs 2, 8).

Young men, on the other hand, are used to seeing human interactions in competitive terms. They are more single minded, which makes them more selfish and less attuned to the needs of others (Baron-Cohen ch. 4; Rhoads, ch. 2). In our culture we've made things worse because men are used to getting sexual access without any courtship. Courtship—taking a date out for dinner or a movie, entertaining her—is a way of making a man less selfish. To be successful at courting, a man has to pay attention to what his date likes.

We've abandoned not just courtship but chivalry and good manners. Feminists who seek an androgynous world have cheered these developments on. Men used to stand

when women came in the room. They held doors and chairs for their dates or their wives. They always made sure that their date had a drink before they got one. At least that's how my mother told me I should behave. Now feminists have long railed against occupational patterns: the men are the bosses; the women are their secretaries. The men are the doctors; the women are the nurses. Why, some feminists ask, are men primary while women are helpers?

Courtship, however, involved customs that made women primary and men their servants. But feminists didn't like this either. I have had very nice young women tell me that they can open their own doors and ask, if opening doors is a courtesy, why they shouldn't be able to show it to men. The effect is, however, that men stop opening doors because they don't know if women want them to do so. We lose another opportunity to get men to be less selfish by paying attention to other people's needs and desires.

Because so much of women's happiness is dependent on strong, loving connections to others, they are more vulnerable when trouble arises in marriages. One study of full-time dual-career couples finds that problems at work increase psychological distress equally for men and women, but that problems in the marriage lead to much more distress for women than for men. Women's vulnerability affects their physical health as well as their mental health. When wives perceive that their family and marriage are not going well, their blood pressure goes up. When husbands perceive trouble, their blood pressure does not increase, but the husband's perception of trouble will send his wife's blood pressure up. Similarly, after having an argument with her spouse, a woman's immune function decreases much more than a man's, and changes persist for at least twenty-four hours (Rhoads, 255).

No wonder women are more likely to be the peacemakers in families. Researchers who put recorders in dining rooms find that mothers are the most likely to deflect an unpleasant quarrel during family meals and that daughters are the next most likely to serve this role (Thompson and Walker, 849). Teresa Crenshaw explains as follows: "mellowing [females] are their relatively high levels of serotonin compared to the male, oxytocin in abundant supply, and estrogen, a gentle, ordinarily soothing antidepressant hormone" (Crenshaw, 184).

FEMINISTS ON MARRIAGE

Now, to this point, the picture of marriage that I have painted is not terribly pretty. Maybe we should look again at the reasons why feminists have been so critical of marriage. They say that marriage is all about patriarchy and male power. Men have constructed an institution in which women won't be happy unless they are the ones who submit within the family. Feminists say that women must come to realize that they can be equal only if they equal men's power in the market place. In the feminist journal *Ms.* one family therapist sets forth her golden rule of marriage: "Whoever has the gold makes the rules" (Rhoads, 261).

The feminists may have spotted a problem, but they surely have not pointed us to the solution. In fact, more earned income does not necessarily equal more power in a marriage. One review article reports that, at home, wives with high-achieving careers, especially the younger ones, "attempt to be especially attractive and sexual for their husbands, and they report indulging husbands' whims and salving egos" (Thompson and Walker, 857).

Even if higher income were the recipe for greater marital power, research shows that wives are especially unhappy in wife-dominated marriages (Gray-Little; Weisfeld et al.). The dominated husband often just tunes out and focuses on other things. Since the marriage is so important to the wife's happiness, she becomes miserable. Evidently marriage cannot be seen as a struggle for power or economic influence in which the winner gains happiness.

TAKING SEX DIFFERENCES SERIOUSLY

Let's take another look at marriage and male power within marriage.

First, it's not so clear that women resent their mate's power. Women want a man who shows strength in the outside world. They want a man who can provide for them and protect them. They also want a strong man for their intimate partner. One researcher on sexuality has noted that the

intense desire for contact and cuddling seems so much stronger in women than in men. [When being held by your mate] you feel completely content, safe and sound. There is submission and dependence, born of trust. Allowing yourself to be held requires dropping all pretense, relaxing, and becoming vulnerable (Crenshaw, 113, 116).

Alice Rossi, a prominent feminist and sociologist, says she suspects that “even the most ardent feminist, in her innermost heart, would feel more positive about being comforted with her head on the shoulder of a male than she would about comforting a man whose head was on her shoulder” (Rossi, 186-187). Another female author believes that “women don’t want to be dependent on men considered as a group,” but they “feel it is sexy to be dependent on the particular man they have chosen” (Marlowe).

Women want to tame the male competitiveness and strength, and channel it; they don’t want to wipe it out. The romance novel, the most popular of all mass market genres, shows this process in book after book (Rhoads, 68). Male competitiveness and toughness can protect families and help civilize sons, so its attractions to women are not just atavistic even in this enlightened age.

Second, taming and channeling really can work, and they start with the wedding bells. Testosterone is associated with aggressiveness. But when men marry, their testosterone levels go down; when married men have children, their levels go down again (Booth, Carver et al., 1027, 1029; Parke and Brott, 20; Gallagher and Waite, 53-55; Daly and Wilson, 14). And when men have children, they come to care about them, and this makes them more social. Problems with school quality or drug use among teens no longer seem so abstract. The Parent and Teacher Associations (PTA’s) at their kid’s schools have new attractions.

Third, though women are harmed more by troubled marriages, they seem to gain more from good ones. One study asked couples to do three things: talk for five minutes about a situation that brought them closer together; then watch a romantic video; then give each other a big hug. The study found that women’s oxytocin rose much more than that of their male partners (Ellas).

Oxytocin tends to make one healthier and happier. It makes one less anxious, more calm and relaxed. It lowers levels of the stress hormone norepinephrine, and it lowers blood pressure. Sarah Hrdy, author of a landmark 700-page book on mothers and infants, calls oxytocin “the kindest of natural opiates” (Rhoads, 197-202).

Since women seem to gain more from good marriages and lose more from bad ones, they may have a little more at stake in making them good ones. So they tend to work harder at them. But really, as we’ve seen above, women work harder at *all* relationships because emotionally close relationships are the secret to their happiness.

In her book *Sex on the Brain*, Deborah Blum reports on the views of Ellen Frank, a researcher at the University of Pittsburgh:

Women are genetically preprogrammed to be more affiliative. Interpersonal attachment is a bigger deal for women than men, and that's true in all cultures and times. It has an adaptive significance for the survival of the species. If women didn't attach, babies wouldn't survive. . . . If we have one half of the human race that's more preprogrammed for attachment, then that's the half that's going to be more vulnerable (Blum, 217).

Feminists are right that women are more vulnerable, but as Frank notes, it's nature, or God, that makes them so, not men or patriarchy.

The modern marriage of two professionals can be relatively androgynous. The routines and concerns of husband and wife can be similar. But all this changes once pregnancy and babies enter the picture. In many ways pregnancy and babies make women vulnerable, and it was not patriarchy that determined that females would have the babies.

A MOTHER'S VULNERABILITY: HOW CHILDREN CHANGE MARITAL DYNAMICS

There are not many professionals who don't face stress at the office, and there is preliminary but accumulating evidence that stress isn't good for the fetal brain (Rhoads, 213; Olbermann). Moreover, working leads to more exposure to germs, which can lead to respiratory infections like the flu. For pregnant women, flu can increase the risk to the fetus of developing devastating conditions. Children whose mothers had a respiratory infection during the middle three months of pregnancy, for example, have double the risk of developing schizophrenia, a condition affecting about 1 percent of the population (Rhoads, 214).

The effects of mothers' mental and physical health on their developing fetuses are just beginning to become widely known. But pregnant women don't need to be told that they are themselves more vulnerable. Women in the midst of a normal pregnancy are subject to a number of maladies. One obstetrics text calls nausea and vomiting, backache, and heartburn "common conditions." Fatigue is even more commonplace, affecting about three-quarters of all pregnant women. Postpartum fatigue is equally normal.

Two different studies have found that at six months postpartum more than 75 percent of mothers have not achieved full functional status. One study specifically asked about daily activities that were limited because the mother was "tired or felt poorly"; 40 to 50 percent of mothers responded that six months after giving birth, they were

“accomplishing less than usual,” “not performing as carefully as usual,” “limiting work or other activities” and “requiring extra effort to perform work and activities.”

The studies that specifically focus on working women with babies at home reach strong conclusions. One finds that more than 75 percent of the women who were back at work did not feel they were functioning at full capacity. A second study finds that employed women have “diminished levels of well-being. . . . approximately 7 months after childbirth.” A third study finds that “women who had taken more than 24 weeks maternity leave had better mental health outcomes at 9 and 12 months postpartum. Mental outlook was also brighter for women who spent fewer hours at their job” (Rhoads, 212-216).

After they have kids most women would prefer not to work or to work only part time (Rhoads, 248-250; Erickson). They are typically less willing than men to spend whole days away from their children. They want to see the first steps and hear the first words, and they feel guilty and anxious if they spend 10-hour days away from their young children.

Of all the moving stories I encountered in researching my book, none are more poignant than those related by prominent politicians who are also mothers and who reflected on their dual roles. Madeleine Kunin, governor of Vermont, tells a fascinating political story in her autobiography. But Kunin says she was tormented at being governor while she was the mother of four children.

“At least once a day,” Kunin remembers, “I would feel a stab in my chest, thinking I should be at one place when I was at another.” There was no cure for the anxiety; all she could do, she says, was “not to let it overwhelm me, not to let it pull me down, but to carry it as gracefully as I could.”

Kunin’s pain was not just from anxiety and guilt. It was also from longing to be at home for special occasions. During a campaign she came home to find that her family had already blown out her child’s birthday candles. She had them do it over again so she could participate (Rhoads, 234, 237).

This long discussion of women, pregnancy and babies is prologue to my fourth point about marriage. Feminists hate the idea that women need paternalistic protection. But they do. A pregnant women needs to avoid stress; a

post-partum women needs time to fully recover and to nurse, a mother wants and needs lots of time to spend with her children. She can't do these things without a husband who will help take care of her so that she can be a healthy and happy mother.

Women who become mothers know that things have changed and that they are now dependent on their husbands in a way that they never were before. Second-wave feminist Naomi Wolf describes how pregnancy and childbirth transformed her. "The ways in which the hormones of pregnancy affected me called into question my entire belief system about 'the social construction of gender.'" Wolf admits to feeling clingier, weepier, "stupidly domestic." She felt a "childlike surge of need for repetitive, utterly simple affirmations that I was—that we, the baby and I, were—not going to be abandoned" (WOLF, 115-16).

When I read this passage in a talk at a convention, a University of Pennsylvania medical student sent me an e-mail saying

Reluctantly, I agreed that your work has merit. Scenarios flashed like bad cinema before my eyes, i.e. looking out the window, waiting for the appearance of one's husband to return home from work was a behavior worthy of my contempt...before my first baby was born.

If loyal, loving and providing fathers go to work and come home every day, wives can be happy. If fathers are not loyal and loving, and if they refuse to provide, mothers' lives will be dramatically worse. Because mothers love and need their husbands, they typically work hard at making marriages work. They often act vulnerable, and their immune function and blood pressure respond accordingly because they are in fact vulnerable. Any creatures who get their happiness from intimate connection to other human beings are necessarily vulnerable because their well-being is dependent on the character, good fortune and good will of those they love.

THE ROUTE TO HAPPIER MARRIAGES

Feminists grasp the principal marital problem that needs solving —unchecked male dominance. But they don't have a clue about how deep its roots go or about how to solve it. If you ask men how they would like to be described, they use words like *dominant, assertive, independent*. Women asked the same question say *loving, generous, sensitive* (Rhoads, 18-19). If marriage means bringing together one person

with a taste for assertion and another with a taste for generosity, unchecked male dominance is a worrisome possibility.

But the problem is best solvable when women are true to their natures. An unmarried man in his late twenties is incomplete. His cronies are married off and moving away. Without shared activities with them he can be very lonely. Most important, he needs a purpose. Women may need a good marriage, but men need almost any kind of marriage. Their health and happiness rise with marriage; even their sex life improves.

Women need to make men slow down and give time a chance to turn their lust into love. And men will respond if loving, generous and sensitive women—feminine women—are willing to show the vulnerability which the birth of their children later make clear to them. When a man sees vulnerability or neediness in a woman he loves, he can come riding to the rescue. He has found his purpose.

Institutions can help turn men into good fathers. One way to get men to dominate less and be open to their wives' influence is to create what Brad Wilcox calls "soft patriarchs." Such figures can be found in conservative Protestant churches, which urge husbands to be "servant leaders" who attend to their wives' needs for communication and affection as well as to the family's needs for economic wherewithal and moral leadership (Wilcox). While the emotional work of marriage may not be inherently pleasurable or come naturally to men, it can become central to their lives if it is seen as a duty or as intrinsic to a mission. (Men hate to iron, but even a Marine, who typically loves risk-taking and excitement, can take to ironing his dress uniform with attentive skill) (Moir and Moir, 251).

The Protestant churches that Wilcox describes appeal to men by giving them a sense of importance and reminding them of their sacred obligation to use their familial power to serve their families. They appeal to the male sense of honor by encouraging the husband to imagine himself in a central, heroic role. Just as Christ sacrificed himself for the sake of others, husbands must be ready to sacrifice themselves for their wives and children. By making the male role in marriage vital, these churches make it more attractive to men; and by condemning extramarital sex, they make alternatives to marriage less attractive and less available.

A more secular approach might challenge men by pointing to the importance of biological fathers to the healthy development of children. Civilization needs family-oriented men. 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. But the titular familial leadership of the male survives. The Census Bureau used to ask, "Who is the head of the household?" Perhaps they expected to get less patriarchal answers when they changed the question to a nearly incomprehensible "Who is the 'family householder?'" (Presser; Carlson). In 1994, nevertheless, 91 percent of American couples said it was the husband.

Wives doubtful about whether to grant titular household leadership to husbands should realize they may not have to give up much more than the title. Some studies have shown that husbands overestimate their decision-making power, while wives underestimate theirs. Yet an early study "found that the most satisfied husbands were those who believed they had the greater decision-making power even where there was no independent evidence of it" (Weisfeld et al.).

Men cannot be happy if their wives are overwhelmed as they scramble to cope with both work and family. Frantic wives tell husbands they are failing as providers and protectors. If I am right about what women value most—emotionally close relationships—they give up less than feminists claim when they cut back on or abandon their careers when their children are young.

One 1997 national survey of women by the Pew Research Center found that 93 percent of mothers regard their children as a source of happiness all or most of the time; 90 percent say the same about their marriage. Meanwhile, only 60 percent of working women find their careers to be a source of happiness all or most of the time. On a 10-point scale, 86 percent of mothers rate their children a 10 for their importance to personal happiness; just 30 percent of employed women rate their job as a 10 (Pew Research Center Survey; Bowman, 24).

A brilliant forthcoming paper by my colleagues Steve Nock and Brad Wilcox shows that feminists get female marital happiness almost exactly wrong. Wives' marital happiness is not dependent on their marketplace income but on their husbands "emotion work." When wives report that they are happy with the love, affection and understanding shown by their husbands, wives report happiness with their marriages. The wives happiest with the love and affection shown by their husbands don't work outside the home. Moreover, wives who make more than 40% of total household income report lower marital happiness (forthcoming in *Social Forces*).

It seems that women with no income of their own do *not*, in fact, get pushed around by dominance-seeking men. Instead they create happy men who feel needed and who cherish their wives. Despite their physical strength and assertive natures, men in marriage do not have all the power in marriage. They often don't even have most of the power. It's still quite common to hear of small, feminine women who have their

strong, masculine husbands “wrapped around their little fingers.” Happy women usually rule indirectly. They can rule because their husbands love and want to please them. They can also rule because, as PET scans of male and female brains have demonstrated, women can read men better than men can read women (Rhoads, 262).

I once heard the University of Chicago law professor Richard Epstein give a talk in which he explained that his father made all the big decisions in his family. He decided, for example, what the family’s position would be on going to war in Korea or on the United States joining the UN. His mother only made the little decisions—where the family would live, where the kids would go to school, where the family would go on vacation—small stuff like that. When I ask my classes who makes these “little” decisions in their families, most of them report that their mothers do.

In most single earner families women have lots of power. For example, they usually have more freedom to organize their days than do their working husbands (Graglia, 57, 89, 112-113). Unlike their husbands, they do give up workplace power. But for most men this does not amount to a whole lot. Most men answer to some boss every working day of their lives.

Besides, most women don’t care so much about work place power and status (Rhoads, 61-66). They tend to warm to a subtle kind of female power—“the force that creates relationships, binds families and builds societies” (Moir and Jessel, 129)

Androgynous feminists focus on a quantifiable marital power. They assume that men and women are alike and thus should share housework and childcare equally. But, as we’ve seen, they aren’t alike. Mothers are loaded with estrogen and oxytocin, which draw them to young children and help induce them to tend to infants. Men are loaded with testosterone and high levels of testosterone are associated with less interest in babies. If dads were as tormented as moms by prolonged absence from their children, we’d have more unhappiness and more fights over which parent gets to spend time with the children. By faithfully working at often boring jobs to provide for their families, dads make possible moms who can do less paid work and thereby produce less stressed and happier households. Dads should surely help with the kids, but they deserve a lot of credit for simply making mom’s nurturing possible.

In my class last year a good student who was a strong feminist declared near the end of the term that feminism had left her incapable of love. She was always asking herself if her partner was doing half of everything. She never looked at him appreciatively and gave him the benefit of the doubt. Such a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude is not likely to lead to women who can report satisfaction with the love and affection shown by their husbands.

At the deepest level, androgynous feminists simply don't like women. This is a strong statement but an accurate one. I hope that I have persuaded you that women care most of all about connection—strong intimate relationships. As argued above, these goals bring with them dependency and vulnerability.

Androgynous feminism's overarching goal is an end to female vulnerability and dependency. Feminists make statements like "If you believe you need a man [in your life] you won't pursue your own goals" and "Don't let your children define you" (Crittenden, 61, 64). Feminists make a religion out of personal autonomy and self reliance (Morse, 58-60). At their core, however, most women want connection, not autonomy. A recent poll found that nearly 81% of mothers said that mothering is the most important thing they do (Erickson). Even feminists sometimes sense their desire for connection and dependency. Katie Roiphe has said:

I live alone, pay my bills, and fix my stereo when it breaks down. But it sometimes seems like my independence is in part an elaborately constructed facade that hides a more traditional feminine desire to be protected and provided for (Crittenden, 65).

We all learn to put up with the self-absorption of teenagers, but feminism would make self-absorption the essential characteristic of thirty-year old women as well. Feminists would make women whose commitment to others reflects their natures and brings them great joy come to believe that to be entangled in dependent relationships is to be not fully human.

Shortly before he became Pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger issued a letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church that emphasized the crucial importance of feminine love for the well-being of children and families. While supporting women's rights to equality in the workplace, the Vatican letter argued that the interrelationship between family and work has, for women, "characteristics different from those in the case of men." It warned that women who work should not have a schedule that forces them to relinquish their family life or endure "continual stress, with negative consequences for [their] own equilibrium and the harmony of the family" (Ratzinger).

Interestingly, the Vatican letter suggested that all family members, husbands as well as children, learn to love by seeing how women love within the home. In support of this understanding, three separate studies have concluded that father-son attachments are less secure "when non-maternal care is initiated on a full- or near-full-time basis in the first year [after birth]" (Belsky). This suggests that men's paternal love is strengthened by observing the example of maternal love. In other words, in addition

to naturally loving their babies, mothers facilitate the entrance of new love into the world.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It’s a difficult standard for women as well as men. But since women care so much about strong relationships with other people, they probably come closer to meeting the standard. Noticing and caring about what others want comes more naturally to women than to men. They can thus take the lead in providing “the force that creates relationships, binds families and builds societies.” Such activity is hardly shameful; it is worthy of emulation.

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