CHAPTER 2

THE DIFFERENT NATURES OF MEN AND WOMEN

'Mrs Merton' to Debbie McGee: 'But what first, Debbie, attracted you to millionaire Paul Daniels?'
Caroline Aherne 1963- English comedienne, writer and actress: *The Mrs Merton Show* (1994-8)

Alpha males and beautiful women – gender-typical professions – gender-typical traits – how men and women typically differ – Professor Louann Brizendine and *The Female Brain* – the female brain and hormones – Professor Simon Baron-Cohen and *The Essential Difference* – systemising and empathising – extreme male brains and autism – extreme female brains: do militant feminists have extreme female brains? – the triumph of emotion over reason – the genetic predisposition to Left-wing thinking – Professor Steven Pinker and the 'Blank Slate' theory of human nature – The Women's Institute – men-only clubs – The Rt Hon Nicholas Soames MP, rhubarb crumble and custard – *Woman's Hour* and the gender pay gap – women crying themselves to sleep – the Prime Minister's fatuous remark – women's enduring search for 'Mr Right' – the continuing flow of resources from men to women – fairness and equality – why are women bothered about gender balance in the boardroom? – the relationship between female attractiveness and promotion prospects – shopping – Prince William and Kate Middleton

There are men among us with faces which (let's be kind) only a mother could love. Some of these men happen to be rich, famous or powerful: 'alpha males'. They commonly share an attribute, having (or having once had) very beautiful partners. One thinks of the musical theatre composer Andrew Lloyd-Webber (Sarah Brightman), the magician Paul Daniels (Debbie McGee), the entrepreneur Bernie Ecclestone (Slavica Radić, a former fashion model 11.5 inches taller and 28 years younger than lucky Bernie), the tennis player Andy Murray (Kim Sears)

and the French president Nicolas Sarkozy (Carla Bruni). Notably beautiful women do not, it would appear, fall in love with *poor* unattractive men. We shall return to the phenomenon of female attractiveness later in the chapter.

It is necessary, for the sake of clarity, that I explain the terminology I use in this book. When I use the terms 'men' and 'women' I am referring to *most* men and women, those that might be considered 'gender-typical'.

A gender-typical profession for a man is engineering, a gender-typical profession for a woman nursing. There exist, of course, female engineers and male nurses; but they form a small proportion of the total workers in those professions, and this is changing only slowly (if at all).

Why should we have an interest in gender-typical traits? Why can we not treat everyone as individuals, thereby avoiding the cardinal sin of stereotyping? The reason is that women campaign collectively – and effectively – for women's interests at the expense of men's interests, while men rarely campaign for men's interests, effectively or otherwise. The 'shortage' of female engineers is seen as a problem to be addressed, while the 'shortage' of male nurses isn't seen as a problem. The inevitable result? A great deal of taxpayers' money has been spent trying to encourage women into engineering, but with minimal impact: even today, over 90% of engineering graduates are men.

I don't consider that either gender is innately superior to the other. But I think it's obvious that the genders are in general *different* in their habits of thinking and acting. I'm now 53, and the different natures of men and women have been clear to me from an early age: their natures haven't changed over that time. 'Nature' being a word whose meaning may be ambiguous, let

me state clearly what I mean by it in the context of this book. In general, I believe, men and women differ with respect to:

- their relative interests in interpersonal relationships, in particular those with family members, friends and work colleagues
- their relative interests in work, politics and business
- their attitudes towards taking risks
- their attitudes towards 'work/life balance': the types of work they seek, the hours they devote to work, and their ambitions to be promoted
- their styles of operating in the world of work: men being more naturally competitive, women being more naturally co-operative

If these differences are real, it follows that they will impact on men's and women's life choices and therefore their average incomes. The most commonly cited measure of the 'gender pay gap' relates to the incomes of male and female full-time workers *regardless of the equivalence of their lines of work*. The gap, while it exists, is not the result of discrimination against women. It is largely attributable to the choices men and women freely make in their personal and working lives, including the greater wish (or possibly readiness) of women to take career breaks to look after babies, young children and ageing relatives. If and when women in significant numbers make different choices, the pay gap will disappear. But there are good reasons for assuming women *won't* make different choices, as we'll see.

If we accept for the moment that, in general, men's and women's natures are different, what might be the source of the difference? Could it be something as obvious as men's and women's brains being different? For answers to this question we turn first to a book written by an American professor of the

female persuasion, Louann Brizendine, on the time-honoured 'ladies first' principle. From Wikipedia:

> Louann Brizendine is a neuropsychiatrist and the author of *The Female Brain*, published in 2006. Her research concerns women's moods and hormones. She graduated in neurobiology from UC Berkeley, attended Yale School of Medicine and completed a residency in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. She is board-certified in psychiatry and neurology and is an endowed clinical professor. She joined the faculty of UCSF Medical Center at the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute in 1988 and now holds the Lynne and Marc Benioff-endowed chair of psychiatry. At UCSF, Brizendine pursues active clinical, teaching, writing and research activities.
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> In 1994 she founded the UCSF Women's Mood and Hormone Clinic, and continues to serve as its director. The Women's Mood and Hormone Clinic is a psychiatric clinic designed to assess and treat women of all ages experiencing disruption of mood, energy, anxiety, sexual function and well-being due to hormonal influences on the brain. Brizendine also treats couples in the clinic.
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> Additionally, Brizendine teaches courses to medical students, residents and other physicians throughout the country, addressing the neurobiology of hormones, mood disorders, anxiety problems, and sexual interest changes due to hormones.

Professor Brizendine is clearly far more qualified than I to make statements about the female brain and to compare it with the male brain. What startled me when I read *The Female Brain* was the sheer extent of the differences between the two brains: men and women truly do inhabit different mental worlds. Brizendine outlines how a range of hormones affect women's brains as they progress through life stages: foetal, girlhood, puberty, sexual maturity/single woman, pregnancy, breast feeding, childrearing, perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause. She reveals in the book that during her

medical education at Berkeley, Yale and Harvard, she 'learned little or nothing about female biological or neurological difference outside of pregnancy', and continues:

> The little research that was available, however, suggested that the brain differences, though subtle, were profound. As a resident in psychiatry, I became fascinated by the fact that there was a two-to-one ratio of depression in women compared with men. No one was offering any clear reasons for this discrepancy. Because I had gone to college at the peak of the feminist movement, my personal explanations ran toward the political and the psychological. I took the typical 1970s stance that the patriarchy of Western culture must have been the culprit. It must have kept women down and made them less functional than men. But that explanation alone didn't seem to fit: new studies were uncovering the same depression ratio worldwide. I started to think that something bigger, more basic and biological, was going on.
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> One day it struck me that male versus female depression rates didn't start to diverge until females turned 12 or 13 – the age girls began menstruating. It appeared that the chemical changes at puberty did something in the brain to trigger more depression in women…
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> When I started taking a woman's hormonal state into account as I evaluated her psychiatrically, I discovered the massive neurological effects her hormones have during different stages in life in shaping her desires, her values, *and the very way she perceives reality* [Author's italics]…
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> Of the fluctuations that begin as early as three months old and last until after menopause, a woman's neurological reality is not as constant as a man's. His is like a mountain that is worn away imperceptibly over the millennia by glaciers, weather, and the deep tectonic movements of the earth. Hers is more like the weather itself – constantly changing and hard to predict.

From the chapter, 'The Birth of the Female Brain':

> Common sense tells us that boys and girls behave differently. We see it every day at home, on the playground, and in classrooms. But what the culture hasn't told us is that the brain dictates these divergent behaviors. The impulses of children are so innate that they kick in even if we adults try to nudge them in another direction. One of my patients gave her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter many unisex toys, including a bright red fire truck instead of a doll. She walked into her daughter's room one afternoon to find her cuddling the truck in a baby blanket, rocking it back and forth, saying, 'Don't worry, little truckie, everything will be all right.'
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> This isn't socialization. The little girl didn't cuddle her 'truckie' because her environment molded her unisex brain. There is no unisex brain. She was born with a female brain, which came complete with its own impulses. Girls arrive already wired as girls, and boys arrive already wired as boys. Their brains are different by the time they're born, and their brains are what drive their impulses, values, and their very reality.

From a later chapter, 'The Future of the Female Brain':

> Almost every woman I have seen in my office, when asked what would be her top three wishes if her fairy godmother could wave her magic wand and grant them, says, 'Joy in my life, a fulfilling relationship, and less stress with more personal time.'
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> Our modern life – the double shift of career and primary responsibility for the household and family – has made these goals particularly difficult to achieve. We are stressed out by this arrangement, and our leading cause of anxiety and depression is stress. One of the great mysteries of our lives is why we as women are so devoted to this current social contract *which often operates against the natural wiring of our female brains and biological reality* [Author's italics].
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> During the 1990s and the early part of this millennium, a new set of scientific facts and ideas about the female brain has been unfolding. These biological truths have become a powerful stimulus for the reconsideration of a woman's social

> contract. In writing this book I have struggled with two voices in my head – one is the scientific truth, the other is political correctness. I have chosen to emphasize scientific truth over political correctness even though scientific truths may not always be as welcome.

How, you might well ask, can 'almost every woman' seeking 'less stress with more personal time' be reconciled with women's alleged quests for senior positions in the workplace in general, and for executive directorships of major companies in particular? It can't. Professor Brizendine followed *The Female Brain* with *The Male Brain* (2010). It's larger, but less interesting. The book, that is.

Onto a book written by Simon Baron-Cohen, an eminent British professor. His biography on Wikipedia:

> Simon Baron-Cohen FBA is a Professor of Developmental Psychopathology in the Departments of Psychiatry and Experimental Psychology at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. He is the Director of the University's Autism Research Centre, and a Fellow of Trinity College. He is best known for his work on autism, including his early theory that autism involves degrees of 'mindblindness' (or delays in the development of theory of mind); and his later theory that autism is an extreme form of the 'male brain', which involved a reconceptualisation of typical psychological sex differences in terms of empathizing – systemizing theory.

The professor's book *The Essential Difference* was published in 2003. He starts by summarising the theory to be outlined in the book:

> The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy.
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> The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.

He describes empathising in the following terms:

> Empathising is the drive to identify another person's emotions and thoughts, and to respond to them with an appropriate emotion. Empathising does not entail just the cold calculation of what someone else thinks and feels (or what is sometimes called mind reading). Psychopaths can do that much. Empathising occurs when we feel an appropriate emotional reaction, an emotion *triggered* by the other person's emotion, and it is done in order to understand another person, to predict their behaviour, and to connect or resonate with them emotionally.

Systemising is described as follows:

> Systemising is the drive to analyse, explore, and construct a system. The systemiser intuitively figures out how things work, or extracts the underlying rules that govern the behaviour of a system. This is done in order to understand and predict the system, or to invent a new one…
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> Just as empathising is powerful enough to cope with the hundreds of emotions that exist, so systemising is a process that can cope with an enormous number of systems. I will argue that, on average, males spontaneously systemise to a greater extent than do females.

The good professor points out here – as indeed he does throughout the book – that he does not mean 'all males' or 'all females': he is talking about *statistical averages*. I contend that success in senior positions in major organisations requires strong systemising skills, not strong empathising skills: so without positive discrimination for women we shall *never* have gender balance in the boardroom. Gender balance in the boardroom is not of the slightest interest to the vast majority of women; it is of interest only to militant feminists, an assortment of people – almost all women – driven by a left-wing ideology. David Cameron, the current British Prime

Minister, is a feminist despite being the leader of the Conservative party.

Baron-Cohen writes about the advantages of systemising brains to human males early in the species' evolution, which fell under the categories of using and making tools, hunting and tracking, trading, attaining and exercising power, developing expertise, tolerating solitude, being aggressive, and being leaders. The advantages of empathising brains to early females are explored under the categories of making friends, mothering, gossiping, being socially mobile, and reading partners' intentions. I contend that systemising brains are increasingly advantageous to individuals as they climb the hierarchy of major organisations, and this on its own would be enough to largely account for the enduring preponderance of men in senior positions.

Questionnaires for self-assessment of empathising and systemising traits are provided in appendices 2 and 3, along with a brief guide to interpreting the results. Why not complete them now, to help you gain a sense of where you are with regard to these traits compared with others of your gender, and with those of the opposite gender?

There is a large and growing body of evidence supporting Baron-Cohen's theory that people exhibiting the condition of autism – a spectrum of disorders which includes Asperger Syndrome – have 'extreme male brains'. On average, compared to both men and women on average, they are markedly less empathising, and markedly more systemising. Baron-Cohen points out that these people can lead productive lives if their work plays to their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Some autistic men are found in the top levels of IT companies, for example. Studies of identical and non-identical twins

strongly suggest that autism is heritable. In people diagnosed with high-functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome, the sex ratio is at least *ten males to every female.*

Baron-Cohen puts a figure of 2.5 per cent on the proportion of the population born with an extreme male brain, but what about the extreme *female* brain, which theory predicts should be as common? He continues:

> All scientists know about the extreme female brain is that it is expected to arise… Scientists have never got up close to these individuals. It is a bit like positing the existence of a new animal on theoretical grounds, and then setting out to discover if it is really found in nature…
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> People with the extreme female brain would have average or significantly better empathising ability than that of other people in the general population, but their systemising would be impaired. So these would be people who have difficulty understanding maths or physics or machines or chemistry, *as systems.* But they could be extremely accurate at tuning in to others' feelings and thoughts.
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> Would such a profile carry any necessary disability? Hyper-empathising could be a great asset, and poor systemising may not be too crippling. It is possible that the extreme female brain is not seen in clinics because it is not maladaptive…
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> A contender for who might have the extreme female brain would be a wonderfully caring person who can rapidly make you feel fully understood. For example, an endlessly patient psychotherapist who is excellent at rapidly tuning in to your feelings and your situation, who not only says he or she feels a great sadness at your sadness or great pleasure at your pleasure but also actually experiences those emotions as vividly as if your feelings were theirs.
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> However, the contender for the extreme female brain would also need to be someone who was virtually technically disabled. Someone for whom maths, computers, or political schisms, or DIY, held no interest. Indeed, someone who found activities requiring systemising hard to follow. We may all know people like this, but it is likely that they do not find their way into clinics, except perhaps as staff in the caring professions.