

Questions & Answers with James Olson, author of

***How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future:  
Why Left Hemisphere Dominance Has Brought Humanity to the Brink of Disaster  
and How We Can Think Our Way to Peace and Healing***

*How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* is a practical, science-based, self-help book focused on how we can more consciously and creatively manage the information that comes to our minds. Approaching the subject of neuroscience, particularly [neuropsychology](#), from the perspective of a management-trained, holistic philosopher acting as a science reporter, Olson has followed up on the research into consciousness that earned [Roger Sperry](#) a Nobel Prize in 1981 and spawned widespread public interest in how the lateral division in our brain impacts our thinking and other behaviors.

*How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* looks at the effects of genetics and brain dominance on consciousness and behavior. Each hemisphere contains a uniquely conscious system that is capable of managing the whole of the brain. The two systems are radically different in terms of the focus of their attention and how they solve problems, and as a result, a natural conflict exists between them. This means that considering the overall management of the brain, for most of us, the two systems don't always work together for one reason or another and can even seem to be in opposition. The good news is that the two systems are actually complementary and capable of harmony. But it is up to us, working in the arena of mind, to decide how to integrate whatever information they offer us. In fact, the process of integration is our most fundamental act of creation—and most people are not even aware that they have this opportunity/responsibility.

Once we are able to recognize that both systems are essential parts of a greater whole, and that they supply us with two different views that show us life from two radically different perspectives, then the need to fight over which one is superior will no longer exist. Seen as a team rather than competitors, cultural polarization can then begin to reverse.

## **Introduction**

### **What inspired you to write *How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future*?**

Many years ago I went to a weekend workshop in which a neuroscientist mapped our brains by asking a series of questions as a way of discovering how right-brain- or left-brain-dominant we were. During that event I discovered that we have two information systems working to inform consciousness, but typically, because of brain dominance, one of the two serves to guide us. Because I could see that the holistic right half of the brain was being widely ignored, yet had much to offer in terms of advancing individual and cultural progress, I decided to write about it. I especially wanted to reach out to the left-brain-directed community, primarily men, most of whom seem to have no clue as to what their right hemisphere is trying to tell them.

### **What can we learn about the nature of our thoughts and how they affect our decision-making and our lives by looking at the brain?**

If we look at the brain's information management systems—which I refer to as the brain's *operating systems*—we can learn a great deal. Along with a lateral split in our brain, we have

a divided consciousness giving us two types of consciousness, one localized and focused (referred to below as "dualistic"), the other global and all-seeing (referred to as "holistic"). The two sides perceive people and events in unique ways, and influence our thoughts and actions using methods that contrast and complement one another. By understanding how the brain influences our thoughts, we enhance our ability to recognize why we do some of the things we do.

### **What do you mean by “whole brain thinking”?**

For most of us—those of us who genetically inherit the experience of left- or right-brain dominance—whole-brain thinking means that we consciously adjust our natural way of seeing and doing so that we use more of our brain’s capacity. We accomplish this by more fully bringing the non-dominant or recessive side of our brain into our attempts to understand an issue and/or craft a response to it.

### **How do the two sides differ in terms of how they attend to the world around us?**

#### **Dualistic Consciousness**

##### **Left Hemisphere**

*Viewpoint: Structurally inward,  
attending to the parts*

Individual self  
Material values  
Linear, directional  
Gives us a polarized picture  
Reveals text—the details  
Focuses on what we know  
Personal needs, security

#### **Holistic Consciousness**

##### **Right Hemisphere**

*Viewpoint: Structurally outward,  
attending to the whole*

Collective self, culture  
Spiritual values, felt values  
Nonlinear, omnidirectional  
Shows us unity  
Reveals context—the big picture  
Shows us all that is new  
Service to others

### **Is it accurate to say that most women are right-brain dominant and most men left-brain dominant? And if so, does that mean our culture is balanced?**

Considering the *input* of information—how we are informed—most men are left-brain-dominant and most women are right-brain-dominant. However, dominance has two components. When we consider information *output*—our response as revealed by handedness studies—we find a different result. Since most men and women are right-handed, and right-handed people tend to be left-brain dominant, this suggests that most people are left-brain dominant *for information output*. As a whole then, we appear to tend toward left-brain dominance.

Cultural forces also contribute to an imbalance. Since males tend to be physically dominant, males have been able to control the most of our institutions of learning and government and thus able to impose their values on culture. By designing our various social systems based on left-hemisphere values, these systems encourage women to think and act like men. And since both men and women tend to be left-brain-dominant in terms of information output—response—we live in a culture that is often heavily biased toward left-brain perspectives, values, and solutions.

**How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future explores our relationship with three energy systems: physical (things), mental (thoughts), and spiritual (emotions or feelings). Most authors focus on only one of these. Why is a holistic approach necessary in order to understand the thinking brain?**

The short answer is that the universe is made up of these three systems. Rather than focus primarily on the world of things (as do scientists), or ideas (as do philosophers), or feelings (as do religionists and therapists), *How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future* explores our relationship with all three energy systems. Too often our attention is only directed toward the physical world, which is the specialty of the left brain. To begin to understand the persona of the brain's right hemisphere we must recognize that it is primarily interested in spirit, secondarily interested in mind, and sees the physical world as little more than an environment, a learning tool, a playground—or perhaps boot camp for spiritual development. The insights that we are given by our holistic right hemisphere reflect this multi-dimensional attitude.

**Understanding the split-brain's remarkable effect on consciousness and culture**

*The Brain and Peace*

**How does brain dominance and a dominant perspective affect our sense of peace?**

The holistic right half of the brain acts in ways that are generally peaceful. Its operating system is one that seeks harmony and service to others.

The left hemisphere is analytical, which is deconstructive. It takes thing apart. It separates. It is also aggressive and forceful—and needs to be in order to overcome the unity of wholeness that functions to unite us, sometimes even against our will. Of course, deconstructive is not always destructive; some things can be reassembled, but the left brain's process is often destructive, and this is the nature of war: destroy your enemy so they are no longer a threat; destroy his hiding places, his weapons. Because left-brain-dominant individuals are focused on survival and force-oriented, and since destruction can be a highly effective tool of persuasion, whenever problems arise, force often seems like an acceptable solution. But no one wants to be forced, so conflict inevitably arises when force is employed and can often lead to some degree of war.

**What is the brain's role in finding peace?**

Peace of mind is achieved by ending the ideological conflict that is created by the split in our consciousness, the result of a lateral split in our brain. The competitive, combative, security-oriented left hemisphere is not inclined to cooperate with the peaceful right out of fear of potential dangers that might arise from the right hemisphere's openness and lack of fear. Although the right hemisphere monitors our environment for danger, the left hemisphere is responsible for taking action. To achieve its security goals it needs to maintain control, a response that often requires us to move away from danger. At other times it might go on attack as a way of defending. Peace and cooperation, on the other hand, typically requires us to coordinate and unite.

*Political benefits*

**How does the split in our brain affect our politics?**

Republicans tend to be relatively conservative, whereas Democrats tend to be relatively liberal. The dualistic left hemisphere gives us our conservative values; the holistic right hemisphere gives us our liberal values. Dominance determines which views prevail. Nevertheless, there are many factors that determine a person's political affiliation, including external forces such as education and propaganda, so brain dominance is just one factor, but certainly there is a strong correlation between a person's brain dominance and whether he or she is conservative or liberal.

### **How do we bring our polarized cultural system into greater balance?**

Since the left brain is security-oriented, skeptical, and energized by fear, the key would seem to be the education of the collective (cultural) left brain. Left-brain-dominants need to understand the value of right-brain ways of seeing and doing. The cultural left brain needs to know that it is to its advantage to coexist in peace with the cultural right—though of course, that does not mean we do whatever right-brain dominants want. At the same time, right-brain-dominants need to understand that left-brain-dominants have a valuable contribution to make, and learn what that contribution is. Right-brain-dominants also need to understand that since they are inherently focused on the big picture, they have a tendency to overlook important details—one of the specialties of left-brain-dominants.

### ***Personal benefits***

#### **How can understanding the brain hemispheres help men better understand women and promote peace between the sexes?**

My goal in writing this book was to explain the holistic perspective, the brain perspective that informs most women. Right-brain dominant women have a different perception of the world, in large part, because they see it from a different vantage point, a holistic one that sees the world as an integral whole, rather than the typical male vantage point which focuses on its individual aspects in a sequential process. To begin to understand women, men need to understand the right-brain perspective. Although there is a lot more to understanding women than understanding their perspective, perspective is a great place to start since it tends to dominate their perception and guide their response.

#### **How does understanding the actions of our brain hemispheres assist in our personal relations, especially with our partners?**

The difference in the way the two hemispheres view and respond is so extreme that the situation is not unlike the communication problems faced by two people who speak different languages. When you don't understand right-brain perspectives and processes, and are not able to understand their purpose, it's often difficult to understand the behavior of people whose perceptions are based on them. Of course, a failure to understand something typically generates fear, which exacerbates any existing divisions.

#### **What is the impact of brain dominance and perspective on religion?**

The upper management of most religious organizations consists entirely of males, and most males are left-brain directed. Consequently, most religious organizations are directed according to how the dualistic left hemisphere perceives and responds. The left hemisphere is inherently focused on the *differences* among religions and is *competitive*. Its operating system is predominately focused on physical matters; consequently, physical choices tend to overshadow spiritual matters in the minds of left-brain-directed spiritual leaders. As a result, they are led to focus on minor details such as what kind of food a person can eat, and on what days, or whether

they can work on holy days, rather than on more important spiritual matters such as unity and peace. Left-brain-directed individuals are more interested in what their thoughts are telling them than in what their feelings reveal, but the concept of God is probably best understood through feelings such as love and peace. That's not to say that left-brain-directed individuals are unaware of the right-brain attributes of religion, only that their dominant brain is poorly equipped to deal with them as compared to individuals guided by their right hemisphere. Because males rely on the left brain to guide them and are in charge of decision-making, religions are inherently separative and competitive rather than unity seeking and cooperative. Thus, for the most part they resist the reading of each other's books or learning from an exchange of views, and tend to set up rules that inhibit such practices. It is ironic that right-brain-dominant women are mentally much better equipped to lead religion than men are, but are not allowed to.

## **LGBTQ – The brain's role in determining sexual orientation**

### **Why do we need to understand the forces that determine our sexuality?**

The reason is it important that we understand the root causes of gender and sexual orientation is to quell the speculation that we can change who we are and stop the useless, divisive and destructive attempts to change people. If straight people understood that homosexuality is genetically determined and thus a normal part of the diversity of life, they would have no reason to try to change the sexuality of others to match their own. If they knew that gender was a function of the brain's operating systems they would understand that no one chooses who they are sexually attracted to, and their fear and opposition would be substantially lessened. It would usher in an end to gender wars.

### **Please explain how you discovered that homosexuality is result of brain dominance?**

My discovery began as a result of preparing a table listing the functional characteristics of the two hemispheres. It soon became apparent that the left side gives us masculine characteristics and the right side gives us feminine characteristics. But I was aware that sometimes the two sides were reversed—that is, women are sometimes directed by a dominant masculine hemisphere. That led me to inquire what happens to males when the feminine side of their brain is dominant. This was the trigger that led me to this discovery.

### **If your hypothesis is correct, does that mean that those who believe that hormonal or environment factors have a role in determining sexual orientation are wrong?**

Not at all. Hormonal factors may well play a role in determining the operating systems we acquire. And our environment is known to affect the body's chemical/hormonal development, which may, directly or indirectly, influence operating-system dominance

### **It's not uncommon to hear the suggestion made that sex begins in the brain. So why do you think that scientists have been so focused on genes and hormones in their search to understand homosexuality, rather than on brain functions?**

Two reasons. I think it is easier to conduct research on physical elements such as genes and hormones than it is to research an organ as immensely complex as the brain—especially if you don't know where to look. Also, the element that is responsible for gender, my research suggests, is an operating system, a management system—which means it is a product of non-physical mind. To research mind you have to take a holistic, multiple-disciplinary approach and combine

it with a study of the brain as an organ of two parts (the split brain). Most scientific research tends to take a more narrow focus.

**Is there any science to support your theory?**

My approach is like that of someone trying to assemble a jigsaw puzzle. I have taken a number of scientific discoveries and put them together to form a bigger picture. My theory—actually it's a hypothesis—is a synthesis of available scientific research on brain hemispheres.

**Do you believe that sexual orientation can be changed?**

No. Genetic dominance determines our brain's operating system, and from our brain's operating system we acquire the characteristics that we associate with gender. I see no scientific evidence that we can change the dominance that genetic forces establish. Likewise, I see no compelling antidotal evidence that suggests we can change.

**What can you tell us about the diversity we see in the gay community, among gay males, for example?**

Since information input to the brain is independent of information output, the two processes are independently variable. As a consequence of this situation, I am convinced we all have two genders, although when both genders are the same, it's like having one gender, and as a result, the possibility of having two genders has long gone undiscovered. The same diversity that we see in the gay community also exists in the straight community, and for the same reason. Whether someone is an effeminate straight male or an effeminate gay male, the femininity appears to be the result of having two genders that are different. Note that information input and output affect our sexuality in different ways. Information *input* determines the body type (sex) that we are attracted to (male or female). Information *output* creates an external response that shows up as masculine or feminine behavior (or a combination), depending on which operating system is in charge. If a male's genetically-determined output is guided by a feminine operating system, regardless of whether he is straight or gay, he is going to exhibit some degree of feminine behavior—though such tendencies can vary greatly in strength. Consequently, he might be strongly feminine, or his femininity might be so subdued that it is difficult to observe.

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