

Study uncovers why women remember events better

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(Medical Xpress)—Gender plays a strong role in how people remember, a new Cornell study confirms. Research – and many tales from real life – report that women are typically better at remembering past events than men. Why?

"It appears that, compared with men, women may attend to and encode more information during ongoing events, experience similar rates of forgetting, and then show greater ability to access retained event information at recall," said author Qi Wang, professor of human development in Cornell's College of [Human Ecology](#).

"Our findings also suggest that the content of memories is reconstructed over time in a gendered fashion," Wang said. "The findings help us understand [gender differences](#) in memory and inform the theoretical debate about where in the [memory formation](#) process these differences emerge."

Her study, "Gender and Emotion in Everyday Event Memory," is published in the journal *Memory* (21:4).

Wang tackled the central question of whether women's superior memory for personally experienced events is due to differences in how men and women initially encode event information in the brain, retain it over time or access it later during retrieval. It also examined how women's memories become more socially oriented than men's.

For the research, a culturally diverse group of 60 college undergraduates received three text messages over the course of a week that prompted them to immediately write down what had happened to them during the past 30 minutes. At the end of the week, they were asked to recall as much detail as possible about these events in a surprise [memory test](#).

Compared with men, the women in the study recorded more event details initially and then recalled more details more accurately about the remembered events a week later, even after controlling for the additional detail women originally encoded. And while the [men and women](#) in the study recorded similar event content initially, at recall, the women reported their experiences by focusing more on relationships and social interactions than men.

"These findings are provocative in showing that women and men see their worlds differently, likely due to different cognitive styles, and that gendered ideologies come into play in memory reconstruction," Wang added.

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More information: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23190136

Provided by Cornell University

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