

Honey, have you shrunk the keys?

The real difference between men and women

BY MARIANNE SCOTT

"I hate women because they always know where things are."

—James Thurber

I can't find my tennis racquet. Have you seen my contact lens case? Where has my wallet bugged off to?" These questions punctuate my daily life. How is it that my husband David, a very bright guy, can continually lose these things?

His "losses" have confounded me for years. At first I thought he was the only one perpetually looking for his bicycle helmet. But thinking back to my childhood, I recall that many of my parents' fights revolved around Dad's forgetting where he left his sweater, the chequebook or the pliers. Mom would indict him for carelessness; he'd remain silent but look at her stolidly, blankly, adding to her irri-

tation. Eventually, she'd locate the mysteriously disappeared item.

"Why can't men ever remember where they've put their things?" she'd wail.

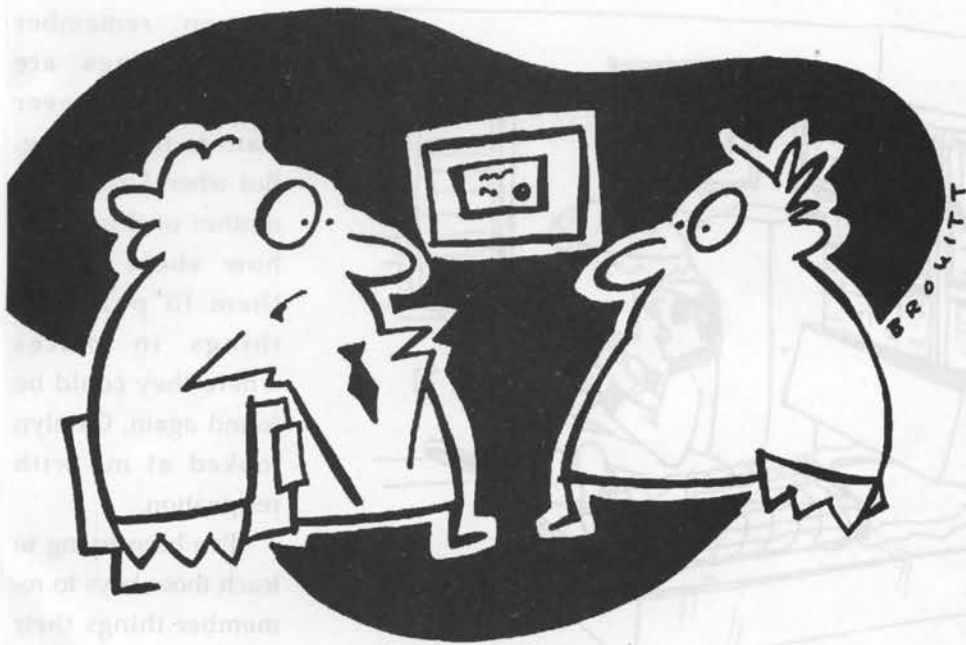
That's the question never asked in the flocks of articles on male and female brains that regularly show up in newspapers and science journals.

Recently *The Globe and Mail* printed thousands of words analyzing differences in male-female grey-matter density and how hormones shape brain workings. The research explored multitasking, visual-spatial correlations, verbal acrobatics, learning disabilities and slates of other multi-syllabic subjects. The tale also took us back to the hunter-gatherer age when, armed with spear, he hid in the bush waiting for the moose while she stayed home gathering the veggies.

The article never probed how often he



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You appear to be completely devoid of irony."*

mislaid that spear. Nor did it explain how contemporary men have relinquished both hunting and gathering to the female of the species. She hunts and gathers the book he's just been reading but can no longer locate.

The other day, my husband's secretary called and said, "I put the travel reimbursement cheque in the second compartment of his briefcase."

We laughed conspiratorially. She knows her boss. Without her telling me where she'd put it, the cheque could easily moulder into dust before he remembered its existence.

My husband is a professor of engineering and is alleged to exist in a world vastly different from the one the rest of us inhabit. He and his kind have been mocked so long the term "absent-minded professor" has become a cliché. And, of course, professors have always been men — female professors are too new on the scene to have become clichés.

But are memory defects found only in professors? Or is this amnesia an engineering affliction?

If I say to any of my female friends, "Where's my wallet? Where are my gloves? Have you seen my bicycle jacket?" I get the amused laughter of instant comprehension. These women immediately recognize husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, male colleagues. Most of them aren't professors — just males losing their keys.

When I'm asked if I've seen those keys, one of three things happens. If I don't know, I ask if they might be hanging on the key rack I installed to minimize this never-ending problem. Or an instant picture flashes into my mind and, without knowing that I knew it, I "see" the keys next to the laundry basket by the garage door. Or a video camera switches on in my head and as it slowly pans each room, the keys lying next to the coffee maker jump into my mind's eye.

For years, I thought I was the only

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"Mr. Greenly, we're not scheduled for primal scream therapy until next week."

woman living in recall mode. But then my neighbour Janet divorced Ben, in part because she was tired of carrying the "black memory box." In her mind, the analogy with the box that's recovered after airplane crashes is perfect.

Janet's frustration with Ben's lack of "object" memory was magnified because he never gave her credit for finding things he'd misplaced.

"Through deduction, I figured out where he could have dropped that report, found it, saved his important meeting and he never even said, 'thank you,'" she explains. To her, finding the document proved her intelligence. To him, it didn't count; it was simply a wifely job.

Isaac Asimov once wrote that intelligence tests were invented when a bunch of white guys got together and concluded the knowledge in their noodles defined intelligence. For others to be smart, they only had to know the same things.

Of course, the tests these hotshots devised were total guy things. Not once did this group consider remembering where they'd left their scarf as a clue to brainpower. And all the millions of I.Q. tests administered since have only probed if men and women could arrange abstract shapes or explain tough words — never who forgot the umbrella on the bus.

Some say little girls are taught to put things away while little boys get to mess things up, so

women remember where things are while men never learn to find a thing. But when I asked the mother of three sons how she'd taught them to put their things in places where they could be found again, Carolyn looked at me with resignation.

"I've been trying to teach those boys to remember things their entire life," she said wistfully, "but I guess I was always there to remind them."

I'm all for research on male and female

brains. But I'd like these studies to have practical utility. Can men be taught to remember anniversaries? Their children's birthdays? Can their brains be rewired to recollect where they put their briefcase? Or can we bestow intelligence credits on women who remember all of those? The answers might improve family life, perhaps save a marriage or two.

They'll certainly reduce the panic of looking for his wallet while the taxi is waiting. ●

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