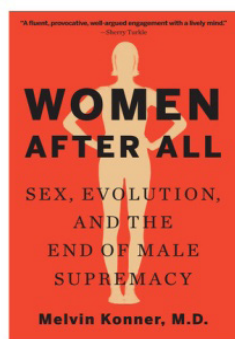


BOOK REVIEW

**Women After All: Sex, Evolution, and the End of Male Supremacy**

Author : Melvin Konner, M.D.

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Konner's *Women After All* begins with the quotation from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading figure of the American suffragist, "Because man and woman are the complement of one another, we need woman's thought in national affairs to make a safe and stable government." This quotation was a part of her address to the National Woman Suffrage Convention in Washington D.C., on January 19, 1869. However, the idea on equality between man and woman is just a starting point toward Konner's thesis which is far beyond equality: women are not equal to men – they are superior to men.

The author's background in anthropology and behavioral biology makes his approach toward gender bias compelling and rich in analysis. According to Konner, the argument whether women are superior to men can be proven through biological point of view regarding the chromosome, genes, hormones, and nerve circuits. Based on the intrinsic elements and structures of the body and brain, women can survive alone without men and are naturally superior to men. There are several supporting arguments to this premise, for examples, women generally live longer than men because they are more resistant toward diseases, they are less potential to have brain disorder that lead to destructive behaviors, and the most important thing is they can produce new life from their own bodies (Konner, 2015, p. 5).

The way Konner presents his ideas in this book might raise the male readers' eyebrow. Men

are positioned as the source of almost all tragedies and disasters along the history of human life. Men, with their competitiveness toward each other, have grown up with destructive traits in themselves. In the *Introduction*, Konner asserts that men are responsible for the poverty, violence, corruptions, and environmental damages throughout history. The bad traits in men's behaviors are called *maleness*.

On the other hand, Konner strongly believes that women are the keepers of the Earth. Women's emotions are generally caring and nurturing, "And the emotions experienced by most women do not narrow, label, and destroy" (p. 8). All the goodness in women's behavior is called *femaleness*. Konner admits that not every man has bad traits, and that not every woman possesses good behaviors. In fact, the percentage of depraved men figures recorded throughout history is very small compared to the number of men as whole. However, Konner considers that the destructive effects caused by the minority of men are more tremendous than those caused by women.

In relation to evolution, Konner proposes a controversial theory about the origin of sexes – male and female. He explains that in the beginning, there was only one sex which was female. Later on, the division occurred because of a "birth defect," a condition where a key pair of chromosomes change. In a normal condition, the chromosomes look the same, but the disorder one is shrunken. This chromosome disorder causes the shortened life span, higher mortality, inability to reproduce, premature hair loss, and brain defect which

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leads to attention deficit, hyperactivity, conduct disorder, hyper sexuality, and both outward and self-directed aggression (p.8). Konner calls the abnormal chromosome as X-chromosome deficiency syndrome or in another term, maleness.

Konner points out that men are born as illness or disorder, so that women are superior to men since they were born. The healthy chromosomes end up to be women, as the opposite, the defective chromosomes are the origin of men that today occur to be 49 percent of the human species. Surely, this kind of explanation will attract so many responses from the readers both pros and cons.

In Chapter I, *Diverge, Say the Cells*, Konner explains the case of a French child named Barbin, who is sexually atypical because Barbin has both vagina and penis. The child grew as a girl and in her early twenties she revealed how special she was. She was then deemed as male. Barbin was forced to leave his job as a teacher in an all-girls school. He was then found dead, suspected as a suicide because of depression. For Konner, the case of Barbin and other types of sexual atypical such as gay, lesbian, and so forth can be a significant proof of his theory on *femaleness* and *maleness*.

In Chapter 2, *Hidden in Darkness*, Konner elaborates the background to sex and gender identity. He starts with Charles Darwin's question on sexual reproduction, "We do not even know in the least final cause of sexuality; why new beings should be produced by the union of sexual elements, rather than by a process of parthenogenesis." The answer to that question is something that Konner says "hidden in darkness." Even so, he illustrates three possible answers: (1) sexual reproduction is the *chef d'oeuvre*, the masterpiece of nature, (2) the tangled bank hypothesis which emphasizes the importance of variations, (3) the Red Queen hypothesis that accentuates the need of variations for the sake of immunity/protection. In this chapter, Konner illustrates his ideas through some sample cases in animals such as, black widow (spider) and snails. However, all of the sample illustrations depict how superior female species are.

In the next chapter, *Picky Females, Easy Males*, Konner explains about the process of sexual selection (a term derived from Darwin). It borders on the struggle between males for possession of the females. In other words, Konner emphasizes his

idea on the sexual hierarchy which puts females above the males. This chapter contains sample cases on several animals like cassowaries, peacock, rat, and some mammals.

Chapter 4, *Primate Possibilities*, talks about human biological relatives – the primates. In this chapter, Konner takes the readers to look at the roles of males and females in the life of lemurs, monkeys, marmosets, baboons, and orangutans. Some primatologists with their research findings are mentioned in order to bring out convincing arguments. Since all of the findings show the idea that females dominate in primate studies, Konner ends this chapter with these questions, "But what about male dominance and abuse of females? Which species are we more like in that?"

Chapter 5, *Equal Origins?*, discusses the equal origin between females and males which starts from the hunting-gathering era. In this era, women become dependent to men due to foods. The end of the hunting-gathering era is marked by the denser population and the growth of more elaborate settlements. This is the beginning of the division between the roles of men and women – men do the hunting and women do the domestic works.

In Chapter 6, *Cultivating Dominance*, Konner explains the history of men's dominance toward women. Violence was once uncommon in the hunting-gathering era, but the growth and distribution of population finally led to warfare and violence. In this era, men could try to exclude women from important and influential decision and even assert dominance over women through power and violence.

The next chapter, *Samson's Haircut, Achilles' Heel*, talks about the status of women throughout history which can be summed up as the following: high, low, middling, terrible, worsening, and improving. Konner uses the narrations of Samson and Delilah as well as Achilles and Helen to exemplify the triumph of women because both tales deal with the limits of male strength.

Konner's Chapter 8, *The Trouble with Men*, is the detailed explanation for what has been said in Chapter 1. This chapter signifies the troubles with men including all the negative traits found since they were chromosomes.

Chapter 9, *Developing Daughters*, suggests the readers to develop their daughters to be successful women without mimicking men. Konner suspects that men nowadays have ceded some power to women partly because they have daughters and they want their daughters to do well. Moreover, the end of this chapter explains how well women's emotion at the workplace compared to men.

The last chapter of the book, *Billions Rising*, focuses on the rise of women in the beginning of 21st century. Konner includes data from several parts of the globe to support his arguments. It is stated that more women become the leaders in various fields including business, education, and politic. Konner is optimistic if there are more

women on top who get influential positions, the governance will be "more communicative and collaborative in legislatures, more candid, transparent, and open to change in executive offices, and much less corruption (p.292)."

Konner ideas might be controversial, but the way he presents his idea through data and narratives around the world is undoubtedly intriguing and thought provoking. In addition, his humorous and fiery phrases make this book a complete package of arecommendedbook for both women and men.

REFERENCE

Konner, M. (2015). *Women After All: Sex, Evolution, and the End of Male Supremacy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.