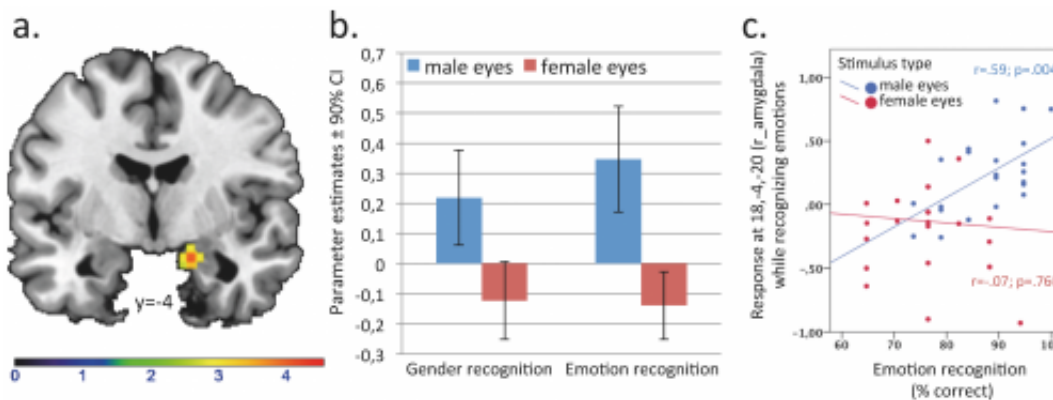


# Study shows men better at reading emotions in other men than in women

April 15 2013, by Bob Yirka



(a) Statistical parametric map and (b) parameter estimates illustrating differential activation pattern of the right amygdala for male and female eyes (regardless of condition: emotion vs. gender recognition). (c) Scatter plots depicting the relationships between amygdala response and emotion recognition accuracy for both types of stimuli. Credit: doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0060278.g003

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers at LWL-University Hospital in Bochum, Germany have found that male volunteers looking at photographs of human eyes were better at guessing the "mood" of the person in the picture, if the person in them was also male. This, the researchers suggest in their paper published in the journal *PLUS ONE*, indicates that men are better able to read the mood of fellow males than females.

Several studies over the past several years have found evidence to support the common notion that men have difficulty in reading the

emotions of women. One such study conducted at Indiana University (home of the Kinsey Institute) found that men tend to misinterpret positive signals from women, quite often mistaking [friendliness](#) for [sexual attraction](#). In this new effort, the researchers attempted to gather actual [physical evidence](#) to gain more insight into what goes on in the minds of men as they attempt to decipher the moods of women.

They enlisted the assistance of 22 male volunteers—all single and all between the ages of 21 and 52. Each was asked to look at photographs showing just the eyes of a person, while undergoing an [MRI scan](#). The gender of the people in the photographs was split 50/50 and each displayed an emotion that was considered to be positive, neutral, or negative. As the volunteers viewed the pictures they were asked to choose between two words given to them that best described the mood of the person they were looking at. No other information was given.

In analyzing the results, the researchers found that the volunteers were better at sensing the mood of the person in the picture if that person was male. They also found that when looking at a pair of male eyes, the amygdala—a portion of the brain that has been found to be involved in emotion—was more active than when looking at the women's eyes. Other [brain areas](#) tied to emotion didn't light up as much when looking at women's eyes as they did for males either.

Because scientists believe that emotional reading happens mostly through the eyes, the researchers suggest that their results show that men are better at reading the emotional state of their fellow men, than they are at doing the same with women.

**More information:** Schiffer B, Pawliczek C, Müller BW, Gizewski ER, Walter H (2013) Why Don't Men Understand Women? Altered Neural Networks for Reading the Language of Male and Female Eyes. *PLoS ONE* 8(4): e60278. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0060278](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0060278)

## Abstract

Men are traditionally thought to have more problems in understanding women compared to understanding other men, though evidence supporting this assumption remains sparse. Recently, it has been shown, however, that men's problems in recognizing women's emotions could be linked to difficulties in extracting the relevant information from the eye region, which remain one of the richest sources of social information for the attribution of mental states to others. To determine possible differences in the neural correlates underlying emotion recognition from female, as compared to male eyes, a modified version of the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test in combination with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) was applied to a sample of 22 participants. We found that men actually had twice as many problems in recognizing emotions from female as compared to male eyes, and that these problems were particularly associated with a lack of activation in limbic regions of the brain (including the hippocampus and the rostral anterior cingulate cortex). Moreover, men revealed heightened activation of the right amygdala to male stimuli regardless of condition (sex vs. emotion recognition). Thus, our findings highlight the function of the amygdala in the affective component of theory of mind (ToM) and in empathy, and provide further evidence that men are substantially less able to infer mental states expressed by women, which may be accompanied by sex-specific differences in amygdala activity.

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