

NEW LIGHT ON OLD CHESTNUTS PAGE 1

The age-old battle of the sexes is debated every day by men and women, but science is beginning to help put the record straight.

Do you think these statements are true☑ or false☒?

- Fathers-to-be gain a stone when their partners are pregnant.
- Men have biological clocks too and they start ticking around 30.

Read the first part of the article and check your ideas.

The Mirror

May 2009

Science helps put the record straight

Finally, some concrete answers to key questions in the age-old battle of the sexes.

Research now shows the

average father-to-be gains a stone when his partner is expecting – laying to rest the myth that only women's bodies change.

Another study found men also have a biological clock and it starts ticking around 30.

Inspired by these discoveries, we looked for other studies that shed new light on some

old chestnuts.

The findings may astonish you...



Vocabulary focus What do these words and expressions from the text above mean?

1 age-old

2 father-to-be

3 lay to rest

4 biological clock

5 shed (new) light on

6 old chestnut

Now match them to these definitions:

___ an innate mechanism of the body that regulates sleeping, etc.

___ having existed for a very long time

___ to clarify

___ a joke, story, etc. that has been repeated many times

___ to solve or end something

___ a man who is going to be a father

Discuss with your teacher and the other members of the class whether you think men or women are better at the following:

driving

car repairs

dieting

identifying infidelity in their partners

fighting infection

D.I.Y.

functioning in the world of work

shopping

multi-tasking

telling jokes

Read the second part of the article, check your ideas and find out what studies shed light on the old chestnuts and what the origins of the differences are.

Driving

Women really are worse drivers than men. A computer-based study at the University of London found they rely on landmarks to get around and are slower to take in spatial information. It backs earlier studies supporting the stereotype that women are poor navigators.



Car repairs

Blokes may be better drivers, but women are less likely to break down because they are better at basic car maintenance. They are less likely to drive on low-pressure tyres and are better at remembering to put in antifreeze. Men are more likely to break the windscreen wipers while replacing them or to overfill engine fluids, according to oil maker Castrol.

Infidelity

When it comes to spotting infidelity, both sexes probably claim they have the upper hand. But a study by Virginia Commonwealth University found men were right 94 per cent of the time when their other halves were playing away. Women were right only 80 per cent of the time.

Dieting

It might have become a national female obsession, but men are actually better at dieting than women. A study earlier this

year by Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York found that women struggle more to avoid eating to excess when hungry, while men are better at suppressing their appetites.

At work

The world of work is an ongoing, never-ending battle of the sexes. Women are better at working in teams and making deals, according to a study conducted by Rolf Kuemmerli and colleagues at Edinburgh and Lausanne universities. Men are more likely to excel at scheming, back-stabbing and cheating.

Fighting Infection

Men are often accused of being overly dramatic about their coughs and colds – but before you condemn them with the words “man flu”, bear in mind that their immune systems are inferior. A Canadian study published this month found that the female hormone oestrogen gives women’s immune systems added bite at fighting off infections.



D.I.Y.

Assembling flat-pack furniture is a ready-made way of sparking a row. But now women can point out they are definitely better at it, according to an Ikea study. The furniture chain found that most women approach the task calmly and follow instructions from start

to end – whereas blokes never look at the directions and try to show off their construction skills.

Shopping

Surprise, surprise – women are better at shopping than men. Researchers at the University of California found that women excelled at finding their way around stores. They were able to locate products and remember the location of fruit, vegetables and high calorie treats. This is down to caveman days when Ug and his mates went off on long hunting trips while the women stayed at home and gathered fruits and berries. The women had to remember where the best trees were – and they still know where to find those goodies.

Multi-tasking

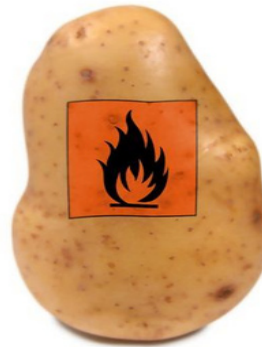
It has always been women’s best shot in the battle of the sexes. But a 2007 report shattered the myth that women can multi-task while men can only concentrate on one thing at a time. A study by Right Guard said that the average man performs 13.4 roles and keeps up with his partner by doing everything from cleaning to chauffeuring children on top of holding down a full-time job.

Telling jokes

Did you hear the one about men being better than women at telling jokes? In a 2003 poll, 98 per cent of males and 68 per cent of females said men were the best at cracking gags. Prof Christie Davies, from Reading University, said blokes became better joke tellers because they needed humour as cavemen.

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Discussion Which of the conclusions do you find most surprising? Do you know anyone who goes against the science? For example, is your husband a bad driver or is your wife good at telling jokes?



Language focus You saw the expression 'old chestnut' in the vocabulary focus. There are other food idioms in English. Complete the gaps to make the idioms defined. Use the images above as clues.

- 1 to be full of _____ to be lively; in high spirits
- 2 to have one's _____ and eat it to try to do or have two things which cannot both be done or had
- 3 in a _____ in brief
- 4 to have a finger in every _____ to be involved in many different things
- 5 to be a big _____ to be an important person
- 6 to cry over spilt _____ to complain about something that has already happened
- 7 a bad _____ a bad person
- 8 a hot _____ a controversial or difficult subject

Practice Rewrite these statements using the idioms above.

- 1 I'll explain it to you briefly John, because I know you're busy.
- 2 The woman who arrived in the limousine is very influential in local government.
- 3 You shouldn't worry about it any more. It's happened, now you have to move on.
- 4 The government knows that high unemployment is a sensitive subject for the voters.
- 5 She was very excited and happy after meeting her childhood hero.
- 6 James has many business interests, from retail outlets to discotheques.

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Teacher's notes

Total pages 4 / student pages 3 / week of 04.05.09 / intermediate+ (B2+)

Vocabulary focus

- 4 an innate mechanism of the body that regulates sleeping, etc.
- 1 having existed for a very long time
- 5 to clarify
- 6 a joke, story, etc. that has been repeated many times
- 3 to solve or end something
- 2 a man who is going to be a father

Language focus

- 1 beans
- 2 cake
- 3 nutshell
- 4 pie
- 5 cheese
- 6 milk
- 7 egg
- 8 potato

Practice Suggested answers:

- 1 I'll explain it in a nutshell John, because I know you're busy.
- 2 The woman who arrived in the limousine is a big cheese in local government.
- 3 Don't cry over spilt milk. It's happened, now you have to move on.
- 4 The government knows that high unemployment is a hot potato for the voters.
- 5 She was full of beans after meeting her childhood hero.
- 6 James has a finger in every pie, from retail outlets to discotheques.