

# How a Man's Mind *REALLY* Works! Part 3

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Photo by Jeff Silker

It's no surprise that these articles have generated a lot of interest by *Womeninc* readers.

*After all, understanding the differences in how men and women think should lead to improved communication and fewer problems.*

In the first two installments, we have discussed how the male and female brains emerge in the uterus with very real anatomic and functional differences. In part three, we'll discuss how divergent levels of brain hormones affect thinking and behavior.

There are big differences in the hypothalamus in men and women. The hypothalamus lies deep in the brain and stimulates the secretion of serotonin and oxytocin, two very powerful brain chemicals. Serotonin calms us down. Men have less serotonin than women, and as a result tend to act impulsively to a greater degree than their female counterparts. For example, a man might react to a perceived threat by using a physical response: to fight or run away. A woman on the other hand, might try to talk herself out of a situation using her superior verbal skills. If the perceived threat happens to be a spider who cannot be reckoned with by words alone, it's nice to have a man around the house who can take action against the dreaded arachnid!

Adult females have up to 60% more prolactin in their bloodstream. Prolactin is the hormone that controls tear gland production. Most women will have larger tear glands than men and will process more feeling through crying and tears. Men won't cry as often and are often confused by women's tears, which are as likely to come in happy times as they are in sad times.

*The higher the oxytocin level in the brain, the more a person will want to be connected and emotionally involved with other people.*

Oxytocin is one of our primary bonding chemicals. When humans feel very connected to someone or something, this feeling comes to a great extent from oxytocin. This "Nesting Hormone" is part of the "Tend and Befriend" instinct often contrasted with the "Fight or Flight" response. The higher the oxytocin level in the brain, the more a person will want to be connected and emotionally involved with other people. Scientists have learned that men have much less oxytocin than women do. A recent study out of the University of N. Carolina had couples talk privately for five minutes about a happy situation, then view a romantic video and hug

each other. During these warm exchanges, women's bodies reacted differently than men's regardless of how happy they were with their partners. Their oxytocin levels rose significantly more than men's did, and their blood pressure dropped, correlating with lower levels of the stress hormone adrenaline.

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Oxytocin drives a woman to find someone to talk to because her brain circuitry knows that if she has a chance to talk about what's bothering her, her oxytocin level will increase and calm her tension. Women do that at all ages. Male brains are highly compartmentalized and have the ability to separate and store information. At the end of a day full of problems, a man's brain can file them all away on the shelf and forget about them. The female brain does not store information this way – it just keeps going around and around in her head. The only way a woman gets problems out of her mind is by talking about and acknowledging them.

When a woman talks to her partner at the end of the day, her objective is to discharge the problem, not necessarily to find a conclusion or solution. The male brain automatically wants to solve the problem. What many women don't realize is that talking about her troubles to lower her stress can actually have the opposite effect on the male brain. It often creates as much stress in the male as it relieves in the female. Knowing this, men often resist talking out of self-protection. A man isn't likely to tell his wife or partner, "Hey, your oxytocin's firing up right now as we talk about this, and you're feeling better but I'm feeling worse." A woman might have to learn how to identify his signals. For example, a man might become physically fidgety or his eye contact might drift in the middle of a conversation. He might interrupt, he might try to jump to problem solving, or he might try to

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get out of the conversation altogether so he can do something else like zone out in front of the TV.

Little girls tend to bond with dolls, while little boys spend more time spatially moving balls in space. Girls and women spend more time relating to others in calm verbal ways, while boys and men tend to seek quick physical tension release. When you drive by a park and see men playing basketball, you are seeing a group of men relying more on spatials than verbals. They are moving an object through space and gaining pleasure through the task itself, not as much through the use of words.

When you drive by a coffee shop and see women chatting together, you are seeing a group of women relying more on verbals than spatials. They don't tend to want to move an object through space in order to feel good. They don't need a ball to bond with each other. Six or seven language centers in their brains are lighting up as they talk to each other, and their pleasure comes from that. Women's brains thrive on the surge of serotonin which gives them the willingness to sit calmly for hours. The bottom line in these observations can be summed up this way: Lower levels of serotonin and oxytocin contribute to the male brain's biological tendency to choose action first and talk second

– the opposite of most women. So, if you have a fender bender and your husband or partner seems more interested in fixing the car than in listening to you explain how it happened, he's not necessarily being insensitive. It may just be the male brain at work. *W*

### Coming next

In the next issue we will discuss how the brain differences in men and women affect things like vision, color perception, and hearing.

