



His Brain, Her Brain

By *Scientific American Editors*

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His Brain, Her Brain By *Scientific American Editors*

Boy or girl? Even before a person is born, that's the first thing everyone wants to know—underscoring just how much value human societies of all types place on gender. In this eBook, *His Brain, Her Brain*, we take a closer look at the anatomical, chemical and functional differences in the brains of men and women—as well as some surprising similarities. For instance, studies of infants—such as those described in "Big Answers from Little People," by David Dobbs—find few differences in cognitive skills between boys and girls; but there is no denying that boys love trucks, whereas girls prefer dolls. While some gender differences are evident even on the first day of a baby's life, most of these discrepancies start out small but get amplified by our gender-obsessed culture. As neuroscientist Lise Eliot explains in "The Truth about Boys and Girls," tea parties and wrestling matches leave their stamp on growing brains, but the gap that separates boys and girls would be less noticeable if parents encouraged activities such as reading for boys and video games for girls. By adulthood, males and females not only have nonidentical brain architectures but also divergent ways of speaking, parenting and responding to both tragedy and comedy. "The Humor Gap," by Christie Nicholson, and "Different Shades of Blue," by Erica Westly, explore these divides. She wants someone who can make her laugh; he wants someone who will laugh at his jokes. And when she's depressed, she gets sad; he gets mad. But men and women aren't from different planets. Few sex disparities are as hardwired as popular accounts make them out to be. A better understanding of the real—and imagined—differences between his brain and her brain can help us overcome cultural biases, improve communication and strengthen relationships.

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Florence Williams:

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