**His Brain, Her Brain – Preliminary Insights**

In their book, *His Brain, Her Brain*, Walt and Barb Larimore tackle the newest research in better understanding marriage by delving into the brain differences between males and females. Drawing from the studies of other experts in this field, the Larimores offer believers a more rounded explanations of this intriguing study as they outline what they believe is the divinely designed brain physiology of women and men.

Although they reference several scientific and medical studies, their material is delivered in a simple and engaging format, addressing technical, philosophical and relational insights on the nature of each gender’s brain and its development.

The book is broken down into four parts:

1. The Science
2. The Differences
3. The Impact on Relationships
4. The Beauty of God’s Design

Today we will reference some of the material from the early parts of their book. Here’s an excerpt that highlights some of the topics covered throughout the text:

“Our good friend Chris came over to our home one Saturday morning to share some time together over a cup of coffee. Chris and his wife, Sherri, had been married for about six months. They had chosen Barb and me to be their marriage mentors, so we had met with them during their engagement and continued to do so after the wedding. After discussing our observations of the Denver Broncos’ football season, Chris and I began talking about marriage.

“Walt,” he began, “when Sherri and I met with you and Barb before we were married, you taught us about some of the differences between men and women and our brains. I accepted what you said but didn’t realize exactly how big a deal it really is.”

“In what ways?” I asked.

“I don’t even know where to begin. There are so many ways we are different. When it comes to sex, Sherri likes thirty minutes of slow foreplay. For me, turning off our bedroom light is foreplay. I like watching football
and The Unit, and she likes watching Dancing with the Stars and anything on HGTV.”

While he took a sip of coffee, I remained quiet, knowing more was coming.

“When I write a note to Sherri, it has the essentials—what she needs to know. When Sherri writes me a note, she uses scented, colored stationery and dots her i’s with little hearts. Even if she disses me in a note, she puts a dorky little smiley face at the end. I hate that! What’s worse, she wants me to write notes the same way.”

He appeared to be deep in thought and then continued.

“Here’s another thing that bugs me. When I say I’m ready to leave the house, it means I’m ready to leave at that moment. When Sherri says she is ready to go, it means she will be ready sometime in the next hour — after she finishes her hair and makeup and changing her outfit two or three times.

“And don’t get me started on the bathroom,” Chris added. “I have, at most, six items in the bathroom—shaving cream, a razor, a toothbrush, toothpaste, a bar of soap, and deodorant. But Sherri must have sixty items! I don’t even know what fifty of them are for.

“And, Walt, isn’t a cell phone a communications tool? I use mine to communicate information in short calls and brief text messages or to get an answer. Sherri uses her cell phone to visit with a girlfriend for two hours after they’ve had lunch that same day!”

He finally stopped, and I was able to get a word in. “So, Chris, what does all this mean to you?”

He thoughtfully sipped his coffee and then nodded. “You were right when you told me that men and women are so different. Now I’ve got to figure out what to do about it.”

The scriptures have long maintained that men and women were both made in God’s image, but that there are unique differences and roles that must be recognized and acknowledged in order to maintain the love and respect that both genders crave.

There is a mountain of brain research from the last two decades that explains how dramatic the differences between male and female brains are in anatomical, chemical, hormonal and physiological ways.
These differences affect the emotions, thinking and behavior of children as well as adults. As believers, the Larimores are convinced that every one of these brain differences is "divinely designed" by the Creator, and not simply a result of nurture, as many secular experts believe. With this basic presupposition, as described in the Psalm 139, the authors offer both sexes positive and encouraging confidence that although men and women are very different, that they are of equal value, and that God created them to complement one another.

The book describes male and female brain anatomy in simple layperson's language and describes how brain chemistry affects the way men and women react to and respond uniquely to their world through their various senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste.

- There are also differences in systemizing and empathizing,
- differences in spatial skills,
- different responses to stress,
- different emotional responses,
- differences in multitasking (they are better at it than we are),
- and differences in intuition

which all serve to better educate one sex about the other, thus providing increased opportunity for deeper understanding and mutual respect.

For example, men express their care for their wives and loved ones by a "vocabulary of action" it is shown by doing things, sharing activities, expressing feelings through inarticulate gifts, favors and physical courtesies.

Women express their feelings of love best through the language of relationship with others and often speak via indirect talk that confuses and frustrates men, but by which their female counterpart friends intuitively understand. (Doesn’t it drive you crazy when they do that?!)

The authors don’t just describe these differences, they also make some good suggestions for dealing with them. One helpful tip they offer is that when women want to talk something over with a man, they shouldn’t hint about it. It doesn’t matter if it is a subtle hint or a strong and obvious hint. Men either won’t get it or they simply don’t respond well to it. Instead ladies need to give their men a suggested time, a convenient place and a brief, but clear plan when requesting time to talk. This appeals to the man's more systematic mind which tends to compartmentalize and deal with one thing at a time. (We’ll give an example later)
Now, why are we like this?

1) Genetics

Research shows that “sex chromosome genes contribute directly to the development of a gender difference in the brain.”

Researchers have found at least fifty-four genes that are produced in different amounts in male and female mouse brains prior to any male hormonal influence.

Eighteen of these genes were found at higher levels in the male brains, while thirty-six were found at higher levels in the female brains.

2) Testosterone Wash

The corpus callosum is the largest structure connecting the right and left sides of brain. This pipeline of more than 300 million fibers functions like a powerful and fast, monster cable that enables both sides of the brain to communicate with each other and process for each other. Women have tremendously more of this than men.

While a male child is in the womb, a gush of testosterone actually causes sections of the corpus callosum to decrease in size by dissolving portions of the connection or by decreasing the growth of the nerves. That’s why men tend to process primarily with the left or right side of their brains, while women are able to mix it up more. It has been said that men are like waffles and women are like spaghetti in this way.

3) Estrogen Wash

In unborn females, the opposite happens. Exposure to the female hormone, estrogen, actually prompts the nerve cells to grow more connections between the left and right brain. So not only is a girl’s corpus callosum larger than a boy’s before birth, it continues to be larger in childhood and adulthood.

So what does this mean? Male brains contain about 6.5 times more gray matter - the “thinking matter” while female brains have more than 9.5 times as much white matter - the “processing matter.”

Not only do women have a relatively larger connection between the hemispheres, but theirs is composed almost completely of white matter.
Dr. Raquel Gur says, “The implication of women having more white matter connecting between the hemispheres of the brain is that they would have better communication between the different modes of perceiving and relating to the world, on the other hand, men,” who have a relatively smaller corpus callosum that is made up of less white matter, “would demonstrate a stronger concentration on working within any one of those modes.”

Different Brain Types and Processing

The systematizing and empathizing brain types manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Here are a few examples:

• in the **toys kids prefer** (girls like human-type dolls, boys like mechanical trucks)
  
  – (*Tell story of feminist who wanted to raise her daughter with gender-neutral influences and found her playing outside with trucks)

• in **response to verbal impatience** (males tend to order others more, females tend to negotiate with others more) I too know exceptions to this, but this is a tendency surfaced by recent research.

• in **navigating** (women personalize space by finding landmarks, men see a geometric system and take directional cues in the layout of routes)

• in **play** (boys compete, girls cooperate)

  *Of course, these are generalizations, but they are biologically based.

How did they discover these differences? Drs. Ruben and Raquel Gur show with fMRI that women’s brains light up in more areas and use more brain pathways than men’s brains when given a variety of tasks. Because a woman’s brain is so highly interconnected when compared to a man’s more compartmentalized brain, women are better designed to multitask. *(Waffles vs. spaghetti)* Not only is a woman’s brain designed to multitask, it virtually never turns off.

**Her Brain:**

You’re on your computer, moving between six or seven open screens on your desktop. Perhaps you’re juggling three or four Word documents, an Excel spreadsheet or two, and your home budgeting program. It’s a digital Grand Central Station.
Now add another dimension: Imagine that some of the open files and programs are actually weeks old and have been running in the background the whole time. Even worse, your computer is infected with advertisements that pop up. You’ve tried to close these unwanted files and pop-ups many times. You’ve installed anti-spyware programs and rebooted your computer, but those pesky things just keep coming back.

**Welcome to a woman’s mental and emotional world!**

But when men are called on to process their emotions, studies show that men can take up to seven hours longer, on average, than women to process emotional stimuli, thoughts, and feelings. And besides that, most of the time, **women** need to **talk** in order to process, but **men** generally need to go off into their cave and secure some time, space, and quiet, hoping to emerge with perspective and maybe some answers. Then, to top it off, after he’s done that, he still has difficulty expressing his feelings in words.

**Different Abilities to see, smell, and listen**

“We *can see colors and textures that men cannot see. They hear things men cannot hear, and they smell things men cannot smell.*” Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.

For example, with repeated exposure to a variety of smells, women quickly get better and better at detecting particular odors. This increased sensitivity was five times greater for these women than for the men who were tested. The guys just couldn’t detect the odors, even with practice. In other experiments, women did better than men at spotting a target odor against a background of other aromas, a setting more like real-life experiences.

And when it comes to listening, brain-imaging shows that men listen with only one side of their brain but women use both. **Women** can listen to, comprehend, and process as many as **seven separate auditory inputs (such as conversations) at the same time**, whereas men can barely follow one. One reason for this is a woman’s larger corpus callosum that connects her brain’s left and right hemispheres and enables her to use several highly connected hearing centers in both sides of her brain simultaneously.

**Differences in Reading People**

Her brain is also more sensitive to reading facial expressions and better at decoding nonverbal communication.
Baby girls, for example, prefer to gurgle at people, but boys are just as content to gurgle at toys or mobiles. Two-to-four-day-old girls spend almost twice as long as boys in maintaining eye contact with an adult, whether the adult was silent or talking.

Further, baby girls observe and follow the eyes of an adult more often than baby boys and make more eye contact than boys. No wonder some researchers now believe that what we’ve called “woman’s intuition” may just be her natural ability to notice small details and changes in the appearance or behavior of others.

One author observes, “It is obvious to a woman when another woman is upset or feeling hurt, while a man generally has to physically witness tears or a temper tantrum or be slapped on the face before he even has a clue that anything is going on.”

Different Language

When it comes to talking, women are naturally good at it, they enjoy it, and they do a lot of it. In addition, their emotions are connected to the verbal centers of their brains. The neural connections between a woman’s emotional processing and memory centers are larger, far more active, and more strongly connected to the verbal centers of the brain than in men.

With a smaller hippocampus, men remember fewer emotional experiences than women. She is designed to connect memories, words, and feelings, so her conversation tends to be laden with emotion and meaning, thus they feel like they remember things better than we do. The biologic design of men causes them to be less likely to identify and communicate their emotions, so they tend to recall the facts and events, with less association to what they felt at the time.

Furthermore, the portions of his brain that process emotion are much smaller and much less connected than those in her brain. So, though a man can feel things quite deeply, a man’s capacity to feel emotions is physically separated from his ability to verbally express them.

In conversation, men are much less likely (or even able) to talk about emotions and generally express much less emotional content than the average woman. This is why male conversations are usually filled with facts and are devoid of most emotions. Dr. Anne Moir, Ph.D. says,

“The reluctance men have with feeling and with communicating emotions has a biological root. Their capacity to feel is, to a greater degree than in women, physically divorced from their capacity to articulate;
further, the emotional centres of the male brain are located far more discretely than in the woman.”

So, knowing these differences, what is a woman to do with men like us? The author’s wife has learned that it can be pretty easy. Here’s what she suggests:

• **Make an appointment.** At breakfast she might say, “Honey, tonight after dinner, can we talk about our vacation plans?” (Clear and specific. Not just, “Can we talk tonight when you get home?” A request like that will generally be the seeds of a panic attack for most men.)

• **Give him an agenda.** She might say, “I want to talk with you about the best time to schedule the repair work on the car.”

• **Let him know there’s a time limit.** “Would you consider taking a ten-minute break at half time to chat?”

  Also . . .

• **Let him know whether she wants a solution to the topic of our discussion or whether she just wants him to listen.**

• **Make sure he has to listen to only one audio input at a time** (*no children talking, TV blaring, or radio playing*). She then goes on to say,

  • “I don’t interrupt when he’s speaking.”

  • ”I do not expect him to be my girlfriend.”

So when a man is dealing with a project, a problem, a stress, or an emotion, a man will typically become very quiet. While a man is using his right brain to solve problems or deal with emotions, it is hard for him to use his left brain to listen or speak. And remember, we tend to use only one side at a time.

Our compartmentalized brain is designed to do one thing at a time; it is difficult for us to solve a problem and converse at the same time. Scans show that when a man is sitting silently, his brain is either at rest or he’s “having a conversation with himself.”

Most women find this incomprehensible, and even frightening, if they don’t understand that this is how a male’s brain is designed to work. It’s almost the opposite of her brain. A woman’s brain is **never at rest,** *(and that’s why when we’re around them, we’re never at rest)* and when she is dealing with a problem, she not only wants to talk, she **needs to** talk. *(And because of that, we need to listen.)*

Her conversation with another person allows her to reduce stress by talking through the problem. It’s important for men to realize that when she does this, she’s **not necessarily looking for a solution** in the same way they would.
We have all heard this, but it is still hard for us to listen to so many problems, concerns, and questions without offering some answers. And there are times when they totally confuse us by actually wanting some answers or solutions. We need to help our wives understand that we need to be told when they want us to just listen and when they want us to help in some other way.

It’s perfectly natural for women to want to talk about their feelings and emotions. It’s also perfectly natural for men to avoid extended conversations as much as possible—particularly if they are emotionally focused.

In the remaining parts of the book, you will appreciate the Larimores’ fine study of the sexual differences and needs between men and women in relation to their brain uniqueness and how respect (for men) and love (for women) play a major role in their sexual fulfillment. From the outset, you will find great value and encouragement here. This is a fresh approach on the current topic of brain differences, and it comprehensively includes our Lord and His divine design into their conclusions. Hopefully this information will help us as we meditate passages such as:

I Pt. 3: 1-2, 7 –

“Wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word (not so much talking) by the behavior of their wives, (what we tend to notice more) as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (As in the Love & Respect material, this is what we tend to value and respond to most.)

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, (Even when we don’t understand them. This is the kind of gentle, tender response that helps them feel loved) as with someone weaker (physically), since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, (This doesn’t allow for superior attitudes or any condescension. Then Peter gives us a sobering warning) so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

Let’s pray to that end.