



KEY TERMS:

visual

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- In explaining speculation about why men spend money to see unclothed women yet women generally do not spend money to see unclothed men, Mr. Prager states, “Some say that the reason is that men are socialized into viewing women as sex objects and that women are socialized into not viewing men as sex objects.” Do you think that socialization, or some sort of ‘upbringing’ or ‘culturalization,’ has something to do with men having such a strong reaction to the visual? Why or why not? What evidence supports your answer?
- Mr. Prager explains that, “Men get turned on by any sight of female flesh on almost any female,” and that, “The effect of the visual in men is so powerful that it even amazes men.” Do you think that a man being aroused by a visual of a woman, or part of a woman, is necessarily objectification of her or of women in general? Why or why not? How does the story of the man who was aroused by the mannequin fit into your answer?
- Mr. Prager shares his own conclusion that, “Obviously, then, It’s not socialization. It’s that men are programmed by nature – not by society – to respond sexually to the visual.” Do you agree with this assertion? If yes, what do you think the anthropological reasons for such a biological mechanism to exist might be? If no, what else could explain men’s intense and ubiquitous reactions to the visual, and how do you explain gay men responding the same way as heterosexual men in response to the visual?
- Mr. Prager further contends that, “This is an area in which men so differ from women that it’s probably impossible – no, not probably, just outright impossible – for a woman to truly understand.” Why do you think that this is the case? Why are women not able to truly comprehend this phenomenon to the degree that men can (regardless of intelligence level of either gender, since intelligence is irrelevant with respect to comprehension in this case)? What might an analogous biological mechanism be for women that men cannot truly understand?
- Mr. Prager ends the video by cautioning, “None of this is in any way meant to excuse inappropriate male behavior. Men must always control themselves.” Why do you think that Mr. Prager felt compelled to add this admonition? What do you think are the important aspects of the relationship between the visual and men ‘controlling themselves’ that both genders should discuss and be aware of?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: The Amygdala

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Study Finds Male And Female Brains Respond Differently To Visual Stimuli,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did the researchers find in regards to how men and women process visual stimuli? What conclusions did they draw from the findings?
- What does Dr. Hamann speculate is the reason for “...males... quickly recognizing and responding to receptive females through visual cues...”?
- Does this article support Mr. Prager’s main point? Why or why not?



QUIZ

SEX AND THE POWER OF THE VISUAL

1. How much do women spend to see unclothed men?
 - a. billions of dollars annually
 - b. millions of dollars annually
 - c. a reasonable amount
 - d. virtually nothing

2. Men are programmed by _____ to respond sexually to the visual.
 - a. nature
 - b. society
 - c. the news
 - d. their fathers

3. If a woman wants to understand male sexuality, the first thing she has to understand is _____.
 - a. family dynamics
 - b. the father-son relationship
 - c. the power of the visual
 - d. the power of advertising

4. An ad with men's legs is _____.
 - a. highly profitable
 - b. absurd
 - c. alluring
 - d. All of the above.

5. The power of the visual naturally excuses inappropriate male behavior.
 - a. True
 - b. False



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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Study Finds Male And Female Brains Respond Differently To Visual Stimuli

Date:

March 16, 2004

Source:

Emory University Health Sciences Center

Summary:

The emotion control center of the brain, the amygdala, shows significantly higher levels of activation in males viewing sexual visual stimuli than females viewing the same images, according to a Center for Behavioral Neuroscience study led by Emory University psychologists Stephan Hamann and Kim Wallen.

The emotion control center of the brain, the amygdala, shows significantly higher levels of activation in males viewing sexual visual stimuli than females viewing the same images, according to a Center for Behavioral Neuroscience study led by Emory University psychologists Stephan Hamann and Kim Wallen. The finding, which appears in the April edition of "Nature Neuroscience," demonstrates how men and women process visual sexual stimuli differently, and it may explain gender variations in reproductive behavior.

The study adds to a growing body of research in animals and humans that indicates the amygdala plays a central role in male sexual behavior, Hamann says.

"This study helps us get closer to understanding the fundamental functions of this area of the brain," Hamann says. In addition to adding to basic neuroscience knowledge, the findings potentially could have applications that could help scientists develop therapeutic measures to help people overcome sexual addictions and other dysfunctions, he says.

In the study, 14 male and 14 female participants viewed several types of sexual and social interaction images for 30 minutes. Their brain activity was then compared using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), a technology that measures neural firing through changes in blood flow.

The fMRI scans revealed significantly higher levels of activation in the amygdala, which controls emotion and motivation, in the brains of the male subjects compared to the females, despite the fact that both males and females expressed similar subjective assessments of their levels of arousal after viewing the images.

Hamann and Wallen had a separate group pre-select the images to ensure they would be equally arousing to both males and females.

"If males and females found the pictures equally arousing, you would assume they would have similar patterns of brain activation," said Hamann. "But we discovered the male brain seems to process visual sexual cues differently."

The scientists' discovery also is consistent with an evolutionary theory that natural selection spurred the development of different sexual behaviors in males and females.

"There is an advantage for males in quickly recognizing and responding to receptive females through visual cues," explains Hamann. "This allows them to maximize their mating opportunities, which increases their chances for passing on their genes."