

How a Man's Mind *REALLY* Works! Conclusion

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Photo by Jeff Silker

Do men experience their feelings and emotions differently than women?

Previous articles in this series have explored the differences between the brains of men and women. Although the brains of males and females look very similar on the outside, modern science has shown big differences in the size and activity of various brain centers, and the connections they make to other areas in the brain. This has a profound influence upon how our brains work. It affects the way we see things, what emotions are involved, and how we remember the experience.

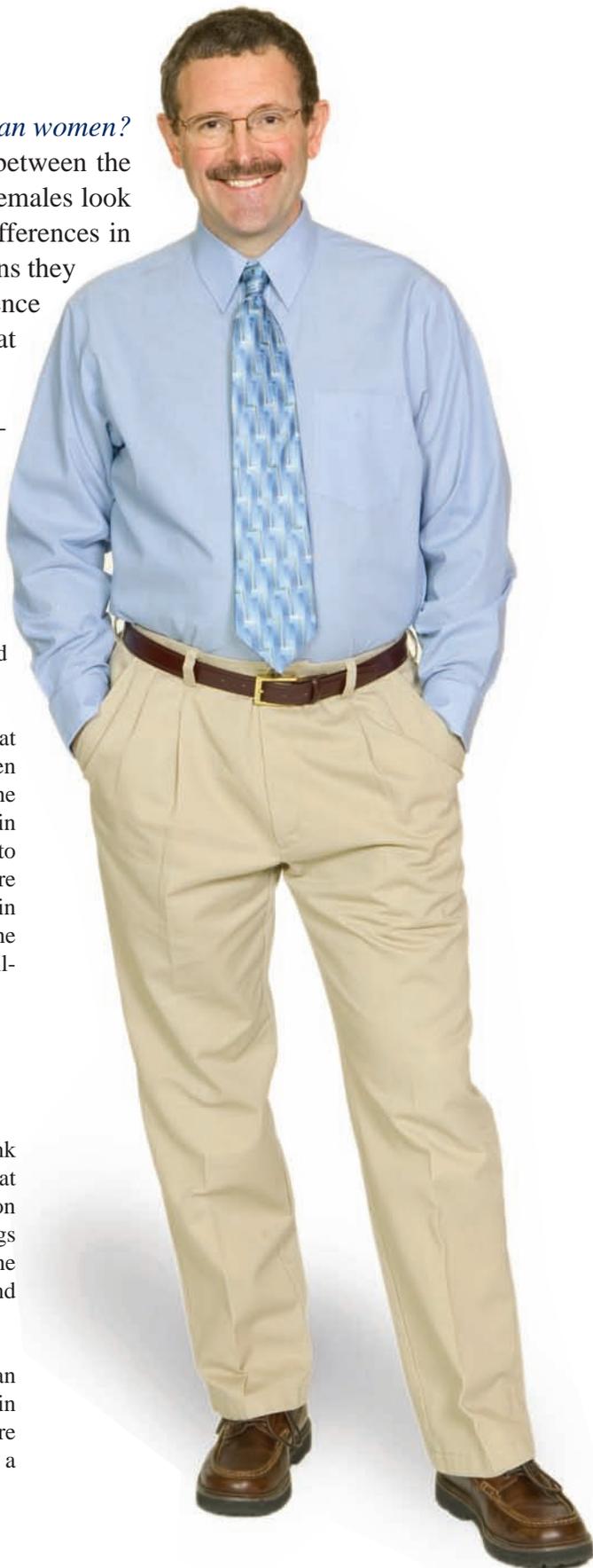
What is happening in the wiring of the brain when we feel emotions? In general, emotional stimuli – sad faces, emotional criticism, a baby's cry, a kiss, a sunset or sunrise, the laughter of a friend, the weeping of a loved one – all these and a million other sensory stimuli move through a person's senses to deep structures in the brain called the limbic system. The nerve endings of the fingers and lips, the retina in the eye, the eardrum, register light, color, touch, movement, sound, and smell, sending signals to the limbic system. If these signals spark a lot of emotion, the emotional content is first handled in the limbic system and then is sent to both the upper and lower brain.

Deep in the brain is a structure in the limbic system called the amygdala that handles many of our emotions and aggressive impulses. Men and women think differently about emotions in part because of the differences in the amygdala and the neural pathways that link it to the higher thought centers in the frontal lobe of the brain. Male and female college students were asked to figure out what emotion was expressed on a face shown to them in a picture while undergoing brain scans. Women scored better than men and the brain scan reflected how much more of the female brain was used to process the emotional signal. Most men cannot discern the emotional state of their children nearly as well as their mothers can.

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Emotions are less enjoyable and often confusing for the male brain. Just think about the last time you went to the movie theater and tried to decide what movie to see. What movie did he tend to choose? He probably chose an action or adventure movie that involved less feeling and emotion, but had things moving and exploding, with a problem to solve. Women tend to choose the drama or story that explores relationships and will lead to more feeling and emotion, often referred to as a chick flick.

The hippocampus is a memory center in the brain. It is larger in women than men, and there are more nerve connections from it to emotional centers in women than men. Have you ever wondered why women can remember more physical and emotional details than men can? Perhaps you've noticed that a



woman can often remember the color of the table cloth, the kind of flowers, and exactly what was eaten at a dinner party six years ago whereas, the man, who was sitting right there at the table, barely remembers a thing. Much of this memory gap between the sexes lies in the male/female hippocampal difference. With a smaller hippocampus in the limbic system, males remember less of their emotional experiences than females do.

When men talk, they have less stored emotional experience to converse about, so their conversation is not as feeling-laden as women might wish. One brief medical caveat here regarding memory loss; the hippocampus is the area in the brain most easily damaged by low oxygen levels. One of the ways men can have lower oxygen levels occurs when they snore loudly because of Obstructive Sleep Apnea. These men stop breathing when they sleep and this lowers the oxygen to the brain. This causes a reversible memory loss that looks like Alzheimer's Dementia. So if you know a man (or a woman) who snores loudly, is always tired, and seems to be having more memory trouble, get them in for an exam and an overnight sleep study.

The memory loss is only reversible if caught early.

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Women's brains don't rest the way men's brains do. While doing brain scans at the University of Pennsylvania, Ruben Gur discovered that when a man's brain is in a resting state, at least 70% of its electrical activity is shut down. Scans of women's brains in the same state however, showed 90% of their full activity, confirming that women are constantly receiving and analyzing information from their environment. Women can hear the baby cry when they are asleep. Women's brains are constantly working, whereas the male brain can "zone out" in front of the TV, for example. Men stare at the TV screen but are not engaged. Their brain scans while staring at TV would look the same as a scan taken when they were gazing deeply into a campfire at the end of a long day.

The female brain takes few mental naps. There is simply more neural activity in

general in women's brains at any given time than in the male brain. Some of you are saying, "I could have told you that!" When women's brains do rest, most of the activity stays lodged in the cingulate gyrus, a very important feeling and emotional center in the limbic system. On the other hand, the male brain shows greater brain activity in the "fight or flight" brainstem when it naps. Males spend less time thinking about their feelings. And when the danger signal is triggered, the flight or flight mechanism kicks in. He will tend to act first, think and feel later. Females think more about their feelings and are less inclined to rush into danger.

Given just these few brain differences that affect emotion, feeling, and our brains at rest, we can better understand how this impacts our relationships. How enlightening it is to see that there are two equally valuable brain types, both essential to love and life. I hope that understanding how a man's mind really works has stimulated conversation with your friends and loved ones. *W*

Standing Strong, continued from page 13

staff meetings. "We know that every action or inaction during a crisis affects not only ourselves but everyone around us," stresses Sarah.

Finding Closure

Sarah attended the hearings of Romero and Rockenback in Federal Court. "It was something I had to do for myself," she says. After their arrest, they were charged with carjacking and Romero was also charged with possession of a handgun by a convicted felon, in Federal Court by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. "It was difficult to confront them but I felt I had to know everything about them," recalls Sarah. "I thought Romero would look evil but he looked like someone who could be your friend. The ATF officers had warned me he was very smart, articulate, and charming."

Romero was sentenced to 19½ years and Rockenback to 78 months in prison.

She credits her staff, family, and friends with helping her through the ordeal by

letting her talk through it again and again.

"It really made me stronger as a person," stresses Sarah. "I know I had divine intervention that day – there were angels protecting me. I felt incredibly strong. I felt God took care of me that day and that He will take care of me in the future."

"In life crisis and difficult events can occur. We have a choice to make when this happens: to keep staying a victim or be a

survivor. We can learn from our experiences and by having a purpose that is higher than our crisis, we can not only heal, but be better and stronger from it."

Sarah's face lights up when she talks about giving back to the community through Exclusively Diamonds.

"I'm passionate about making a difference and it gives me an energy inside," she shares. "It's all about helping people and having a worthy purpose in your life." *W*



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