

He Buys



RESEARCHER DAVID
ORIGINS OF MALE

BY JANINE LATUS MUSICK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TRAVIS FOSTER

JOHAN DOE READS THE NEWSPAPER. HIS wife, Jane, lets the dog in and the cat out, pops the ejected pacifier back into the baby's mouth, scrambles eggs for breakfast and fills out two field-trip permission slips, all while telling John every detail of their friends' most recent fight. "Can you believe he said that?" she asks. "Huh?" he answers.

Tempted as she is to smack him—and tempted as he is to get a hearing aid just so he can turn it off—they both have an excuse: It's in their genes. So says psychology Professor David Geary, author of *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences*, published in 1998 by the American Psychological Association. Such exchanges stem from cave dweller days, when the man who could focus completely was more likely to kill his prey or adversary and therefore more likely to survive and pass on his genes. The "focus" genes survived, while the scatterbrained ones were eaten by some prehistoric carnivore. The ancestral woman, on the other hand, kept her offspring alive by dividing her attention among multiple

stimuli and keeping her finger on the pulse of her social circle. The woman who didn't could find herself and her children shunned by the group, stripped of status, spouse and sustenance.

Geary's book, based on more than 1,200 primary and secondary sources in genetics, anthropology, sociology, paleontology, neuroscience, education, ethnology and other disciplines, asks the question: Why do men and women fall into certain roles in virtually every society, even going back to their chimpanzee ancestors?

The answer is decidedly not politically correct: Men want sex and women want babies. Before you throw your magazine in protest, hear Geary out. He says that survival is an instinct burrowed deep in our individual genes. We may believe we've climbed out of the primordial ooze, but some of our DNA is still wallowing in survival mode.

GOTTA HAVE IT

That explains why men compete in everything. After all, the highest-ranking male

is the one who gets the most women, and the one who has the most women is the one whose genes are most likely to survive. Getting women requires status, though, which requires winning by whatever standard is at hand. For chimpanzees, that often means being the baddest boy in the bunch. For prehistoric man, it meant dominating subordinates and bringing home the most dinosaur bacon. For modern American men, it has been refined somewhat to mean, well, dominating subordinates and bringing home the bacon.

SUGAR AND SPICE AND EVERYTHING NICE

The female, you see, is looking for a male who will either help her raise the children or provide her with resources that improve the chances that her offspring—and thus, her genes—will survive and thrive.

Until the past few centuries, 30 percent to 40 percent of children died, so it is ingrained in the maternal psyche that children further up the social ladder are

She Fries



GEARY MAKES THE CASE FOR
AND FEMALE STEREOTYPES.

less likely to drown under the muck of poverty.

Furthermore, she knows that violence, upheaval and displaced food sources cut her chances of genetic survival, so she constantly monitors and manipulates her social surroundings. Sure, she builds tight, interdependent friendships with a few, but she also uses innuendo, backbiting and gossip to manage the rest.

That's not to say women can't be physically vicious. Cross-cultural studies show that women in really aggressive societies can be more brutal than men in more peace-loving cultures. Their aggression just manifests itself differently: While the men are out killing other men and women, the women are engaging in harsh childrearing, beating their children to prepare them for adult life.

"In some cultures, life is rough," Geary says. "This is how the women socialize their children to get them ready."

It's hardly sugar and spice.

THAT EXPLAINS A LOT

From childhood, Geary says, humans seek

out experiences that give them the skills our ancestors needed, though not necessarily the skills we need today. Take throwing, for example. Males are built for it, with longer forearms and no intrusive hip to throw off their pitch. But given that most of us no longer throw spears at our dinner or rivals, what good does it do? Other prehistoric proclivities flourish, some of them much too familiar:

ON THE COURTS

John and Jane play tennis. John plays singles, rushing the net, slamming his serves and cursing every missed shot. After the game, he and his adversary go out for a beer. Jane plays doubles, calling encouragement to her teammate and meeting for a four-way chat at the net between games. Afterward, she frets that her partner is mad at her. She's afraid to call her for a week.

"Women develop intimate, egalitarian relationships with other women. They're all focused on each other and how each other is doing and how their social world is going," Geary says. "Men form relationships with other men as political

allies in their fights, so to speak, against other coalitions of men. These coalitions are fairly fluid, so your enemy now might be your coalition partner in another conflict later."

IN THE COURTS

Two male lawyers scream, scheme and threaten, then play golf after work. The female lawyer tries to negotiate a settlement, just to avoid conflict and hurt feelings.

"Somebody you have a conflict with one day may be an important ally three or four weeks later, so not taking it personally and not harboring grudges allows men to maintain larger coalitions. Chimps are the same way," Geary says. "But when there's a rift in a female relationship, it tends to be for the rest of their lives. The males will beat on each other, and then two weeks later they're grooming each other and everything's fine."

And you thought you had evolved.

MERYL VS. ARNOLD

If he picks the movie, it's full of chase scenes, explosions and cathartic violence.

The good guy blows away the bad guy and makes off with the fertile-looking babe. In other words, the guy who wins gets the girl. If she picks it, it's going to have complicated relationships and lots of dialogue that can be endlessly parsed over a post-movie cappuccino. Why is that?

"It's simple," Geary says. "For the men, it's power, aggression, competition. For the woman, it's relationships and nuances."

SPECTATOR SPORTS

It's Saturday afternoon, and a bunch of guys are watching a ball game. "Did you see that? That ref is blind!" is as deep as the conversation gets. Everyone's happy. Throw a woman into the bunch, though, and she'll want to know what she did wrong.

"When women are mad at each other, one of the things they do in all cultures is shun," Geary says. "They don't talk to each other, they don't make eye contact, they're kind of nasty, so there's a real sensitivity to that on the part of women. Guys can get together and sit around the TV for three hours and drink beer and not say much of anything at all and be completely bonded. The friendships are all maintained, and 'See ya.' There's no

hurt feelings, there's no real need for intimacy.

"What the woman is thinking, though, is that if it was her girlfriend there and she was acting like that, it would mean the girl was really mad at her, because what they'd naturally be doing is talking about what is going on in their life. Men don't do that. When the ball game's on, the ball game's on, and it's really nothing personal."

THAT PHONE THING

Boy calls boy.

"Do you want to play?"

"Mom says I can't."

"OK. Bye."

Fifteen seconds, maximum. Two girls could easily stretch that conversation to an hour, probing the fairness of the mother's decision and how it fits with every other girl's mother's decisions in the past.

"The goals of males' conversations are pretty utilitarian," Geary says. "They need the information, and that's it. With women the goal is more personal, it's an emotional, bonding, networking sort of thing."

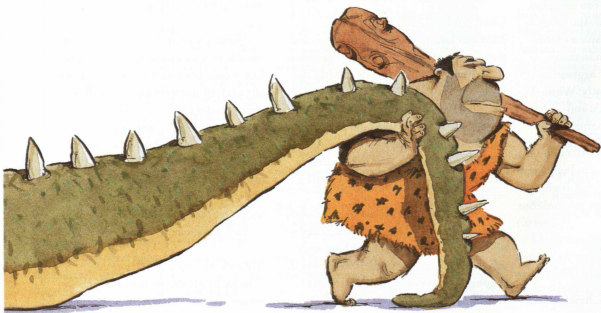
Women are obsessed with communication nuances. "It drives me nuts if I'm in a

conversation with someone and my wife wants to know it verbatim: What did they say, how did they say it, because she's looking for inferences. Part of it is that men are just more blunt in their conversations with one another, so they don't have to attend to it as much. Women are much more indirect."

It's simply because women can't control their social position the way men can. "Domineering men can just do it by brute force, intimidation or controlling resources, either individually or more typically through political coalitions," Geary says. "Women have to be a little more subtle about it. The way they seem to do that is to get as much information as they can on other people, and then use it accordingly. It can be in a positive way by providing support and building up debt, or it can be manipulating, spreading rumors. But that strategy only works if you're attuned to other people's lives."

Women have evolved to do this for the safety of offspring, who do best with social stability. If there is going to be a disruption or rebellion, it's almost always instigated by men, Geary says, and if any-body benefits, it will be a group of men.

The women generally lose, or at least live through a threatening time of





upheaval. That's why even among chimpanzees, adult females serve as peacemakers, trying to help the males calm down and reconcile. "When things are in turmoil, mortality rates of infants go up, and the women get the brunt of at least some of the aggression," Geary says. "Social stability often requires the suppression of male-male competition to some degree."

The most significant rechanneling of male-male competition, however, comes from socially and legally imposed monogamy. "When there's one girl for every boy, deadly competition is less necessary or beneficial," Geary says. "Men are competing for cultural success, so instead of being focused on acquiring wives, they can be an inventor, an entrepreneur, or have success in other ways."

Monogamy also increases paternal investment. "In societies where monogamy isn't socially imposed, most men spend their money and effort on getting an extra wife and not on the quality of the children. Monogamy diverts some effort from mating to parental effort."

That's good, because in 97 percent of mammalian species, males have nothing to do with their offspring. So, even though men on average spend about 30 percent as

much time caring for children as women do, they're bucking the evolutionary urge that defines success as dominating other males and amassing females.

Traditionally female characteristics also manifest themselves differently, depending on how a girl is raised. If, for example, women in a society have jobs and political power, the girls tend to be less obedient, more assertive and more aggressive than girls in societies where men overtly control everything, Geary says. Evolution lays the foundation, but parental and cultural factors exert their own influence.

There are those who would say Geary's got it backward. Alice Eagly, professor of psychology at Northwestern University, is one dissenter. "My position is that the social roles that men and women have in particular societies are the main determinant of their behavior, but that role assignments are affected by built-in physical characteristics—especially female reproduction and male size and strength." In a recent *American Psychologist* article, Eagly writes that if a female is expected to cook and clean and nurture when she becomes an adult, she will develop the skills and other personal

characteristics necessary to successfully fill that role. Likewise for men.

Eagly's theory doesn't explain hormone-based sex differences, Geary says, such as males' greater tendency toward physical aggression in all cultures. Those differences, also seen in animals, are related to prenatal exposure to sex hormones as well as to circulating sex hormones. In other words, the tendency toward aggression is the result of a biological process, not a social one. A scientist would have to ignore cross-cultural regularities, hormonal influences and cross-species studies not to see the evolutionary basis for the behavior, Geary says.

The nature vs. nurture controversy has generated a long and lively debate among scholars and the public alike. But no one debates that men and women are fundamentally different, even given similar stimuli.

"Men and women grow up in vastly different social climates. So, when you put them together the boys take the boys' style with them and girls take the girls' style, and they're not really compatible," Geary says. "Sure, the divorce rate is 50 percent, but it's amazing that people stay married at all." ❁