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DELUSIONS OF GENDER

How Our Minds, Society, and Neuroscience Create Differences  
CORDELIA FINE

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## IS SCIENTISM SERVING SEXISM EVEN TODAY? YES! SAY THE INSTIGATORS OF A BRAIN BACKLASH

"Keep your hardwires out of my brain!" say two scholars in new books about how men and women think and behave. In recent years, MRI technology and advances in our understanding of fetal development have fueled the theory that even before we're born, boys and girls are set on divergent mental trajectories. Boys' craniums "marinate in testosterone" at a key stage in the womb, in the memorable phrase of Luann Brizendine, MD, who wrote *The Female Brain* and *The Male Brain* and founded and directs the Women's Mood and Hormone Clinic at the University of California at San Francisco. Thenceforth, it would seem, men are more or less doomed to emotional unintelligence and blind to the hideousness of combining stripes and polka dots.

Fiddlesticks, concludes Australian academic psychologist Cordelia Fine, whose *Delusions of Gender* (Norton) is an admirably fluent review of a gazillion brain-science studies. Barnard College sociomedical scientist Rebecca M. Jordan-Young goes deeper into the weeds in *Brain Storm* (Harvard), a formidably technical analysis of the research program of the whole field of "brain organization theory." Both Fine and Jordan-Young find that culture, socialization, and pervasively gendered expectations decisively shape all the stereotypical behaviors that Brizendine and her confederates dubiously attribute to the hormones and hardwired cells in our heads. Social Darwinism in its time exploited the popular understanding of natural selection to excuse and justify social inequalities as

resulting from "the survival of the fittest." Just so, writes Jordan-Young, "Brain organization theory is little more than an elaboration of long-standing folktales about antagonistic male and female essences." So let the cage match begin, and may the best, er, person win.—B.D.

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