



Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences (Library Edition)

By Leonard Sax, Raymond Todd



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[UPDATED EDITION: Now updated to include new research on vision, hearing and math instruction.]

Are boys and girls really that different? Doctors and researchers didn't think so twenty years ago. Back then, most experts believed that behavioral differences in girls and boys were mainly due to differences in how they were treated by their parents, teachers, and friends.

It's hard to cling to that belief today. An avalanche of research over the past two decades has shown that sex differences are more significant and profound than anybody guessed. Sex differences are real, biologically programmed, and important to how children are raised, disciplined, and educated. In *Why Gender Matters*, psychologist and family physician Dr. Leonard Sax leads parents through the mystifying world of gender differences by explaining the biologically different ways in which children think, feel, and act. He addresses a host of issues, including discipline, learning, risk taking, aggression, sex, and drugs, and shows how boys and girls react in predictable ways to different situations. For example, girls are born with more sensitive hearing than boys, and those differences increase as kids grow up. So when a grown man speaks to a girl in what he thinks is a normal voice, she may hear it as yelling. Conversely, boys who appear to be inattentive in class may just be sitting too far away to hear the teacher--especially if the teacher is female. Likewise, negative emotions are seated in an ancient structure of the brain called the amygdala. Girls develop an early connection between this area and the cerebral cortex, enabling them to talk about their feelings. In boys these links develop later. So if you ask a troubled adolescent boy to tell you what his feelings are, he often literally cannot say.

Dr. Sax offers fresh approaches to disciplining children, as well as gender-specific ways to help girls and boys avoid drugs and early sexual activity. He wants parents to understand hardwired differences in children, but he also encourages them to push beyond gender-based stereotypes. A leading proponent of single-sex education, Dr. Sax points out specific instances where keeping boys and girls separate in the classroom has yielded striking educational, social, and

interpersonal benefits. Despite the view of many educators and experts on child-rearing that sex differences should be ignored or overcome, parents and teachers would do better to recognize, understand, and make use of the biological differences that make a girl a girl and a boy a boy.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In the feminist conception of gender flexibility, no set rules apply: girls can play with trucks; boys can play with dolls. But pediatrician and psychologist Sax argues that our theories about gender's fluidity may be wrong and to apply them to children in their formative years is quite dangerous. Sax believes the brains of boys and girls are hardwired differently: boys are more aggressive; girls are more shy. And deliberately changing a child's gender—in cases of intersex (hermaphroditism) or accident (as in the case of David Reimer, who was raised as a girl after a hideous circumcision mishap)—can ruin a child's life. Sax also believes modern gender philosophy has resulted in more boys being given behavior-modifying drugs and more girls being given antidepressants. Much of his argument makes sense: we may have gone to the other extreme and tried too hard to feminize boys and masculinize girls. Sax makes a compelling argument for parents and teachers to tread lightly when it comes to gender and raises important questions regarding single-sex education, which he supports. His readable prose, which he juxtaposes with numerous interviews with school administrators, principals, scientists and others, makes this book accessible to a range of readers.

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From Scientific American

When I was a college freshman, a male teaching assistant I sought help from told me matter-of-factly that women were not good at inorganic chemistry. Had I been armed with *Why Gender Matters*, about how biological differences between the sexes can influence learning and behavior, I could have managed an informed rejoinder to go along with my shocked expression. Sax—a pediatrician and psychologist in the Washington, D.C., area and founder of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education—hopes to make today's teachers and parents aware of the science behind differences between girls and boys. He was inspired to write the book as more and more parents brought their young sons to his office in the mid-1990s, seeking an evaluation for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Recalling studies that show boys do not hear as well as girls, Sax felt that for some of the boys he assessed, simply not hearing the teacher led to their inattention, a problem that could be solved by a front-row seat. Although Sax repeatedly makes clear these differences do not limit what either sex can achieve, he does contend they play a valuable role in determining the most effective methods for teaching, disciplining and understanding children and young adults. Using studies as well as anecdotes from his practice and visits to classrooms, he offers advice on such topics as preventing drug abuse and motivating students. In his chapter on aggression, Sax cites research that shows young male primates are much more likely to engage in rough-and-tumble play than females to illustrate why some amount of aggression in boys is normal and why banning "healthy" outlets such as dodgeball—done in his local school district—is misguided. The book is thought-provoking, and Sax explains well the science behind his assertions. His anecdotes are generally instructive, although some are a little too thin to support his points. Sax ends by offering several compelling arguments in support of same-sex education, such as analyses that find girls are more likely to study physics and boys are more likely to study literature in single-sex schools. But whether or not you agree with Sax, his volume is a worthy read for those who care about how best to prepare children for the challenges they face on the path to adulthood.

Aimee Cunningham

Review

"...a lucid guide to male and female brain differences." --David Brooks, *The New York Times*

"*Why Gender Matters* is a fabulous resource for teachers and parents. Dr. Sax combines his extensive knowledge of the research on gender issues with practical advice in cogent, highly readable prose. I am eager to have my colleagues at school read this book and discuss it!" --Martha Cutts, Director of Upper School, National Cathedral School, Washington, D.C.

"In this reader-friendly book, Dr. Sax combines his comprehensive knowledge of the scientific literature with numerous interesting case studies to argue for his thesis that single-sex education is advantageous." --Dr. Sandra Witelson, Albert Einstein/Irving Zucker Chair in Neuroscience, McMaster University

"Extremely interesting . . . Challenged many of my basic assumptions and helped me to think about gender in a new way." --Joan Ogilvy Holden, Head of School, St. Stephen's School, Alexandria, Virginia

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Laura Thompson:

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Steve Domingo:

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