

GENDER MATTERS: A PRIMER FOR PARENTS

LDSHE HOME EDUCATION CONFERENCE
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Ariel Rodriguez, Ph.D.

Overview

The New Gender Discourse
LDS Doctrinal Overview
Research Overview (minimal jargon)
Principles
Application Ideas
Take Clarifying Questions as We Go
Take All Other Questions at the End

The New Gender Discourse

- Transgender identity politics are driving a new discourse about gender
 - Bruce Jenner became Caitlyn Jenner
 - North Carolina's House Bill
 - The Obama Administration's Title IX guidelines about gender in school bathrooms
 - Social media: YouTube channels, Facebook
- Children are exposed to the messages of the new gender discourse at earlier ages

Terms and Messages of the New Gender Discourse

- **Gender** is social (socially constructed) and behavioral: a set of behavioral norms society assigns to each sex.
- **Sex** is biological: genes and genitalia, (some activists argue that sex, like gender, is a social construct).
- **Gender Identity** is the way you internalize and enact the social norms of your (chosen) gender.
- Sex differences in social behavior are trivially small in comparison to similarities.
- Masculinity and femininity are not discrete categories, but lie along a continuum. We should more accurately talk about masculinities and femininities, and a range of other yet-to-be-named options in the middle.

Terms and Messages of the New Gender Discourse

- We need to be liberated from Gender
 - Gender norms are imposed upon children by parents, siblings, peers, media, and other socializing agents.
 - But the proportion of people who violate gender norms is high.
 - Violating gender norms leads to social sanctions and negative psychological consequences.
 - Fear of sanctions leads people to overconform to gender norms.
 - Some gender norms are dysfunctional (i.e. male aggression).

LDS Teachings About Gender

Structure of the Proclamation

Paragraph 1 (Intro): The main declaration—marriage and family are divine institutions central to Heavenly Father's plan of Happiness for his children.

Paragraphs 2–7 (Body): Doctrinal development of the main declaration.

Paragraphs 8–9 (Conclusion): Warnings & Calls to Action

LDS Teachings About Gender

The Body of the Proclamation

Paragraph 2: The Eternal Nature of Gender
Paragraph 3: The Plan of Happiness
Paragraph 4: The Sacred Nature of Procreation
Paragraph 5: The Sanctity of Life
Paragraph 6: The Sacred Obligation of Parenthood
Paragraph 7: Keys to a Happy Marriage & Family Life

The Priority of Gender

Correct understanding of the Proclamation begins with a correct understanding of gender. Without a correct understanding of gender, we can't understand, explain, and defend our doctrines regarding:

- Our identity as children of god
- Our heavenly parents
- The plan of happiness
- Keys to a successful marriage & a happy family

LDS Teachings About Gender

"Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose."

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

"The purpose of mortal life... is to prepare the sons and daughters of God for their destiny—to become like our heavenly parents."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Same-Gender Attraction, Ensign, Oct. 1995, 7–8

LDS Teachings About Gender

"And the spirit and body are the soul of man."
D&C 88:15

LDS Teachings About Gender

"It is peculiar to the theology of the Latter-day Saints that we regard the body as an essential part of the soul. Read your dictionaries, the lexicons, and encyclopedias, and you will find that nowhere [in Christianity], outside of the Church of Jesus Christ, is the solemn and eternal truth taught that the soul of man is the body and the spirit combined."

Jeffrey R. Holland, President of Brigham Young University, devotional address, 12 January 1988.

LDS Teachings About Gender

"We know so little about the reasons for the division of duties between womanhood and manhood as well as between motherhood and priesthood. These were divinely determined in another time and another place."

Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *The women in God, in Women* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 94.

LDS Teachings About Gender

"Because Satan desires that 'all men might be miserable like unto himself' (2 Ne. 2:27), his most strenuous efforts are directed at encouraging those choices and actions that will thwart God's plan for his children. He seeks to undermine the principle of individual accountability, to persuade us to misuse our sacred powers of procreation, to discourage marriage and childbearing by worthy men and women, and to confuse what it means to be male or female."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Same-Gender Attraction*, Ensign, Oct. 1995, 7–8

LDS Teachings About Gender

"The account in Genesis of Adam and Eve being created and placed on earth emphasizes the creation of two distinct genders: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them...' Gender differences increasingly are dismissed as trivial, irrelevant, or transient, thus undermining God's purpose in creating both men and women."

The Divine Institution of Marriage (newsroom.lds.org)

LDS Teachings About Gender: Summary

1. Gender is an essential characteristic of our eternal **identity**.
2. Gender is an essential characteristic of our eternal **purpose**.
3. Our (gendered) bodies are an essential component of our (eternal) **souls**.
4. We know little about the reasons for the gendered division of duties in the plan of happiness.
5. Satan works to confuse our notions of gender.
6. Gender should not be dismissed as trivial, irrelevant, or transient.

Research About Sex Differences

- Sex differences (i.e. biology) influence gendered behavior in meaningful ways.
- Social environments influence boys and girls to behave differently, but biological influences lead boys and girls to seek different social stimuli and environments.
- Not nature vs. nurture, but nature and nurture

Research About Sex Differences Overview

- Evidence of Biological Influence includes:
 - Differences in hearing and vision
 - Differences in neuroendocrinology
 - Differences that appear before socialization
 - Differences also present in other primates

Sex Differences in Hearing

- Newborn baby girls hear better than newborn baby boys
 - They hear better in the range necessary for speech discrimination, with an acoustic brain response about 80% better than the average boy.
 - The difference gets bigger with age.
 - This difference should not be dismissed as trivial.
 - Intervention: girls hummed the Brahms lullaby to premature babies, but not others.
 - Premature infant girls hummed to: discharged 12 days earlier than control girls
 - Premature infant boys hummed to: no effect.

Sex Differences in Vision

- The retina contains receptor sites for sex hormones
- The male retina is substantially thicker than the female retina.
 - Boys – more rods – distributed across retina – movement and direction – larger M ganglion cells
 - Girls – more cones – concentrated in center of field of vision – texture and color – smaller P ganglion cells
- The difference should not be dismissed as trivial.
 - Day old baby girls prefer the face (and talking faces)
 - Day old baby boys prefer the mobile, moving shapes, blinking lights

Sex Differences in Neuroendocrinology

- Prenatal Hormone Priming
 - Monkey: late-gestation in utero hormone injections
 - Testosterone given to females
 - No effect on genitalia or pubertal onset (they pass the maternal sniff test)
 - More masculinized play (rough and tumble, play-mounting)
 - Conclusion: male play pattern (rough and tumble) does not result from maternal differential treatment
 - Adreno-Genital Syndrome (AGS) girls
 - Masculinized play: rough & tumble
 - Prefer male toys, and less interested in dolls
 - Prefer male play mates

Sex Differences in Neuroendocrinology

- Testosterone explains between group & within group differences
 - Greater focus, less multi-tasking
 - Greater persistence
 - Use fewer words, harder time articulating
 - Talk more about events and activities and less about relationships and feelings
 - Spatial skills: mental rotation, targeting...
 - Navigating via internal compass (vs. landmarks)
 - Mechanical skills; Physics aptitude and interest
 - Competitive

Differences in Neuroendocrinology

- Brave in the face of danger
- Adventurous, exploratory
- Panache: confidence, self-esteem, showing off
- Aggressive, violent
- Higher libido, greater interest in sexual variety, and greater interest in sex without relationship
- Lose things

Differences in Neuroendocrinology

- Oxytocin
 - Mammalian maternal behavior: Lactation, nest building, pup retrieval
 - Produced during pregnancy, labor, & delivery, lactation
 - In Humans: feelings of calm and attachment
 - Present in high levels in mothers milk
 - In females:
 - Positive stable close relationships: increased by touch
 - Negative relationships: depleted by touch

Differences that Appear Before Socialization

- One day old
 - Girls prefer the real face, boys prefer the mobile face
 - Girls respond more strongly than boys to the sound of a human in distress
- Three days old
 - Girls maintain eye contact with a silent adult for twice as long as boys
 - If the adult talks, the girls will look even longer; it makes no difference to the boys

Differences that Appear Before Socialization

- One week old
 - Girls can distinguish an infant's cry from other noise, boys generally can't
- Four to five months old
 - Girls can distinguish photographs of people they know from strangers; boys generally can't
 - Boys are more interested in 3-D geometric forms and blinking lights. They smile and babble at them as if they were animate—girls rarely make this mistake.

Differences that Appear Before Socialization

- Toddler's Language Development
 - Girls develop vocabulary sooner than boys
 - Girls talk more than boys—except when talking to boys!
- Toddlers' Arousability:
 - Boys are more quickly aroused by a threatening film
 - Girls are more quickly aroused by a sympathy-inducing film.

Differences that Appear Before Socialization

- Toddlers' Risk Taking
 - Boys think higher-risk = more fun
 - Boys engage in more high-risk activities
 - When boys engage in the same activities as girls, they perform them in a riskier manner.
 - Boys are more likely to approach hazardous items. When they do, they are more likely to touch and retrieve, while girls are more likely to look and point.

Differences that Appear Before Socialization

- Same-Sex Self-Segregated Play
 - During the third year, same-sex preference emerges in girls.
 - During the fourth year, it emerges in boys.
 - Boy Groups: larger, hierarchy, more active, on the periphery
 - Girl Groups: smaller, intimacy, more verbal, in the center
 - Group size and favored activities, regardless of societal agendas, determine the skills children practice and develop in their efforts to achieve in-group cooperation

Differences in Development Also Present in Other Primates

- Toy preference (in lab and in the wild)
- Play preferences
- Sex-segregated play
- Male groups are larger, hierarchical, more active, on the periphery
- Prepubescent females have greater interest in infants

Principles Based on Research

- Gender differences are not arbitrary
 - Gender is not socially constructed void of any biological influence.
 - Societies can and do influence gender free of biological influence, as evidenced by changing social norms across historical time.
 - But the weight of scientific evidence demonstrates that biological and social forces interact in nuanced ways to influence gendered behavior and development.

Principles Based on Research

- Sex differences are not small or trivial
 - Newborn girls hear human speech better and prefer faces more than do boys.
 - By the end of the toddler years, they prefer playing with girls in small groups, where they practice more face-to-face communication: they talk more than boys and develop vocabulary more quickly than boys
 - By adolescence, the language centers of girls' brains are roughly 6 years ahead of boys' brains.
 - There are more similarities in communication style between elementary school girls and adult women than between elementary school girls and elementary school boys.

Principles Based on Research

- Biology effects are often complicated
 - Environmental effects sometimes depend on biology:
 - High-T males thrive when put in charge of a group (i.e. the alpha male)
 - Moderate- and low-T males experience stress when put in charge
 - Environments can affect biology.
 - Men generally experience a surge in T when their team wins the game.

Principles Based on Research

- Biological effects are often nuanced
 - Men and high-T people in general have superior spatial skills
 - But...
 - Gender (not T or prenatal hormones) seems to be the exclusive predictor of mental rotation tasks
 - Prenatal hormone exposure predicts targeting
 - Prenatal hormone exposure has a curvilinear relationship to figure disambiguation

Principles Based on Research

- The Biological Influences on Gender are not arbitrary but pointed to particular purposes.
 - Females bodies facilitate close nurturing relationships, particularly in relation to the rearing of children and the maintenance of monogamy (and kinship ties).
 - Male bodies facilitate vigilance in the face of potential danger, fight-more-than-flight, risk-taking/exploring, efficient societal order at the band level, enough sharing of genetic material to ensure species survival, and supportive responsiveness to female procreation biology.

Application

- Arm your kids with a clear doctrinal understanding of how gender fits into the plan of happiness.
- Arm your kids with solid scientific information showing that gender is not an arbitrary social construction

Application

- Incorporate critical thinking exercises, analyzing the messages of the New Gender Discourse.
 - In relation to homosexuals, LGBTQ advocates argue that they are born that way. They have no choice. It's not fair that we expect them to love members of the opposite sex.
 - In relation to transgendered individuals, LGBTQ advocates argue that bodies don't matter. Gender and sex are arbitrary social constructions. You should be willing to date and marry transgendered people. If you're not, that's discrimination.

Application

- Instill a sense of missionary accountability
 - It's not: "they're wrong and I'm right."
 - It's: "in the millennium, when you see that you still have the body you were born with, and you realize the cost of your mistake, I don't want you to look at me and say, why didn't you ever say something?"
- Above all, teach tolerance, understanding, and Christ-like love for all those who struggle with gender, and all those who advocate the messages of the New Gender Discourse.