

Questions & Answers with James Olson, author of
*How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future:
Why Left Hemisphere Dominance Has Brought Humanity to the Brink of Disaster
and How We Can Think Our Way to Peace and Healing*

How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future is a practical, science-based, self-help book focused on how we can more consciously and creatively manage the information that comes to mind. James Olson's original purpose was to help men better understand the thought processes of women, but it quickly became clear that neither hemisphere could be understood in isolation. They are a team. Approaching the subject of neuroscience, particularly [neuropsychology](#), from the perspective of a management-trained, holistic philosopher acting as a science reporter, Olson has followed up on the research into consciousness that won [Roger Sperry](#) a Nobel Prize in 1981 and spawned widespread public interest in how the split in our brain impacts our thinking and other behaviors.

Sperry found that each hemisphere is “a conscious system in its own right” and capable of managing both hemispheres as a whole, thereby helping to explain the basis of the difference between right-brain- and left-brain-thinking, as well as why men and women, as a whole, have different perspectives. But we are not limited by this system; it only makes us specialists in one viewpoint or the other. We are free to choose what to believe; we can always draw on our non-dominant hemisphere once we understand its characteristics—what it is trying to tell us. We just need to better understand our choices so that we might better integrate them and achieve a whole-brain viewpoint.

Taking Sperry's work to the next level, in a groundbreaking discovery, Olson found that the determination of whether we are right-brain- or left-brain-dominant is governed by [genetic dominance](#). And as he shows, this finding suggests that we have *four* fundamental systems of consciousness rather than just two: the left brain's, the right brain's (both products of complete dominance), a hybrid of the two (a product of incomplete dominance), and a system made up of the two systems working as a team (created by codominance). In addition, Olson posits that the brain's information input and information output are *independently* subject to genetic dominance. Therefore, since any one of the four systems can govern information input and any one of the four can govern information output, we can inherit any one of 16 different operating systems! Examples of their differences are illustrated on page 86 of the book in a chart (also attached) by describing their effect on gender, and consequently on sexual orientation.

Introduction

What can we learn about the nature of our thoughts and how they affect our decision-making and our lives from looking at the brain? A lot—at least if we look at the brain's information management systems, the macro systems of the left and right hemispheres, the systems that orchestrate the whole of the brain's various functions—what I refer to as the brain's *operating systems*.

Why is the exploration of the differences in our brain hemispheres an important study in understanding our lives?

There is nothing that we might learn that is more important than the discovery of who we are. When we have an understanding of how the brain/mind/consciousness complex governs the body and feeds us the information we require in order to guide our lives, we can live in such a way that we can feel good, achieve our goals, and stay out of trouble. And we can build upon the peace that is our natural state of being. Understanding how we think and process information allows greater freedom of choice, as well.

How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future looks at the effects of the split brain on consciousness and behavior, noting that the perspective and response of the two sides of the brain have such radically different characteristics in terms of the focus of their attention and how they solve problems, that a natural conflict exists between them. This means that considering the overall management of the brain, for most of us, the two systems don't always work together for one reason or another and can even seem to be in

opposition! The good news is that the two systems are actually complementary and capable of harmony. But it is up to us, working in the arena of mind, to decide how to integrate whatever information they have to offer us. In fact, the process of integration is our most fundamental act of creation—and most people are not even aware that they have this opportunity/responsibility.

The following excerpt is from page 32 in *How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future*, which is part of a three-page chart outlining Unity Consciousness. Note how different the two sides are in terms of what they show us of our world.

**Perspectives:
Operating-system inputs—shaping our perception**

Dualistic Consciousness

Left Hemisphere

*Viewpoint: Structurally inward,
Attending to the parts*

Linear, directional
Gives us a polarized picture
Focuses on smaller elements
Limited by a focus on the parts
Focuses on elements
Reveals text—the details
Focuses on what we know
Nonliving things
Interiors of holons
Individual aspects of holons
Individual self
Scarcity
Material values
Personal needs, security
Egoic

Holistic Consciousness

Right Hemisphere

*Viewpoint: Structurally outward,
attending to the whole*

Nonlinear, omnidirectional
Shows us unity
Attends to larger elements
Unlimited in scope
Sees relationships of elements
Reveals context—the big picture
Shows us the new
Living things
Holon exteriors
Collective aspects of holons
Collective self, culture
Abundance
Spiritual values, felt values
Service to others
Godlike outlook

Once we are able to recognize that both systems are essential parts of a greater whole and it becomes clear that they supply us with two different views that show us life from two radically different perspectives, then the need to fight over which one is superior will no longer exist. Seen as a team rather than competitors, cultural polarization can then begin to reverse.

What inspired you to write *How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future*?

If the most important reality that we can understand is our self, surely the brain that guides us deserves our foremost attention. Many years ago I went to a weekend workshop in which a neuroscientist mapped our brains by asking a series of questions as a way of discovering how right-brain or left-brain-dominant we were. During that event I discovered that we, in effect, have two brains working to inform consciousness, but typically, because of brain dominance, one of the two serves to guide us. Because I could see that the holistic right half of the brain was being widely ignored, yet had much to offer in terms of advancing individual and cultural progress, I decided to write a book about it. I especially wanted to reach out to the left-brain-directed community, primarily men, most of whom have no clue as to what their right hemisphere is trying to tell them.

Assuming that most women are right-brain dominant and most men left-brain dominant, does that mean our culture is balanced?

No. As a result of most males being physically dominant, males tend to be mentally dominant and are able to control the most fundamental institutions of learning and government. By designing cultural

systems based on left hemisphere values, these systems encourage women to think and act like men. As a result, we live in a culture that is often heavily biased toward left-brain perspectives, values, and solutions.

***How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* focuses heavily on the role of perspective in informing us. What is the difference between perspective and perception?**

Perspective reflects our physical, mental, and spiritual observations, and is determined by where we position ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually, and where we direct our attention. Our perspectives supply us with the raw information that guides us. Two people can have very similar, if not identical perspectives, but end up with widely varied perceptions, depending on how they have evaluated their perspective. We have a great deal of control over the perspectives we acquire, and by taking a greater role in this process we are able to help guide our response to the world.

***How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* explores our relationship with three energy systems: physical (things), mental (thoughts), and spiritual (emotions or feelings). Most authors focus on only one of these. Why is a holistic approach necessary in order to understand the thinking brain?**

The short answer is that the universe that surrounds us, as well as the universe within our skin—the universe that the brain is reporting on—is made up of these three systems. Rather than focus primarily on the world of things (as do scientists), or ideas (as do philosophers), or feelings (as do religionists), *How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* explores our relationship with all three energy systems. Too often our attention is only directed toward the physical world, which is the specialty of the left brain. To begin to understand the persona of the brain's holistic hemisphere we must recognize that it is primarily interested in spirit, secondarily interested in mind, and sees the physical world as little more than an environment, a learning tool, a playground—or perhaps boot camp for spiritual development. The insights that we are given by our holistic right hemisphere reflect this multi-dimensional attitude.

Understanding the split-brains remarkable effect on consciousness and culture

A greater sense of inner peace

How does brain dominance and its perspective affect our sense of peace?

The holistic right half of the brain acts in ways that are generally peaceful. Its operating system is one that seeks harmony and service to others.

The left hemisphere is analytical, which is deconstructive. It takes thing apart. It separates. That's how it goes about exploring reality. It is also aggressive and forceful—and needs to be in order to overcome the unity of wholeness that functions to unite us. Of course, deconstructive is not always destructive; some things can be reassembled, but the left brain's process is often destructive, and this is the nature of war: destroy your enemy so they are no longer a threat; destroy his hiding places, his weapons. Because left-brain-dominant individuals are focused on survival and force-oriented, and since destruction can be a highly effective tool of persuasion and often successful—and quickly so—whenever problems arise, force is naturally an acceptable solution. But no one wants to be forced, so conflict inevitably arises when force is employed and can often lead to some degree of war.

What is the brain's role in finding peace?

Peace of mind is achieved by ending the ideological conflict that is created by the split in our consciousness, a division that occurs because of the lateral split in our brain. But the competitive, combative, security-seeking left is not inclined to cooperate with the right. The left hemisphere's #1 mission appears to be self-preservation, and to accomplish that goal it needs to maintain self-control, and often, that means to get away from dangers, an act that involves separation. Cooperation, on the other hand, requires us to unite and coordinate. The left hemisphere is equipped and willing to apply destructive methods if necessary to avoid being brought under the umbrella of the right and its quest to bring us into

harmony. That doesn't mean the left brain won't cooperate, but it is skeptical by nature and must be convinced that its actions are in the interest of self.

I believe we find peace by showing the dualistic left brain that it is to its advantage to coexist in peace with people who are led by the holistic right—a process of education. But misunderstanding and mistrust can easily trigger rational and irrational fears. While such fears can be minimized by understanding the benefits inherent in holistic thinking, keep in mind that *holistic thinking is not whole-brain thinking*. Example: The fearlessness that is characteristic of the holistic hemisphere can lead us into danger. As such, holistic thinking by itself is not the answer.

Political benefits

How does the split in our brain affect our politics?

Republicans tend to be conservative, whereas Democrats tend to be relatively liberal. The dualistic left hemisphere gives us our conservative values; the holistic right hemisphere gives us our liberal values. Dominance determines which views prevail. Nevertheless, there are many factors that determine a person's political affiliation, including external forces such as education and propaganda, so brain dominance is just one factor, but certainly there is a strong correlation between a person's brain dominance and whether he or she is conservative or liberal. The list of hemispheric characteristics on pages 32-34 of my book helps explain the basis of what makes us liberal and conservative. But cultural forces can often prevail over natural forces, so we have many exceptions—for example, having been educated by their parents, people often vote the way their parents do.

Where might we start if we are to bring our polarized cultural system into greater balance?

The key would seem to be the education of the collective (cultural) left hemisphere about the value of their right hemisphere, leading to whole-brain thinking. The design of the brain is such that left hemisphere is relatively isolated and does not understand the right hemisphere, something that tends to create a fear of right-brain values. Fear then causes excessive division, with the result being polarization. Further contributing to the division, the cultural right is not always sufficiently respectful of the cultural left (and vice versa)—and often makes mistakes. The cultural left brain needs to know that it is to its advantage to coexist in peace with the cultural right—though of course, that does not mean we do whatever right-brain dominants want. There will always be some tension between the two because of their different insights and values, but there need not be distrust and disrespect. I believe that people led by the left brain can be brought to a more cooperative state by employing methods that the left brain values, such as logic and reason—whole-brain thinking is logical. But this approach requires that we understand the vision and motives of the liberals and conservatives *correctly*—and distinguish their errors from their insights—and to be able to integrate their insights. Right brain individuals, like left brain individuals, make many mistakes and these mistakes often get attributed to liberal or conservative values, when in actuality, they are simply the failure of people to understand themselves and their world, and the consequent decision-making errors that are made—decisions that are often made on the basis of selfishness, a left-brain quality that pollutes the decisions of liberals and conservatives alike.

Personal benefits

How can understanding the brain hemispheres help men better understand women and promote peace between the sexes?

My goal in writing this book was to explain the holistic perspective, the brain perspective that informs most women. Women have a different perception of the world, in large part, because they see the world from a different cosmic vantage point, a holistic one that sees the world as in integral whole, rather than the typical male vantage point, which is to focus on individual aspects of it in a sequential process. To begin to understand women, men need to understand the right-brain perspective. Although there is a lot more to understanding women than understanding their genetically determined perspective, perspective is a great place to start since it tends to dominate their perception and guide their response.

How does understanding brain hemispheres assist in our personal relations, especially with our partners?

The difference in the way the two hemispheres view and respond is so extreme that the situation is not unlike the communication problems faced by two people who speak different languages. When you don't understand right-brain perspectives and processes, and are not able to understand their purpose, it's often difficult to understand the behavior of people whose perceptions are based on them. Of course, a failure to understand something typically generates fear, which only exacerbates any existing divisions.

What is the impact of brain dominance and perspective on religion?

The upper management of most religious organizations consists entirely of males, and most males are left-brain directed. Consequently, most religious organizations are directed according to how the dualistic left hemisphere perceives and responds. The dualistic hemisphere is inherently focused on the *differences* among religions and is *competitive*. Its operating system is predominately focused on physical matters; consequently, physical choices tend to overshadow spiritual matters in the minds of left-brain-directed spiritual leaders. As a result, they are led to focus on minor details such as what kind of food a person can eat, and on what days, or whether they can work on holy days, rather than on more important spiritual matters such as unity and peace. Left-brain-directed individuals are more interested in what their thoughts are telling them than in what their feelings reveal, but the concept of God is probably best understood through feelings such as love and peace. That's not to say that left-brain-directed individuals are unaware of the some of the right-brain attributes of religion, only that their dominant brain is poorly equipped to deal with them as compared to individuals guided by their right hemisphere. Because males rely on the left brain to guide them and are in charge of decision-making, religions are inherently separative and competitive rather than unity seeking and cooperative. Thus, for the most part they resist the reading of each other's books or learning from an exchange of views, and tend to set up rules that inhibit such practices. It is ironic that right-brain-dominant women are mentally much better equipped to lead religion than men are, but are not allowed to.

LGBTQ – How our dominant hemisphere determines sexual preferences

How did you discover that homosexuality was the result of a reversal in brain dominance, and would you explain what brain dominance reversal is?

My discovery began as a result of preparing a chart listing the functional characteristics of the two hemispheres. It soon became apparent that the left side gives us masculine characteristics and that the right side gives us feminine characteristics. But I had read that sometimes the two sides were reversed—e.g., women are sometimes directed by their masculine hemisphere. That led me to inquire what happens when to male when the feminine side of the brain is dominant? That was the trigger that led me to this discovery. By dominance reversal I refer to a reversal of the prevailing pattern of dominance, meaning the one most of us experience, which in males is the operating system that gives us masculine characteristics, and in females, the operating system that gives us feminine characteristics.

If your hypothesis is correct, does that mean that those who believe that hormonal or environment factors have a role in determining sexual orientation are wrong?

Not at all. Hormonal factors may well play a role in determining the operating systems we acquire. And our environment is known to affect the body's chemical/hormonal development, which may, directly or indirectly, influence operating system dominance

It's not uncommon to hear the suggestion made that sex begins in the brain. So why do you think that scientists have been so focused on genes and hormones in their search to understand homosexuality, rather than on brain functions?

Two reasons. I think it is easier to conduct research on physical elements such as genes and hormones than it is to research an organ as immensely complex as the brain—especially if you don't know where to

look. Also, the element that is responsible for sex, my research suggests, is an operating system, a management system—which means it is a product of non-physical mind. To research mind you have to take a holistic, multiple-disciplinary approach and combine it with a study of the brain as an organ of two parts (the split brain). Most scientific research tends to have a more narrow focus.

Is there any science to support your theory?

My work is grounded in science. My approach is like that of someone trying to assemble a jigsaw puzzle. I have taken a number of scientific discoveries and put them together to form a bigger picture. My theory—actually it's a hypothesis—is a synthesis of science. Scientists tend to take things apart to try to understand them. My discoveries are the results of having put things together. Mainstream science rarely takes a holistic approach—for one thing, it greatly increases the complexity, which complicates research.

Do you believe that sexual orientation can be changed?

No. Genetic dominance determines our brain's operating system, and from our brain's operating system we acquire the characteristics that we associate with gender. I see no scientific evidence that we can change the dominance that genetic forces establish. Likewise, I see no compelling antidotal evidence that suggests we can change.

What can you tell us about the diversity we see in the gay community, among gay males, for example?

I am convinced we all have two genders (as a result of brain input and output being independent variables), but when both genders are the same, it's like having one gender, and as a result, this characteristic has long gone undiscovered. The same diversity that we see in the gay community also exists in the straight community for the same reason. Whether you are an effeminate straight male or an effeminate gay male, it appears to be the result of having two genders. The input of information to the brain establishes the gender that determines the body type (sex) that we are attracted to (male or female). Brain *output* then creates an external response, and it too depends on which genetically determined operating system is controlling the flow of information. So if a male's genetically determined output is guided by an operating system that is feminine, regardless of whether he is straight or gay, he is going to exhibit some degree of feminine tendency—though such tendencies can vary greatly in strength, so he might be strongly feminine, or his femininity might be so subdued that it is difficult to observe.

Some of us might know people that don't fit the pattern you describe. We know guys who seem to be right-brain-dominant, yet straight. What do you say about them?

We first input information and internalize it. We then respond, meaning, we output information. Information that in input is private. Output information is generally public. So, if most of a man's behavior appears to be right-brain dominant (he displays right-brain characteristics), that is because his *output* dominance, his response. His output behavior has little or no connection with who he is sexually attracted to, thus, a male can be straight, but still display a right-brain temperament. The dominance of a man's brain *input* is what makes him straight or gay. Most of what we are able to observe of a person's behavior is a reflection of brain *output*.

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