

Is It Time to Let Women Take the Wheel? By Daniel Amen, MD

Our world needs a change in leadership.

I'm not talking about the divide between Republicans and Democrats. I'm not talking about the UN or the influence of U.S. foreign policy, or the power struggles in the Middle East. At the end of the day, all of these may end up being less important than a fundamental division of power that goes back to the beginning of the human race.

What I'm talking about here is the gender balance: the distribution of power and leadership between men and women.

Despite the tremendous gains made by women over the last 100 years, women still represent only a tiny fraction of the leadership in this country and worldwide. It's true that this year we saw a historic (and welcome) upturn in the amount of women elected to government. There are [20 women](#) in the U.S. Senate and 78 in the House of Representatives this year. Similarly, the Fortune 500 for 2012 showed that [18 women](#) were CEOs of the top companies in the nation. This is up from 12 female CEOs the year before. It's good news, but it isn't enough.

While most companies have male CEOs and most leadership positions in the U.S. and abroad are held by men, the "CEO part of the brain" -- the prefrontal cortex, which governs things like judgment, organization and planning -- is actually *stronger* in women, suggesting that women, not men, are a better suited to hold positions of power and are probably better equipped to change our world than men.

This isn't idle speculation. [Research](#) we have been conducting at the Amen Clinics over the past 22 years bears this out.

The Largest Brain-Imaging Analysis Ever^[1]

My team and I recently completed the [largest brain-imaging analysis ever conducted](#) to evaluate the differences between male and female brains. The results confirm what many of us have known intuitively for decades: There is a big difference between the brains of men and the brains of women. Only, the differences aren't what some of you may think.

In this study, we took single photon emissions computed tomography (SPECT) scans of 26,000 people -- some 46,000 scans -- and compared them to see if there were any differences between the sexes. Included in the group were healthy males and females as well as men and women with a wide variety of neurological and psychiatric conditions. What we found was stunning.

Women showed significantly increased cerebral blood flow in 112 of the 128 regions of the brain we measured. Put simply, this means that women generally have more brain activity than

men. But what fascinated me as a psychiatrist and brain imaging specialist wasn't that women's brains were much more active than men's. I think a lot of us guys have known that for years. What I found particularly interesting were the specific areas of the brain that were more active in women -- areas that show women may indeed be better equipped to lead our world toward meaningful change than men are.

Why Women Make Better Bosses (and Leaders)

The first thing my team noticed was that the inner CEO (the prefrontal cortex) of women is much more active than men. This area of the brain governs things like judgment, forethought, organization, planning, empathy, impulse control and learning from the mistakes you make. These are the very qualities needed to successfully manage a company, lead a nation, mediate crisis, and get people working together toward a common goal.

This strength in the prefrontal cortex also points to a possible explanation for the lower incidence of [ADHD](#), [antisocial personality disorder](#), [substance abuse](#), and possibly [incarcerations](#) (women are 14 times less likely to go to jail than men).

In addition, women showed increased activity in the hippocampus. Men, if you've ever wondered why your wife or girlfriend never forgets anything, here is your answer. The hippocampus is the part of the brain that helps memories get into long-term storage. Increased activity in this area means that women generally remember things better for longer than men -- a useful tool for leaders and CEOs.

Understand these are only a few of the key areas of increased brain activity that stand out in women. In fact, men were more active in only nine areas of the brain, those primarily associated with visual perception, form recognition and object representation. Men are better at tracking objects in space, usually female objects that get us in a whole bunch of trouble.

Due to this increased brain activity, women tend to exhibit greater strengths in the areas of:

- **Empathy** -- the ability to share or understand the feelings of another
- **Intuition** -- knowing that something is true without knowing exactly why
- **Collaboration** -- the ability to work with other people toward a common goal (another key reason they make such great bosses)
- **Self-control** -- which, as mentioned above, points to their reduced risk of substance abuse, going to jail, or even getting a [traffic ticket](#)
- **Appropriate worry** -- women tend to worry about and take care of their health, their family, etc. more effectively than men. This point is actually quite fascinating -- in a large study, it was found that the "don't worry, be happy" people, more typically men on motorcycles, died earlier from accidents and preventable illness. Appropriate worry may be one reason women live longer than men.^[2]

Females are neurologically well-equipped to lead, manage and help us resolve the major problems of the world. Men have been in positions of power since the inception of the human race, and while the progress of civilization is impressive, we still face war, strife, power struggles, ill health and more every day. By understanding and honoring the female brain, we can empower girls and women to use their brains to change the world.

My hope is that you women out there use this program to unleash the extraordinary power of *your* female brain. Our world needs you and your brains now more than ever to lead us toward a more peaceful, more collaborative, more sustainable, healthier way of life.

This idea and the data from our study inspired me so much that [my latest book](#), *Unleash the Power of the Female Brain*, is dedicated to it. In it, I show how women can supercharge their brains using the techniques we have developed at the Amen Clinics for better health, energy, mood and sex. The book gives women a complete step-by-step program that teaches them how to love their brain, overcome mood disorders and optimize brain function.

References

[1] Amen, D, Trujillo, M, Keator, D, et al. "Gender differences in rCBF in a healthy and psychiatric cohort of 46034 SPECT scans." Amen Clinics. 2013. In advance of publication.

[2] Friedman H, Martin L. "The Longevity Project: Surprising Discoveries for Health and Long Life from the Landmark Eight-Decade Study." 2011. Plume.