**Questions & Answers with James Olson,** author of

 ***How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future:***

***Why Left Hemisphere Dominance Has Brought Humanity to the Brink of Disaster***

***and How We Can Think Our Way to Peace and Healing***

***How Whole Brain Thinking Can Save the Future*** is a practical, science-based, self-help book focused on how we can more consciously and creatively manage the flow of information from brain to mind. To better explain this process Olson delves into the operation of the brain’s left and right hemispheres, in particular, their psychology, [neuropsychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuropsychology), an example being their respective viewpoints and values. A systems-oriented philosopher, Olson has followed up on the research into consciousness that helped [Roger Sperry](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1981/sperry-facts.html) win a Nobel Prize in 1981 and spawned widespread public interest in the brain’s impact on our thinking and other behaviors.

Each hemisphere is operated by a uniquely conscious system, an autonomous system. Because the two systems are radically different in terms of how they focus our attention and prompt us to solve problems, a natural conflict exists between them. Being so different, the two systems don’t always work together and can even appear to be in opposition. The good news is that the two systems are actually complementary, and thus capable of harmony. But it is up to us, working in the arena of mind, to decide how to integrate the two diverse streams of information that they offer us. In fact, this process of mental integration is our most fundamental act of creation—and most people are not even aware that they have this opportunity.

**Introduction**

**What can we learn about the nature of our thoughts and how they affect our decision-making and our lives by looking at the brain?**

By studying the brain’s information management systems—which I refer to as the brain’s *operating systems*—we learn that each side of the brain makes its own unique contribution to consciousness. Each hemisphere of the brain has its own way of perceiving people and events, and each uniquely shapes our thoughts and actions. By understanding how the hemispheres influence our thinking, we enhance our ability to recognize why we do some of the things we do, and thus open ourselves to the possibility of making conscious changes to the way we evaluate and process our thoughts.

**What do you mean by “whole brain thinking”?**

Most of us—those of us who inherit the experience of left- or right-brain dominance—are primarily reliant on the guidance of one hemisphere. Through whole-brain thinking we consciously overcome the limiting effects of dominance and thus are able to use more of our brain’s capacity. We achieve whole-brain thinking by more fully bringing the non-dominant or recessive side of our brain into our attempts to understand an issue and/or craft a response to it.

**Benefits of Understanding the split-brain’s remarkable effect on consciousness and culture**

***The Brain and Peace***

**How does brain dominance affect our sense of peace?**

The holistic hemisphere of the brain is focused on collective issues, on unity. It seeks harmony and service to others. It acts in ways that are fundamentally peaceful and loving. In contrast, the dualistic hemisphere is focused on individuality. This hemisphere is protective and thus needs to be fearful. It is the engine of aggressive and forceful behavior. The two sides generate different feelings.

**What is the brain’s role in finding peace?**

Peace of mind is achieved by ending the conflicts and fears that arise as two fundamentally different operating systems struggle to integrate. Obviously, we can best integrate them when we understand them. However, when consciousness resides in our competitive, combative, security-oriented hemisphere (typically the left), the barriers to cooperation and integration are powerful. This hemisphere is naturally fearful of the dangers that might arise from being open. Rather than unify, it urges us to separate. To escape our brain-based fears and achieve peace, we must respect both individualityand unity.

***Political* *benefits***

**How does the split in our brain affect our politics?**

Republicans tend to be relatively conservative and focused on individual needs. We get our conservative values from our dualistic hemisphere. Democrats tend to be relatively liberal and focused on the collective need. Our liberal values come from our holistic hemisphere. There are many factors that determine a person’s political affiliation, including external forces such as education and other influences, so brain dominance is just one factor in our political choices. But certainly, there is a strong correlation between a person’s brain dominance and whether he or she is conservative or liberal.

**How do we bring our polarized cultural system into greater balance?**

The two sides need to better understand one another. Collectively-focused liberals need to recognize that since they are inherently focused on the big picture, they have a tendency to overlook the details—one of the specialties of the conservative hemisphere. Individually-focused conservatives need to recognize that they have a default blindness to the values of the collective viewpoint, and then find a way to enhance their collective viewpoint.

***Personal benefits***

**How can understanding the brain hemispheres help men better understand women and promote peace between the sexes?**

Because each side of the brain has its own system of operation, the two systems harbor different viewpoints, values, and behaviors. The left hemisphere tends to dominate in men; the right hemisphere in women. Until educated otherwise, we tend to not understand our nondominant side very well. And of course, this means we don’t understand *those in whom it is dominant.* This is the prime source of our conflict. If men and women are to really understand one another, they need to understand the systems that operate the hemispheres.

**What is the impact of brain dominance and perspective on religion**?

The upper management in most religious organizations is almost always male, and most males are informed by their dualistic left hemisphere. Consequently, most religious organizations are directed according to how the left hemisphere perceives and responds to ideas and events. Consider: The left hemisphere is inherently focused on differences in people and ideas. It is *competitive*. Its operating system is predominately focused on physical matters and on details. Since physical choices tend to overshadow spiritual matters in the minds of left-brain-dominant spiritual leaders they are led to focus on details such as what kind of food a person can eat, and on what days, or whether they can work on holy days, rather than on more important spiritual matters such as unity and peace. Left-brain-directed individuals are more interested in what their thoughts are telling them than in what their feelings reveal; however, the concept of God is surely best understood through feelings such as love and peace. That’s not to say that left-brain-directed individuals are unaware of the right-brain attributes of religion, only that their dominant brain is poorly equipped to deal with them as compared to individuals guided by their holistic right hemisphere. Because most males rely on the left brain to guide them, religions directed by left-brain dominant males are inherently separative and competitive rather than unity-seeking and cooperative. For the most part male leaders resist the reading of each other’s books or seeking an exchange of views, and often even set up rules that prohibit such practices. It is ironic that right-brain-dominant women are much better equipped to lead religion than men are but are not allowed to.

**LGBTQ – The brain’s role in determining sexual orientation**

**Why do we need to understand the forces that determine our sexuality?**

The reason is it important that we understand the root causes of gender and sexual orientation is to quell the speculation that we can change who we are and stop the useless, divisive and destructive attempts to change people. If straight people understood that same-sex attraction is genetically determined and thus a normal part of the diversity of life, they would have no reason to try to change the sexuality of others to match their own. If they knew that gender was a function of the brain’s operating systems, they would understand that no one chooses who they are sexually attracted to, and their fear and opposition would be substantially lessened. It would usher in an end to gender wars.

**How did you discover that same-sex attraction was the result of a reversal in brain dominance, and would you explain what brain dominance reversal is?**

My discovery began as a result of preparing a table listing the functional characteristics of the two hemispheres. It soon became apparent that in most cases the left side gives us our masculine characteristics and that the right side gives us our feminine characteristics. Men tend to inherit a system in which the masculine left hemisphere is dominant. Most women experience a dominant feminine right hemisphere. But I knew that the two sides were sometimes reversed—as for example when women are directed by their masculine hemisphere with all of its masculine responses. This was the trigger that led me to discover the source of same-sex attraction. By dominance reversal I refer to a pattern of dominance that is the opposite of the prevailing pattern of dominance that most of us experience. When males inherit a dominant feminine system to inform them, and females inherit a dominant masculine system, I call this dominance reversal.

**Do you believe that sexual orientation can be changed?**

No. Genetic dominance determines our brain’s operating system, and from our brain’s operating system we acquire the characteristics that we associate with gender. I see no scientific evidence that we can change the dominance that genetic forces establish. Likewise, I see no compelling antidotal evidence that suggests we can change.

**What can you tell us about the diversity we see in the gay community, among gay males, for example?**

The same diversity that we see in the gay community also exists in the straight community, and for the same reason. Whether someone is an effeminate gay male or a masculine gay male, it’s the result of having two genders. This condition occurs because both the flow of information into the brain and the output thereof contribute to our experience of gender. As a consequence of this situation, whether we are gay or straight, we all have two experiences with gender, although when both genders are the same, it’s much like having one gender. As a consequence, the differing effects of information input and output on gender has largely gone unrecognized.