

Sex on the Brain

Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women

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Go beyond the headlines and the hype to get the newest findings in the burgeoning field of gender studies. Drawing on disciplines that include evolutionary science, anthropology, animal behavior, neuroscience, psychology, and endocrinology, Deborah Blum explores matters ranging from the link between immunology and sex to male/female gossip styles.

- The results are intriguing, startling, and often very amusing. For instance, did you know that...

Male testosterone levels drop in happy marriages; scientists speculate that women may use monogamy to control male behavior

- Young female children who are in day-care are apt to be more secure than those kept at home; young male children less so

- Anthropologists classify Western societies as "mildly polygamous" The Los Angeles Times has called Sex on the Brain "superbly crafted science writing, graced by unusual compassion, wit, and intelligence, that forms an important addition to the literature of gender studies."

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Reviews

For centuries, links between biology and behavior have been mined for ammunition in the gender wars. Western science has often tainted the discussion by skewing the norm toward men so that the biological underpinnings of their weaknesses and strengths are applauded while those of women are denigrated. Sex on the Brain is a chatty, fairly evenhanded report on a broad range of animal and human studies intended to provide insight into hot-button issues such as aggression, nurturing behavior, infidelity, homosexuality, hormonal drives, and sexual signals. According to one researcher, "We inherit the behavior essentially of our past." Morning sickness, for example, which steers some women away from strong tastes and smells, may once have protected babes in utero from toxic items. Infidelity is a way for men to ensure genetic immortality. Interestingly, when we deliberately change sex-role behavior - say men become more nurturing or women more aggressive - our hormones and even our brains respond by changing, too.

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The answers, the focus of Sex on the Brain, are sometimes solid, occasionally unconvincing, always incomplete. Such fraught subjects seem to be Deborah Blum's specialty: her last book, The Monkey Wars, was about animal rights and animal testing. She handles her topics with scrupulous even-handedness, and she's a good reporter.

The New York Times Book Review, Ann Finkbeiner