

## **Book Review**

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Barnett, R., & Rivers, C. (2004). *Same difference: How gender myths are hurting our relationships, our children and our jobs*. Basic Books: New York.

Not too many months ago, Carly Fiorina was the poster child for women breaking the gender barrier to lead Fortune 500 companies. Unfortunately, her recent firing as CEO of Hewlett-Packard by the board of directors quickly turned her into an example of why women cannot make it leading Fortune 500 companies. Then there are the infamous remarks by Lawrence H. Summers, Harvard University President, that have caused a fire-storm on his own campus as well as across the country. In January, 2005, he publicly suggested that women are not found in senior faculty positions in Math and Science because of innate gender differences.

Gender issues, or what are being attributed to gender issues, are as relevant today as they were 20 years ago. For that reason alone, Barnett and River's book is worth reading. Their book provides an excellent synthesis of research studies that help reassure that Carly's situation may indeed be more complex than that she was a woman who couldn't handle the position. And, indeed the hue and cry about Summers' remarks was justified because they shortchanged women and disregarded the host of social science research to the contrary.

*Same difference* is a well-written, straightforward look at gender myths, the research that debunks them, and the ways in which these myths have permeated and misguided society. The book has three foci: relationships, work and parenting. The folksy-titled chapters that support each focus belie the stark facts and examples that they contain. They have cited and discussed the works of some of the major authors including Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky, Alice Eagly, Susan Faludi, and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, although the discussions are interspersed with references to non-academics such as Madonna, Hillary Clinton, Newt Gingrich and Marilyn Monroe.

One of the more influential studies has been that of Carol Gilligan. In her book, *In Different Voices*, Gilligan concluded that women were inherently more caring and more relational oriented than men, while men see the world in terms of individuals and independence. The conclusions from her work have become the foundation for many works in the social sciences and have led to the popular press “Men are From Mars” variety of self-help books. Barnett and Rivers conclude that Gilligan’s research has been over generalized and that the data do not support Gilligan’s conclusions. Other researchers such as Alice Eagly have tried to refute Gilligan’s work, but the myth has proved to be stronger than the data.

Gilligan’s work and those that followed her view have created all types of artificial boundaries for men and women from suggesting that women should not head major institutions to claims that men are not as caring or as good at raising children as women. Barnett and Rivers note that neither generalization is true and that these myths hurt both men and women.

It is interesting to note that the conclusions reached in each of the articles in JOLE’s recent special issue on Gender and Leadership parallels the conclusions of Barnett and Rivers. There appear to be more differences among men, and among women, than there are differences based on gender. Consequently, more complex studies that explore more than the gender dichotomy are needed. Another parallel between the book and the special issue’s articles is the conclusion that many studies that have moved from the social science literature into the popular press have been grossly generalized in the transfer. Sample sizes for some of the most-heavily cited research are often small, leaving the conclusions to be ungeneralizable, and in some cases, contextualized. However, the messages about the research that are imprinted in the general population are indelibly etched in their brains and start to impact their attitudes and behaviors. This cycle perpetuates itself and impacts many facets of our lives, including college curriculum that is sometimes founded upon these myths.

Although the book is positive, engaging, and a good read for the researcher as well as the general population, it has some shortcomings. It does a fine job covering the social science research on gender; however, it does not provide an in-depth review of the biological research on the brain. Perhaps that is the next book that Barnett and Rivers will tackle, and it would certainly be one that is sorely needed.