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News reporting of scientific understandings of “baby brain”

Outline of presentation

Historical
context of
baby brain

News
reporting
on baby
brain

Types of evidence

Use of anecdotes

Privileging of hormonal explanations for baby brain

Historical context of baby brain

- Hysteria
- The dangers of educating women
- Phrenology



Types of news reporting on baby brain

Baby brain is a
myth

(55 articles)

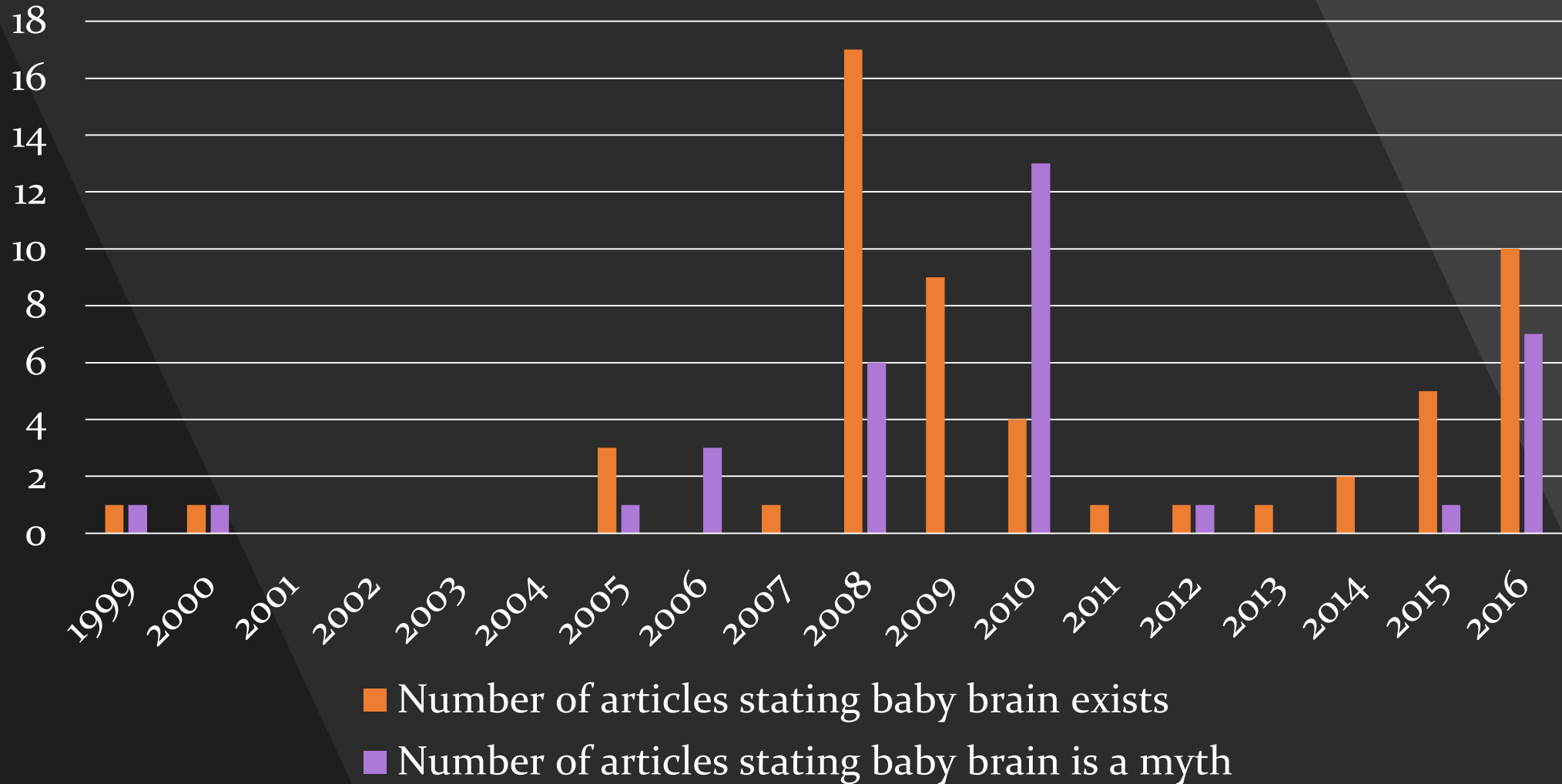
Baby brain is
real

(32 articles)

Baby brain is
an asset

(37 articles)

News reporting for and against baby brain



Anecdotes supporting baby brain

“I'll bet Professor Christensen's subjects had no sooner returned to their cars than they found themselves lost in contemplation of childcare options, while attempting to feed the lipstick into the ignition.” (Lewis 2010)

“When asked whether she had washed fish on the auto cycle with rinse aid in her days before children, Mrs W refused to comment, instead flinging a fillet of salmon at the questioner's head, leading to suspicions that important neurons had short-circuited in the brain and she was confusing fish with frisbee. I resolved to take video footage next time and send it to the ANU researchers.” (Webster 2010)

Conclusions

Australian news reporting on baby brain promotes the existence of the phenomenon

Hormones are emphasised as a likely mechanism for baby brain

Baby brain ideology occurs in the tradition of earlier scientific attempts to promote and explain women's suitability for child-rearing at the expense of intelligence