WOMEN BALANCING BIOLOGY & OPPORTUNITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Dr. Cynthia K. Chandler
Counseling Program
Dept. of Counseling and Higher Education
College of Education
University of North Texas
Men’s and Women’s biology today is designed for a time when women were needed to stay in the village and serve and take care of the men, children, and elderly while the men protected the village against attack and hunted wild game. So, human’s could survive and thrive in a primitive society.

Men’s hormone testosterone enabled fulfillment of their duty to perceive and respond to threat or opportunity for gain.

Women’s hormone oxytocin enabled their duty to assess and care for the needs of others.
TIMES HAVE CHANGED

- With technological advances we no longer require a reliance on men’s testosterone enhanced strength to protect or feed the village.
- Nor do we have a reliance on women’s oxytocin enhanced ability to caretake the villagers.
- Times have changed greatly – our bodies, not so much.
OXYTOCIN INFLUENCE

- Women have a lot of the hormone oxytocin which is very helpful in reproduction. And, the effects of oxytocin are enhanced by reproductive hormones.
- Oxytocin is also a social bonding and caretaking hormone.
- Oxytocin influences women to attend to relationships and to often sacrifice self for others.
- Because of Oxytocin influence women often feel very guilty when they attend to their own needs.
CONSCIOUS CHOICE

- With enhanced career and family opportunities today in our Westernized cultures, women have the freedom to expand beyond being a relationship partner, a mother, or caretaker of others – they can also pursue a career.
- Women can exercise much more free will and choice to decide when to attend to self and when to attend to others.
- Understanding the role of biological influence can assist in the process of conscious choice making.
Biologically women are designed to be caretakers.

Women’s brains and hormones drive them to identify themselves through their relationships. This begins at early adolescence.

Society often perpetuates this biological tendency to caretake.

But career opportunity offers more choices for women today.

Today, women have an internal competition of two forces - attention to others versus attention to self.
INSIGHT IS KEY

- Because women are designed to identify self through relationships, then their self-esteem is often effected by perceived success or failure of relationships – they may take on too much responsibility for a relationship.
- Women may stay in unhealthy relationships too long.
- Women may take on too many responsibilities and feel guilty about delegating. Or they may feel guilty about attending to their own needs.
- Or lose their self-identity to a relationship or caretaking, and feel a sense of not knowing who they are or what they want.
SELF IN RELATION

- Identifying oneself in relation to others is not a bad thing – it is a talent – a biologically based gift that women can embrace and utilize in healthy ways in their home and, if they choose, their careers.
- There is no need to reject this natural tendency, nor is there a need to be ruled by it. It is what it is.
- Women, with conscious awareness of biological influence, can make the most of their social and relationship ability.
BILOGICAL PERKS

Though environmental influence can dampen biological influence -
- Women have a biological predisposition to assess the needs of others and find ways to help others get these needs met.
- Women have a biological predisposition for conflict resolution – a tendency toward modifying rules to salvage relationship.
- Women have a biological predisposition to value relationship over self satisfaction – a tendency toward altruism.
While always present and active in the female system, large amounts of Oxytocin are released during positive social interaction, most especially during nurturing touch. Large amounts of oxytocin are also released when stress is perceived.
Oxytocin helps to manage stress, women tend to engage in domestic activities (an extension of caretaking) and social interaction (an extension of social bonding) when stressed. They reach out to others and want to talk or interact.

Oxytocin also enhances a sense of well-being and directly and positively effects health – lowers anxiety, normalizes blood pressure, etc.
EMBRACING BIOLOGY

- There is no need to fear or reject the influence of female biology.
- An understanding of biological influences and drives along with the exercise of conscious choice will, ideally, assist women in living a life with less irrational guilt, less unnecessary self-sacrifice, and healthier and more fulfilling relationships.
- Knowledge of women’s biology presents magnificent opportunity for thriving in a complex 21st century world in both relationships and career.