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SKU: 9780190260316-TEST-BANK

Chapter 2: Ordained by Nature: Biology Constructs the Sexes

Short-answer prompts:

1. What are the three primary areas of research that are used to explain biological differences between men and women?
2. What is the sociobiological explanation for the sexual behaviors and choices of men and women?
3. Identify three pieces of evidence and/or arguments that challenge Social Darwinism.
4. Identify three areas in brain research that focus on locating differences between men and women and then discuss the limitations of each.
5. Identify two pieces of evidence about hormones that are used to prove that differences between men and women are biological, and then explain how these findings are limited.

Essay prompts:

1. Are gender differences biological or cultural? Choose a side and argue the legitimacy of the position, using as much evidence as possible to do so. Make sure you thoroughly explain both sides as you justify.
2. How are biological arguments for gender differences linked to politics? In what ways have political ideologies shaped the research agenda on gender differences, and in what ways have people used the biological research on gender differences politically?

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Multiple-choice questions:

1. Prior to the nineteenth century, which group provided most explanations of gender difference?

(a) Physicians

(b) Astronomers

(c) Midwives

*(d) Theologians

2. What is Darwin's theory of natural selection?

(a) The idea that humans have evolved from apes

*(b) The idea that species adapt to their changing environments

(c) The theory that evolutionary success is random and unpredictable

(d) The theory that environments adapt to changing species

3. What are the three areas from which current biological theories of gender difference draw their evidence?

*(a) Brain research, endocrinological research on sex hormones, and evolutionary theory

(b) Biology, chemistry, and physics

(c) Musculoskeletal research, obstetrical and gynecological studies, and the history of medicine

(d) Zoology, studies of infants and children, and sociology

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4. What is the major claim about gender differences from the perspective of Social Darwinism?

(a) Human men and women, like their animal counterparts, have evolved in many ways, but their gender arrangements have stayed the same.

*(b) Males and females develop reproductive "strategies" to ensure that our own genetic code passes on to the next generation.

(c) Environments shape gender difference.

(d) Only the fittest men and women have survived.

5. In psychologist David Buss's study of men and women from many different cultures, what features did participants most prize in a mate?

(a) Economic prosperity for women and youth and beauty for men

*(b) Love and kindness for both women and men

(c) Good looks for women and ease of sexual conquest for men

(d) Economic prosperity for both women and men

6. What is problematic about comparing human gender difference with that of animals?

(a) Many people will be offended.

(b) People have the capacity to reason and animals do not; there is thus no comparison between the two.

(c) People have the capacity of language and animals do not; there is thus no comparison between the two.

*(d) It is unclear what species we should use as the standard of measurement, and different species have far different behaviors.

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7. What is a problem with the argument that rape is an evolutionary adaptation designed to ensure maximal reproduction?

(a) Rape is motivated by rage more than by lust.

(b) Many rape victims are male.

(c) Many women are raped who are outside of reproductive age.

*(d) All of the above

8. What is the limitation of calling a gender difference "natural" to explain it?

(a) Natural is not necessarily a good thing.

(b) It is an entirely subjective judgment that cannot be scientifically proved.

*(c) All it tells us is that it is found in nature, and many contradictory and surprising things are found in nature.

(d) Nothing about gender difference is natural.

9. What evidence is there for the claim that women's evolutionary "strategy" might be promiscuity?

*(a) Women are the only primate females who are potentially sexually receptive even when they are not fertile.

(b) Women are the only primate females who enjoy sex more than their male counterparts.

(c) Women are particularly sexually active when they are fertile.

(d) Having multiple sexual partners increases a woman's chance of having a healthy child.

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10. Early-twentieth-century scientists interpreted intelligence tests in which women consistently scored higher as evidence that:

(a) Women are more intelligent than men.

*(b) Women must study harder because they are not as intelligent.

(c) Women concentrate better during tests because of their left-brain dominance.

(d) Women are better test-takers than men because of their right-brain dominance.

11. What is one problem with contemporary research about gender differences between the right and left hemispheres of the brain?

(a) It is actually impossible to judge how men and women experience their thoughts and emotions, and both sexes often misreport these in surveys.

(b) The two hemispheres are so vastly differently proportioned between men and women that it is unclear whether they have the same function.

*(c) Scientists keep changing their minds about the functions of each hemisphere, which one is superior, and which one is dominated by men or women.

(d) The associations scientists make with each hemisphere are entirely shaped by cultural factors that do not actually correspond to the brain or its structure.

12. What have studies revealed about the claim that women are more verbally capable and men more mathematically capable?

*(a) There is a far greater range of differences among males and among females than there is between males and females.

(b) It is actually the case that women are slightly more capable in both areas.

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(c) It is actually the case that men are slightly more capable in both areas.

(d) All of the tests designed to measure intelligence in these areas are heavily weighted toward men and against women.

13. What have the studies on twins that seek the "gay gene" shown?

*(a) There is actually little concordance between twins with regard to sexuality.

(b) Male twins very often have the same sexual orientation, but female twins do not.

(c) Female twins very often have the same sexual orientation, but male twins do not.

(d) The gay gene is only a factor with multiple births.

14. What have the studies of testosterone and aggression revealed?

*(a) Testosterone does not cause aggression but rather amplifies the aggression that is already there.

(b) Testosterone raises aggression levels, but only in men.

(c) Testosterone actually lowers aggression levels in men, so it is a myth that it raises them.

(d) Testosterone raises aggression levels in men only when they are drinking.

15. When researchers injected gay men with testosterone, what was the result?

(a) The men considered heterosexuality, but only while their testosterone levels were high.

(b) The hormones raised their aggression levels but did not change the objects of their desires.

(c) The men had lower voices and rougher skin, but no change in their desires.

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*(d) The hormones increased their sexual urges but did not change the objects of their desires.

16. What are the political implications of biological essentialism?

(a) They are generally politically liberal because these arguments postulate that we cannot help our identities and should work to change our environments instead.

(b) They have no political affiliations and are based solely in the service of scientific endeavor.

(c) They are all over the political map, depending on the affiliations of the researchers involved.

*(d) They are generally politically conservative because these arguments tend to postulate that the status quo is part of the unchangeable state of nature.

17. Given that none of the biological explanations of gender difference is conclusive or convincing, what, if anything, can we conclude about the body's part in gender difference?

(a) Nothing: we should step away from biological explanations and turn solely to cultural explanations of gender difference.

(b) Bodies are definitively male and female, and men are definitively masculine and women definitively feminine, but nothing else can be assumed in advance.

*(c) Biological differences provide the raw materials from which we begin to create our socially constructed identities within culture.

(d) The body is not itself gendered: gender is what we project on the body, which is what creates the mass delusion of gender difference.

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18. One major reason why biological explanations of gender difference are so popular is because:

(a) They are seen as more objective than other explanations.

(b) They have the ring of a true science and scientific knowledge production.

(c) They obscure the fact that inequality isn't inevitable and thus benefit those with privilege and power.

*(d) All of the above

19. The theory of natural selection became a way for people to argue that:

(a) Women needed to work harder to adapt if they wanted to survive.

*(b) Fighting for women's equality went against the laws of nature.

(c) Men should be more respectful of women's inferiority.

(d) Fighting for LGBT equality went against the laws of nature.

20. The biological principle in sociobiology is the pressure that creatures, species, and even humans experience as they undergo:

(a) Fetal development

*(b) Evolutionary selection

(c) The testosterone bath

(d) Endocrinological change

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21. To say that women have to be more choosy and hesitant in mate selection than men, because the risk to them and their offspring is greater than to men, is to explain men's and women's differing:

(a) Sexual proclivities

(b) Sexual identities

(c) Sexual orientations

*(d) Sexual psychologies

22. A key issue with evolutionary studies and their applicability to modern-day men and women is that:

(a) Many of the data are based on White men and women and thus are not applicable to people of color.

(b) Many of the data are based on heterosexual men and women and thus are not applicable to homosexuals.

*(c) Many of the data go far beyond what is empirically testable and thus are not applicable to any modern-day men and women.

(d) All of the above

23. Which of the following is an example that "maternal instinct" is a socially constructed concept and not a biological imperative?

*(a) Infanticide rates

(b) Birth control usage

(c) The number of teen mothers

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(d) All of the above

24. Which of the following proves that rape is not a reproductive strategy of biological "losers" but is rather about power and control?

(a) The number of men who are raped

(b) The number of women who are also rapists

(c) The fact that rapists often wear condoms

*(d) All of the above

25. Which of the following areas of research has proven that men's and women's brains are biologically different?

(a) Studies on weight and size

(b) Studies on test scores

(c) Studies on lateralization

*(d) None of the above

26. What is a key issue with the brain research on sexual orientation differences?

(a) It focuses primarily on twins and thus can't explain rates of homosexuality in non-twins or people with no siblings.

*(b) It primarily uses the brains of dead men who died of AIDS and then had their brains preserved in formaldehyde.

(c) It focuses primarily on men and thus can't explain rates of lesbianism.

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(d) It primarily uses brains of dead women who did not die of AIDS, so you wouldn't be able to know how men who did die of AIDS were impacted.

27. When it comes to testosterone and competition, what have studies concluded?

(a) Men with high levels of testosterone succeed in competitions more often.

(b) High levels of testosterone lead to higher success rates in competitions.

(c) Men with lower levels of testosterone succeed in competitions more often.

*(d) Success in competitions leads to higher levels of testosterone.

28. The male equivalent of menopause is:

(a) Womenopause

(b) Hemenopause

*(c) Andropause

(d) Men's menopause

29. Which of the following proves the link between hormones and homosexuality?

(a) Studies on prenatal stress, lack of testosterone, and homosexuality in men

(b) Studies on the testosterone bath, tomboy behavior in youth, and lesbianism in women

(c) Both a and b

*(d) None of the above

30. Those who wish to maintain inequality on the basis of sexual orientation often rely on what argument?

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(a) Sexual orientation is biological (i.e. “born this way”), and as such we should be able to cure or altogether eliminate it from the species.

(b) Sexual orientation is learned, and therefore we can simply teach people not to be gay (e.g., through conversion therapy).

*(c) Both a and b

(d) None of the above

31. To say that “genes demand instant gratification,” is to make a(n):

*(a) Anthropomorphic hyperbole

(b) Anthropological hyperbole

(c) Biologically essentialist hyperbole

(d) Fictitious hyperbole

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