

Women are significantly better at multitasking than men

October 24 2013

(Medical Xpress)—Women are better than men at carrying out multiple tasks according to new research from a team of psychologists including researchers from the University of Hertfordshire.

Women can juggle different tasks at the same time, while [men](#) find it difficult to do more than one thing at a time are commonly-held beliefs. Despite these notions being widely believed, very little research has even examined such notions. However, new research from the Universities of Hertfordshire, Glasgow and Leeds just published in *BMC Psychology* provides support for the proposal that women are better at multitasking.

Keith Laws, Professor of Cognitive Neuropsychology at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "We've all heard stories about men not being able to multitask and only being able to focus on one thing at a time. And also stories about women who are able to manage several activities at the same time.

"Through a set of two experiments we measured people's ability to carry out [multiple tasks](#) either at the same time or in very quick succession. And the results showed that women had a distinct advantage in both types of multitasking."

In the first experiment, 120 men and 120 women participated in a computer-based challenge designed to measure their task-switching abilities. The participants performed two tasks separately before being asked to perform them both in the same test.

Although men and women performed the separate tasks with the same speed and accuracy, men were slower than women on the mixed tasks. Women's responses were around sixty-one per cent slower, whereas men's responses were seventy-seven per cent slower - suggesting that women have an advantage over men in this type of multitasking.

In the second experiment, a different group of forty-seven men and forty-seven women were tested to measure their response to multitasking in more common real-life tasks.

In a pre-set time limit, they were asked to sketch out how they would attempt a search for a set of lost keys in a field; to find restaurant symbols on a map of the city of Philadelphia (to test their everyday attention levels); and solve simple arithmetical questions. The tasks were chosen to test their planning and strategic abilities, their attention control and manipulation of simple information under time pressure.

It was left for participants to decide how to split the time between each task and they were also told to expect a phone call at some point during the test – which they could choose to answer or not. If they answered the phone, they were asked a series of additional general knowledge questions to add to the burden.

In this series of tests, women scored significantly higher on the key search task - suggesting that they are better at tasks which require high-level cognitive control, particularly planning, monitoring and inhibition.

Overall the results of both experiments support the notion that women are better at [multitasking](#) than men. However, further research is required to provide explanations as to precisely why [women](#) appear to be better multitaskers.

More information: The team's paper, 'Are women better than men at

multi-tasking?', is published today in the Open Access journal *BMC Psychology* (*BMC Psychology* 2013, 1:18 [DOI: 10.1186/2050-7283-1-18](https://doi.org/10.1186/2050-7283-1-18)). www.biomedcentral.com/2050-7283/1/18

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

Citation: Women are significantly better at multitasking than men (2013, October 24) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-women-significantly-multitasking-men.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--