

BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Women After All

Sex, Evolution, and the End of Male Supremacy

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Melvin Konner has had a protean career of research, remarkable and utterly responsible scholarship, and literary contribution of stellar quality. His writing is as smooth and tangy as brandied butter, and he is on a firmly different planet from colleagues who communicate in punishingly opaque postmodern code. He began graduate anthropology at Harvard and (this is so personally gratifying, forgive me) describes in a recent paper in a Festschrift for Robin Fox how one day he visited the office of his mentor, the late Irven DeVore, who had on his desk a copy of a paper Fox and I wrote titled "The Zoological Perspective In Social Science," which appeared in 1966 in *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society*. In nine printed pages, we told it how we thought it should be. Konner and, evidently, DeVore too took this to be admonitory. Konner eventually gained an MD degree, so convinced was he that to know society accurately the body also had to be known, and in the remarkable detail the body boasts.

Now in *Women After All*, Konner focuses on what he perceives to be a basic shift in human community from what has been traditional in many places and which he links to male supremacy, to even the dreaded Hollywood goon, patriarchy. He is fully justified and correct in so doing because it is obvious that changes in the future will have to accord with the nature of a hunting-gathering species (Konner studied the Bushmen extensively) in which everyone, including both men and women, have jobs to do to ensure survival, reproduction, security, and perhaps a little fun.

First of all, Konner's notes and bibliography could be published on their own, so thorough and fair are they about the colorful and intricate history of the study of human evolution and more recently its augmentation by essentially anthropological study of the behavior and kinship of other animals. Here Konner wholly appropriately recalls and evaluates the central work of Sarah Hrdy on female-male relations, first in other primates and

then in us. He provides a fair account of a vast body of scholarship and thought. This should never have to be done again.

An especially inventive aria in the book is Konner's insistence on sex differences between males and females and how the raw, dumb fundamentalism of "sexes are made by culture" corrodes any sensitive effort to understand not only what is going on but what can happen if people want to live in a different kind of gendered community in the future. Western Europe and North America are currently in psychic turmoil because countless important institutions are enjoined to comport themselves so that jobs and benefits must equate to statistical measures. Statisticians have become ur-moralists who can pronounce a group defective if there are not as many men and women in each job as there are in the population at large. This is especially the case where there is a female deficit, as with female engineers, but not when there is a male deficit, as in virtually the entire undergraduate population. And sometimes our leaders lie, for example when it is repeatedly announced that nationally US women earn 77% of what men earn, which is a true aggregate number except that women are also out of the labor force on average 5–8 years and losing normal increases, and they work part time much more too. A Department of Labor study in 2010 indicated firmly that only 2%–3% of income differential resulted from discrimination, and all the rest resulted from personal choice.

By the way, since it is unlikely that anyone who is not an academic will read this, it may be of interest to recall what happened when the US government, in defiance of all actuarial experience, created unisex pension tables. This meant that men and women will put in whatever pension money is extracted from their paychecks and that when they retire they will get back an appropriate amount. But that is an average amount, even though women live some 5–7 years longer. TIAA-CREF, which provides pensions for countless academics and researchers, (excellently) protested this on elementary actuarial grounds. Supporters of the measure announced that men lived shorter lives not because there were real sex differences but because they worked harder and longer. TIAA-CREF then conducted a study comparing the longevity of female academics to that of females married to matched academics who did not work. Guess who

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lived longer? So every man taking an annuity (this applies just to annuities) is losing a few years of income to his female colleague next door because of the fundamentalist error that there are no coercive sex differences. And he is dying sooner too.

Konner is concerned with the future of what he defines as male supremacy. Of course, this is a gross blight on human decency, whether it takes the form of the insane antifemaleness of fundamentalist Wahhabi Muslims or ultraorthodox Israelis. It is unlikely that such crystal structures of theological certainty will survive the new reality of female-managed birth control. Their breathtaking fatuity will be threatened by women who cannot take it anymore and by men who wonder why they should bother spending their only life cycle supporting a female and offspring.

Konner records that some 40% of babies are born to women without husbands, and there is every reason to expect that more and more men will be willing to do less and less within the family scheme. Margaret Mead once announced that females were relatively straightforward to raise—some 85% will still have children, which is after all something to do—but males were much harder to turn out well and required morale boosters, such as clubs, teams, epaulets, and bizarre rules of conduct. What are these male supremacists doing now? Watching sports on a thousand channels, pornography everywhere, and not marrying unless they are decently middle class with a costly degree.

The new harshest societal question Konner does not—and cannot, perhaps—address fully is what to do with the males. Male infanticide? Prison for even more of them? Marry each other? I published a book on male decline some years ago (Tiger 2000), and the warmest (and unexpected) response I received was from the mothers of boys who could not compete in a school in which they were the overwhelming victims of Ritalin and similar peculiar drugs used to change their behavior. There is now the beginning of effort to form charter schools or special ones focused on what may be different needs and forms of satisfaction for boys who are currently ignored or unrewarded in the system. In large US cities, women from 23 to 35 years old earn larger salaries than men. They are better at their jobs. What's next? Konner raises vital questions elegantly and with depth. We are in his debt.

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In December 2014, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to a 17-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai, who had been shot by the

Taliban because of her advocacy for women's right to education. Her near murder did not silence her. She has continued to speak out and challenge the powers that would bar girls from getting an education. In her acceptance speech, she said, "my father did not clip my wings." It was a beautiful way of putting what Melvin Konner shows us to be women's potentialities. Not all daughters are as fortunate as Malala, whose father ran a school for girls in Swat, northwestern Pakistan, with development aid. If anyone doubted what education can do for girls as well as for their families and societies, *Women After All* is likely to have them convinced. It is no easy road; the obstacles, as Konner also shows, can be formidable. But his main argument—that there is no better way to spend one development dollar than on education for girls, because of a host of beneficial effects—will be hard to counter, although he is prepared for that: "You might say that this book will have something to offend almost everyone," he notes in the introduction.

Konner marshals solid scientific evidence from evolution and biology to show that women are not equal to men—they are "superior in many ways, and in most ways that will matter in the future" (3). This is not on account of culture, although culture or upbringing matters. It is because of biology and intrinsic differences in the body and the brain. This is not likely to hearten those who would believe otherwise, although as Konner observes, "It's important to understand that the similarities between men and women's brains are much greater than any differences; the differences that exist are unrelated to general intelligence, but they are tied to specific dispositions" (229). Women come out superior in regard to judgment, empathy, nurturance, and survival. Konner argues, convincingly in my view, that "gender identity is at its core something biological, something set early in life, whether it is masculine, feminine, or one of the many interesting varieties of identity that cannot be simply labeled either" (14). In making his argument, he builds on Ashley Montagu's classic *The Natural Superiority of Women*: "But I will show you that in our new century we can be even more confident of the thesis of that book, not least because of advances in brain science in the past decade" (15). And he does.

As a social anthropologist who has spent much of my life in quite strictly sex-segregated societies, I am struck by the fact that some of the differences between the sexes that Konner points to are recognized in places one might not expect to find them: "The men govern, but it's the women who rule," said women I met in southeastern Arabia (Wikan 1991 [1982]), and there was much in their lives to support that. "With us, the women rule," said both men and women in the back streets of Cairo (Wikan 1996). At issue is recognition of women's innate superiority of judgment and decision making. As Fatima Mernissi (1975) has noted, subjugation of women in some societies does not spring from a belief in their inferiority but in their superiority.

Konner does not deal with culture to any great extent; it is an interesting fact of his book. He describes himself as a strong cultural determinist in his youth who would not at first accept

what he now sees as “a deep biological and philosophic insight” that boys and girls really are different (206). The deep value of this insight is that it enables us “to make better use of it than we have throughout history,” namely, to work to make a difference in boys’ and girls’ sense of equality and fairness. “But the difference will endure, and it is not one that favors men” (206).

I live in a society that Konner mentions for its performance in gender equality. Norway now has its second female prime minister, and women hold 50% of cabinet positions. The country has come an enormously long way over a few decades, but so have many others that do not feature high in equality ranks. Take the Sultanate of Oman: in 1970, there was not a single school for girls. Today, female literacy is above 90%, and in universities women outnumber men. Few of the empirical studies referred to in Konner’s book refer to the Middle East. Religion is not an issue for him, although he does mention that Hindus are more inclined to use contraceptives than Muslims in India.

Among the specific biological dispositions that differ among the sexes, Konner’s book gives much warranted attention to aggressiveness and sexual drive. The studies he relates about the hookup culture in US colleges and universities are disconcerting, to say the least, and reminds me of a young Muslim girl coming from Egypt to Norway who, after her first evening out with a group of “Norwegian” friends, said, “I’m so glad I’m a Muslim!” She felt it gave her a way out, as indeed it does, against peer pressure and male aggressiveness. So identity, while biological, is also cultural through and through—a fact Konner surely recognizes. The value of his book is in challenging those who would see it all as cultural-social.

Konner does not always make it easy for himself: “Change comes because it resonates with the nature of women and men. . . . Virtue is being redefined, and the old version, closely tied to male political and martial ambition, is being consigned to the trash heap of history” (199). I wish it were so. The facts are that honor or virtue in “the old version” is being renewed, reinforced, and reinvigorated in parts of the world, also in the West (Wikan 2008). Konner’s book would have benefited from less lofty language at times. This also pertains in his use of development rhetoric, which seems to say at times that women’s empowerment (a difficult word in itself that has no translation in many languages, including Arabic and Norwegian) would lead inevitably to democracy and other values held high in the West.

Democracy does not have the brightest future for the time being, and with good reason: Western powers have helped discredit the idea of democracy in several parts of the world, as at home. The engagement of my country, Norway, in Afghanistan was never labeled “war” by the government, whereas girl’s education and human rights were underscored. Women’s empowerment can be an umbrella for military operations with various purposes (Fassin 2012). *Women After All* would not be expected to go into that, but it could with advantage have used more sober language.

Konner’s prose is strong. He tells a convincing story with a breadth and width of research to sustain it. He anticipates counterarguments, is not afraid to offend (in this “age of offense”), and brilliantly shows us the bright new world that we could really have were women’s capacities as biologically given truly recognized for what they are.

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Melvin Konner, currently Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor at Emory University, has long been recognized as a sharp-minded interdisciplinarian whose scholarship combines his backgrounds: Konner holds an MD and PhD (in biological anthropology) from Harvard University. He has written well-received books on a number of topics, including his most recent *The Evolution of Childhood* (2010), which is widely regarded as an exhaustive work of brilliance. What that means for his latest project is that the expectations of this reviewer, and I suspect many others, are quite deservedly high.

Konner’s newest book, *Women After All*, is the definition of a provocative page-turner: quite likely to please on one page and to irritate on another, but either way sure to excite and stimulate thoughtful discussion. The author has crafted a storyline that forces a reader to think critically about the form and function of human sex differences in our past, present, and future. Konner’s writing is clear and light, but this should not be mistaken for simplicity. Nearly every page presents a scientific finding, tucked between his humorous turns of phrase and well-crafted interpretations. I imagine any reader, specialist or not, will find themselves learning something new (yes, that is a bold statement!). The author draws on a wide body of science and scholarship to understand the biological bases of sex and sex differences. He covers a tremendous amount of material and disciplinary ground, synthesizing a great amount of material—from the evolution of sexual reproduction to philosophical writings on sex and gender, from parthenogenetic lizards to assisted reproductive technologies, from cross-cultural farming practices to sexual hookup culture in the United States, from institutionalized violence and warfare to gender gaps in science. *Women After All* cuts across

a shocking amount of disciplines, including the subfields of anthropology and a range of material in the natural, behavioral, and social sciences. Perhaps the most profound aspect of Konner's writing is that he is a master of thinking and framing in biocultural perspective, and indeed this book, like his others, will do an important social justice by moving discussions beyond nature-nurture and instead into an integrative gene-by-environment framework.

While the title of the book may lend itself to images of female exceptionalism, Konner is cautious to avoid such an approach. He is clearly aware of the tendency for this outcome, and although he goes so far as to describe males and masculinity as a sort of sociobiological "birth defect" (or what he quips to be "X-chromosome deficiency syndrome"), he is often cautious to avoid a more simplistic account of "woman are special." Moreover, Konner also frequently reminds the reader of diversity in traits, including with respect to sex and gender, an important point for his storyline given that so many biological traits, including those under selection pressure, often have diversity in trait expression, which itself may or may not have adaptive consequences. Yet while the reader is frequently reminded of this diversity, its etiology and significance is not a focus of the story told. Inasmuch, throughout the book there are instances that seem to lack the nuance that the scientific literature on these issues demand; but if Konner's intended audience is a more general readership, it is not clear that the specificity of academic writing would achieve all that much that the internalized ivory-tower debates on these issues have not already thrown fists over. Konner's accessible and witty writing, on the other hand, is likely to have a broader public impact. Case in point: for those tuned in to social media or watching the popular press, prerelease clippings from the book are already generating substantial buzz and discussion.

All this said and despite carefully researched discussions, there are also moments when one begins to wonder whether Konner has managed to fully master the literature and debates in the behavioral sciences on sex differences/similarities—and on the social construction of gender, for that matter. While there are eloquent explanations of sexual diversity in one breath, in another there are spots when one wonders whether the author is conflating gender identity and sexual orientation or simply trying to purposefully be more inclusive with respect to sexual and gender minorities. Some of this questioning is most notable in chapter 1 (which admittedly does the hard work of laying the groundwork for the remaining chapters), with the author's often uninterrogated use of terminology. Examples are the repeated use of the term *transsexual* rather than *transgender* (or *trans**) even in instances beyond references to genital reassignment surgery, the use of "real girls" (37) in comparison to young boys who dress up as girls, and a somewhat quizzical dance with gender pronouns and gender-neutral terms for children with disorders of sex development that does not appear to be based entirely on identity but rather on sexed bodies and heteronormative reproductive motives. It is perhaps these subtle moments, when

the author invokes the minoritizing view of gender diversity with a determined focus on the biological significance of two sexes (male and female) and their relationship to each other that have come to shape the evolution of the human condition, that are most difficult to digest.

But if there is any sizable flaw in this thoroughly interdisciplinary and integrative book, it is perhaps a failure to truly integrate with the wider body of gender-studies scholarship. Despite an interestingly argued case for the decline of male supremacy, this scholarship might suggest that Konner has made a misjudgment regarding the systemic hold of patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and sociopolitical institutions that keep so many women around the world in positions of subjugation. While Konner clearly elucidates the many ways in which we are coming closer to (re)gaining gender egalitarianism if not altogether turning the tides of gender imbalance—and in so doing also makes clear the biological and historical forces that have allowed for men's supremacy—there remain countless ways in which men maintain social, political, and economic dominance. By its very nature "patriarchy" is an amorphous beast, and positions of power—and the individuals or classes that occupy them—will sooner shape-shift than lose their upper hand. Indeed, our legacy as a social primate comes with the complexity of regulating social behavior and the tendency to assess, learn from, and respond to the social and status-relevant behaviors of others. While both the overt and the subvert form of power that men hold over women are clearly changing, we should be cautious to assume that they are altogether diminishing. That is, while the primacy of the sex wars may indeed be fading, we should not be so fast to forget that for now, in very real and tangible ways with a variety of consequences, there remain many gender imbalances where women remain oppressed. There is an impressive literature in gender studies and feminist praxis that routinely examines and attempts to trouble these dynamics, which exist at multiple levels and in multiple domains. This wider gender-studies literature might help elucidate the challenges that remain and together form a truly new research and social justice agenda that takes seriously human evolutionary biology, sex differences, and the social construction of gender. Regardless of whether you agree with him, when that is realized, Melvin Konner will be one of the influential minds to thank for pushing these conversations forward.

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For years I have been on a campaign to get my now 17-year-old daughter to read *Bleak House*. I tell her it is all there—

the folly of human nature, the terrible way people treat each other, the craziness that comes with human intelligence and self-consciousness, and, of course, love, which implies sex in the Victorian way. But now that I have read Melvin Konner's *Women After All*, I am switching tracks because I believe this book will change her life even more profoundly than *Bleak House*. For a young woman just about to embark on adult life, I feel that reading this book is imperative, that it will make sense of the world and human behavior and empower my daughter to deal with the constant blizzard of antifemale sentiment that is surely roaring her way.

Although the book cover imprints Melvin Konner with the letters "MD," he has another degree that in my mind makes him more qualified than a physician to write this book. Konner also holds a PhD in biological anthropology; he is not only professor of neurosciences and behavioral biology but also professor of anthropology at Emory University. Those of us who have read his many previous books have relied on both paths of his training and interest to give us an all-encompassing anthropological perspective that takes in the mechanics and development of the human body, has an evolutionary perspective, and crosses cultures to speak of human nature and human universals (or not). That anthropological view might be informed by Konner's training as a physician, but really what makes his books so illuminating and his arguments so convincing is his anthropological grounding. And that is what makes *Women After All* such a glorious book.

Konner's main thesis is simple—although women have been treated badly by culture and history, they are actually the superior sex. Obviously, it is loads of fun to have a man say this, but just as obviously it is not so much fun to realize that this argument is a hook, and the book will probably sell better and be read by more people than the mountains of books written by women making the same argument. But women should not be bitter about this. Instead, let us be glad that when a man decided to take on this subject he has been so thorough, so academically correct, so adamant and convincing that women should be grateful, not resentful.

Women After All is a sweeping indictment against men and their historical oppression and fear of women. Reading this book, I was reminded of Susan Faludi's (1991) groundbreaking and best-selling trade book *Backlash*, which was the first popular book to point out that men are terrified of the power that women hold. Konner underscores this power by pointing out that human females are biologically in better shape than men right from conception. He writes that having X and Y chromosomes (being male) rather than two X chromosomes is disastrous: "The result is shortened life span, higher mortality at all ages, an inability to reproduce, premature hair loss, and brain defects variously resulting in attention deficit, hyperactivity, conduct disorder, hypersexuality, and an enormous excess of both outward and self-directed aggression" (8). Well, that is a concise way to put what women always notice but keep to themselves in fear of male derision.

Konner then comments on how biological or evolutionary differences between men and women translate into the real world: "Above all, I mean that women can carry on the business of a complex world in ways that are more focused, efficient, deliberate, and constructive than men's because women are not frequently distracted by impulses and moods that sometimes indirectly lead to inappropriate sex and unnecessary violence" (4). Spend some time in a faculty meeting and see the truth in Konner's observations.

In separate chapters Konner covers, for example, the familiar ground of the variation of genetic sex and our cultural fear of what we see as ambivalent sexual identification, female sexual behavior in the animal kingdom in all its glory, what nonhuman primates can tell us about human females, how men have been able to dominate women, and the fact that many women have busted out from that domination. Konner's writing is so engaging, so conversational that sometimes the book is hard to put down. And that flowing text is the cover for deep scholarship as well as his underlying fury at how women have been treated throughout human history. By simply talking and talking simply, he is able to draw the reader along and make a convincing and amiable case that male supremacy is over. He seems to be saying, "Here is the evidence. Doesn't it make sense? Let's stop pretending men are superior."

And so I will be leaving multiple copies of this book around the house. My daughter will see me lying on the couch reading it for the second or third time. I will continue to read passages out loud to her as I have done for the past few weeks. I will buy this book for her friends, especially those who think they are feminists so they can see what it really means to self-identify with that word.

I will be a champion of *Women After All* because Mel Konner had the guts to write the last paragraph, in which he claims that "women are smart, determined, steady, fair, calm, strong, optimistic, capable, democratic, cooperative, and unstoppable" (306). I might just needlepoint the word *unstoppable* and hang it on my wall because this is the word my daughter's generation of women needs to hear, know, feel, and put into action. And I believe that *Women After All* is the manifesto that will remind these young women, as well as us older ones, to be fierce. Always, every minute of every day—unstoppable.

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Konner begins: "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 matter in the future.” Here is an erudite and empirically rich account, funneled from the big, evolutionary, and biological to the changing gendered present. Konner covers the relevance of atypical sex differentiation to unpack mechanisms of sex/gender identity and development. From black widows to whiptail lizards, he covers a taxonomic spread of sex roles and dimorphisms as well as the evolutionary roots to those differences. That means invoking Darwin and Ralls to discuss why cassowary females are larger than males and why males provide more offspring care. Discussions of fossil hominins and modern human hunter-gatherers help us model relationships between women and men in deeper time. Where once sex/gender relationships were relatively egalitarian among mobile foragers, the rise of dense settlements increased social inequality and fostered male-male coalitions and patriarchy. Read the Bible—or the discussions of it in Konner’s book—for illustrations of violence, polygyny, and slavery that are increasingly hobbled. Feminism rises, and mankind is troubled. Women fight off sexual harassment to occupy greater roles in government and the corporate world just as fewer men are killed by their fellow kind.

Other books have tackled similar gender-related issues in the United States. In popular circles, Hanna Rosin’s *The End of Men* (2012) made related claims but embedded that discussion in social change in recent decades. Yet relatively few scholars have sought to weld the tools of behavioral biology to frame and understand the ongoing shifts in political power. A strength of Konner’s approach is that he musters various lines of evidence—comparisons with other animals, hunter-gatherer data, findings from archaeology and fossil hominins, neuroendocrine research—within an evolutionary perspective (Gray 2013). This facilitates interdisciplinary and deeper engagement (“big history meets the big present?”). He references a good body of recent and classic scholarship in the process—from Robert Trivers to Camille Paglia to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. This formulation helps reframe the standards of debate. “Biology has its influence, but it interacts with experience in complicated ways” (33).

Central to Konner’s case is that the world has changed in ways favoring women’s talents and less so in ways beneficial to men. What is propelling more gender equality? Konner draws on Steven Pinker’s recent book (2011) on the decline of violence to suggest that feminization of society and democratic institutions play key roles. Others emphasize the rise of machines, of a service and information economy, of a world in which adults have fewer children in whom they invest tremendous amounts of educational and social capital and garner few resources from children in return. Yet the question still lacks a complete answer.

Konner could do more to model how individuals’ heritable physiology interacts with social factors across the life course to yield population-level patterns. This would help account for gendered patterns of social behavior without arguing that one sex is superior. He nicely recalls Judith Brown’s classic note on women’s work often being constrained with respect to direct childcare but does not discuss increases in direct paternal care

in recent decades or a role of greater mobility and diminished availability of other alloparents (Gray and Anderson 2010). He alludes to greater male propensity to risk, although this treatment could be enhanced to talk about its continued relevance in the “heroism” professions, such as the police force or the military, or in the technology frontiers in Silicon Valley—or even in the contemporary sports arena. The frequent deployment of indirect aggression in female-female competition that Joyce Benenson (2014) finds among children and that Anne Campbell (2013) discusses among adults looks less optimistic than the female social dynamics characterized by Konner. Lippa, Preston, and Penner (2014) also point to sex differences in attractions to things versus people, and Roy Baumeister (2010) has emphasized the important contrast between capacities and motivations. Integrating more such considerations could help provide reasoned interpretations (against knee-jerk assumptions of “bias”) when some outcome does not conform to a target that an individual or group favors.

As a related example in anthropology, an impactful *PLoS ONE* paper (Clancy et al. 2014) presented survey findings on sexual harassment faced during fieldwork, with one pattern being that many women identified unwanted contacts made by male superiors. Such findings warrant close scrutiny of the causal processes at play and how those can be addressed. As another illustration, Susan Pinker (2008) discussed the “paradox of choice” whereby some well-educated Canadian women pare back their career aspirations; the paradox was that a well-earning spouse or circumstance gave them that option, whereas fewer women in Russia or the Philippines having such options choose degrees and employment to garner necessary incomes. The latter looks like STEM educational outreach success but ties into different social structural factors.

While there is merit in seeking a central narrative to shifts in human sex/gender roles, the variation historically and in the present warrants explicit attention. Plenty of people live in contexts where manual labor pays, where the police are not there to halt a rape, or where the US achievement gap at school (more women than men) is reversed (e.g., many sub-Saharan African countries) or even more extreme (in some African Caribbean populations). Some of the assertions applying to US society also do not hold elsewhere: women in China commit suicide as often as men, and in countries like Nigeria, in which many teenage women marry, they have earlier sexual debuts than men. A recent article in *Current Anthropology* (Karaninos et al. 2014) described an urban Philadelphia world where male violence is legitimized rather than shunned. An emphasis on the general masks the greater variation within men and women (the variance), and Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) highlights the contemporary relevance of social inequality.

Few topics elicit more profound interest than sex differences, sex roles, and their underlying causes. Acknowledging his predecessors in this terrain, including Montagu’s *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1999), Konner has written a volume rich in examples, concepts, and insights. Whether or not you agree with his recommendations, you will find much

to foster continued deep and literate debate about the changing and gendered human condition.

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Mel Konner has written a lively, readable feminist book arguing that the complementarity of the sexes is returning and women are forging ahead as the historic anomaly of male dominance is ending. Konner, an evolutionary anthropologist and physician, and I, a cultural anthropologist, have very different approaches to issues of gender and sexual differences. But I admire his ability to master a wide range of literatures from his own field as well as from cross-cultural research, social psychology, history, and current media outlets.

His first few chapters cover the genetic differences between men and women, the research on intersexed individuals, the role played by hormones, and the vast literature on sex differences among animals, including primates. He has an important chapter on hunter-gatherers and his own experiences when he and his first wife, Marjorie Shostak, lived with the !Kung San of Botswana between 1969 and 1971 and in 1975. It was after their second trip that I first got to know Marjorie and Mel, since both Marjorie and I were at the Radcliffe Institute, and Marjorie was working on her book *!Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Shostak 1981).

There is a monumental difference between Konner's account and *Man the Hunter* (Lee and DeVore 1968), the most widely

read book about hunter-gatherers and gender differences in our graduate school years. In those days, hunting had a special place in human evolution as a “master integrating pattern,” a spur to tool making, and the basis for economic reciprocity. It was not until feminist scholars marshaled the evidence for the importance of Woman the Gatherer that opinions started to change (Dahlberg 1981; Tanner 1981; Zihlman 1978).

In primate studies, the focus was on baboon troupes and male hierarchies. Two generations of women researchers in primate and animal behavior (all documented in Konner's book) have taken attention away from male reproductive success and placed emphasis on female mate choice, where “picky females” select mates rather than only submit to male advances. The feminization of evolutionary biology, primatology, and foraging studies—and anthropology in general—has made a huge difference.

Konner correctly argues that mid-twentieth-century foraging societies provide egalitarian gender models that probably were present for most of human evolution. At first glance, it appears that our collection *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974) takes an opposing stand. The first three articles argued for universal female subordination, while other contributions attested to the variation in women's status from relatively egalitarian to extreme male dominance. The claim of universal female subordination set off a lively debate, with a number of female researchers arguing that most foragers and some horticulturists had a “complementary but equal” gender structure. One's position depended on how one evaluated the kinds of male privileges Konner documents among the !Kung (the importance of hunting, men's dominant role in trance dancing, and male interpersonal violence). In the end, we all reached the position that foraging societies are the most egalitarian of all populations we know about, exhibiting what Ortner called an “egalitarian gender ideology” that was hegemonic (1996a).

What feminist anthropologists have also contributed are a number of careful analyses of the role played by the state in the subordination of women. This literature adds to Konner's discussion of state societies by focusing on the structures that were put in place as states were formed. Even in patrilineal tribal chiefdoms, women retained important rights as sisters in their own patrilineages. But with the rise of the state, women became wives. Women were actively discriminated against and participated less in mutual aid, socializing activities, divorce, political office, and extradomestic dispute settlement (Sacks 1979).

Karen Sacks rightly argues that states were based on class, with a hierarchy of classes having different access to resources. Property was taken out of the hands of lineages, clans, and large kin groups and privatized to smaller extended families headed by a senior male. Women's labor was confined to a domestic sphere while men's labor (especially that of the peasant masses) became public. Men produced crops or craft items for elite consumption, and they were conscripted to build pyramids and palaces and to serve in standing armies (see also Reiter 1975). While Konner emphasizes the ways in which

women were sexually exploited through war, rape, and captivity and by forms of polygyny, Ortner argues that harems and purdah palaces were a result of arranged marriages with daughters of political subordinates, providing the “glue” that held class hierarchies together and under the control of the ruler (Ortner 1996b).

Finally, Konner shows (using data primarily from the United States and Europe) that women now have access to birth control (and consequently have fewer babies). They are participating in the paid labor force in greater numbers and above all are taking advantage of college and postgraduate education in a wide variety of fields. Konner foresees women gaining top jobs in the corporate world; more political positions at local, state, and national levels; and more important roles in the professions. In the next decades, as more women move into positions of power, their different style of leadership, collaboration, and networking will make governments, corporations, medical facilities, and law offices less hierarchical and more egalitarian.

I agree, but it is also important to think about structures and legal changes that have to be made to accelerate the trend that Konner emphasizes. For example, women’s increased entrance into higher education was helped along by the huge expansion in state university systems and community colleges in the 1960s and 1970s and the concomitant expansion of graduate education. Affirmative action in the 1970s and early 1980s brought fairer rules for hiring, tenuring, and promoting women in institutions of higher education.

Konner says little about the options for working-class and minority women. Here, advancement will not be just a matter

of increased education but will necessitate institutional change. The structure of blue-collar and pink-collar jobs needs to be dramatically altered. Rather than part-time temporary jobs at McDonald’s or Walmart, wages need to be raised, work schedules made more regular, and additional full-time positions made available. Working-class women need access to affordable child care, after-school programs, and decent wages for the child care workers themselves. We need to understand structural inequalities (as well as biologically based behaviors), and we need to transform these structures and institutions if we want to increase women’s rise to equality.

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