Viewpoint: Hard-wired gender — Don’t believe claims that there are almost no
differences between male and female brains

Sex differences in many aspects of behavior and cognition are now well-established. These include women’s more communal (formation of intimate relationships) and men’s more agentic (goal achievement) approach to life, as well as men’s advantage in spatial abilities and women’s advantage in memory for personal experiences (episodic memory). Current debates focus on their origin and range from evolved biases to adherence to socially imposed gender roles.

Sex differences in brain organization and functions are the last frontier in this line of research, and their study is shaping up to be a ruckus.

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To explore these, I took the ten areas that showed the largest advantages (in cortical volume, area, and/or thickness) for women and men, reverse-engineered them in terms of their basic functions, and then integrated these with currently known sex differences. The results provide a glimpse into differences in women’s and men’s orientations to the social and physical world.

Disproportionately (controlling for brain size) larger brain areas in women than men support language, social cognition (sometimes called emotional intelligence), emotional processing and reactivity, and contextual and spatial memory, among others.

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