

Text 1.

Differences in Brain Function may Explain Male-Female Aptitudes for Charts and Chatter

Scientists have shed new light on why women are better listeners than men and why men are better at map reading. A study using the latest brain scanner technology found that men and women activate different parts of the brain when they carry out tests linked with these tasks.

"Maybe science sometimes just proves what we already know," said Dr. Tonmoy Sharma of the Institute of Psychiatry, London.

The study, presented to the Human Brain Mapping meeting in Dusseldorf, may show why men are less talkative, for example.

"When you think of conversations with a female colleague, we are normally quiet and lost for words," said Dr. Sharma, who headed the research team. He used a technique called functional magnetic resonance imaging to show the brain in action. Twenty people, 10 men and 10 women, performed two tasks to test language and memory skills while undergoing brain scans.

Earlier studies revealed that men have better spatial skills, which is linked to the use of working memory, so that they find it easier to read maps and distinguish right from left.

However, women are better at processing complex verbal information, which Dr. Sharma tested with a language task. Dr. Sharma designed the tests so that both sexes could perform them equally well: if men had become frustrated while performing the test, and vice versa, the brain scans could have become confused — for instance by heightened activity in areas of the brain linked to frustration or disappointment.

He did find different patterns of brain activity that could shed light on why men excel at one task and women at the other. During the memory task, men activated the supplementary motor area more than women. The region, found in the frontal lobe of the brain, is involved in spatial skills, such as map reading, among a variety of activities such as intention. However, in the language task, women showed stronger activation than men of a region called the dorsolateral prefrontal gyrus, a region found on both sides of the brain that is involved in manipulating information. The memory task was conducted by showing the volunteers a sequence of letters and asking them to press a button when they recognized a certain sequence. The language task was tested by giving volunteers a word and asking them to judge if it was living or nonliving.

This kind of work on sex differences could have implications for conditions such as schizophrenia and depression, where the incidence is linked to gender.

Dr. Sharma said: "Further brain imaging research on gender differences could help explain the higher incidence of depression in women or why men succumb to schizophrenia at an earlier age than women."

This is not the first time that such sex differences have been identified. Several years ago, Prof. Ruben Gur and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Centre used a different brain scanner technique to study whether there were sex differences in metabolism in the areas of the brain that control emotions and cognition. The scanner revealed that the region that is thought to control more "action-oriented" emotional responses was more active in men, while the higher centre of the brain thought to control more "symbolic" emotional responses was more active in women.

The findings supported the possibility that men are more biologically inclined to express themselves physically, such as through aggression, and women are biologically disposed to talk things through, said Prof. Gur.

Text 2.

Growing Concern

The great buzz word for the 21st century is sustainability, meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In a world of food miles, GM crops, petrochemical pesticides and an increasingly obese population, it sometimes seems that the food we eat is anything but sustainable.

When it comes to what we put on our plates, the key words should be "organic", "local" and "seasonal". And what could be more sustainable than growing your own food? Modern gardens seem to be shrinking, with little room for a vegetable patch; the answer could be to get yourself an allotment.

When looking for an allotment, your first port of call should be your local authority. While they may not own any allotment sites near you, they should at least be able to put you in contact with someone who does. Allotments are becoming increasingly popular, and you may find there is a waiting list for your local site. But don't despair; vacant plots do come up, especially at the start of the year as the New Year rents become due!

Genetically modified tomatoes that are picked before they are ripe and which taste of nothing, lettuces sprayed with four different fungicides whilst growing and then washed in bleach and cucumbers that are packaged in "modified atmospheres" where the oxygen levels are reduced sufficiently to prevent old fruit from decomposing; the contents of the average salad aren't entirely appetizing. You can take control of where your food comes from and what goes in to it. You know that not everything is right with the world when the food on your plate is better travelled than you are! The supermarket shelves currently stock asparagus from Peru, carrots from Kenya, apples from California, not to mention prawns from Indonesia, fish from the Antarctic and lamb from New Zealand. What better way of keeping your food miles down and knowing exactly where your food has come from than by growing it yourself?

Why waste hundreds of pounds a year going to the gym only to watch Sky News whilst running on the spot? Digging compost in to the potato beds, building a cage to protect the red currants, wheeling barrow loads of weeds down to the compost heap and carrying the produce home again at the end of the day; the allotment gives you plenty of exercise, and all for a fraction of the cost of gym membership.

As well as keeping you and your family in fresh fruit and vegetables right through the year, an allotment can also be a fantastic place for wildlife. Wood mice in the compost heap, scarce arable weeds beneath the runner beans, hedgehogs in the hedge bottoms, slow worms in the long grass and blackbirds in the bramble patch, not to mention the rabbits, pigeons and large white butterflies that will do their best to get to your vegetables before you do!

Text 3.

Television by Roald Dahl

The most important thing we've learned,
So far as children are concerned,
Is never, NEVER, NEVER let
Them near your television set --
Or better still, just don't install
The idiotic thing at all.
In almost every house we've been,
We've watched them gaping at the screen.
They loll and slop and lounge about,
And stare until their eyes pop out.
(Last week in someone's place we saw
A dozen eyeballs on the floor.)
They sit and stare and stare and sit
Until they're hypnotized by it,
Until they're absolutely drunk
With all that shocking ghastly junk.
Oh yes, we know it keeps them still,
They don't climb out the window sill,
They never fight or kick or punch,

They leave you free to cook the lunch
And wash the dishes in the sink --
But did you ever stop to think,
To wonder just exactly what
This does to your beloved tot?
IT ROTTS THE SENSE IN THE HEAD!
IT KILLS IMAGINATION DEAD!
IT CLOGS AND CLUTTERS UP THE MIND!
IT MAKES A CHILD SO DULL AND BLIND
HE CAN NO LONGER UNDERSTAND
A FANTASY, A FAIRYLAND!
HIS BRAIN BECOMES AS SOFT AS CHEESE!
HIS POWERS OF THINKING RUST AND FREEZE!
HE CANNOT THINK -- HE ONLY SEES!
'All right!' you'll cry. 'All right!' you'll say,
'But if we take the set away,
What shall we do to entertain
Our darling children? Please explain!'
We'll answer this by asking you,
'What used the darling ones to do?
'How used they keep themselves contented
Before this monster was invented?'
Have you forgotten? Don't you know?
We'll say it very loud and slow:
THEY ... USED ... TO ... READ! They'd READ and READ,
AND READ and READ, and then proceed
To READ some more. Great Scott! Gadzooks!
One half their lives was reading books!
So please, oh please, we beg, we pray,
Go throw your TV set away,
And in its place you can install
A lovely bookshelf on the wall.
Then fill the shelves with lots of books,
Ignoring all the dirty looks,
The screams and yells, the bites and kicks,
And children hitting you with sticks-
Fear not, because we promise you
That, in about a week or two
Of having nothing else to do,
They'll now begin to feel the need
Of having something to read.
And once they start -- oh boy, oh boy!
You watch the slowly growing joy
That fills their hearts. They'll grow so keen
They'll wonder what they'd ever seen
In that ridiculous machine,
That nauseating, foul, unclean,
Repulsive television screen!
And later, each and every kid
Will love you more for what you did.

Text 4.
Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf

by Roald Dahl

As soon as Wolf began to feel
That he would like a decent meal,
He went and knocked on Grandma's door.
When Grandma opened it, she saw
The sharp white teeth, the horrid grin,
And Wolfie said, 'May I come in?'
Poor Grandmamma was terrified,
'He's going to eat me up!' she cried.
And she was absolutely right.
He ate her up in one big bite.
But Grandmamma was small and tough,
And Wolfie wailed, 'That's not enough!
I haven't yet begun to feel
That I have had a decent meal!'
He ran around the kitchen yelping,
'I've got to have a second helping!'

Then added with a frightful leer,
'I'm therefore going to wait right here
Till Little Miss Red Riding Hood
Comes home from walking in the wood.'

He quickly put on Grandma's clothes,
(Of course he hadn't eaten those).
He dressed himself in coat and hat.
He put on shoes, and after that,
He even brushed and curled his hair,
Then sat himself in Grandma's chair.

In came the little girl in red.
She stopped. She stared. And then she said,
'What great big ears you have, Grandma.'
'All the better to hear you with,'
the Wolf replied.
'What great big eyes you have, Grandma.'
said Little Red Riding Hood.
'All the better to see you with,'
the Wolf replied.
He sat there watching her and smiled.
He thought, I'm going to eat this child.
Compared with her old Grandmamma,
She's going to taste like caviar.

Then Little Red Riding Hood said, '
But Grandma, what a lovely great big
furry coat you have on.'

'That's wrong!' cried Wolf.
'Have you forgot

To tell me what BIG TEETH I've got?
Ah well, no matter what you say,
I'm going to eat you anyway.'

The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.
She whips a pistol from her knickers.
She aims it at the creature's head,
And bang bang bang, she shoots him dead.

A few weeks later, in the wood,
I came across Miss Riding Hood.
But what a change! No cloak of red,
No silly hood upon her head.
She said, 'Hello, and do please note
My lovely furry wolfskin coat.'