

Kirkus Reviews

THE SEXUAL PARADOX: Men, Women, and the Real Gender Gap Susan Pinker

Canadian psychologist and *Globe and Mail* columnist Pinker crafts a biologically based and sure-to-be-controversial examination of sex differences between “fragile men” and gifted women who opt out of successful careers.

Coming of age at the cusp of second-wave feminism, the author, like many of her peers, decided that education and career comprised a better plan than getting married and being a mother. Women made spectacular inroads in male-dominated careers like physics and engineering during those years, and today they outnumber men on American university campuses. So, with the world as their oyster, why do some women opt out of high-profile, top-tier jobs and make different occupational choices than men? In her evenhanded study, Pinker looks first at the male. With myriad examples, Pinker demonstrates that the male, programmed by nature to mature later, compete fiercely and die younger, is more prone to high and low extremes. Males suffer more often from dyslexia, autism and ADHD, and “nerdy” boys often make brilliant careers in fields such as math and computers. The “extreme male brain” found in geniuses and criminals is rooted in such biological developments as the flooding of testosterone in utero and the underdevelopment of empathy. In contrast, notes Pinker, women are less vulnerable, heartier, longer-lived and (because of their superior verbal skills) prone to making eclectic career choices, such as using their scientific knowledge to enter medical or health fields “with a whole-person or community perspective.” The “empathy factor” plays a role in those career choices, asserts Pinker, providing substantial evidence that women gravitate more frequently than men toward “people jobs” and are likelier to leave

work to care for children and loved ones.

A valuable demonstration of how discounting biology during the last 40 years has done a disservice, especially to men.