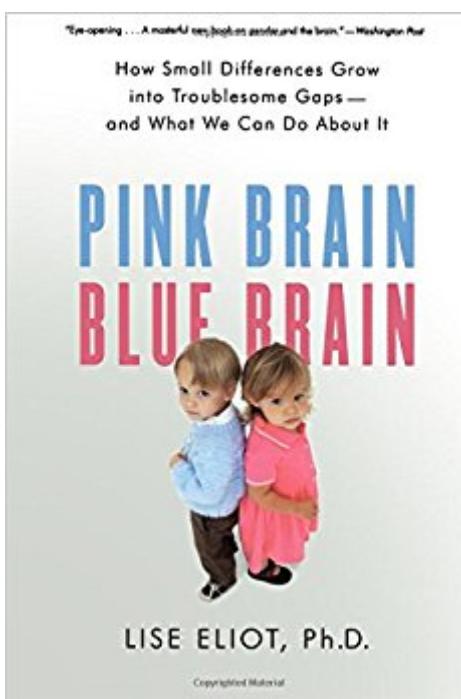


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Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow Into Troublesome Gaps -- And What We Can Do About It



Synopsis

A precise scientific exploration of the differences between boys and girls that breaks down damaging gender stereotypes and offers practical guidance for parents and educators. In the past decade, we've come to accept certain ideas about the differences between males and females— that boys can't focus in a classroom, for instance, and that girls are obsessed with relationships. In *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, neuroscientist Lise Eliot turns that thinking on its head. Calling on years of exhaustive research and her own work in the field of neuroplasticity, Eliot argues that infant brains are so malleable that small differences at birth become amplified over time, as parents and teachers—and the culture at large—unwittingly reinforce gender stereotypes. Children themselves intensify the differences by playing to their modest strengths. They constantly exercise those “ball-throwing” or “doll-cuddling” circuits, rarely straying from their comfort zones. But this, says Eliot, is just what they need to do, and she offers parents and teachers concrete ways to help. Boys are not, in fact, “better at math” but at certain kinds of spatial reasoning. Girls are not naturally more empathetic; they’re allowed to express their feelings. By appreciating how sex differences emerge—rather than assuming them to be fixed biological facts—we can help all children reach their fullest potential, close the troubling gaps between boys and girls, and ultimately end the gender wars that currently divide us.

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Customer Reviews

Professor of neuroscience at Rosalind Franklin University, Eliot (What's Going On in There?) offers a refreshingly reasonable and reassuring look at recent alarming studies about sex differences in determining the behavior of children. Her levelheaded approach recognizes assertions by the nature versus nurture advocates such as Michael Gurian, Leonard Sax, Louann Brizendine—e.g., boys lag behind girls in early development, are more risk taking and spatially adept, while girls are hardwired for verbal communication and feeling empathy—but underscores how small the differences really are and what parents can do to resist the harmful stereotyping that grows more entrenched over time. Eliot revisits much of the data showing subtle differences in boy-girl sensory processing, memory and language circuits, brain functioning, and neural speed and efficiency, using clever charts and graphs of her own. However, she emphasizes most convincingly that the brain is marvelously plastic and can remodel itself continually to new experiences, meaning that the child comes into the world with its genetic makeup, but actually growing a boy from those XY cells or a girl from XX cells requires constant interaction with the environment. At the end of each chapter, she lists ways to nip early troubles in the bud—i.e., for boys, language and literacy enrichment; for girls, stimulating movement, visual and spatial awareness. Dense, scholarly but accessible, Eliot's work demonstrates a remarkable clarity of purpose. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Lise Eliot nimbly refutes the overemphasis on sex differences that has dominated popular thinking in our Mars and Venus age--but without resorting to a facile denial of differences, either. This is a lively, marvelously clear and readable book that combines all the latest research on sex differences with smart, sensible and humane advice to parents on how bring out the fullest potential in both boys and girls.” Margaret Talbot, Staff Writer, *The New Yorker* “I wish that *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* had been available when my children were small. It’s smart about our biology, smart about our culture—and genuinely thought-provoking in considering the way the two intersect. Read it if you’re a parent seeking some savvy insight on child rearing, as a teacher looking to help students—or just read it for the pleasure of understanding yourself a little better.” Deborah Blum, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women* “Lise Eliot surveys the real science of sex differences in a way that is clear and careful as well as entertaining, and her advice on everything from public policy to parenting is sensible and scientifically grounded.” Mark Liberman, University of Pennsylvania “Lise Eliot covers a

wealth of the best scientific work on gender in an accessible and engaging style. The suggestions she offers for raising and teaching children are well grounded in research and readily implemented in practice. *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* is an excellent resource for parents, educators, and anyone else interested in how boys and girls develop. •Lynn S. Liben, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Penn State University “I can’t stop talking about *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*. Every time I see a toddler on a playground, or walk into a toy store, I remember some remarkable new fact I learned from Lise Eliot. This book will change the way you think about boys, girls, and how we come to be who we are.” •Jonah Lehrer, author of *How We Decide* and *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* “[a] sharp, information-packed, and wonderfully readable book.” •Mother Jones “This is an important book and highly recommended for parents, teachers, and anyone who works with children.” •Library Journal “(a) refreshingly reasonable and reassuring look at recent alarming studies about sex differences in determining the behavior of children....Eliot’s work demonstrates a remarkable clarity of purpose.” •Publishers Weekly “Read [this] masterful book and you’ll never view the sex-differences debate the same way again.” •Newsweek “eye-opening...[a] masterful new book on gender and the brain...Eliot’s contribution in *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* is to explain, clearly and authoritatively, what the research on brain-based sex difference actually shows, and to offer helpful suggestions about how we can erase the small gaps for our children instead of turning them into larger ones.” •Washington Post “refreshingly evenhanded...Written in a readable style and organized in chapters ordered by age level, this makes some scientific concepts about brain development accessible to laypeople...Anyone interested in child development and gender studies will be enlightened.” •Booklist “Considering the nonsense already in print (much of it erroneously presented as scientific fact), *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* should be required reading for anyone who wants a more thoughtful consideration of how the brains of boys and girls do—but mostly do not—differ.” •Science

An interesting read about the differences in gender. It's a definite conversation starter. I recommend this for readers who want to explore this topic further. Eliot gives practical suggestions for teaching each gender which, in my experience, sometimes holds true.

I was encouraged, by a well-meaning educational foundation, to read Michael Gurian's "The Minds of Boys". While interested in the relative decline of boys' success in school - an issue that my

community college wants to face and overcome - I did not expect to read Mr. Gurian's baseless and dire predication about the future of boys in our educational system unless we segregate the sexes in our schools. Having also studied the subject of the so-called gender differences in Math and the Physical sciences as a student in a Community College some 10 years ago, I was disturbed by Mr. Gurian's assertions, and the lack of evidence to support his claims. I sought a book that would calmly and without polemics, show what is really going on with young men and women in schools. This book by Dr. Eliot is such a book. Although the book is accessible like the Gurian book, its chapter notes actually contain references to real, independently verified studies of scientific research. I am midway through the book, and at this point, I highly encourage readers of Gurian's books to read this book based on facts first before they get carried away. It is a well-researched book that is written by someone careful in her characterization of the problem so that you - the academic researcher, student, teacher or administrator - can realize the depth and breadth of the issues.

I thought the overall book was very interesting and very informative. It was a welcome change of perspective after reading the Female Brain (by a different Author). I am a very research oriented person and I appreciate knowing the statistics. There was one part at the end of "Pink Brain, Blue Brain..." book I disagreed with the Author, and that was concerning the questioning of whether single sex education for girls/woman is useful for the development of girls. As a person who attended two all-women institutes, Dana Hall high school, and Smith College for undergraduate, and then went on to study in a male-dominated field at two coed schools for my graduate work, I definitely saw and felt a huge benefit from having attended all-women institutes. And, I received substantial financial aid from all the institutes I attended, so I wasn't attending them as an economically advantaged person (Lise Eliot points out that the social-economic-factor is a strong indicator of optimal development for both sexes). Although I had excellent experiences at most of my schools (one coed graduate program wasn't that fantastic of an experience), I did not experience any form of sexual or gender bias or harassment while attending the all-girl/women schools; I did run into sexism and/or harassment at the coed schools. All-girl/women institutions leave women feeling particularly empowered and positive about themselves. These positive feelings leave women feeling empowered to succeed in a world that is not always fair. These same all-girl/women institutions also work to develop institutions in other disadvantaged places in the World, helping other women to develop to their fullest potential which in-turn helps them and their families and their countries. I hope Ms. Eliot explores the subject more in the future and that she

does not emphasize that women would probably do better at coed institutions. In some or possibly many cases, having a safe haven for learning for some part of a person's life is very beneficial.

I really enjoyed reading this book! very well written and has an overall "calmed down" approach. Every chapter has a "tip" section, which at first I was thinking was annoying, but later, come to appreciate (and actually got convinced on some points).Unlike many popular science books that have a dumb-down approach, telling us a study is significant and that's it, she actually bothers to tell us how much significant. I find this extremely important.The overall message can be summed up in a sentence from the book (paraphrasing): "it's not women from venus man from mars, it's women from north dakota, man from south dakota"

Clearly Dr. Eliot wants to add more light and subtract some heat from the ever popular issues of gender differences, and she clearly wants what is best for birth sexes, and is not counting up the wrongs committed against one gender or the other. On the other hand I think she has two visions before her and they don't combine well. On the one hand she used the analogy whereby she compared to gender socialization to learning different languages, and then a few pages later points out the huge overlap on psychological tests and experiments where boys and girls are tested. She seems to be saying that socialization has this large effect making boys and girls really different, but on the other hand they are really not that different. It is my impression that this does not create insurmountable cognitive dissonance because she places the not that different into the nature basket, and the boys and girls speak different languages into the nurture basket, and somehow the same critical mind she brings to nature, has a kind of double standard when reviewing the nurture studies. I think her approach struggles with understanding the misery of children raised contrary to their brain sex if socialization was as nearly all powerful as she suggests. I am no expert in this area but was surprised to find a simple search uncovered a number of articles on the differences between the corpus callosum in neonates, and Dr. Eliot was quite emphatic that such differences could not be found.

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