

## STEREOTYPES SUPPORTED BY SCIENCE

### 1. Read the article once and put the headings in the correct place.

- A. Men are better navigators than women.
- B. Women talk more than men.
- C. Men don't see colours as well as women.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

Men have a reputation for wearing clothes that don't look good together – if men do look good, it's because their girlfriends or wives have helped them get dressed. Why's that? *Science says*: Let's take a look at chromosomes – the parts of our DNA that control many things about us. The colour red is carried only by the X chromosome. Women have two X chromosomes, and so they are more likely to be able to see red. Men only have one X chromosome. How we see colour depends on the ability to see red, blue, and green, so women are more likely to see colours better. Being able to see colours well was important in prehistoric times when women looked for fruit for food. They had to be able to tell the difference between the types of fruit on the trees so that they didn't choose a type that was poisonous. For them, seeing different colours meant they could survive.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

Most men have a natural ability to read maps while women usually need to turn them round. How come?

*Science says*: Men are able to see the size and position of things much quicker than women. This ability is called «spatial awareness». Researchers discovered in a study of four-year-old children that only one girl has this ability for every four boys. Once again, the explanation can be found in the past. Do you remember those prehistoric women? Well, while they were looking for fruit, the men travelled long distances to hunt animals. When they had caught enough, they had to find their way home again. And this is where they learnt «spatial awareness». The women didn't need it because they hardly ever went out of sight of their homes, but for the men, it was vital.

3 \_\_\_\_\_

Humans are social animals, so why is it that men don't like sharing their problems while women tell their best friends everything?

*Science says*: The answer is in the brain. The parts responsible for language are 17% larger in a woman's brain than in a man's brain. Also, women use both the left and the right side of the brain to use language, while men use only one side – their strongest side. And there's more. The part of the brain that connects the two parts together – the corpus callosum – is larger in women too, which means that they can move information from one part to the other part more quickly. Nobody is sure why these differences exist, but it's clear that women have a definite advantage over men when it comes to communication.

### 2. Read the article again. Choose the right answers.

1. Men can find it difficult to perceive...

- a) three colours.
- b) one colour.
- c) any colours.

2. Seeing colours well helped prehistoric women...

- a) find interesting things to eat.
- b) cook food correctly.
- c) choose the right fruit.

3. The results of the study showed that...

- a) four-year-olds don't have spatial awareness.
- b) boys learn spatial awareness before girls.
- c) girls don't have spatial awareness.

4. Women didn't need spatial awareness in prehistoric times because...

- a) the men were always with them.
- b) they never left home.
- c) they didn't travel far from home.

5. Men are worse at communicating because...

- a) parts of their brains are smaller.
- b) their brains are 17% smaller.
- c) their brains are larger.

6. The function of the corpus callosum in the brain is...

- a) to communicate between both sides.
- b) to store different languages.
- c) to control the language process.

## British stereotypes

I have just returned to the UK after a year living abroad in France. Something that really struck me while I was away from home was the fact that very often the people I met would talk about 'stereotypes'. It is inevitable when you meet someone who comes from a foreign country that your mind evokes associations and compares that person with the stereotypes connected with their country and culture. Many believe that there's no smoke without fire and so if a stereotype exists, it must be based on truth. I feel that thinking about 'stereotypes' is an interesting way to look at differences between different cultures and countries, but of course many should be taken with a pinch of salt! Here are my top 5 favourite stereotypes about British people and whether or not I think they are true or false!

### 1) British people drink a lot of tea

TRUE! I have to say that this stereotype, in my experience, is definitely based on reality. Although I myself am not a fanatical tea-drinker, my sister has been known to drink around 6 mugs of tea per day! British people tend to offer a cup of tea (or a 'cuppa') whenever a guest arrives regardless of the time of day; and always if someone is upset or needs cheering up. With a mug of steaming tea in their hands, a British person can't help but feel at home.

### 2) British people have a 'stiff upper lip'

This is a common conception that British people traditionally do not express emotions or talk about how they feel openly. However, I have found that, as is the case in most cultures, it is a question of individuals. Some people are naturally at ease discussing their feelings, and others prefer to keep their personal life private. In my experience wherever you live it takes time to build up a friendship in which people feel confident about confiding in each other.

### 3) British people like to talk about the weather

TRUE! In the town where I grew up most conversations would start with a comment about the weather, especially if you did not know the person very well. This is called 'small talk'. Frequent comments about the weather include, "It's a beautiful day today isn't it?! Make sure you make the most of it!" or "It has been raining cats and dogs all morning!" British people, in my experience, could make complaining about the weather into an Olympic sport!

### 4) British food is not good

During my year abroad I met many people who often cited this stereotype about British food. My opinion is that it is simply a case of what you are used to and personal taste. Traditionally, British food is very warming comfort food. Good examples are steak and ale pie, toad in the hole (this is a dish of sausages served in a baked batter) and, of course, fish and chips. Now however visitors to the UK will find a wide range of different cuisines available on the high streets of British cities from Indian restaurants to Japanese sushi bars.

### 5) British people are very polite

My French friends would often find it funny how often I would apologise for myself or the fact that I would repeat 'please' and 'thank yous' in a conversation. Even I described myself as 'very British'. However I find that in every country you will come across very polite people and less polite people. A lot of the time there are simply different perceptions of what is 'polite' and what is 'rude' across cultures but this (although sometimes embarrassing!) can be a fascinating journey of discovery!