

Formic gender disorder

Divide and conquer.

Barrington J. Bayley

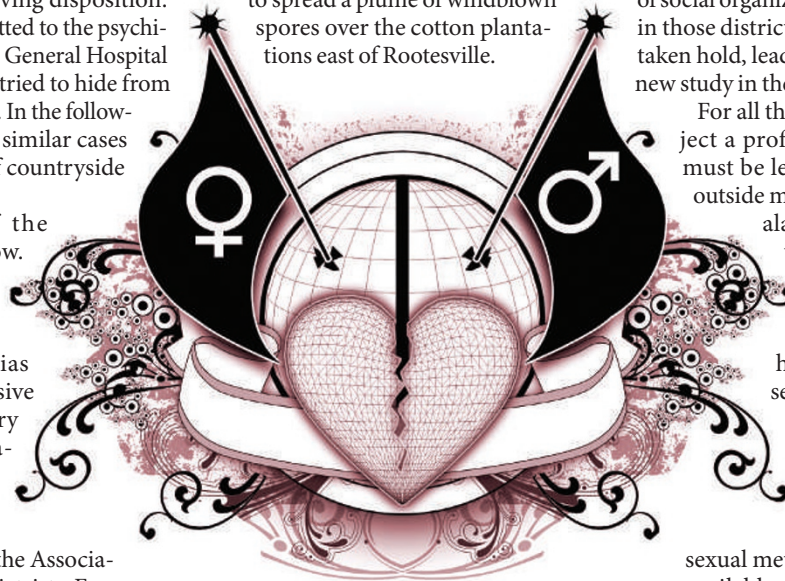
The waywardly named formic gender disorder (FGD) is the foremost of a growing number of ailments some physicians still refuse to recognize. *The Encyclopaedia of Psychocentric Dysfunctions*, compiled by Hortense Constantia, MD, in 2025, lists it alongside other disorders dismissed as imaginary. The first case to come to attention was that of Hattie Jacquiefs, a 45-year-old housewife of Rootesville, Louisiana, who in 2022 ran screaming from her house in terror of her husband, a man of known placid and loving disposition. Mrs Jacquiefs was admitted to the psychiatric ward of Rootesville General Hospital where she cowered and tried to hide from certain members of staff. In the following months a cluster of similar cases occurred in a swathe of countryside to the east of the town.

Determination of the aetiology has been slow. Initially investigation was psychiatric and the condition classified alongside other phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Moves to carry out physical examinations were delayed by political objections, particularly on the part of a feminist faction in the Association of American Psychiatrists. Even now sufferers universally withhold consent to microbial studies. Only after some years was the disorder dignified with a diagnosis of somatic pathology as the view gradually began to prevail that it is a fungal infection of the nervous system. Relevant references are appended.

Federal authorities have now been forced to admit that an eastern suburb of Rootesville is home to the Canine and Feline Accidental Injuries Statistical Institute (CFAISI), a clandestine micropathology research laboratory funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The laboratory had for 20 years been studying a nervous disease affecting the solitary stink ant, a denizen of the Western Cameroons. Occasionally the stink ant breathes in the spores of a fungus, which then grows inside its body, attacks its brain and controls its behaviour. Under the influence of the fungus the stink ant, for the first time in its life, climbs the stem of a plant, sinks its mandibles into it and clings there until it is consumed by the fun-

gus, having gained sufficient height from which to spread fresh spores.

A behaviour-controlling infectious disease has obvious political value. Formic gender disorder was named in honour of the African solitary stink ant by Doctors Humbold Gresgud and Ebenezer Schwartz, both workers at the CFAISI. The initial swathe of infection did, it is true, radiate from a point coinciding with the location of the institute, and the laboratory where Doctors Gresgud and Schwartz pursued their research is situated on the tenth floor of the building, an ideal height from which to spread a plume of windblown spores over the cotton plantations east of Rootesville.



A comprehensive history of the disease should mention that Doctors Gresgud and Schwartz were allegedly infamous for their unbending misogyny. It should also be stated that they both vehemently denied being responsible for the epidemic, claiming that they merely identified the cause of the disease where other medical laboratories had failed. Both refused to voice any sympathy for the epidemic's victims.

Symptoms are insidious at onset, but progressive. The early phase resembles Tourette's syndrome, the patient being unable to refrain from outbursts of extravagant language. Male sufferers first mutter then shout with increasing frequency: "Fie, fie, fickle female!" Female victims in similar manner splutter: "Bastards! Bastards! Bastards!" The preliminary phase typically lasts three days. A vehement revulsion for the opposite sex then sets in, both psychologically and physically, developing in not less than 48 hours into a dread which equals the intensity of rabid hydrophobia.

Once the early phases are gone through sufferers are able to function normally provided they meet with no visual, auditory, olfactory or verbal stimuli reminding them of the opposite sex.

The disorder has defied attempts at treatment. Segregation of sufferers is the only recourse. The rapid spread of the disease is surprising. It can be transmitted by skin contact, sneezing or even by breathing heavily in the same room. It also comes as a surprise that the sexual link binding the male and female sides of the human race can be so drastically severed. New forms of social organization have perforce arisen in those districts where the epidemic has taken hold, leading to the emergence of a new study in the field of sociology.

For all that, it is necessary to interject a professional note. Criticism must be levelled at those who step outside medical bounds and spread alarmist prognoses, stating that should it come about that males and females no longer reproduce in partnership they are henceforth, by definition, separate species; predicting the division of the planet into male and female hemispheres, and so forth. It is admittedly fortuitous that non-sexual methods of reproduction are now available. But it should be stressed that medical science has faced greater challenges than simple gender phobia before now. If formic gender disorder introduces any novelty into the medical record it is that this is the first contagious disease in history whose sufferers unanimously proclaim it an inestimable boon to humankind.

References

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Barrington J. Bayley's science-fiction production spans half a century. The novels *The Soul of the Robot*, *The Fall of Chronopolis* and *The Zen Gun* are typical of his work.

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