



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on October 22, 2012

Study: Women Have Trouble Handling Bad News

It seems as if no news really is good news — at least if you're a woman. So says a study out of the University of Montreal (UM), which found that women experienced stress after reading negative news stories while men did not. Writes William Raillant-Clark in a UM [press release](#):



The researchers asked 60 people divided into four groups to read actual news stories. In order to determine their stress levels, the researchers took samples of the participants' saliva and analyzed them for a hormone called cortisol. Higher levels of this bodily chemical indicate higher levels of stress. A group of men and a group of women read "neutral" news stories, about subjects such as the opening of a new park or the premiere of a new film, while the [other] two gender segregated groups read negative stories, about events such as murders or accidents.

CBS News reports on the findings, [writing](#):

The day after the experiments, the subjects were called in and asked about what they had read. While reading the stories alone did not increase stress levels, the researchers found that women who read negative news had higher stress levels after memory and intellect experiments compared to the women who read the neutral news.

"Moreover, the women were able to remember more of the details of the negative stories," [lead author and Ph.D. candidate Marie-France Marin] said. "It is interesting to note that we did not observe this phenomenon amongst the male participants."

In a case of uncanny timing, a cute corroborating anecdote presented itself shortly after I read about this study. On Wednesday, Oct. 17, Bill O'Reilly was [discussing](#) how the contentious second presidential debate might have turned women off, and segment guest Juliet Huddy provided a testament to this, saying, "The debate was anxiety-producing. I was stressed out watching the two of them [Romney and Obama]." In fact, I think she actually said she had trouble sleeping. Hey, quick, test that woman's saliva.

Really, though, this apparent sex difference isn't hard to understand. Women are well-known to be worrywarts while men tend to be more cavalier. Just consider, for instance, a mother's and father's very different reactions to risks faced by their young son, say the climbing of a tree or having to confront a bully. The father will likely chalk it up to boys being boys or to a rite of passage to manhood, whereas



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all the mother may think about is how the lad could get hurt. If taken to an extreme, these phenomena can result in men who are a bit careless about young kids' safety or women who would smother their children in bubble wrap. The wise path, obviously, lies in between.

The study's findings about women and bad news also bring to mind the sexes' different reactions to bad personal news; for example, being told, either in seriousness or in jest, that you're fat. Women may take such things to heart and be hurt, while men roll with the punches and are more likely to, again, in seriousness or in jest, punch back.

Another factor that helps explain the study's findings (and I'll elaborate on this in a moment) is that women are more detail-oriented than are men. Another way of saying this is that women are little-picture people while men are big-picture people. And this aligns with the roles the sexes have generally performed. Women traditionally have taken care of little children, who present us with a lot of little pictures that must be tended to; that is, the details of their lives must be micromanaged, as there is little they can do for themselves. On the other hand, men avoid intimate involvement in the minute-to-minute affairs of the domestic order, but, rather, have historically created the civic order. And this is where being too detail-oriented can be detrimental. After all, do we want an intrusive government that micromanages our lives?

This difference, by the way, partially explains the sex gap in voting — why women are more likely than men to support a micromanaging government. And it's why it is fitting that we use a feminine descriptive for such a government: the nanny state.

Why does this focus on details help explain the female tendency to worry? First, on a simple level, if you're ever mindful of numerous details, there perhaps will be more on your mind to worry about. Additionally, however, a little picture is a little world, and in little worlds problems seem so much bigger. As with understanding how significant one tree is, perspective is only gained by stepping back to a distance that allows a view of the whole forest.

As for the researchers' finding that women are more likely to remember negative details than men are, doesn't it make sense? It helps explain why two men can have a fistfight and then be having a drink together an hour later whereas women, who are more likely to hold on to negative emotions, will often hold grudges. It also explains many men's lament that their wives always remember the bad things (and bring them up well after the fact), and many women's lament that they can have a big argument with their husband and then a little while later he's able to just roll over and go to sleep.

Lastly, the UM research partially explains [studies](#) showing that women know less about current events than men do. After all, you won't be as likely to imbibe news if it causes you anxiety.

Speaking of which, I'll offer some advice, for whatever it's worth. With an election coming up, bone up on those current events, gals, but don't sweat the small stuff. You'll have enough big things to worry about soon enough.



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