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Be wary of brain studies: study

By Dave McGinn
Globe and Mail Update

Research argues there is good reason to distrust reports of brain differences between the sexes

The male brain and female brain are so different, aren't they? Actually, not so much.

Writing in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, Cordelia Fine argues that there is good reason to distrust reports of brain differences between the sexes.

Dr. Fine, a psychological scientist at Macquarie University in Australia, took an interest in the topic when she read books about the differences between boys' and girls' brains and then decided to check out the studies these books were based on.

"There were huge discrepancies between what the neuroimaging studies showed and the conclusions and claims that were being drawn from them," she said in a release [<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/not-so-fast-sex-differences-in-the-brain-are-overblown.html>].

One problem, according to Dr. Fine, is that studies are often conducted with very small numbers of men and women. Differences found in 20 or so participants might be statistically significant between the two groups, but they don't say much about men and women in general.

As well, while neuroimaging may reveal differences in the appearance of male and female brains, just how these differences should be interpreted is up for debate.

"A healthy dose of skepticism is required when it comes to reports of sex differences in the brain and what they mean," Dr. Fine said.

She expands on her findings in her book *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*.

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