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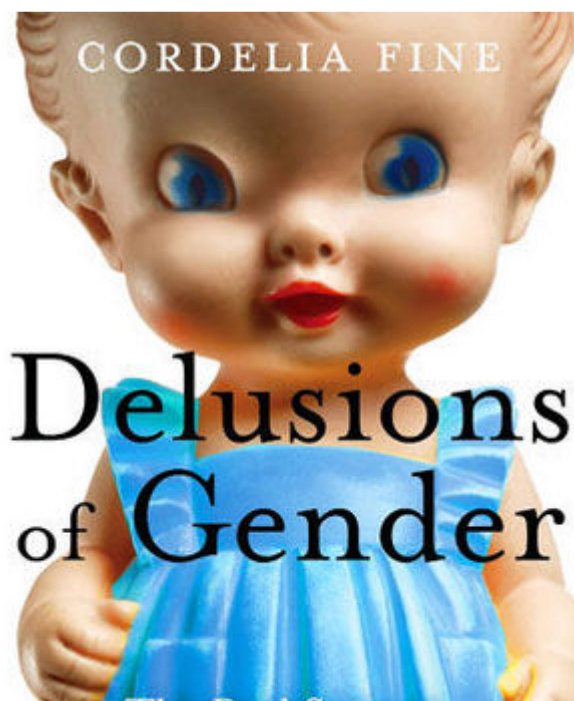
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Book review: Delusions of Gender

GEMMA NISBETT, The West Australian
November 2, 2010, 7:00 am



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Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences

Cordelia Fine

Icon Books, \$29.99

Three years ago, academic psychologist and writer Dr Cordelia Fine discovered her son's kindergarten teacher was reading a book that claimed the little boy's brain, being male, was unable to forge connections between emotions and language. As someone who knows a thing or two about neuroscience - she had published her first book, the widely acclaimed *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*, not long before - Fine was sceptical and presumably concerned that someone so influential in her son's development might believe he was incapable of verbally expressing emotions. And so the concept for her latest book was born.

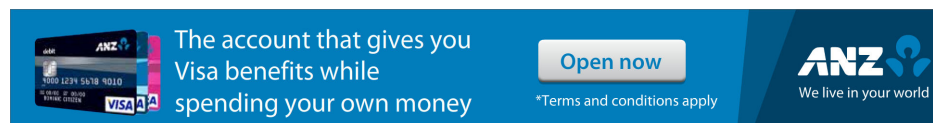
Delusions of Gender tackles the pervasive idea that male and female brains are "hard-wired" differently, accounting for everything from why women are supposedly better empathisers or more inclined to do housework than men, to the reason that females are under-represented in many traditionally masculine careers. And while this idea provides a convenient scapegoat in explaining continuing gender inequalities, Fine makes a

convincing case that it is simply not true.

Instead she suggests that this is just the latest in a long line of pseudoscientific means of "locating the cause of inequality in some internal limitation of women". Fine argues that our brains are not hard-wired like computers but are extraordinarily malleable, shaped by an often-subtle process of enculturation that may begin even in the womb, as well as by our genes and sex. Furthermore, the sheer complexity of the brain - and scientists' as-yet incomplete understanding of it - means interpreting the sex differences that do exist remains very tricky. "We can't assume that even quite substantial sex differences in the brain imply sex differences in the mind," she writes.

Fine pulls no punches, attacking the dodgy science and "neurosexism" of everyone from university professors to writers of popular self-help books with a zeal that recalls Bad Science author Ben Goldacre. Lashings of wit ensure that the book is eminently readable, despite the complex subject matter, and Fine's passion is both obvious and infectious: "No, really, no need to thank me. I do this for fun," she assures the reader at one point. As a result, this important book is as enjoyable as it is timely and interesting.

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