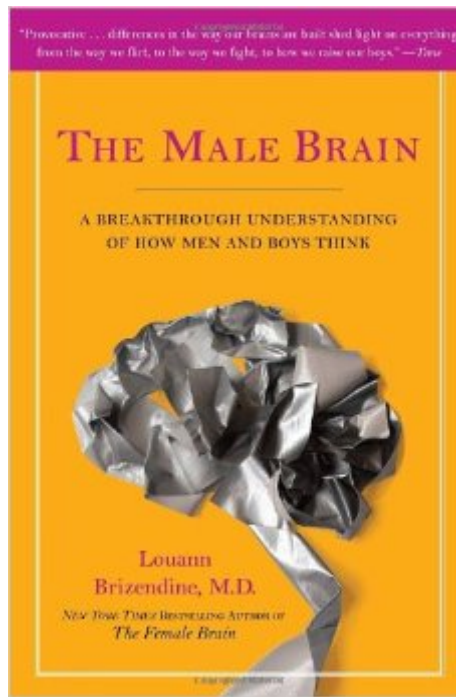


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The Male Brain



Synopsis

From the author of the groundbreaking New York Times bestseller *The Female Brain*, here is the eagerly awaited follow-up book that demystifies the puzzling male brain. Dr. Louann Brizendine, the founder of the first clinic in the country to study gender differences in brain, behavior, and hormones, turns her attention to the male brain, showing how, through every phase of life, the "male reality" is fundamentally different from the female one. Exploring the latest breakthroughs in male psychology and neurology with her trademark accessibility and candor, she reveals that the male brain: is a lean, mean, problem-solving machine. Faced with a personal problem, a man will use his analytical brain structures, not his emotional ones, to find a solution. thrives under competition, instinctively plays rough and is obsessed with rank and hierarchy. has an area for sexual pursuit that is 2.5 times larger than the female brain, consuming him with sexual fantasies about female body parts. experiences such a massive increase in testosterone at puberty that he perceives others' faces to be more aggressive. *The Male Brain* finally overturns the stereotypes. Impeccably researched and at the cutting edge of scientific knowledge, this is a book that every man, and especially every woman bedeviled by a man, will need to own. Praise for *The Female Brain*: "Louann Brizendine has done a great favor for every man who wants to understand the puzzling women in his life. A breezy and enlightening guide to women and a must-read for men." —Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence* From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

There've been plenty of books reexamining female physiology, and it seems fitting that it's men's turn. And sure, I'm curious the crazy things some men do. Why is Michel Gondry driven to make such lyrical, eccentric movies? Why did Bach think it was interesting to weave distinct melodies together in a fugue? Why did male physicists go to such lengths to find replicable ways of describing matter? Why was James Joyce so interested in the English language, its roots, its capacity for double meanings, its use and misuse? And what made Kant so sure that we possess "a priori" knowledge? Sadly, relying on a posteriori knowledge, Dr. Louann Brizendine restricts herself to familiar obsessions about men's attitudes toward sex and women. She sees men as potentially quite impulsive when it comes to sex. However, she chides, men can and should learn to control their impulses. She certainly agrees with pop psychologists that men are less empathic than women. Sure, it resembles cheesy self-help, but it's science. After all, men have a larger "sexual pursuit area" than women. Due to this and the effects of testosterone, men can go into a "man trance." Popular science writers draw these kinds of conclusions from the kind of fMRI studies Brizendine cites. These studies show brain activity under various conditions. Unfortunately, MRI studies are often not reliably replicable - results vary from time to time. Further, no one is really sure what brain activity in varying conditions means or what conclusions you can draw from it. Most good neurologists would be pretty cautious about making assertions based on such studies. Anyway, there is no such thing as a "sexual pursuit area" in men or anyone else. Oh - and "man trance" is an expression Dr. Brizendine made up. A search of medline or other databases will not find any research using this expression. It's fine to make up your own catchy phrases. That's what writers do, and many of the reviews here have praised Dr. Brizendine for her "clear" and "unpretentious" writing. The "man trance" idea also relies on research seeking to establish a connection between visual circuitry and testosterone. There are a couple studies on this with birds and goldfish. They were not conclusive. Even if they were, they may not apply to human behavior. The "man trance" is not the only clear, unpretentious passage in this book based on irrelevant research. Dr. Brizendine's use of evidence is often just plain baffling. In the section "Tuning Out," she writes, "The teen male ... begins to perceive voices and other sounds differently than he did before adolescence." This refers to Krystyna Rymarczyk and Anna Grabowska, "Sex differences in brain control of prosody", *Neuropsychologia* 45(5):921-930, 2007. There are two really weird things about her use of this study. First, it's got nothing to do with changes in teens, male or otherwise -- the subjects in this study were all in their late 50s to mid 60s; two thirds had suffered serious strokes of various sorts: (from Rymarczyk): "Fifty-two individuals (28 men and 24 women) with unilateral infarction involving the right cerebral hemisphere and 26 (11 men and 15 women) neurologically intact

controls (C) participated in this study."The second weird thing: the study found no sex differences of any kind in the intact control subjects. The only differences had to do with interactions between sex and various areas of brain injury. On to Brizendine's next point: "In Portugal, researchers found that during puberty, estrogen surges in females and testosterone surges in males increase the hearing differences between girls' and boys' brains."Her footnote reveals that this comes from the same study of stroke victims: "Rymarczyk 2007 found a sex difference in the brain's processing of tone of voice."None of the notes relating to these paragraphs seem to reference any work done in Portugal. (But let's put that aside.) The important thing is that the research (Rymarczyk 2007) contains nothing about hormone surges in teens. Its conclusion, again, is that (in 60-ish subjects): "We examined the possibility that the effectiveness of prosody processing may differ between the sexes. Contrary to our expectations, we did not find any significant differences in the ability of healthy men and women to comprehend emotional intonation."And what does any of this have to do with the common idea that men "tune out" or "don't listen"? Nothing, but Brizendine does refer to at least one study having to do with listening. She confidently asserts that in a study in the Netherlands: "female brains intensely activated to both the white noise and the music. The male brains, too, activated to the music, but they deactivated to the white noise. It was as if they didn't even hear it. The screening system in their male brains was automatically turning off white noise."Let's leave aside the question of whether "tuning out" white noise is good or bad. Brizendine refers to Ruytjens 2007. She says: "Ruytjens found the male brain screened out white noise better than the female brain."This time the study is relevant, because it does say something about listening. But she sadly misreads it. Ruytjens et. al. studied male and female responses to different types of sound. Here are their conclusions: "The male group showed a deactivation in the right prefrontal cortex when comparing noise to the baseline, which was not present in the female group. Interestingly, the auditory and prefrontal regions are anatomically and functionally linked and the prefrontal cortex is known to be engaged in auditory tasks that involve sustained or selective auditory attention. Thus we hypothesize that differences in attention result in a different deactivation of the right prefrontal cortex, which in turn modulates the activation of the PAC and thus explains the sex differences found in the activation of the PAC." This is a study with 10 men and 10 women, and it showed male "deactivation" when listening to noise in a select part of the brain, the right prefrontal cortex. Three huge problems: i) you can't conclude anything from a study of 10 men and 10 women; a different 20 persons may give different results; ii) this study in any case didn't conclude anything about listening in general - only about brain activity in a specific part of the brain. No one can say what this means about men listening to women or to white noise - almost certainly nothing. Research on sex

differences in general finds only minor differences between men and women in matters of communication and language; one cannot generalize from these differences. Differences between individuals of whatever sex, however, are striking - and should be researched. This is junk science. Even for junk science, it's bad.

When I told my wife I was reading *The Male Brain*, she laughed, "That's a short book." Others have joked about the anatomical location of the male brain. But in the companion volume to *The Female Brain*, Dr. Louann Brizendine demonstrates that the male brain is not simple, even if its thinking processes are closely tied to sex. The book is a real eye-opener into the current scientific understanding of how the male brain works, how it is tied to specific behaviors, and how it is different from women's brains. The study is not limited to the male brain, however. It also examines "neuro-hormone characters" such as testosterone, vasopressin, Mullerian inhibiting substance, and oxytocin, among others. Interestingly, the brain and its neuro-hormones are not a static entity; they act and react dynamically as a man grows and develops from infancy to old age. At different stages of life, the brain and hormones play different roles in a man's life. And the influence of brain/hormonal activity is not one way. They influence male behavior, but they are also influenced by male behavior. Apple has made the phrase, "There's an app for that," a byword. Regarding male behavior, we might say, "There's a complex brain/hormonal process for that." Whether it's sexual drive, territoriality, the protective instinct, or the problem-solving mode, what men do exists in a symbiotic relationship with what's going on in their brain. As the parent of a male toddler, I read this book with keen interest, for it helped explain what is happening in my son's development as well as what will happen as he ages. As a man with a philosophical bent, the book took me back to college discussion of the relationship between the mind and the brain as well as the possibility of free will. If a man's actions can be explained neuro-chemically, is he free or morally responsible for his actions? Brizendine doesn't reflect on these more philosophical questions, but in an appendix on the male brain and sexual orientation, she notes that one study found that "about 35 percent of sexual orientation is attributable to genetic influences, whereas the rest is due to as yet unidentified factors." We are, to a significant degree, shaped by our biology, brain structure, and hormones. Shaped, but not determined. Somewhere in that other 65% is what makes uniquely human.

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