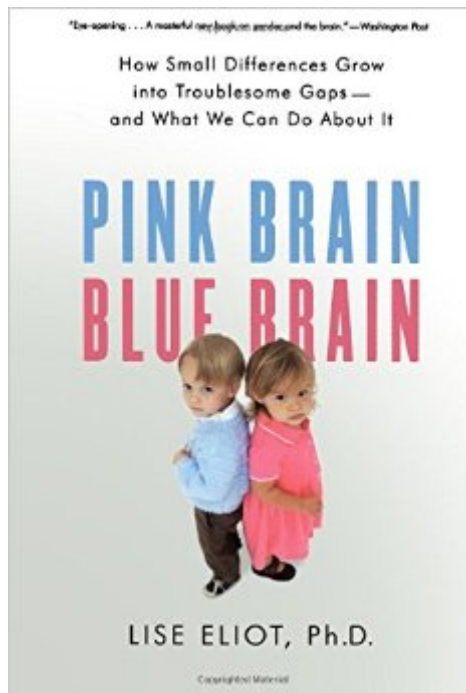


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Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow Into Troublesome Gaps -- And What We Can Do About It



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

There are a lot of reasons i should like this book: I'm a math/science/tech-oriented woman, I have

an undergraduate degree in psychology, I have an infant son, I've never been terribly girly, etc. Despite all of this, and a habit of reading academic and semi-academic texts, I struggled through this book. The one thing that really sticks with me after finishing the book is a feeling that the author spent an awful lot more time pointing out studies that have been disproved or discredited, rather than making any positive arguments or citing any validated results. It becomes almost formulaic: she'll discuss a study in some length, including the methods, the results, and the implications, and then pontificate on how this explains observational or anecdotal information. Then she'll tell you that no further studies duplicated the results, so it's all just back to square one. I do appreciate that this is how science goes sometimes, but it's an awfully long book just to say that precious few studies have shown anything at all worth believing. A lesser complaint is that the author seemed to have trouble deciding what kind of book she was writing. At times, it was a moderately dense scholarly work, with studies and statistics and name-dropping. Other times, it's pure anecdotal accounts, suggesting a vastly less academic target audience. There were also numerous references to her own children, done in such a way as to make it seem briefly like a memoir instead of research. There are some things I did like about this book. First, the organization. Rather than just being a heap of studies and discussion thereof, it's parsed into age groups.

On the first day of school in 1967 I walked into my chemistry class excited about the challenge of what I knew would be a difficult course. Once we had settled in our seats, our teacher introduced himself. Looking around the class, he said "I don't know what all you girls are doing in here." His wife was the home-ec teacher at our school, and he made it quite apparent that he thought all of us "girls" should be in her class, not his. As I expected, it was a difficult class. Without the mentoring of a teacher who believed in me, I squeaked by with a B- average in the course, my lowest grade in high school. It was obvious to me that I should not select a career which required an aptitude for science. I began college as an English major, preparing to teach my favorite subject. Now fast forward 42 years. Today no chemistry teacher would dare to make that kind of boldly sexist statement. However, many well-educated people still believe that boys have a natural edge in math and science, and treat their female daughters or students accordingly. While Dr. Eliot tells us there are subtle differences in the brains of girls and boys, these differences are magnified through "plasticity", a term used to describe the fact that the brain changes in response to its own experience. So parents who buy dolls for little girls and Lego's for little boys are offering experiences which will later help to mold each child's brain. Perhaps it is time for your children to select a college and career. Just as I did so many years ago, most girls gravitate toward what comes easiest to them

and away from technical and quantitative fields. Dr.

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