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**Brains on toast: the inexact
science of gender**

Joyan Saunders and Liss Platt

This experimental videotape presents a humorous examination of scientific theories about gender and sexuality. The cast of eight characters (a professor and her students) grapples with past and present research data on brains, hormones, reproduction and private parts. They discover a legacy of tainted evidence revealing several generations of scientists on a hell-bent mission to create and exaggerate differences between male and female anatomy and cognitive function. The tape digs up a storehouse of suppressed evidence which demonstrates that these biological distinctions are highly ambiguous and frequently non-existent. Throughout the narrative, man-on-the-street interviews are intercut with other scenes, including a bullfight, a dinner party with brains as the main course, and a nightmare sequence which finds the professor in bed with her entire class.

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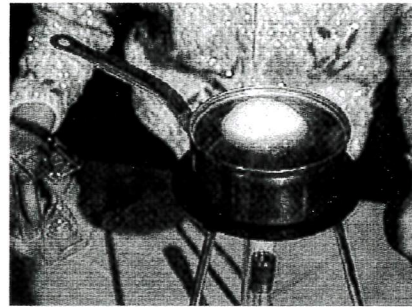
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During the Victorian era scientists believed that a woman's reproductive system had a debilitating effect on her brain. It was said that menstruation, childbearing, and breastfeeding literally drained the brain of blood and other vital juices. If a woman chose to defy nature and exercise her brain, she would reverse this natural flow . . .

Blood would travel upstream
from her uterus to her head . . .

Her mind could only be nurtured at the expense of her fertility. OK, that was then and this is now. Now we know better than that, but still we're haunted by the specter of infertility, and now it's called an epidemic. Surely this isn't just a replay of tired old Victorian notions . . . Well, let's try to visualize the contemporary problem lady. I, I think it's me, an ambitious well-educated woman whose



ovaries and eggs

have been atrophied by the physical and mental demands of her high stress career. Gee, I guess you do have to break a few eggs to make an omelet. But wait a minute, we've been down this road before, and now it is time to ask, what's wrong with this picture . . .



Low sperm count

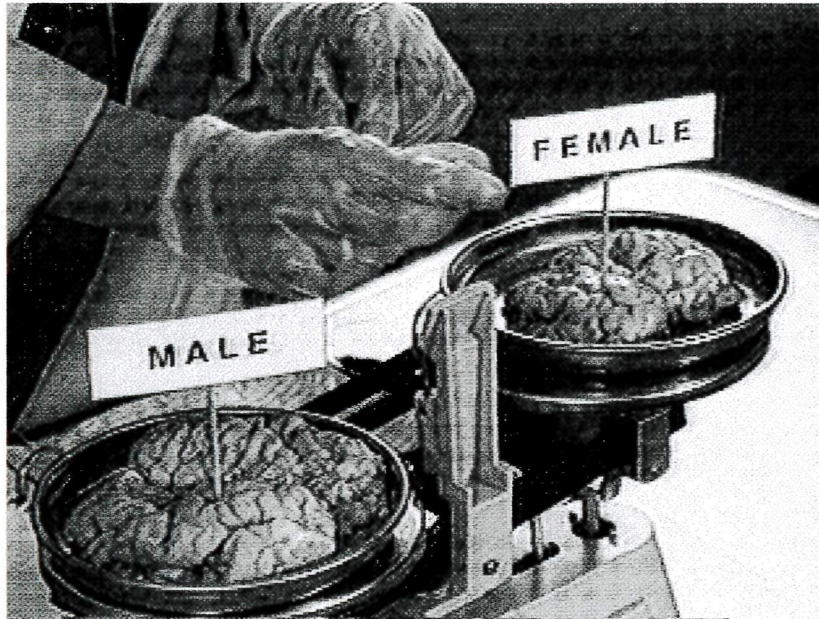
is a principal cause of infertility – the average man's count has fallen from 200 million sperm per millimeter in the 1940s to between



40 and 70 million in the 1980s.

In the 1850s craniologists

were weighing brains and they discovered that women's brains are generally smaller than men's . . . bigger was better, even then, and the researchers concluded that this made men intellectually superior to women . . .



But what about elephants and whales?

They eventually figured out that elephants do have bigger brains than men, and this became known as the

Elephant problem

It was replaced by another formula that calculated brain weight in relation to overall body weight. With this new-fangled method it could be shown that a man was indeed smarter than an elephant after all . . . Unfortunately this formula had to be jettisoned when it became apparent that

Relative to their body weight, women have bigger brains than elephants

and men.

I want to tell you a true story about a perfectly normal baby boy who lost his penis at seven months old. The baby boy and his identical twin brother were taken to the doctor for circumcision. The doctor

over-juiced the current



on the electric cauterizing tool and cooked the penis of the first baby boy. Shortly thereafter it sloughed off like an umbilical cord. The parents consulted a plastic surgeon who recommended that the boy be

reassigned as a girl.

That's when he was taken to Dr John Money. When the boy was 17 months old he was given a change of name, clothing, and hairstyle. At 21 months old his testicles were removed and the genital area was reworked into a female appearance. Money periodically consulted the mother to check on

the child's progress . . . The boy became a

perfect

little girl . . .

"You want me to tell you how we made the change-over from her being a boy to being a girl. OK, well, at the outset I started dressing her not in dresses, but, you know, in



little pink slacks and frilly lacy blouses,

things like that. And I let her hair grow, and later on I made all her night-wear into granny gowns. Now she wears bracelets, and she likes for me to wipe her face. She can't stand to be dirty, and her twin brother is so different. I can't wash his face for anything. She seems to be daintier, maybe it's because I encourage it. One thing that really amazes me is that

she's so feminine . . ."

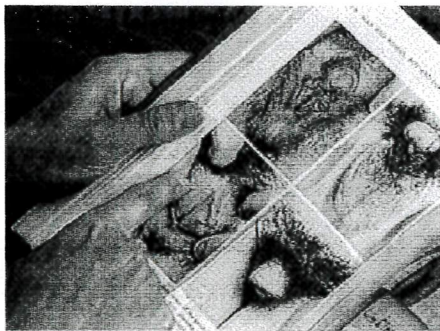
There are persistent rumors

that Kim Novak is a biological male who was raised as a female because he/she was born without the . . .



standard male equipment.

This guy, John Money, is a psychologist who did studies in the 1960s on girls who were born with masculinized genitals because they were exposed to



high levels of androgens while they were still in the womb . . . They had enlarged clitorises, fused labia, things like that. Some of them were mistaken for boys. After their

condition was diagnosed

they were operated on, and this is usually described in really euphemistic terms, like the genital tissue was rearranged into a female appearance . . .

In most cases the operation is more like surgical castration and nothing is left of the clitoris that looked

too much like a penis.