

Books to change your life: The science of sex difference

I don't need sat nav because my father taught me to read maps from an early age. So I really shouldn't describe my sensitive daughter as 'emotionally intelligent' and my grunting son as 'not much of a communicator'. Yet, as Cordelia Fine shows in this brilliant debunking of 'neuro-sexism', our perceptions of gender are attuned to supposedly immutable differences.

For hundreds of years, people have pitted female brains against male ones and found them wanting; from the 17th Century French philosopher who declared 'everything abstract' is incomprehensible to women because of 'the delicacy of the brain fibres', to headline-grabbing bestsellers like *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. It makes you wonder how the sexes manage to share their values, abilities and achievements, let alone their lives. But in the face of continued neuro-scientific claims that men are hard-wired for reasoning and building (ergo, they make the best scientists and engineers), and women for – you've guessed it – empathy (so should therefore stick to nursing and teaching), you can see why women remain under-represented in certain professions.

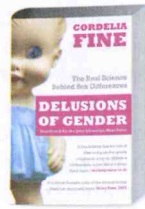
Having ruthlessly exposed the gaps and poor methodologies in many studies on neurological gender

differences, Fine proceeds to make a powerful case that who we are is much more closely attuned to the culture that surrounds us, than to the biology of our brains. A female approach to the world does not start in the womb, she argues; gender difference is the *result* of inequality, not the other way around. Yet neuroscience is routinely used to underpin gender expectations that permeate our entire lives.

Fine was prompted to write *Delusions of Gender* when she discovered her son's female kindergarten teacher reading a book which claimed that his brain was unable to make the connection between emotion and language. The result is an essential read that is both entertaining and scientifically compelling.

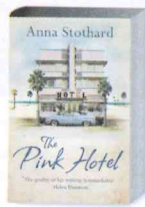
Among the many choice quotes I highlighted is this particular favourite: 'Behind every great academic man, there is a great academic woman. Behind every great academic woman is an unpeeled potato and a child who needs some attention.' Now, there's nothing biological about that. ■

CAROLINE SANDERSON is an author and journalist. Her books include *A Rambling Fancy: In the Footsteps of Jane Austen* and *Kiss Chase and Conkers*, a compendium of traditional children's games. She is also non-fiction books editor of *The Bookseller*.



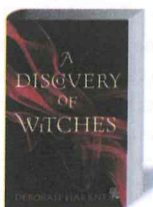
◀ DELUSIONS OF GENDER

by Cordelia Fine
(Icon, £8.99)



▶ THE PINK HOTEL

by Anna Stothard
(Alma Books, £11.99)



◀ A DISCOVERY OF WITCHES

by Deborah Harkness
(Headline, £14.99)

Story of a sale

Deborah Harkness' debut novel, *A Discovery of Witches*, reached number six in the *Sunday Times* Bestseller charts on publication.

The novel began when historian Harkness saw an airport display for Stephenie Meyers' *Twilight* series en route to a holiday in Mexico. A specialist in the history of magic – with two scholarly nonfiction works behind her – Harkness started thinking about why supernatural beings have such an allure in our rationalist age. If witches and vampires lived among us, she wondered, what would they do for a living – and how would we rationalise

evidence of their activity?

Her nonfiction agent took on the challenge of representing the novel with gusto. The subject matter was hot, the writing good, the story enticing. Viking US snapped up world rights. The 1,100 page manuscript was delivered in September 2009, in time for the Frankfurt Book Fair, where rights were sold into 32 countries, including Headline UK.

Over the following months Harkness cut the book by a third to 608 pages. The next job was packaging. The final design, says Headline editor Claire Baldwin 'speaks to the core readership, critical when launching a debut author'. Head of publicity Caitlin Raynor created a buzz with two styles of proof – black for witches and red for vampires. DK ■

Independent Press Alma Books

Italian husband and wife team Alessandro Gallenzi and Elisabetta Minervini founded Alma Books in 2005. It publishes mainly literary fiction; occasionally thrillers, biography, memoir. Around 60 per cent of titles are English-language originals; the remainder translations. Mass-market books can expect an initial run of around 4-5,000. Advance and royalties vary according to the sales prospects.

The press publishes around 14 books a year. Notable successes include Rosie Alison's *The Very Thought of You*, a debut which sold 100,000 copies and was short-listed for the 2010 Orange Prize. The book had been passed over by 18 publishers, but Alma recognised the strong writing and embarked on some comprehensive editing with the author. This, says Elisabetta Minervini, is what makes Alma different – and successful. **THEY SAY:**

'Alma means soul in ancient Italian. We think we are a publisher with soul. For us, it is all about quality. We enjoy that lengthy editorial process, and we keep our list small so that we can follow each book from beginning to end.'

LATEST BOOK:

The Pink Hotel by Anna Stothard is about a 17-year-old Londoner who flies to LA for her estranged mother's funeral. Stothard creates a fascinating character study of a young woman who, by uncovering details of her mother's life, discovers herself. The book is soaked in the atmosphere of the seedier side of LA and narrated by a surprisingly tough, angular yet sympathetic heroine. ■

Submission guidelines

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome with or without an agent. Submit by post only and please don't call the office to check on the progress of your submission.

DO SEND: A summary of the book, short bio and two chapters. Study their list before submitting to see what they like. **DON'T SEND:** Graphic novels or cookery books!

CONTACT: The Publisher, Alma Books, London House, 243-253 Lower Mortlake Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 2LL

LAURA FRAINE is a freelance journalist. She lives in Tyne and Wear with her husband and their two children.