

## Venus Brain and Mars Brain

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One cannot live through the month of February without constant reminders from stores and social media about Valentine's Day. So this month's article will highlight the interesting differences between men's and women's brains, particularly how stress affects men and women differently, and how biological variations affect our behavior.

The Right Inferior Parietal lobe, or RIP, is the area of your brain that handles interpersonal skills and nonverbal cues (ironic acronym, huh?). Brain scans taken around the world have revealed that the RIP area is generally bigger in women. On the other side of the brain, the Left Inferior Parietal lobe, or LIP, is responsible for categorizing systems, problem solving, fixing things...and, you guessed it, the LIP is bigger in men.

During the day, a man's testosterone levels tend to rise, helping him focus and face challenges. Once he gets home testosterone levels decrease, which helps to calm the stress hormone cortisol. When a man's testosterone levels drop the LIP goes into low gear, and the already smaller RIP goes into super-low gear. The real world result is that a man is much less inclined to talk in the evening, which helps him de-stress.

On the contrary, when a woman relaxes, her female sex hormone estrogen increases. Estrogen stimulates the RIP, which is already bigger in women. Therefore, when a woman gets home from a stressful job she likes to sit down and talk, which helps her de-stress.

So, for this month of celebrating love, I encourage you to be mindful of and honor our differences as we get home to be with each other after a long day of stressful work. When you receive a monosyllabic response to "How's your day, honey?" recognize that it's nothing about you. It is a natural response made in an effort to decrease cortisol levels, which is critical for one's health! Not only do our sex hormones influence our behaviors, but certain areas in the male and female brain are simply wired very differently. This is not to say same-sex couples have it easy. Many same-sex couples have a partner who has more or less of a gender tendency.

The love hormone, oxytocin, also affects men and women differently. Oxytocin surges with orgasm. This causes women to feel an increased need to bond through sharing and talking, but much less so in men. Oxytocin causes men to fall asleep. Okay, in this regard, perhaps same-sex couples do have their perks!

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