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"I see the ellipsoid from inside" : responses from Galton's 1880 questionnaire on the faculty of visualising

Between November 1879 and April 1880, Francis Galton circulated a questionnaire on Mental Imagery to colleagues, schools, professional societies, and journal contributors. He received responses from 107 men, 180 women, and hundreds of schoolchildren. Galton restricted his statistical analysis and publications to the results from 100 men ("at least half of whom are distinguished in science or in other fields of intellectual work") and 172 boys from the Charterhouse School.

Among the women whose responses were consigned to the obscurity of a few vaguely qualitative remarks were Charlotte Angas Scott and Constance Herschel, fellow students at Girton College in Cambridge, who would both become resident lecturers there. Their responses and accompanying letters to Galton have been preserved and digitized by the University College London Digital Collections alongside all of Galton's surviving correspondence on Mental Imagery.

This talk will situate the responses from Scott and Herschel on the imagery of geometry and numerals with respect to their mathematical training and popular perceptions (including Galton's) of sex differences in imagery and abstract thought.