THE POLITICAL DOWNPLAY OF EVOLVED PSYCHOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES: 1980-2010

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To my dad for passing along his love of history, and to my stepdad for teaching me that history is not always what it seems.

Short Abstract

This dissertation explores the rise of evolutionary psychology—as both an academic discipline and a topic of heated public debate—within the United States from 1980 to 2010. Spearheaded by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, this subdiscipline of psychology claimed that human behavior was heavily influenced by natural selection, and its popularity fueled—and was fueled by—countless newspaper articles, magazine features, and best-selling books. The field's journey from the minds of Cosmides and Tooby to the homes of millions of curious Americans was riddled with hostility, however. I argue that evolutionary psychology's founders and advocates in the press faced elevated levels of pushback and criticism from their fellow scientists and public intellectuals; not because their methods or data were being legitimately questioned, but because the field's conclusions regarding the more sinister elements of human behavior were viewed as a threat to society.

This "downplay" was largely political for two reasons: First, it was "politically correct" in that it sought to dismiss legitimate explanations of human behavior that could reinforce harmful stereotypes or lead to violence. Second, it was predicated on a blind loyalty to an ideological team—the progressive Left—which was under pressure to adhere to a new set of social guidelines stemming from the rise of multiculturalist rhetoric and relativistic anthropology. These two motivations operated in tandem in order to stop the spread of potentially dangerous ideas.

Historians who have examined the modern Left's rare yet notable rejections of evolutionary science have tended to focus on the radicalizing influence of Marxist thought, which spread through American universities in the 1960s and '70s. These histories have also focused specifically on the impact of Marxist science within the context of the sociobiology debates that played out in the 1970s, and the "science wars" that took place in the '90s. Little attention has been paid to the wider downplay of scientific theories that pointed to the existence of an evolved mind, which was driven more by an entrenched fear of public misappropriation than by a sincerely held and Marxist-driven belief that the science itself was flawed.

Long Abstract

This dissertation explores the rise of evolutionary psychology—as both an academic discipline and a topic of heated public debate—within the United States from 1980 to 2010. Spearheaded by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, this subdiscipline of psychology claimed that human behavior was heavily influenced by natural selection, and its popularity fueled—and was fueled by—countless newspaper articles, magazine features, and best-selling books. The field's journey from the minds of Cosmides and Tooby to the homes of millions of curious Americans was riddled with hostility, however. I argue that evolutionary psychology's founders and advocates in the press faced elevated levels of pushback and criticism from their fellow scientists and public intellectuals; not because their methods or data were being legitimately questioned, but because the field's conclusions regarding the more sinister elements of human behavior were viewed as a threat to society.

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The downplay of evolved psychology can only be fully understood within the context of a dramatic increase in popular science literature, whose reliance on generalization and simplification fueled public confusion and subsequently forced left-leaning scientists to overcorrect. This dissertation therefore examines the public-facing rhetoric of those who championed and dismissed theories of an evolved mind, by looking at popular newspaper and magazine articles alongside the formal academic publications that informed them.

Five Themes

The fear-driven political downplay of evolved psychology revolved around five general categories of human behavior, each of which is the subject of its own chapter: the divergent interests of men and women, sex-linked mating strategies, cohabitation and parenting, violence, and prejudice.

Chapter One—Men & Women—focuses on the downplay of evolutionary theories pertaining to the general differences in temperament between men and women, much of which stemmed more from bad reporting than bad science. Evolutionary scientists believed that men and women had evolved differences in temperament, and that these differences transcended the

impact of culture. Natural selection was at play every time a man threw a punch or placed a risky bet, they argued, just as its presence could be felt whenever a woman chose to focus her energies on people rather than things. These sex-linked proclivities could be altered through environmental manipulation, but they were not entirely immutable. The press, eager to capitalize on America's thirst for intersexual drama, took these rather anodyne conclusions and sensationalized them through strained metaphors and misleading headlines, which led Americans to believe that the differences between the sexes were larger and less malleable than the science claimed. Concerned scientists felt obligated to enter the fray in order to set the record straight, but they too were operating within a headline-driven media machine that prioritized brevity over nuance, and would therefore frequently resort to the types of broad generalizations they were attempting to counter. This vicious cycle grew more pronounced as the adaptationists narrowed their focus to the biology behind women's underrepresentation in STEM fields, and "Darwinian feminists" who refused to toe the constructionist line were regarded as traitors to the cause.

Chapter Two—Mating Strategies—shifts focus to the divergent mating strategies of men and women, whose competing courtship rituals could be explained just as much by nature as they could by Western nurture. A virtually endless supply of sperm had driven men to be more promiscuous than women, whose relatively limited supply of eggs had incentivized them to prioritize quality over quantity in their pursuit of a mate—thus the persistent stereotype of the sexually-aggressive man "chasing" the coy woman. These were unpopular and potentially dangerous arguments to make at a time when the physical risks and repercussions of men's boorish behavior were being emphasized and debated in the news, and evolutionary explanations of male promiscuity were frequently dismissed and ridiculed as the wishful musings of opportunistic men eager to rationalize their own infidelities. Some on the Left who had instinctively rejected an evolutionary analysis of human sexuality quickly changed their tune, however, when scientists began discussing the biological foundations of homosexuality.

Chapter Three—Family Life—examines the Left's dismissal of evolutionary arguments pertaining to family dynamics, especially the volatile ways in which men and women interacted with each other and their children behind closed doors. Contrary to social constructionist dogma, marriage—along with the jealous violence and sex-based division of labor it tended to produce—was a universal and cross-cultural constant, which led evolutionary scientists to believe that its origins could be traced to an evolved instinct for monogamous pair bonding. These claims were downplayed and occasionally rejected by feminists and left-leaning social scientists, who had reason to believe that the biologicization of "traditional" family dynamics would give cover to conservative Republicans—many of whom appeared willing to suspend their rejection of evolutionary science as long as it could be used to promote a cultural agenda that kept women at home and out of the workplace.

Chapter Four—Violence—looks at the fear of public misappropriation that drove the Left to downplay evolutionary explanations of aggression and warfare. The unprecedented barbarity of two world wars had compelled a generation of behavioral scientists to forcefully and publicly reject the notion that violence and aggressive behavior were in any way "natural" elements of the human condition, despite the fact that this was provably false. Evolutionary psychologists who pushed back against these claims by pointing to the universality of everything from fist fights and murder to rape and genocide were painted as irresponsible fearmongers, whose focus on the evolved origins of violent behavior could be misconstrued as an attempt to offer excuses rather than explanations. Unusually high rates of violent crime, paired with the Right's history of

embracing racially-tinged deterministic rhetoric to explain its origins, only reinforced the divide between the adaptationists and the behaviorists on this front.

Chapter Five—Hate & Fear—focuses on how the resistance to evolved explanations of violence was tied to the idea that prejudice was socially constructed as well. In order to defend the claim that violence—whether it played out in small cities or between entire countries—was unnatural (and therefore correctable), the constructionists had to act as though it was the result of resource competition and nothing more. This made little sense given the ubiquity of aggressive conflict between communities that shared abundant resources, according to the evolutionists, who argued that much of the violence that played out on the world stage was instead the upshot of an evolved hatred and fear of the "other." Prejudice and xenophobia were believed to be byproducts of cognitive mechanisms that had evolved to facilitate the formation of coalitions, which would have necessitated the creation and exclusion of an out-group. Evolutionary psychologists also found, however, that humans were easily capable of re-categorizing the "other"—meaning that xenophobia was natural but racism was not. The news that racism and bigotry could potentially be eradicated through cultural conditioning should have been embraced in progressive circles, but any science that appeared to link bigotry to biology—even if it was to expose the weakness of the link—was treated as a threat to society.

The knee-jerk condemnations of evolutionary psychology and the adjacent fields with which it became associated by liberals were therefore not liberal at all. These were illiberal and inherently *conservative* moves, which sought to inhibit the spread of legitimate scientific knowledge for the same reason the Right had fought to keep evolution out of American schools: a fear of what this knowledge would bring. These actions and tactics did not reflect the principled stands of people with an authentic, competing ideology (as historians have suggested). Instead, they were the efforts of those who feared the implications of a science they knew to be correct. It was anxiety, rather than conviction, that drove the downplay of evolved psychology.

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Contents

Introduction 1

ONE: Men & Women 29

General Differences 35

Women in Science 52

TWO: Mating Strategies 67

Female Mating Strategies 73

Male Mating Strategies 86

Homosexuality 97

THREE: Family Life 112

Jealousy 117

Marriage and Parenting 132

FOUR: Violence 151

Aggression and Murder 156

War 169

Rape 179

FIVE: Hate & Fear 197

Prejudice 204

Conclusion 227

References 242

INTRODUCTION

Legend has it that when the Bishop of Worcester's wife, a contemporary of Darwin's, first heard about the theory of natural selection and its implication that man came from beast, she was less excited than she was concerned. "My dear, descended from the apes!" she howled. "Let us hope it is not true, but if it is, let us pray that it will not become generally known."[1] From 1980 to 2010, a similar concern was reflected in the public-facing discourse of a cadre of social scientists and left-leaning academics, who feared that a new and increasingly popular discipline known as evolutionary psychology (EP) was threatening the social fabric. Evolutionary psychologists studied the human mind using the same adaptationist lens through which evolutionary biologists had explored the development of the human body for decades, and their proposition was simple: Since behavior can be traced to the mind and the mind to the brain (which is an organ not unlike the heart or liver), human emotion and therefore behavior should be, at least to some extent, forged by evolution. Many of the field's critics, however, appeared to believe that evolution only applied from the neck down—leaving the brain and subsequently the mind untouched by the same environmental selection pressures that had manufactured every other element of the human animal over millions of years.

Much of the criticism came from respected evolutionary scientists and fell within the purview of boilerplate academic discourse. They took issue with the field's methodologies and its lack of testability and falsifiability in modern environments, the questionable existence of mental "modules" in the brain that had evolved to perform discrete tasks, and the validity of a single, homogenous ancestral environment—the Pleistocene—from which evolutionary psychologists extracted the lion's share of their hypotheses.[2] Another common line of attack was that evolutionary psychologists tended to conflate theory with speculation, and were therefore guilty of telling "just-so" stories about the origins of human nature—a reference to Rudyard Kipling's fables that offered children fanciful explanations for the development of phenotypic traits that were far too convenient to be true. For biologists like Jerry Coyne, evolutionary

[1] R. Leaky, R. Lewin, *Origins*, New York: E.P. Dutton (1977), p. 21. Similar quotes have been attributed to a variety of people within Darwin's orbit. Although the quote may be apocryphal, the sentiment was widely held among the religious elite.

[2] Scientists were averse to analyzing environments they could neither see nor manipulate. "We don't have a time machine," the ecologist Dr. Patricia Gowaty once pointed out. See: E. Goode, 'Human Nature: Born Or Made?', *The New York Times* [New York], (14 March, 2000), p. F1.

psychologists peddled the kinds of entertaining yet factually dubious tall tales that "evolutionists swap over a few beers at the faculty club" as opposed to lecture halls and journal articles. If "evolutionary biology is a soft science," Mr. Coyne claimed, then "evolutionary psychology is its flabby underbelly."[3]

Not all criticisms, however, were confined to skeptical evaluations of the field's methodology and feasibility. Many had nothing to do with the underlying science at all, and instead focused on its negative social implications along with the threat that EP posed to an entrenched model of human behavior rooted firmly in the social sciences. These critics were "not just skeptical, they are angry," wrote two prominent evolutionary psychologists in 2007, who believed this anger stemmed from "something other than a humble search for the truth."[4] In the words of another observer, although the "anti-EP dragon is slain repeatedly," it "always resurfaces, emboldened by its blind and prideful ignorance of the facts."[5]

There seemed to be a deeper, underlying impulse that drove the downplay of evolutionary psychology, which had less to do with ideas and more to do with emotion; less to do with concerns of scientific legitimacy and more to do with scientific liability. It was an impulse that prioritized identity—of both the scientist and the subject—over objectivity, and championed partisanship over the pursuit of universal truths. It was not a coincidence that the cries of disapproval grew louder when the evolutionists made claims regarding the origins of violence as opposed to the origins of altruism, or spoke of the evolved psychology that drove men to cheat on their wives as opposed to bonding with their child. This was not simply an attack on a new academic discipline, it was an attack on the very idea that human emotion had evolved through Darwinian selection at all.

The downplay of an evolved human psychology and the academic brand with which it became entangled—evolutionary psychology—was therefore largely political for two reasons: First, it was "politically correct" in that it sought to dismiss legitimate explanations of human behavior that could reinforce harmful stereotypes. Second, it was predicated on a blind loyalty to

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[3] J. A. Coyne, 'Of Vice and Men: The Fairy Tales of Evolutionary Psychology', *The New Republic* [Washington], (3 April, 2000), pp. 27-34.
[4] M. Daly and M. Wilson quoted in R. Kurzban, 'Grand challenges of evolutionary psychology', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1/3 (7 March, 2010).
[5] G. Saad, 'The Never-Ending Misconceptions About Evolutionary Psychology', *Psychology Today* [New York], (22 June, 2009).

an ideological team—the progressive Left—which was under pressure to adhere to a new set of social guidelines stemming from the rise of multiculturalist rhetoric and relativistic anthropology. These two political motivations operated in tandem in order to stop the spread of dangerous ideas.

This was a uniquely American phenomenon, which could have only unfolded the way it did in a country where the fragile social fabric of the 1980s and '90s—rooted in a variety of age-old tensions involving gender, race, and class—made candid discussions regarding this type of science particularly difficult. Social scientists felt an obligation to forcefully denounce any science that could be associated with or weaponized by right-leaning Republicans, whose track record of hijacking value-free science in order to promote conservative policies was enough to give even the most apolitical researchers pause. Evolutionary psychology's threat to the status quo of environmentalism and behaviorism was simply too destabilizing; its popularity among the public too dangerous; and its implications for social policy too ugly.

Forging a Discipline

The idea that natural selection played a role in human behavior was not new. In Ancient Greece, Plato argued in *Republic* that children often resembled their parents in both looks and temperament, and could therefore in theory be selectively bred for their minds as well as their bodies.[6] Centuries later, in the final pages of *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin predicted that "in the future…psychology will be securely based" on the "necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation," and that this foundation would shed "much light" on the "origin of man and his history."[7] Even Sigmund Freud was intrigued by the idea that Darwinian evolution had a hand in the development of certain mental disorders.[8]

The roots of evolutionary psychology as a unique academic discipline, however, can be traced to 1975, when Edward Wilson released *Sociobiology* and inadvertently upended decades of consensus regarding the origins of human behavior. Mr. Wilson was not a typical taboo-busting academic. Unlike other public intellectuals such as Steven Pinker or Charles Murray,

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[6] *Neurobehavioral Genetics: Methods and Applications* (2nd ed.), B. Jones, P. Mormede (eds.), Boca Raton: CRC Press (2006), p. 3.
[7] C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species* [*sic*], New York: P.F. Collier (1909), p. 527.
[8] G. Marcaggi, F. Guénolé, 'Freudarwin: Evolutionary Thinking as a Root of Psychoanalysis', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9/892 (19 June, 2018).

who seemed to relish the spotlight of public controversy, Wilson had spent most of his career studying ants. He was neither a psychologist nor a social scientist, and by all accounts was introverted almost to a fault.[9] He was not particularly interested in the evolution of human behavior, and had limited his published thoughts on the matter to a relatively small chapter at the end of his nearly seven-hundred-page tome, the rest of which dealt exclusively with animals.[10]

This brief chapter at the end of *Sociobiology*, however, was enough to disrupt and threaten an entire social science framework that had gone to great lengths to distinguish the psychology of man from that of the beast. Wilson's conclusions and phrasings were tame, and he offered no social prescriptions. He was nonetheless immediately and simultaneously derided as a racist and a sexist, who was committed to ushering in a renaissance of right-wing, hereditarianist social policies, much like those that had been popularized during the eugenics movement half a century earlier.

Even his supporters questioned whether these ideas—many of which had been quietly accepted by evolutionary scientists behind closed doors for years—should be made public. The anthropologist Sherwood Washburn of the University of California at Berkeley, for instance, believed Wilson, along with the growing number of sociobiologists who stood by his side, should be more "worried by their repetition," as they could so easily be associated with the "errors of the eugenicists, social Darwinists, or racists" of the recent past.[11] Evolutionary scientists who watched the drama unfold from their academic posts believed the public needed to be introduced to a new, less-threatening paradigm—one that highlighted the nuanced interplay between genes and environment and broke down the artificial barriers between nature and nurture that had come to define the debate between sociobiologists and social scientists. It was time for scientific centrism to become a bit more radical.

Founded by Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, Davis Buss, Margo Wilson, and Martin Daly, evolutionary psychology aimed to clean up the mess left in *Sociobiology*'s wake through the development of a "unifying meta-theoretical framework," which would bring evolutionary

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[9] L. E. Ottesen Kennair, 'Human Nature and the Limits of Blank Slateism', *Human Nature Review*, 2 (2002), pp. 483-91.
[10] E. O. Wilson, *Naturalist*, London: Allen Lane (1995), p. 332.
[11] Washburn quoted in C. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, New York: Oxford University Press (1991), p. 318.

theory into discussions of human nature while leaving ample space for the influence of environmental stimuli.[12] The academic paths of Cosmides, Tooby, Buss, Wilson, and Daly all converged at Harvard in the early 1980s, and during the field's infancy their conversations were confined to small intellectual circles and ad-hoc seminars in and around Cambridge. Their ideas soon began to develop and gain traction outside of Harvard, however, and David Buss was eventually elected as a fellow at the Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California, where he and a team of researchers—which eventually included Cosmides, Tooby, Daly, and Wilson—began putting their thoughts to paper and laying the official groundwork for a new discipline.[13]

It was not until 1992, when their ideas were synthesized through a collection of papers in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, that the field and its title became popularized. One of the book's primary goals was to push back against the "Standard Social Science Model" (SSSM) of human behavior—a term evolutionary psychologists coined in order to describe the overzealous and unyielding emphasis social scientists had placed on nurture rather than nature in their analysis of human behavior. The SSSM (which, according to Cosmides and Tooby, had "served for a century as the intellectual framework for the organization of psychology and the social sciences") had also provided the "intellectual justification for their claims of autonomy from the rest of science."[14]

It was this flawed model and its illegitimate claim to authority that was ultimately responsible for the lack of consilience that plagued the nature versus nurture debates, evolutionary psychologists claimed, and among its many sins was its power to generate a type of fearmongering that had inhibited value-free inquiries into the evolved origins of behavior. These intimidation tactics were problematic not only for scientists who wished to pursue knowledge for knowledge's sake, but for a society that was trying and failing to find answers to behavioral problems that seemed immune to social intervention. By falling victim to the naturalistic fallacy—in which "natural" is conflated with "good"—and performatively denying evolution's role in "bad" behaviors such as murder, sexism, hate, and rape, social scientists were making these problems worse, not better.[15]

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[12] D. Buss, 'The Great Struggles of Life', *American Psychologist*, 64/2 (February-March, 2009), pp. 140-8.
[13] D. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, Boston: Pearson Education (2004), p. xxi.
[14] *The Adapted Mind*, J. H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, J. Tooby (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press (1995), pp. 23-9.
[15] Ibid.

What was needed, according to evolutionary psychologists, was a new model of human behavior that accounted for the universality of human emotion across all cultures: the Integrated Causal Model (ICM). By harnessing the "natural connections that exist among all the branches of science," this new analytic structure would highlight the dynamic "interplay among all the factors that bear" on human emotion and behavior. The ICM was meant to bring the social sciences closer to the hard sciences through the simple acknowledgment that the human brain had been forged through natural selection, and had therefore evolved specialized mechanisms (often referred to as "modules") that were called upon to navigate a wide range of human predicaments related to mate selection, family protection, and food acquisition. To argue against the existence of an evolved mind, evolutionary psychologists challenged, was to argue against the very notion of Darwinian evolution itself, and to make the rather absurd claim that the universality of human behavior observed throughout cultures separated by vast amounts of time and space was merely a grand coincidence.[16]

In addition to replacing the SSSM with the ICM, evolutionary psychologists hoped *The Adapted Mind* would "introduce the newly crystallizing field of evolutionary psychology to a wider scientific audience,"[17] and therefore enrich the ongoing "cognitive revolution" that had been on a steady march to unite the previously disparate fields of psychology, anthropology, and neuroscience since the 1950s.[18] Another goal was to show how this new model, by "focusing on the evolved information-processing mechanisms that comprise the human mind," was the elusive missing link between "evolutionary biology and the complex, irreducible social and cultural phenomena studied by anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and historians." Evolutionary psychologists believed their central argument—that human nature is real and therefore universal—was as unthreatening as it was reasonable.[19]

To its founders, EP was part of a revolution already under way, in which the needlessly rigid dichotomies between genes and culture were already beginning to crumble.[20] Although evolutionary psychology was technically a new discipline, it relied on the same methods of investigation and analysis that mainstream psychologists had used to test their hypotheses for

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[16] Ibid.
[17] *The Adapted Mind*, p. 3.
[18] G. A. Miller, 'The Cognitive Revolution: A Historical Perspective', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7/3 (March, 2003), pp. 141-4.
[19] *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 3-5.
[20] Ibid.

years, including laboratory experiments, questionnaires, genetic analysis, and brain imaging technology. What set evolutionary psychologists apart, however, was their introduction of methods and tools that allowed them to focus on the universality of human behavior through cross-cultural analysis, which included ethnographic records, archeological artifacts, and paleontological data.[21]

For left-leaning behaviorists and social scientists who feared the impact this dangerous new science would have on an impressionable public, however, evolutionary psychology was not simply a new player for the opposing team—it was a new and far more threatening team that was poised to demolish the premise of infinite behavioral malleability, and with it the promise of social harmony.

Left and Right

America's political parties and the ideologies with which they were associated had shifted and realigned multiple times since the birth of the party system at the turn of the 19th century, but by 1980 the country's two dominant parties—the Democrats and the Republicans—had coalesced around a series of ideological and moral tenets that defined their politics and shaped their debates. Generally speaking, Democrats were aligned with a liberal, left-leaning ideology that stood for civil rights, social progress, and the advancement of science over religion, while Republicans were aligned with a conservative, right-leaning ideology that was wary of social progress and prioritized religion over science.

The divide between the Left and Right on matters of social justice and equality was especially pronounced in the 1990s, when, as Gary Gerstle has noted, the American Left was "cosmopolitan, open to the liberation movements," and "looking for new ways of creating a new and diverse America." The American Right, on the other hand, wanted to "reassert the patriarchal, heterosexual family," by encouraging men to work and women to stay home.[22] The Right that began to emerge in the late '70s and early '80s was also known for its "political militancy" on social issues that included "women's rights, abortion, and homosexuality," as

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[21] D. Buss et al., 'Evolutionary Psychology: Controversies, Questions, Prospects, and Limitations', *American Psychologist*, 65/2 (February-March, 2010), p. 112.
[22] E. Klein, 'Are We on the Cusp of a New Political Order?', *The New York Times* [New York], (1 November, 2024), consulted online (4 December, 2024), https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/01/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-gary-gerstle.html.

Andrea Dworkin observed in 1993, along with its emphasis on the "importance of the authority of the husband and the androcentric church."[23]

An equally stark ideological divide separated the Left and Right regarding the existence of evolution through natural selection, and whether it should be taught in schools. The Right's rejection of evolutionary science was largely driven by a Christian belief in a creationist God,[24] and these beliefs were widespread and mainstream: The Republican president George W. Bush, for instance, argued in 2005 that "both sides" of the debate between the evolutionists and the creationists "out to be properly taught" in American schools, six years after the Kansas Board of Education eliminated all references to evolution in the state's science curriculum.[25] This wariness reflected a deeper distrust of science in general, and church-going conservatives were the least likely demographic to believe in the explanatory power of science between 1974 and 2010.[26]

Democrats consistently outnumbered Republicans in the United States between 1980 and 2010,[27] although this relatively moderate divide was dwarfed by the size of the gap between the parties within the nation's leading universities and scientific institutions, both of which skewed heavily to the left and subsequently incorporated liberal notions of social justice. "Left identity politics grew especially strong in the academy" during the late '80s and early '90s, wrote Jill Lepore in *These Truths*, "where to disagree with the distinctive status of someone belonging to a particular identity group was to violate what conservatives, in an allusion to Stalinism, like to deride as 'political correctness.'"[28,29] The Right's disdain for America's left-leaning institutions and the elite academics who powered them was famously illustrated by William F. Buckley, Jr.,

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[23] A. Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, New York: Lawrence Hill Books (1993), p. 191.
[24] A. Mazur, 'Believers and Disbelievers in Evolution', *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 23/2 (September, 2004), pp. 55-61.
[25] J. Wilgoren, 'Politicized Scholars Put Evolution on the Defensive', *The New York Times* [New York], (21 August, 2005), p. A1.
[26] G. Gauchat, 'Politicization of Science in the Public Sphere: A Study of Public Trust in the United States, 1974 to 2010', *American Sociological Review*, 77/2 (2012), pp. 167–187.
[27] 'Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014', Pew Research Center, (7 April, 2015), consulted online (16 April, 2024), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/feature/party-id-trend.
[28] J. Lepore, *These Truths*, New York: Norton (2019), p. 703.
[29] In 1991, President H.W. Bush became the highest-ranking public official to employ the term "political correctness" when he spoke of its oppressive power during a 1991 commencement address at the University of Michigan. "Although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred," President Bush said, "it replaces old prejudices with new ones." See: R. D. McFadden, 'Political Correctness: New Bias Test?', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 May, 1991), p. A32.

who once said that he would "rather be governed by the first 2,000 people in the Boston telephone directory than by the 2,000 people on the faculty of Harvard University."[30]

The Left's resistance to evolutionary psychology, paired with its attacks on the elite scientists who had developed and promoted the field within the nation's most respected—and most liberal—universities, therefore amounted to a drastic deviation from the norm, as the Left suspended the progressive, pro-science ideals on which its fight against the anti-science Right had been based for decades.

Histories

The American Left's rare yet notable rejections of modern science have been scrutinized before, most directly by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt in *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (1994), and most famously by Steven Pinker in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2002).

In *Higher Superstition*, Gross and Levitt focused primarily on the rise of multiculturalism and postmodernism, and the culture of "resentment" that these two entangled philosophies produced within academia at the expense of objectivity and scientific truth. They cast a wide net; detailing the various ways in which the "academic left dislikes science" in general, especially "the uses to which science is put by the political and economic forces controlling our society, especially in such areas as military hardware, surveillance of dissidents," along with "destructive and environmentally unsound industrial processes." *Higher Superstition* also ascribed much of the Left's resentment and rejection of science to the triumph of capitalism over communism, and the authors' "announced intention" was to "analyze and refute the critiques of science—its methods, assumptions, conclusions, and social aspects—that have arisen among left-wing scholars."[31]

In *The Blank Slate*, Pinker argued that the rigid behaviorist model of human behavior from which his book's title was derived had become "part of a secular faith," which was sincerely held by people who had been deceived into believing it was true.[32] Like Gross and

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[30] Interview with William F. Buckley, Jr., NBC News: *Meet the Press*, (11 July, 2004), transcript consulted online (10 October, 2024), https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna5409538.
[31] P. Gross and N. Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1994), p. 2, pp. 31-7.
[32] S. Pinker, *The Blank Slate, New York:* Penguin Press (2002), p. 421.

Levitt, Pinker focused on the ascent of multiculturalism and postmodernism, but his sights were more trained on the Marxist infiltration of scientific thought—specifically its hold on leading, "Marxist utopian" scientists like Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Lewontin, and Noam Chomsky, and their quarrels with famous sociobiologists like Edward Wilson. (Even B.F. Skinner was "ever the Maoist," according to Pinker.)[33] Pinker also concentrated mainly on the academic debates taking place behind the scenes, the vitriol of which he claimed stemmed almost entirely from the radicalization of a generation of scientists in the 1960s and '70s.

Both *Higher Superstition* and *The Blank Slate* therefore argued that the Left's selective distaste for scientific explanations of human behavior stemmed from a genuine belief in a multiculturalist, behaviorist model that was predicated on Marxist ideas.[34,35] The blank slate theory of mind was "so entrenched that many intellectuals cannot *comprehend* an alternative to it," Pinker wrote, "let alone argue about whether it is right or wrong [emphasis original]."[36]

There was another factor lurking behind this downplay, however, that had less to do with entrenched confusion and more to do with fear—specifically the fear that if an adaptationist model of the mind were to be embraced by the public, it would usher in an era of data-driven bigotry in which sexism, violence, and prejudice were all given a scientific stamp of approval.

This fear pervaded the public-facing discourse of not just card-carrying Marxists but less radical academics as well, and it was fueled by a sharp increase in the publication and dissemination of popular science books, magazines, and media. A massive expansion of popular science literature—in which books that covered topics from genetics and evolution to archeology and climate science were stocked next to best-selling novels—expanded America's knowledge base in profound ways. For the first time since the sociobiology debates, fascinating theories pertaining to the origins of human nature were being vocalized by scientists who also happened to be gifted and prolific writers, and they were writing specifically for a lay audience. Americans

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[33] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 246.
[34] Gross, Levitt, and Pinker were also scientists (a biologist, a mathematician, and a cognitive psychologist, respectively), and had therefore been part of the controversies they were describing—rendering them hardly impartial observers.
[35] The moral philosopher Peter Singer made the same case when he implored the Left to adopt a more Darwinian view of human behavior, by arguing that the "belief in the malleability of human nature" was an ideology and philosophy that "perpetuates the standard Marxist idea of Darwin for natural history and of Marx for human history." See: P. Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation*, New Haven: Yale University Press (2000), pp. 24-30.
[36] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 372.

whose education in genetics and psychology had terminated in high school or perhaps after an introductory college course suddenly had access to ideas that were usually confined to subscription-based academic journals. Popular science had never been more popular.

The popularization of behavioral science necessitated simplification, however, and magazine covers ranging from *Psychology Today* and *Discover* to *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* became saturated with juvenile headlines touting the all-powerful and unassailable gene,[37] as authors prioritized brevity over nuance in their treatment of the dynamic interplay between nature and nurture that had forged the human mind. These contortions generated dangerous misconceptions that required clarification, but many of the scientists who entered the fray in order to set the record straight succumbed to the same types of simplifications and generalizations that had created these distortions to begin with.

These books and magazines sold so well partly because they dealt with sex, in both senses of the word. It was difficult for even the most progressive authors to discuss established theories of evolved psychology without touching on gender differences, since a core tenet of evolutionary psychology and its adjacent disciplines was that males and females had evolved different and complementary temperaments that facilitated the survival of the gene. This meant that men and women were predisposed to inhabit different roles in society, and had developed radically different and oftentimes conflicting mating strategies that were responsible for a range of modern-day conflicts within and outside of the workplace. Evolutionary psychologists took pains to point out that these differences were not synonymous with superiority or inferiority, but these assurances failed to assuage fears that this new and increasingly popular science was little more than a right-ring plot to repress women. For a surging women's liberation movement riding high on theories of innate gender equality and cultural constructionism, evolutionary psychologists were delivering very unwelcome news.

Evolutionary explanations of violence and hate were similarly unwelcome among members of the Left, who feared that the American public would fail to separate reasons from excuses. Decades of irresponsible pseudoscience linking aggression to genes (and oftentimes by extension, race) had permanently soured progressives on the idea that violence and bigotry were

[37] Between 1980 and 2010, *Time* alone ran over thirty cover stories that dealt with the latest scientific trends in human psychology, most of which focused on the heritability of traits such as love, addiction, jealousy, risk-taking, hate, fear, happiness, ambition, and morality. See: The *Time* Vault: https://time.com/vault/subject/psychology.

anything more than a consequences of environmental circumstance and bad luck, which could be reduced or even eradicated through increased spending on social programs and the welfare state. The fact that conservatives often took the opposite stance (by claiming that violence and hate were inherited traits and therefore impervious to social engineering), only fueled the Left's desire to double down on their opposition to an evolutionary analysis of the world's greatest evils.

Literature Review

Although the conflict-ridden history of evolutionary psychology is most closely aligned with *Higher Superstition* and *The Blank Slate*, it sits within a wider body of scholarship related to the following themes in 20th century American history: sociobiology, science communication, science in public, multiculturalism, Cold War anxieties, Left-Right politics, and the Science Wars. Any historian of these topics would benefit from understanding the history of evolutionary psychology, whose subject matter and fraught popularization are deeply intertwined with these broader themes. EP rode sociobiology's wave and altered its public image; its widespread scrutiny reshaped the ways scientists fought over contested ideas in front of a wider audience; it sought to explain the types of evolutionary wiring that plagued multicultural cohabitation; its contentiousness helped prove that "dangerous" science could be dangerous without the menacing backdrop of the Cold War; its ability to alienate liberals and attract conservatives exposed the malleability of the Left-Right divide in America; and its popularity acted as a moral yardstick by which many of the adjacent debates that took place during the Science Wars were judged throughout the 1990s. This literature review therefore examines ten historical works that have served as foundational texts for the development of these themes—while illustrating how this dissertation either builds on or diverges from their overarching claims.

It would be impossible to write the history of evolutionary psychology without taking into account Ullica Segerstråle's *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond* (2000), in which Segerstråle argues that the heated battle over Edward Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975) was driven just as much by values and ethics as it was by facts and data. Wilson's flirtations with genetic determinism in humans alarmed a cohort of self-described Marxist scientists such as Richard Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould, who feared that such rhetoric—regardless of its intent—would curtail their work and

usher in a new era of race science in the United States and beyond. Segerstråle focuses mostly on the debates taking place behind the scenes—relying on close readings of academic texts (as well as their watered-down analogs in the popular press), along with extensive and intimate interviews with her subjects. By focusing on how an ill-defined search for "truth" undermined a commitment to traditional empiricism, Segerstråle shows how scientists like Lewontin and Gould were angling to produce a "scandal," and that they ultimately lacked a "good scientific alternative" to Wilson's most controversial claims.[38]

This dissertation seeks to pick up where Segerstråle left off in two ways: First, by lengthening the timeline from the late 1970s to 2010, it demonstrates how the struggle over the validity and moral implications of sociobiology reflected a deeper and more entrenched distrust of any evolutionary science that sought to explain human behavior. Evolutionary psychology—a direct offshoot of sociobiology—was subjected to similarly elevated levels of skepticism and scorn by those who feared its social implications, and much of this pushback came from people who were far less politically radical than Lewontin and Gould. Second, this dissertation borrows and expands on one of Segerstråle's main themes, by showing how the heightened publicity surrounding EP worked to alter its messaging, tone, and social impact in profound ways. The forced journalistic simplifications, petty squabbles, and name-calling that shaped the sociobiology debates did not end in the 1980s, and in fact grew more heated and pronounced as the 20th century drew to a close.

There are several key differences between *Defenders of the Truth* and this dissertation, however, the most significant being that the latter tells the story of a new science operating under a new mantle. This pivot introduces a new cast of characters with new motivations, and although the underlying "nature versus nurture" debate remains in place, the ideological context in which this debate takes place is markedly different. Little attention is paid to Marxist ideologies and the Cold War pressures that buoyed them, for instance, and even less is paid to "famous" scientists like Lewontin and Gould, whose aversion to studying the mind through an evolutionary lens has already been exhaustively documented by authors like Segerstråle. By analyzing the shared assumptions and dissents of less prominent academics and their advocates in the press, this dissertation shows how a resistance to EP was forged more by an entrenched and generalized

[38] U. Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000), p. 5.

resistance to biological explanations of human nature than by a single, volatile moment whose outcome rested on the passions of a handful of elite scientists.

The fact that the most heated exchanges surrounding EP took place almost entirely within the United States is also significant. Although primarily situated within America, *Defenders of the Truth* crosses the Atlantic by looking at prominent British sociobiologists and Wilson's "transatlantic comrade[s]-in-arms," like Richard Dawkins.[39] This dissertation focuses exclusively on the United States, where a distinctly contentious history of racial and gender politics heated the rhetoric and raised the stakes. If, as Segerstråle writes, *Defenders of the Truth* can be thought of as an "opera," which catalogues "individuals passionately believing in their causes, telling us in beautiful arias about their longings," and in which the "object of desire" is "not a woman, but Truth,"[40] evolutionary psychology's story can be thought of as an American *soap opera*—a modern melodrama packed with petty feuds and barbed dialogue that was more aligned with lowbrow public consumption than sober academic deliberation.

At their core, soap operas are about communication—their plot devices predicated on gossip, deception, and family dysfunction—and in many ways, the history of science communication is no different. This was especially true in the United States during the Cold War, when moral melodramas that catered to binary narratives of good versus evil dominated the news. In *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (2010), we see this dynamic unfold in real-time, as authors Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway show how a small cadre of scientists engaged in a series of deceptive rhetorical tactics meant to undermine well-established scientific consensuses concerning tobacco smoking and climate change, both of which were threatening corporate interests. By intentionally injecting uncertainty into the dialogue surrounding smoking and climate change, these rogue, meddling scientists were able to instill reasonable doubt in the minds of Americans for the sake of protecting corporate profits.[41]

By highlighting the nefarious distortion of established scientific consensuses at the hands of scientists angling for corporate payouts, Oreskes and Conway tap into a common theme in the

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[39] Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth*, p. 178.
[40] Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth*, p. 6.
[41] N. Oreskes, E. M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues From Tobacco Smoke to Global Warmin*g, New York: Bloomsbury Press (2011), Introduction.

history of modern science, in which scientists struggle to win over not only the minds of the public, but their hearts as well. Delivering polished data to the public is only half the battle, which can only be truly won once the scientist is able to also convince the layman that their intentions are pure. This dissertation checks and expands on this theme by arguing that American scientists have betrayed the public's trust by intentionally distorting and misrepresenting research *without any clear monetary objective*—that their goal was simply to shape a scientific narrative for the sake of protecting a fragile cultural fabric. Most of the scientists whose emotional broadsides against EP lacked a credible scientific alternative had no corporate backing or clear economic incentives, and were instead motivated by a genuine, almost altruistic desire to protect the public from the effects of a new, "dangerous" science. Unlike in *Merchants of Doubt*, the scientific denials and distortions in the pages that follow were deployed for the sake of the public, not profit.

This dissertation also confirms and expands on what Oreskes once referred to as the media's "attraction to conflict,"[42] and how this age-old attraction can foster an environment in which a statistically insignificant number of scientists with controversial opinions are afforded the same amount of time and attention as scientists whose opinions form an overwhelming consensus. Evolutionary psychologists wrestled with this phenomenon in two ways: First, when their more anodyne scientific conclusions were being attacked in the press by relatively unknown scientists (most of whom lacked expertise in behavioral science); and second, when discredited scientists would cloak themselves in the language of evolutionary psychology in order to advance racist and sexist doctrines that were not in line with the field's research, conclusions, or goals.

The media's conflict addiction played a significant role in the size and scope of the Science Wars as well, and in *Science Wars: The Battle over Knowledge and Reality* (2021), Steven Goldman traces the high-profile spats that took place among scientists and the public throughout the 1990s to a wider and more entrenched American problem: the average citizen is often ignorant not only of what science can do, but of what it is *designed* to do. This ignorance was on full display throughout the 1990s, when "criticism of science became openly hostile,

[42] N. Oreskes interviewed by BloomsburyUSA, YouTube, (uploaded 11 February, 2010) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1RyHTDycng (15 August, 2025).

together with criticism of Western culture generally," writes Goldman, who points out that both enterprises were roundly denounced as "sexist, racist, colonialist, homophobic, elitist, imperialist, and capitalist." The critics of Western science, he continues, "shared an anti-foundationalism—denying the possibility of objective criteria for knowledge, truth, and values."[43]

The pervasive overconfidence and hubris of condescending scientists contributed heavily to the public's distaste for expertise, according to Goldman. Scientific theories can "at most claim to be interpretations of empirical experience, justifiable on contingent grounds," he writes, and are therefore "not uniquely correct 'pictures' of reality."[44] Ignoring the "clear evidence of the history of science, scientists balk at the characterization of theories as 'merely' probable, transient interpretations of experience justified not by correspondence with reality but by some combination of explanatory power, predictive success, and technological applications."[45] The smug scientists in Goldman's story, in other words, created an environment in which the public's cynicism was justified. The well-documented flare-ups between these two camps in the 1990s were merely the culmination of decades of bad communication and scientific hubris—all of which was fueled by the proliferation of mass media and opportunistic journalism.

This dissertation expands on Goldman's primary claim, by arguing that although the battle lines he describes between science and the public certainly existed, a great deal of the vitriol aimed at behavioral scientists throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century came from their fellow academics. This infighting among scientists (many of whom would have theoretically belonged to the same "team" in *Science Wars*) was arguably more potent and damaging than anything the public could throw their way, since it politicized and undermined the entire scientific enterprise from within. Goldman does indeed detail the disagreements that took place among experts, but these disputes are treated largely as genuine disagreements over the role of science in a diverse and free society. These disputes, although certainly destabilizing, were frequently outweighed by the more existential battles among experts that played out in public, in which behavioral scientists began to question the legitimacy of their own work.

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[43] S. L. Goldman, *Science Wars: The Battle over Knowledge and Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2021), p. 243.
[44] Goldman, *Science Wars*, p. 252.
[45] Ibid.

Historians such as Jane Gregory and Steve Miller have shown how the communication of scientific ideas in public has both clarified and distorted the layman's perception of scientific authority, and in *Science in Public: Communication, Culture, and Credibility* (1998), Gregory and Miller aim to deliver a coherent "synthesis" of the history of science in public on a global scale. The "ideas of sociologists and communications researchers rub shoulders here with the promises of politicians and the hopes of educators," Gregory and Miller write. The "public are here, and so is science, in both their idealized and real-world guises. The book's scope is broad, but so is its subject."[46] *Science in Public* therefore amounts to a sweeping and measured survey that spans several continents, centuries, and scientific subjects, all within a single volume that highlights the "perspectives of scientists, historians, psychologists, sociologists, communications researchers, lay groups, and journalists."[47]

This dissertation is, by its very nature, far narrower in scope and more limited in sources, as it focuses specifically on the development and attempted segregation of a single and relatively niche scientific field. There are some noteworthy overlaps, however, between this dissertation's analysis of public science communication and one of the primary claims put forth by Gregory and Miller. In fact, the history of evolutionary psychology lends support to one of *Science in Public*'s most consequential and overarching arguments: Historians tend to rely too heavily on the "deficit model of public understanding of science," which "conceptualizes the lay mind as an empty bucket into which the facts of science can and should be poured," as Gregory and Miller put it.[48] As the anxiety-ridden battle over the legitimacy of EP confirms, the "public" is not made up of "blank slates or empty vessels—as minds in deficit that need scientific information in order to be replete," to borrow another definition from Gregory and Miller.[49] Instead, the public consists of people for whom scientific information is largely inseparable from preexisting (and often deeply held) convictions and biases.

This dissertation diverges from *Science in Public*, however, in its analysis of the motivations of scientists who seek to popularize their field. For Gregory and Miller, the popularization of science is often linked to a lack of institutional affiliation: "Scientists often turn

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[46] J. Gregory, S. Miller, *Science in Public: Communication, Culture, and Credibility*, New York: Basic Books (1998), p. ii.
[47] Gregory, Miller, *Science in Public*, p. ii.
[48] Gregory, Miller, *Science in Public*, p. 164.
[49] Gregory, Miller, *Science in Public*, p. 31.

to popularization when their institutional links are weak," they write. "In a field that is poorly institutionalized (perhaps because it is new, or because of rapid or radical conceptual change), security and rewards are hard to find, and scientists may look to popularization to provide these."[50] Gregory and Miller arrive at this conclusion after having researched a wide range of scientific movements and counter movements, and this rule may indeed hold true with an adequately large sample size. Most evolutionary psychologists, however, despite their field being "poorly institutionalized," were perfectly content working in relative obscurity, and the rare EP who was eager to popularize the field seemed all too aware that their work would yield neither security nor rewards. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides were especially averse to the spotlight, having seen what it had done to the work and reputation of their friend, Edward Wilson.

Another historian who looks at the history of science in public (and subsequently the public's perception of scientific authority) is Andrew Jewett, whose book, *Science Under Fire* (2020), charts a century's worth of history in which scientific authority has been repeatedly checked and thwarted by "political and cultural barriers." Although Jewett places an emphasis on science's "cultural influence through the seismic shifts of the 1960s and 1970s and into the culture wars of the late twentieth century,"[51] *Science Under Fire* tells a broader tale of widespread and rampant populist distrust, which touches on everything from the more familiar instances of religious, evangelical skepticism to the more secular, left-leaning campaigns against elite scientific authority. Politics aside, society's lingering disdain for scientific authority—along with its subsequent hesitance to accept scientific "truths"—is an inescapable element of practicing science in a democracy, Jewett argues. Historians who dismiss these movements as little more than the ignorant whims of an uninformed public do themselves a disservice, since populist forces have repeatedly acted—for better or for worse—as legitimate checks on rapid and reckless scientific advancement, much of which has been viewed by the average citizen as a threat to traditional values.

Since Jewett is working his way through several decades of anti-science ideology, he inevitably pays more attention to the American Right than the Left—specifically the Christian Right, which has consistently "targeted myriad scientific theories and innovations as part of its

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[50] Gregory, Miller, *Science in Public*, pp. 156-7.
[51] A. Jewett, *Science Under Fire: Challenges to Scientific Authority in Modern America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2020), p. 8.

'culture war' against modern liberalism."[52] As Jewett notes, however, "it is not just conservatives who question scientific authority in the United States," and "alarm at many applications of biological research, for example, crosses party lines."[53] Beginning in the 1960s and '70s, he writes, "Left critics now joined conservatives in arguing that scientism represented the characteristic ideology of a ruling elite." Yet these critics tended to identify science as a "bulwark of traditional social norms, not a corrosive threat to such norms," according to Jewett, who claims they "increasingly argued that science's cultural influence buttressed social inequalities, keeping favored groups in power and others down." In the 1970s, "left-leaning critics also ascribed pernicious effects to biology as well as the social sciences. Here, the target of criticism was not science's morally relativistic character but rather its entanglement with assertions of innate group differences."[54]

This dissertation complements Jewett's analysis in that it underscores the distrust that existed between the American Left and science's "entanglement with assertions of innate group differences." The script, however, is somewhat flipped: Evolutionary psychology's story is one in which an apprehensive scientific community *distrusts the public*, where enthusiasm for a new, "sexy" science masks the layman's inability to grasp the important details of a scientific discipline predicated on the complex interplay of genes and environment. While Jewett focuses on the public's rebellion against scientific expertise, this dissertation shows that many in the public in fact placed inordinate trust in a new discipline that often seemed to validate their baser impulses.

One such baser impulse was the drive to discriminate based on race and ethnicity. Evolutionary psychology's ascent coincided with high levels of non-white immigration to the United States, and as a result its founders and followers found themselves in the middle of a heated debate over belonging, nationhood, and the merits of pluralism versus ethnic homogeneity. No history of these debates would be complete without Gary Gerstle's *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (2001), which argues that America's promise of social and political equality has repeatedly chafed against the reality of racial

[52] Jewett, *Science Under Fire*, p. 2.
[53] Jewett, *Science Under Fire*, pp. 1-2.
[54] Jewett, *Science Under Fire*, p. 15.

segregation and ethnic hierarchies, even as social movements and institutions (such as wartime patriotism and labor unions) dealt significant blows to racial and economic inequality. Gerstle argues that in an ethnically and intellectually diverse nation of laws, such movements naturally ebb and flow. "The people living within a set of national borders are never homogeneous," Gerstle concludes, and the "problems associated with ethnic or religious difference will inevitably arise."[55] The constant push and pull between American "civic nationalism" and "racial nationalism" is what ultimately "shaped the history of the American nation in the twentieth century," according to Gerstle, who shows how "both ideals influenced critical immigration and war mobilization policies, shaped social reform movements ranging from progressivism and the New Deal to the Congress of Industrial Organizations and civil rights, and animated the nation's communal imagination."[56]

This dissertation fits within the wider scope of Gerstle's work by highlighting the history of the science behind his thesis. Evolutionary psychologists found that the rampant xenophobia on which *American Crucible* is based is likely a fixed variable—an immutable element of the human condition that can be diminished to some extent through education and social reform, but is unlikely to be fully extinguished. The history of evolutionary psychology is impossible to write without addressing the actual science behind the "crucible" that Gerstle details; the science of the mind that makes it so difficult for the Left's elusive "melting pot" vision to come to fruition.

Historians understandably avoid bringing biology into play when tracing the causes and effects of ethnic tensions, and "bio-history" is still rightly condemned as unreliable at best and pseudo-historical at worst. It would be difficult to argue, however, that historians would be unduly burdened by glancing at the work of prominent behavioral scientists who study the very emotions that have wreaked so much havoc on the societies they study. This is especially true regarding the emotions of hate and bigotry—two primary drivers of world events that have shaped everything from borders and governments to wars and revolutions. Historians who avoid taking human nature into consideration at all costs risk missing relatively easy answers to difficult questions, and the history of evolutionary psychology is rife with such insights.

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[55] G. Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2001), p. 368.
[56] Gerstle, *American Crucible*, pp. 4-5.

Hate and bigotry were hardly the only base emotions evident during the Cold War, during which intense tribalism often escalated into "hot" violence. In *Creatures of Cain: The Hunt for Human Nature in Cold War America* (2019)**,** Erika Milam argues that on the American front, a consensus began to emerge among evolutionary and behavioral scientists that humans—particularly males—were inherently violent. Milam leans on the sociobiology debates to show how those who claimed to be delivering sober and measured takes on man's proclivity for violence had been driven in part by the broader narratives of their time, as they attempted to make sense of an increasingly dark and dangerous world. Biological explanations of human violence were therefore shaped as much by Cold War opportunism as they were by a commitment to dispassionate inquiry, Milam claims, and the popularization of this pessimism helped shape a flawed scientific analysis of human nature that was eventually dismantled and corrected by feminists and anti-war activists.

It is true that the "startlingly pessimistic view" that human nature "contains the seeds of humanity's destruction" enjoyed "wide currency in the United States between 1966 and 1975," as Milam notes,[57] and feminists and anti-war sentiment did indeed undermine the overblown narrative that violence was an inescapable element of the human condition. *Creatures of Cain* also convincingly demonstrates how "understanding the historical fate of any scientific vision of human nature requires attending to the political and social concerns that endowed that vision with persuasive power."[58]

This dissertation charts a slightly different course, by arguing that although feminists and anti-war protestors did certainly disrupt the narrative that violence was foreordained, the narrative survived largely intact. It also pushes back against the implication that these disruptions were all made in good faith. There were, of course, plenty of principled arguments that challenged the growing scientific consensus that biology contained the "seeds of humanity's destruction," but ulterior motives were common, and many of the challenges launched against any behavioral science that sought to explain the prevalence of violence in the United States

[57] E. L. Milam, *Creatures of Cain: The Hunt for Human Nature in Cold War America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2019), p. 1.
[58] Milam, *Creatures of Cain*, p. 8.

were themselves premised on ideology and bias, rather than a cold and dispassionate refutation of dangerous ideas.

In some ways, however, this dissertation picks up where *Creatures of Cain* left off, since the latter's timeline ends as Wilson's sociobiology is still on the rise. One of Milam's stronger arguments is that during the "maelstrom of the social, cultural, and political transformations that characterized the American home front in the Cold War, scientific theories of the human animal provided powerful tools for sorting the bewildering violence of the world into sensible order," and that despite the fact that "long-standing questions about violence and human nature took on an outsized importance," it was "neither inevitable nor obvious" that "readers granted evolutionists the power to settle these questions."[59] This dissertation suggests that it may indeed have been "inevitable" that large swaths of the public were willing to grant scientists the power to settle these questions, simply because scientists were delivering favorable news that appeared to excuse bad behavior—especially among *Playboy*-reading males. The Cold War framing, although valuable, also fails to explain why these types of books and articles remained so popular (and controversial) after the ideological battles of the Cold War had been largely settled.

Cold War history also reveals that our instinct for hatred and tribalism is not limited to inter-ethnic conflict, and the ideological tribalism that played out within the United States and across the globe throughout the second half of the 20th century impacted American scientists who began to blur the line between scientific objectivity and patriotic duty. In *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (2013), Jamie Cohen-Cole argues that during this time, there was an intentional, top-down effort by elite, American behavioral and cognitive scientists to frame the idea of an inquisitive "open mind" as the cognitive counterpoint to the authoritarian "closed mind." Objective scientific analysis was therefore undermined by a high-stakes international competition, in which open-mindedness—characterized by "autonomy, creativity, and the use of reason"—served as a "model and ideal of national and intellectual character," and therefore as a threat to America's closed-minded, communist foes.[60] This ideology eventually found its way into school curricula across the country, where teachers sought

[59] Milam, *Creatures of Cain*, pp. 14-15.
[60] J. Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2013), pp. 1-2.

to mold a new generation of Americans that would be better equipped to resist communist encroachments for years to come.

This may well have been the case during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and '60s, but these types of ulterior, nationalistic motives played no direct role in the development and popularization of evolutionary psychology, which was almost entirely apolitical by nature. Still, there is a great deal of ideological overlap among the protagonists in both of these stories, especially regarding their assessments of the mind's innate biological programming and malleability. Much like Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, the psychologists in *The Open Mind* viewed the mind "in terms of a recurrent constellation of features: the open mind was tolerant, broad, flexible, realistic, unprejudiced," while the "closed mind was rigid, narrow, conformist, intolerant, ideological, and prejudiced."[61]

This dissertation takes this narrative a step further, however, by showing how evolutionary psychology was predicated on the idea that the mind reflected a constellation of all of the above—that these positive and negative traits were to a large extent inseparable from one another. EPs arrived at this conclusion—which was neither inherently pessimistic nor optimistic—precisely because they were unburdened by a top-down pressure campaign to conform to a government's idea of how a brain should function. By the time Cosmides and Tooby embarked on their synthesis, the threat of a marauding, totalitarian menace had largely faded from the public's imagination, which allowed them to conduct their research in a relatively impartial manner. Indeed, evolutionary psychologists appeared to be driven by a genuine desire to obtain value-free data about the mind's origins and impulses, as opposed to a grander, ulterior desire to reengineer society. There was no greater, existential enemy in need of defeat, aside from perhaps the Standard Social Science Model.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, as the world teetered on the edge of nuclear destruction, the political tribes and their competing ideologies were relatively easy to discern within the United States. It was the Right's McCarthyites pitted against the anti-McCarthy liberals; the conservative traditionalists against the civil rights activists; the neoconservatives against the New Deal scholars—all battles that took place within a wider culture war over what constituted legitimate dissent. This type of political division was not

[61] Cohen-Cole*, The Open Mind*, p. 4.

always so clear cut, however. In *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (1998), Alan Brinkley argues that the Left's New Deal optimism—driven by a genuine belief in the transformative power of federal and state institutions—began to deteriorate in the middle of the 20th century, when a series of domestic and international events (notably the Civil Rights movement and the war in Vietnam) led Americans to believe that the government was incapable of solving the types of problems that routinely plagued the American experiment. Sensing a spiritual and intellectual void, conservatives leapt at the opportunity to cast American "freedom" as primarily economic in nature, by emphasizing the importance of market deregulation and individualism. Feeling as though they had lost the trust of the American people, the defeated champions of New Deal liberal values ended up ceding the remnants of their power to conservatives, who solidified their hold on American politics by attacking elite intellectuals.

This dissertation builds on Brinkley's argument by showing how a rampant distrust of scientific institutions cut across party lines. It was not only the conservatives who felt betrayed by scientists at Harvard and Berkeley; liberals were also more than willing to abandon their faith in these institutions and their entire premise as soon as academics began delivering news that clashed with their utopian visions. This was particularly true regarding the innate differences in temperament between men and women, and the human male's proclivity for violence. Brinkley argues that generally speaking, the Right viewed liberalism as a "threat to freedom and prosperity," and a "threat to community."[62] This dissertation argues that the Left, somewhat ironically, also viewed large swaths of the academic Left as a similar threat.

Brinkley is not blind to this dynamic, and convincingly argues that American liberalism has "suffered from some of its own internal weaknesses and incongruities, and from the unwillingness or inability of many liberals to look skeptically or critically at their own values and assumptions." Understanding where "postwar liberalism came from," he continues, is therefore "part of understanding where it has gone, and why."[63] While Brinkley focuses on the politics that eroded the Left's association with institutional power and expertise, however, this dissertation focuses more on the universal human emotions that can lead people of all political persuasions to dismiss evidence and data that fails to adhere to a predetermined social narrative.

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[62] A. Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1998), p. x.
[63] Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, p. xi.

This story therefore expands on Brinkley's work by lengthening his timeline and focusing more intently on one of his key themes: How American liberals undermined their own tradition of embracing value-free, empirical science. While the New Left in Brinkley's narrative was uniquely aggressive in its opposition to anything that threatened social and cultural equality, the newer Left of the 1980s and '90s—though less radical and more restrained—treated any science that seemed to threaten gender or racial equality with comparable disdain. Whereas Brinkley's Left lost faith in the scientific institutions that had promised and failed to deliver a brighter future, the Left that stood in opposition to evolutionary psychology lost its faith in science because it hinted at a darker future that looked a lot like the past.

Brinkley's study of the Left-Right political divide in America is indebted to Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), which argues that the myriad historical instances of populist pushback against elite expertise in the United States should not be thought of as a series of unrelated events, but rather an integral component of a nation that prioritizes democracy, egalitarianism, and moral conviction. "Anti-intellectualism was not manifested in this country for the first time during the 1950s," Hofstadter writes. "Our anti-intellectualism is, in fact, older than our national identity, and has a long historical background," which suggests that "regard for intellectuals in the United States has not moved steadily downward and has not gone into a sudden, recent decline, but is subject to cyclical fluctuations."[64] Although Hofstadter focuses primarily on a particular strain of right-leaning anti-intellectualism (driven by a potent blend of religious zealotry, capitalistic greed, McCarthyite paranoia, and the rise of a mass media culture that rejected nuance by design), he gives no quarter to the anti-intellectual Left. "Progressive education has had its own strong anti-intellectual element," writes Hofstadter, who believes that anti-intellectualism "has become formidable in our education partly because our educational beliefs are evangelically egalitarian."[65]

This dissertation carries this theme into the modern era by showing that—even in a post–Cold War world—highly educated, secular elites continued to challenge the ideological status quo in ways reminiscent of the earlier pushback associated with the uneducated and the religious. The most vocal opposition to evolutionary psychology (which, again, was technically an

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[64] R. Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, New York: Penguin Press (1963), p. 6.
[65] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pp. 22-3.

establishment-level enterprise run by Ivy League academics) came from people who themselves operated within the same academic ecosystem. Neither their backgrounds nor their complaints fit neatly within Hofstadter's framework, which took for granted that most disagreements among academics would revolve around methods and approach rather than intents and implications.

Taken together, the ten works referenced above show how Americans have long wrestled with the dangers and moral implications of scientific explanations of human behavior, and by extension the legitimacy of scientific authority itself. Whether through the politicization of the sciences during the Cold War, the media's attraction to conflict, the competing moral anxieties of the Left and Right, or the persistent friction between expert knowledge and democratic skepticism, each of these studies point to the country's nuanced and fluid relationship with potentially "dangerous" science in a pluralist democracy. Despite these contributions, the literature still leaves an important question unanswered: how and why a new behavioral science—evolutionary psychology—became such a uniquely volatile flashpoint for scientists and non-scientists across the political spectrum. By tracing the development, popularization, and politicization of evolutionary psychology from 1980 to 2010, this dissertation shows how EP's rise and reception exposed a deeper, unresolved tension in American culture: between a desire for value-free science and the fear of its implications; between a willingness to embrace biological explanations of human behavior and a commitment to moral egalitarianism; and between scientific expertise and the more emotional, ideological convictions that shape public life.

Methodology

The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand how and why certain evolutionary explanations of human behavior—especially those pertaining to sex differences, violence, and prejudice—were met with such disdain and anxiety within the United States between 1980 and 2010. To that end, this study looks at how the words of evolutionary psychologists were articulated, politicized, simplified, and distorted as they made their way through academic journals, popular science books, and mass media. The geographic focus is deliberate, since the United States during this period reflected a patchwork of conflicting ideals pertaining to political equality, free speech, race, and sex, which amplified tensions around any rhetoric that could be

associated with the more rigid biological determinism of the early 20th century. The United States therefore provides a particularly sharp vantage point for gauging how "dangerous" behavioral science was narrated, trafficked, and consumed. And while evolutionary psychologists hailed from other countries—including the United Kingdom and Canada—the field was coined and developed mostly within the walls of American universities.

The primary sources fall into three general categories: academic texts written by evolutionary psychologists and their critics, popular science books that served as the main point of contact between EP and non-specialist readers, and media coverage ranging from mainstream newspapers and magazines to niche outlets and lifestyle publications. The academic texts reveal how the field's key players wrestled with communicating their findings to an audience that oftentimes struggled to separate the natural from the good, and help show how critics within the academy—including feminist scientists, social psychologists, and anthropologists—sought to reframe and restrict the debates in order to limit social harm. Particular attention is paid to the metaphors and analogies behavioral scientists employed in their texts, along with the ways in which they positioned themselves relative to adjacent and competing models of human behavior, such as sociobiology and the Standard Social Science Model.

The popular science literature includes bestsellers penned by evolutionary psychologists, critical monographs that warned of the field's dangers, and hybrid works that blended watered-down behavioral science with self-help rhetoric. The juxtaposition of these texts against the more formal academic publications that informed them is crucial, since this demonstrates how some of EP's most consequential and controversial claims shifted across genres. Nuance gave way to generalization, important caveats were ignored, and moral framings were added in ways that fueled misunderstanding and anxiety—often for the sake of attracting public attention and profit.

Finally, close readings of the media coverage surrounding EP and the controversies that followed in its wake reveal the extent to which Americans were eager to consume this type of "forbidden" knowledge, which was oftentimes mistakenly assumed to offer biological excuses for bad behavior. Cover stories, interviews, and editorials across a wide range of popular news sources are examined to determine how journalists framed terms like "universal" and "instinct," and how these decisions created a vicious cycle that forced scientists to push back against oversimplification with simplifications of their own. Relatively niche publications such as *Playboy* play an important role in this analysis, since these sources help explain why a certain

type of "sexy" science—much of which dealt with male desire and social status—was embraced by large numbers of men and rejected by many feminists.

An analytical framework that relies exclusively on close readings of published texts has its limitations. By design, it captures the general "mood" of the American public regarding a particular type of behavioral science at the expense of gauging how these feelings were ultimately shaped behind closed doors, which would require a combination of archival research and first-person interviews. Nor can this approach fully reconstruct the reception of evolutionary psychology among those who left no written record. For the purposes of a study whose goal is to highlight the reception and media-driven interpretations of evolutionary psychology *in public*, however, delving into private exchanges and the personal motives of those who eventually put their views into print is largely irrelevant. The distinction between primary and secondary sources in a study of this kind can be difficult to discern, however, since scientific articles, journal publications, trade books, and popular science pieces are all treated as contributions to a single, evolving discourse in which the boundaries of acceptable communication about human nature were continually shifting.[66]

This study is therefore largely interpretive rather than statistical. Controversial and high-profile episodes and pertinent debates that took place surrounding evolved explanations of human behavior are examined in order to expose patterns that point to larger themes in the history of science—namely overcorrection, moral panic, and confusion regarding the limits of scientific knowledge. By placing academic writings, popularizations, and media coverage within a single analytic frame, and by organizing the analysis around substantive themes as opposed to a chronological order of events, this dissertation shows how ideas concerning human nature were shaped not only by data and theory, but also by genre conventions, commercial incentives, moral expectations, and the complex fabric of American history.

[66] Remedies for these limitations, along with directions for future research in this vein, are outlined in the conclusion of this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE
MEN & WOMEN

In general, I don't think feminism and science are inherently antagonistic, any more than conservatism and science are…Science provides information that can be used to further the goals of feminism, and feminism is a way of improving science.

- Carol Tavris, 1999[67]

INTRODUCTION

A Harvard President's Debacle

When Lawrence Summers took the reins of Harvard as the university's 27th president in 2001, he was cheered as someone well-positioned to deliver what Harvard so desperately needed: a renewed focus on undergraduate teaching, an expansion of the campus, and a more streamlined integration of the university's schools and departments. His supporters compared his personality and leadership style to that of Charles Eliot (one of the university's most esteemed presidents), and celebrated his brash, no-nonsense approach to setting and achieving goals.[68]

Less than two months into 2006, however, Dr. Summers announced he was stepping down from the presidency—the final and only remaining move for a man whose tenure had been marred by controversy since January 14th of the previous year, when Summers suggested during an academic conference that "issues of intrinsic aptitude" may be partly to blame for women's underrepresentation in science and engineering fields. His remarks made national headlines and put pressure on the Harvard Corporation to call for his resignation, which Summers ultimately delivered when the last of his support disintegrated. "It looked to me like the magnitudes of the rifts with certain segments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences faculty were at a level where I thought it would be very difficult for us to advance on a whole set of fronts," he concluded during an interview with the *Harvard Crimson* shortly after he made his decision public.[69]

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[67] C. Tavris interviewed by Michael Shermer, *Skeptic*, 7/1 (1999).
[68] 'President of Harvard Resigns, Ending Stormy 5-Year Tenure', *The New York Times* [New York], (22 February, 2006).
[69] 'Summers Resigns: Shortest Term Since Civil War', *The Harvard Crimson* [Cambridge], (22 February, 2006).

During the fateful 2005 speech that precipitated his downfall, Summers had been commenting on the intractability of the women-in-science problem, and although overt sexism doubtlessly played a role in the imbalance he was addressing, Summers was unconvinced that it was the only variable. He had just returned from Israel, where he had toured a kibbutz and been introduced to the movement's steadfast commitment to eliminating traditional gender roles, by creating an environment in which men and women did the same jobs. "Sometimes the women were going to fix the tractors, and the men were going to work in the nurseries," Summers observed, and "sometimes the men were going to fix the tractors and the women were going to work in the nurseries." Summers was skeptical, however, that this was a sustainable departure from what many believed to be the natural state of affairs. "I guess my experience with my two-and-a-half-year-old twin daughters who were not given dolls and who were given trucks, and found themselves saying to each other, 'look, daddy truck is carrying the baby truck,' tells me something," Summers said, before quickly shielding himself from accusations of biological determinism by clarifying that nature and nurture were both surely at play.[70]

All he could offer the audience was his "best guess" of what was behind this decades-old disparity, which boiled down to the "general clash between people's legitimate family desires and employers' current desire for high power and high intensity"—something that was especially pronounced in the world of science and engineering, where "issues of intrinsic aptitude" were "reinforced by what are in fact lesser factors involving socialization and continuing discrimination." Summers ended on a note of humility: "I would like nothing better than to be proved wrong," he assured his audience, "because I would like nothing better than for these problems to be addressable simply by everybody understanding what they are, and working very hard to address them."[71]

Unfortunately for Summers, remarkably few people seemed interested in understanding the root causes of these problems, as long as these roots were affiliated with science that was associated with evolution, and by extension, biological determinism. Science, regardless of its objectivity or validity, was quickly subordinated to emotion. "For [Summers] to say that 'aptitude' is the second most important reason that women don't get to the top when he leads an

[70] 'Full Transcript: President Summers' Remarks at the National Bureau of Economic Research', *The Harvard Crimson* [Cambridge], (18 February, 2005).
[71] Ibid.

institution that is fifty percent women students—that's profoundly disturbing to me," Nancy Hopkins, a chemistry professor at MIT, told the Harvard student paper shortly after she stormed out of the conference in protest. "He shouldn't admit women to Harvard if he's going to announce when they come that, 'Hey, we don't feel that you can make it to the top.'" Elizabeth Spelke, a professor of psychology, was similarly displeased with her president, writing that Summers "ignores the impediments to women's progress posed by long-standing patterns of prejudice, unwelcoming environments, and unequal resources."[72]

For those who feared the implications of an evolved psychology, the fact that Summers had repeatedly mentioned the additional impediments Ms. Spelke claimed he had omitted was meaningless. This was no time for compromise or an acknowledgement of the vastly complex and symbiotic interplay between genes and environment. A line had been drawn between nature and nurture, and the political tribes held firm.

Female scientists who broke from their assigned tribe and voiced their support of Summers found themselves on the receiving end of a peculiar type of condescension, whose couriers were taken aback by the notion that a woman could defend a man under such circumstances. Asked for her thoughts on Summers' comments, Carole Hooven, a freshly-minted Harvard Ph.D. preparing to teach her first class on the evolution of human sex differences, told a student interviewer something that seemed obvious to her as a scientist who studied human behavior.[73] "We tend to put blinders on to science when the explanations for behavior or social problems are distasteful or difficult," she said. "There are many lines of research that suggest that biology plays a role in the modulation of sex differences in behavior and perhaps cognition." Dr. Hooven asked Summers' critics to focus on the data. "Challenge his scientific claims," she added. "Don't criticize him for bad breath."[74,75] In their introduction of Hooven in a piece entitled "The Larry Summers Fan Club," the Harvard newspaper authors placed her identity—not her ideas—at center stage. "A bioanthro professor and—get this—a woman, Hooven's

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[72] 'The Worlds [*sic*] That Started The War', *The Harvard Crimson* [Cambridge], (9 June, 2005).
[73] C. Hooven, 'Academic Freedom Is Social Justice: Sex, Gender, and Cancel Culture on Campus', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 52 (7 November, 2022), pp. 35-41.
[74] 'The Larry Summers Fan Club', *The Harvard Crimson* [Cambridge], (3 March, 2005).
[75] Reflecting on the episode years later, Hooven wrote that Summers "said what he did because he believed that openly debating the possible causes of a problem was an important step in trying to solve it." See: C. Hooven, 'Academic Freedom Is Social Justice: Sex, Gender, and Cancel Culture on Campus', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 52 (7 November, 2022), pp. 35-41.

support of Summers' inflammatory comments about women in science stands in opposition to many of her colleagues in her outspoken department."[76]

Politicizing Charles Darwin

The political climate in which Dr. Summers' downfall occurred, and the failure of his opponents to separate his sex from his opinions, had been festering for decades in the United States—itself a reaction and correction to decades of social science research that had placed men and women into two irreconcilable categories of behavior. Books like the 1991 best-seller *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* had capitalized on a new wave of scientific inquiry which held that although men and women might not technically be from different planets, the everyday, observable differences between them were biologically hardwired to the point that this might as well have been true.

This renewed focus on the biology of gendered psychology was not simply confined to hardcovers with catchy titles, either. Throughout the 1980s and well into the '90s, major publications ranging from *Newsweek* and *Discover* to *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* leaned into racy columns on the supposed innate (and inert) nature of male and female psychology, profiting from their readership's seemingly unquenchable desire to know whether their household brawls and family feuds were manufactured by nature or taught by nurture. Nuance and scientific detail were cast aside for the sake of eye-catching headlines such as "Why the Sexes Still Rage at Each Other" (*Cosmopolitan*) and subtitles that trivialized the scientific debates that were taking place behind the scenes. "Authorities now say nature, *not* nurture, makes him thump and thunder while you rescue lost kittens," read one especially misleading *Cosmopolitan* subtitle.[77]

The American press was doing what it had always done best by taking advantage of the average reader's proclivity for easy answers to complex problems. But in doing so, these publications had inadvertently given weight to an age-old rightwing political position, which held that American gender roles were largely dictated by nature—rendering any attempts to alter them through social engineering dead on arrival. The conservative American Right, long an outspoken adversary of evolutionary science and a constant bullhorn for creationist rhetoric, seemed willing to suspend its downplay of Darwin as long as his legacy could be used to further

[76] 'The Larry Summers Fan Club'.
[77] Headlines found in B. Beckwith, *Science for the People*, 16/4, (July-August, 1984), pp. 18-23.

their cause, by reinforcing a status quo that kept men in the office and women in the kitchen. The Left's insistence that evolution be jettisoned from discussions pertaining to gender inequality, along with liberal Democrats distancing themselves publicly from any science that pointed to the biology behind these disparities, left Darwin unguarded and free to be used and abused by conservatives, who were eager to show Americans that "science" was actually on their side.[78]

Darwin therefore became an unlikely ally in the Right's battle to enforce traditional gender roles and promote the nuclear family. Prominent American conservative authors such as James Q. Wilson invoked evolutionary psychology in books like *The Moral Sense* (1993) and *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Damages Families* (2002), which he used as platforms from which to preach traditional family values.[79] Conservative writers and historians such as Richard Pipes borrowed heavily from EP's conclusions regarding tribalism in order to make the case for the sanctity of private property, and right-leaning political scientists like Larry Arnhart of Northern Illinois University called on his fellow conservatives to embrace Darwinian principles as a way to bolster and promote Republican social policies, such as maintaining an all-male military. "I do indeed believe conservatives need Charles Darwin," Mr. Arnhart said during a 2007 interview in which he stressed the potential benefits the Right could glean from embracing evolution. "The intellectual vitality of conservatism in the 21st century will depend on the success of conservatives in appealing to advances in the biology of human nature as confirming conservative thought," he concluded. Two years earlier, Mr. Arnhart had published *Darwinian Conservatism* (2005)—a treatise on the congruity that supposedly existed between Darwin's analysis of the human animal and conservative ideals of individualism and laissez-faire capitalism.[80] For many conservatives, social structures such as marriage and the nuclear family had "evolved" as a result of "Darwinian natural law."[81]

Efforts like those of Mr. Arnhart are what led progressive evolutionary scientists like Steven Jay Gould to bemoan the overuse of Darwin by conservative Republicans in a 1998 opinion piece. "As a paleontologist by trade and (dare I say it?) a card-carrying liberal in politics," Mr. Gould wrote, "I have been amused, but also a bit chagrined, by the current fad in

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[78] S. J. Gould, 'Let's Leave Darwin Out of It', *The New York Times* [New York], (29 May, 1998), p. A21.
[79] 'A Split Emerges as Conservatives Discuss Darwin', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 May, 2007).
[80] Ibid.
[81] L. Arnhart, 'Natural Law and the Darwinian Conservatism of Sex Differences', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 34/3 (Summer, 2005), pp. 135-143.

conservative intellectual circles for invoking the primary icon of my professional world—Charles Darwin" as an "ally in support of cherished doctrines." Pointing to an op-ed in the *National Review* in which the conservative thinker John McGinnis had recently posited that "the new biological learning holds the potential for providing stronger support for conservatism than any other new body of knowledge has done," and that "Darwinian politics is a largely conservative politics," Gould took conservatives to task for suggesting that social inequalities are, to a certain extent, "natural." Gould saved some criticism for the Left, however. "Misuse of Darwin has not been confined to the political right," he said. "Liberals have also played both contradictory ends of the same game—either denying Darwin when they found the implications of his theory displeasing, or invoking him to interpret their political principles as sanctioned by nature."[82]

Gould may have been a "radical scientist," as Steven Pinker charged,[83] but one did not need to be an ardent egalitarian in order to believe that the widespread popularization of Darwinian science was problematic. The Left's knee-jerk dismissal of Summers' comments and the evolutionary theories on which they were based had less to do with revolutionary idealism and more to do with a reasonable fear that these ideas would be misunderstood and misused. This fear permeated the discourse surrounding relatively mundane differences between the sexes, and grew far more pronounced when the evolutionists narrowed their focus to the underrepresentation of women in science.

By the mid-1980s, the rigid ideological factions present in Segerstråle's account of the sociobiology debates had splintered into more heterogeneous "teams," whose overlapping motivations for embracing or criticizing sex-based behavioral science bore little resemblance to the more traditional divide that had pitted Edward Wilson against his Marxist foes. This dynamic complicates the implicit assumption—present in works like Milam's *Creatures of Cain*—that there was a coherent, largely feminist critique of sex-based behavioral science, and that women who deviated from traditional modes of criticism were automatically operating outside the bounds of rational feminism.

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[82] Gould, 'Let's Leave Darwin Out of It'.
[83] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 111-12.

This fragmentation also illustrates how traditional, academic postmodern skepticism toward behavioral determinism—central to the Science Wars literature—only partially explains the dogged resistance to evolutionary psychology, which became democratized through the proliferation of popular science literature and decoupled from elite academic circles in the late 1980s and early '90s. The democratization of this resistance also suggests that while the types of deliberate, top-down academic challenges to inconvenient science brought to light by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway were certainly present, evolutionary psychologists were primarily up against a grassroots coalition of opponents, who sought moral victories instead of profits.

The events in this chapter do, however, support an important claim made by historians such as Jane Gregory and Steve Miller—that the "deficit model" of science communication fails to account for much of the visceral antagonism toward behavioral science in the era of EP. Those who fought against evolutionary narratives of sex differences were clearly not operating with minds analogous to "empty bucket[s]," as Gregory and Miller put it. Instead, they joined the resistance armed with a series of preexisting narratives regarding human behavior—many of which had been forged prior to the sociobiology debates, when it had indeed been the case that a significant number of behavioral scientists pursued their work with the intent of influencing public policy. Such progressive precautions proved largely unnecessary, however, since evolutionary psychologists—unlike their predecessors—had little interest in shaping culture.

GENERAL DIFFERENCES

Fragmented Feminism

Sitting atop a blog post by the evolutionary psychologist Glenn Geher celebrating the launch of the Feminist Evolutionary Psychology Society in 2009 are two quotes. The first is from Kramarae and Treichler's *A Feminist Dictionary* (1996): "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people." The second is from Geher himself: "Evolutionary psychology is the radical notion that human behavior is part of the natural world." Geher and his fellow evolutionary psychologists were steadfast in their belief that these two ideas were in no way contradictory. Feminists need not be afraid of evolutionary psychology, assured Geher, since its underlying

goal of "understanding human behavior in light of evolutionary forces is not inherently conservative, sexist, or evil—not even close."[84]

Geher's reassurances fell flat, however, due in part to the fragmented nature of the feminist movement in the United States. Feminist ideology had always been far from monolithic, but in the 1980s, evolutionary psychology found itself being dragged into a women's liberation movement that was particularly volatile—the result of a rhetorical civil war regarding the woman's role and responsibilities in a male-dominated society. On one side stood the liberal or "equality" feminists, who argued that any perceived differences between men and women were pure illusions—fabricated products of oppression and social constructionism whose destruction could be achieved through increased education and activist legislation. On the other side stood the "difference" feminists, who, as Suzanne Kelly has noted, tended to embrace the notion that males and females were naturally different, and that these differences should be celebrated rather than denied.[85]

By the end of the millennium, it was the equality feminists—who claimed men and women were psychologically equivalent—who managed to win the ideological battle and with it the approval of the American Left, as their ideas spread to a growing number of women's studies programs throughout the country.[86] Discourse pertaining to differences between men and women soon became so dominated by the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM) that as the millennium drew to a close in 1998, researchers like Nirao Shah, who was trying to harness the power of cutting-edge molecular technology in order to study sex differences in human behavior, had virtually no competition. Shah, who had recently completed his Ph.D. at Caltech, had been expecting to find at least some researchers in the field who shared his curiosity about the divergent attitudes and interests of men and women—fellow neuroscientists who were interested in exploring the sex-linked neurological differences in everything from memory and navigational skills to rates of depression and drug addiction. The desire to research the biological roots of these differences, however, was virtually nonexistent among his peers, due to fears that the science (or, more ominously, the scientist) would be deemed sexist. Even animal researchers

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[84] G. Geher, 'The Launching of the Feminist Evolutionary Psychology Society: FEPS', *The Evolutionary Studies Consortium* blog, (18 July, 2009), consulted online (12 March, 2023), https://evostudies.org/2009/07/the-launching-of-the-feminist-evolutionary-psychology-society-feps.
[85] S. Kelly, 'Tofu Feminism: Can Feminist Theory Absorb Evolutionary Psychology?', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 38/3, (2014), pp. 287–304.
[86] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 341

rarely used female subjects in their studies out of fear that they would be accused of practicing "neurosexism."[87]

Popular Science Stirs Trouble

Despite the SSSM's victory in academia, the question of how (or even if) men and women differed in any meaningful way was far from settled in the public square, where a variety of best-selling books on gender psychology in the 1990s had captivated an unusually wide audience. One such book was Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990), which immediately rose to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list where it held the number-one spot for eight months.[88] Blending science with anecdotal humor, Dr. Tannen, a Georgetown University linguistics professor, suggested that men's obnoxious knack for interrupting women had less to do with dominance and more to do with natural differences in temperament. "Pretending that women and men are the same hurts women," she claimed, "because the ways they are treated are based on the norms for men."[89] The book was widely praised by critics outside of academia, and Tannen even received messages from readers crediting her for saving their marriages.[90]

Not everyone was enthusiastic, however. Writing from the University of Northern Iowa, Victoria DeFrancisco claimed the book's "seductiveness" made it "dangerous." By "suggesting that no one is to blame, and that common genderlects [dialects associated with one's sex] even exist," Tannen "ignores our patriarchal culture," DeFrancisco wrote. "The very premise that women and men come from different cultures is problematic."[91]

Alice Freed of the Department of Linguistics at Montclair State University similarly accused Tannen of acting irresponsibly by trusting an uninformed public with a dangerous idea. "From increasingly restrictive abortion laws, unsafe breast-enhancing devices, legislative bodies composed almost entirely of white men, sexual harassment in the workplace, pay differentials for women and men," and an "epidemic of violent crime…against girls and women, we learn daily

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[87] B. Goldman, 'Two Minds: The Cognitive Differences Between Men and Women', *Stanford Medicine Magazine* [Stanford], (22 May, 2017).
[88] 'About The Book: You Just Don't Understand', Harper Collins Publishers, (2010), consulted online (5 January, 2024), http://www.harpercollins.com/books/You-Just-Dont-Understand-Deborah-Tannen/?isbn=9780060959623.
[89] D. Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand*, New York: Harper Collins (1990), Preface.
[90] 'Why (S)he Acts So Funny', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (24 July, 1990).
[91] V. L. DeFrancisco, 'Review of You Just Don't Understand', *Language in Society*, 21/2 (June, 1992), pp. 319-24.

of the reality of patriarchal rule in our culture," Freed wrote. "It [is] in this context that any discussion of interaction between women and men in the United States must be situated," she continued, before labeling Tannen an "apologist for men."[92]

By simplifying complex linguistic conclusions for a lay audience, wrote Freed, Tannen was playing a risky game. It was one thing to engage in "quiet debate" within the "privacy of the academy," where objections to theories regarding gendered communication had been "muted and polite." But with the "publication and extraordinary success of Tannen's book," Freed argued, "the stakes have become much higher." Adding, "Now the general public, already ignorant about fundamental principles of language and rather tolerant of male dominance, embraces a theoretical model of communication that simultaneously perpetuates negative stereotypes of women, excuses men their interactive failings, and distorts by omission the accumulated knowledge of our discipline." Therefore, the "objections must be more forceful and more public."[93]

Authors like Deborah Tannen were breaking an unspoken rule by writing about gender differences through a lens of adaptation as opposed to indoctrination. By taking nuanced conversations surrounding the evolution of gender differentials out of the academy and into the public, Tannen threatened to undermine the idea that psychological differences were entirely malleable and in some cases extinguishable—a platform that people like Ms. Freed and her colleagues had worked hard to protect. It was also a platform that owed its prevalence to books like Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), whose central thesis can be intuited from three quotations pinned to the top of the first chapter: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one." (Simone de Beauvoir); "Strictly speaking, 'women' cannot be said to exist." (Julia Kristeva); and "The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual." (Monique Wittig).[94,95] Similar sentiments could be found in other influential books of the era, including Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Myths of Gender: Biological*

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[92] A. F. Freed, 'We Understand Perfectly: A Critique of Tannen's View of Cross-Sex Communication', appears in K. Hall, M. Bucholtz and B. Moonwomon (eds.) *Locating power: Proceedings of the second Berkeley women and language conference* (vol. 1), Berkeley Women and Language Group, pp. 144-152.
[93] Freed, 'We Understand Perfectly'.
[94] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge (2006), p. 1.
[95] Three years before *Gender Trouble*, Butler released a widely-read paper entitled 'Doing Gender', which, according to Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, quickly became one of the most cited works in gender studies programs across the country. See: H. Pluckrose, J. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, Durham: Pitchstone (2020), p. 146.

Theories About Women and Men, and Cordelia Fine's *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*.

The accusations of "neurosexism" to which Cordelia Fine referred in her book's title were aimed at the work of scientists like Simon Baron-Cohen, whose research into sex differences was predicated on advancements in brain organization theory, which held that certain hormones delivered to a fetus during its early development could permanently alter the ways in which the brain organizes thoughts pertaining to gender, sexuality, cognition, and overall behavior. (A high prenatal delivery of certain androgens, in other words, was all it took to ensure that a boy would grow up to choose toy guns over dolls.)[96]

This type of work and the binary gender categorizations upon which it rested did not sit well with those angling to downplay inherent psychological differences between the sexes. Mr. Baron-Cohen pushed back, however, accusing Ms. Fine of promoting a "barely veiled agenda" and exhibiting a "strident, extreme denial of the role that biology might play in giving rise to any sex differences in the mind and brain." For Fine, Mr. Baron-Cohen continued, "even a hint of biological influence is too much biology." The "biggest weakness of Fine's neurosexism allegation," however, was the "mistaken blurring of science with politics. Her book reads as a polemic about the implicit political bias underlying the science of sex differences. However, this ignores that you can be a scientist interested in the nature of sex differences while being a clear supporter of equal opportunities and a firm opponent of all forms of discrimination in society."[97]

Fuel for the Fire

For those attempting to dismiss biology's role in gendered psychology, popular science books touting simplified narratives were merely a symptom of a much larger problem. They needed to root out the intellectual source that was fueling the dissemination of threatening ideas, and all signs pointed toward evolutionary psychology, whose hypotheses concerning sexual asymmetry in humans played an integral role in the field's rise, its influence in the realm of popular science, and ultimately its public denigration at the hands of those who wished to uphold the status quo of behaviorism. EP's conclusions regarding behavioral differences between men

[96] R. Jordan-Young, 'Hormones, context, and "brain gender": a review of evidence from congenital adrenal hyperplasia', *Social Science Medicine*, 74/11 (June, 2012), pp. 1738-44.
[97] S. Baron-Cohen, 'Delusions of gender: "neurosexism", biology and politics', *The Psychologist*, 23/11, (November, 2010), pp. 904-5.

and women were also a foundational element of the field—a unifying thread that weaved its way through every subject evolutionary psychology touched; from the different ways in which the sexes competed for mates to the more subtle differences that helped explain gender disparities in aggression and child rearing.

A key tenet of evolutionary psychology's analysis of these differences was that no sex is inherently superior or inferior. "Neither women nor men can be considered superior or inferior to the other," David Buss wrote in 1996, "any more than a bird's wings can be considered superior or inferior to a fish's fins or a kangaroo's legs."[98] This was not a performative placation of the field's critics. Just as different parts of the body were forged under the pressures of natural selection in order to produce a single, functional unit, so too were the complimentary psychologies of men and women, according to the evolutionists. "The sexes either are or are not different in a certain domain," wrote the evolutionary biologists Nancy and Randy Thornhill, and to "suggest that a conclusion of difference implies that one sex is superior to the other is one form of the naturalist fallacy." Variance in athletic ability, for example, "might be similar in men and women," but this "does not negate sex-specific, species-typical psychological mechanisms that result in higher average athletic ability in men because of hormone titers, muscle development, and so forth. We emphasize that a belief in sexual differences is not the same as a belief in sexual inequality."[99]

Judging by the firestorm of controversy these types of hypotheses elicited, however, it would have been easy to assume that these scientists were arguing for a strictly deterministic gender paradigm, in which the laws of biology dictated each gender's role in society. Evolutionary psychologists tended to brush aside zealous and misinformed accusations that their field was essentially a mouthpiece for genetic determinists, but they rarely shied away from pointing to the evolved psychological differences between men and women, given the topic's centrality to their field.

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[98] D. Buss, 'Sexual Conflict: Evolutionary Insights into Feminism and the "Battle of the Sexes"', chapter in *Sex, Power, Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives*, D. Buss, N. Malamuth (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press (1996), pp. 300-6.

[99] R. Thornhill, N. Thornhill, 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 15, (1992), pp. 404-16.

These differences could be relatively benign. Margo Wilson and Martin Daly published research in 2004, for instance, which concluded that men were more inclined than women to "discount the future"—a trait that had been hypothesized for years by casual observers of men who always seemed to out-drink and out-gamble their female counterparts. Men were more likely than women to opt for a small sum of money delivered immediately rather than a larger sum delivered in the distant future, and were far more likely to choose the immediate benefit of mating with a less attractive female over the possibility of mating with a more attractive partner in the future. This "male-specific shift in future discounting," according to David Buss's analysis of the study, "rather than reflecting maladaptive impulsivity, reflects an adaptation designed to obtain immediate reproductive benefits when future opportunities are uncertain."[100]

In addition to being more impulsive, men were found to suffer from relatively poor spatial recognition—a design flaw that gave females an edge when it came to finding and remembering the locations of immobile objects such as food, which would have likely led to a sexual division of labor during the Pleistocene epoch in which men hunted and women gathered. As David Buss pointed out, if anything, these types of studies painted women as the superior sex, and "contrasted sharply with previously documented male superiority" in areas pertaining to navigation.[101]

Stark gender differences were also uncovered regarding cultural displays, with men being more likely than women to showcase their artistic and musical talents as a way to broadcast their mate value. Just as "male nightingales sing more and male peacocks display more impressive visual ornaments," male humans "paint more pictures, record more jazz albums," and "write more books," wrote Geoffrey Miller in *The Mating Mind*. This was especially true of men between the ages of twenty and thirty, when "sexual competition and courtship" was at its peak.[102] "As every teenager knows and most psychologists forget," Miller pointed out, "cultural displays by males increase their sexual success."[103]

Men and women also appeared to have developed distinctly different phobias. David H. Rakison of Carnegie Mellon University showed that eleven-month-old female infants, for

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[100] Buss, 'The Great Struggles of Life'.
[101] Ibid.
[102] G. Miller, *The Mating Mind*, New York: Anchor Books (2001), pp. 82-84.
[103] G. Miller, 'How mate choice shaped human nature: a review of sexual selection and human evolution', in C. Crawford and D. Krebs (eds.), *Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology: Ideas, Issues, and Applications*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (1998), pp. 118-119.

instance, were four times as likely as their male counterparts to fear spiders and snakes,[104] while a study conducted by Detlef Fetchenhauer and Bram Buunk found that adult females exhibited a greater fear of environments in which there was an elevated risk of injury.[105] These findings supported an evolutionary approach to gendered psychology, wrote David Buss, since "with the exception of rape, men are more likely to experience these threats to survival than women." This in turn was due to the fact that "sexual selection has created risk-taking strategies in men to obtain status, resources, and mating opportunities," whereas it "favored more cautious strategies in women because of the need to protect their offspring."[106]

Another study by Beatrice Whiting and Carolyne Edwards showed that young males between the ages of three and eleven exhibited more aggressive and dominant behavior than females, and were more likely to engage in attention-seeking acts such as "rough and tumble play" with a peer, in order to advertise their desire for status and an affinity for taking risks. Females, on the other hand, gravitated more toward displays of nurturing, sociability, and fairness.[107] Evolutionary psychologists argued that these baseline psychological differences, forged through a dynamic interplay of genes and environment during the Pleistocene epoch, offered a partial yet important (and routinely dismissed) answer to why women and men seemed to differ and spar in the modern age.

The Limits of Culture

Throughout the 1990s, tests routinely confirmed that men and women had divergent psychologies regarding traits like competitiveness, assertiveness, cooperation, and nurturance.[108] Yet despite a steady stream of research that pointed to the role of "biophysical genesis" in behavioral sex differences,[109] social scientists still clung to the idea that culture was the overwhelmingly dominant variable. Although the polarization of the nature versus nurture debate

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[104] D. H. Rakison, 'Does women's greater fear of snakes and spiders originate in infancy?', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 30/6, (November, 2009), pp. 439–444.
[105] D. Fetchenhauer and B.P. Buunk, 'How to explain gender differences in fear of crime: towards an evolutionary approach', *Sexualities, Evolution & Gender*, *7*(2), pp. 95-113.
[106] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 87.
[107] B.B. Whiting, C.P. Edwards, 'A cross-cultural analysis of sex differences in the behavior of children aged 3-11', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 91, (1973) pp. 171-188.
[108] J. Tierney, 'As Barriers Disappear, Some Gender Gaps Widen', *The New York Times* [New York], (8 September, 2008).
[109] Whiting, Edwards, 'A cross-cultural analysis of sex differences in the behavior of children aged 3-11', pp. 171-188.

had given way to a more nuanced discussion of the interplay between genes and environment regarding individual behavior by the turn of the millennium, it remained stubbornly rigid when it came to blanket differences between males and females. The first line of attack against any research that began to tilt the needle away from nurture and toward nature was to claim that any measurable difference in temperament between men and women was culturally constructed—the result of generations of inadvertent indoctrination that had kept men and women trapped in their artificial roles for centuries. For those who adhered to this social constructionist philosophy, it was tempting to believe that these roles and the boundaries they produced could be eliminated simply by making society more equitable—by ensuring men and women had equal access to the same education, career opportunities, and support systems.

Evolutionary psychologists soon found, however, that the amplitude of personality differences between men and women was directly proportional to the egalitarianism of the culture in which they existed, meaning that societies with higher levels of social equality produced men and women whose personalities diverged *more* than they did in cultures that repressed women. "For evolutionary psychologists, the bad news is that the size of the gender gap in personality varies among cultures," wrote John Tierney in a summary of the studies. "For social-role psychologists, the bad news is that the variation is going in the wrong direction."[110] This led the adaptationists to conclude that the observed differences between men and women in their interests and desires were at least partially innate; that Darwin's invisible hand was tipping the scale toward boys preferring combat to dialogue and girls preferring dolls to dump trucks.

Evolutionary psychology's credibility in this area rested almost entirely on cross-cultural confirmations of their hypotheses. Beginning around 2005, coordinated groups of research teams had been conducting and analyzing personality tests of men and women in sixty countries across the world. As John Tierney wrote, "A husband and a stay-at-home wife in a patriarchal Botswanan clan seem to be more alike than a working couple in Denmark or France"—a finding so puzzling that David Schmitt, a psychologist at Bradley University in Illinois, decided to run the study again with new data from 40,000 men and women on six continents. The results were identical. Fewer barriers to gender equality led to *more* disparities in behavior between the sexes,

[110] Tierney, 'As Barriers Disappear, Some Gender Gaps Widen'.

which was reflected by differing career choices. “In some ways modern progressive cultures are returning us psychologically to our hunter-gatherer roots,” Schmitt concluded.[111]

No amount of cross-cultural analyses highlighting the universality of divergent gender roles, however, seemed to disabuse the Left of the notion that culture was still to blame for gender disparities. If it was in fact the case that men and women throughout the world had predictably different interests, the rebuttal went, this must be due to the prevalence of patriarchal structures, which were themselves socially constructed. As the philosopher Neil Levy observed, however, this approach to the problem simply swapped one universal trait for another. “Feminist opponents of EP often invoke the (near) universal existence of patriarchy to explain the kinds of data collected by evolutionary psychologists,” wrote Mr. Levy in 2004. “These feminists grant that the gendered responses and patterns of behavior these researchers discover are real enough, but argue that patriarchy and its norms explains this data, not the modular brain.” This merely passed the buck, Levy continued. “Perhaps patriarchy, and not evolved preferences, explains the universality of gender inequality,” he opined. “But what explains the universality of patriarchy? It seems, then, that if the SSSM [Standard Social Science Model] is to meet the challenge posed by EP, it must advance its own explanation for the existence of universals.”[112]

Very few people who adhered to the SSSM model were willing to meet this challenge, however, due to the political liabilities that came with entertaining an evolutionary approach to gender disparities in a society where sexism was still rampant, and to some extent more ingrained than other forms of prejudice. One reason why discussions of biological sex differences became uniquely contentious was that in the minds of most Americans, sexism was simply harder to eliminate than racism. Sex differences—biological or not—were enshrined in popular media, advertising, and culture. “We can make categorization by race go away, but we could never make gender categorization go away,” John Tooby asserted during an interview in 2008. From a psychological perspective, he added, it was simply far more difficult to deprogram society’s negative bias toward women than it was to deprogram racism.[113]

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[111] Tierney, ‘As Barriers Disappear, Some Gender Gaps Widen’.
[112] N. Levy, ‘Evolutionary Psychology, Human Universals, and the Standard Social Science Model’, *Biology & Philosophy*, 19/462 (2004).
[113] N. Kristof, ‘Our Racist, Sexist Selves’, *The New York Times* [New York], (6 April, 2008).

Alice Eagly, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University,[114] agreed that "in general, gender trumps race" when it came to insidious and harmful stereotypes, partly because stereotypes pertaining to women tended to be less obviously vicious than those pertaining to Blacks, and partly because the female stereotypes were often presented in a deceptively positive light (and frequently came from women themselves).[115] For many Americans, women seemed to be not only different, but blatantly *better* than men in every category related to sociability and agreeableness—a stereotype which, although technically positive, hindered women's ability to obtain leadership positions in both the public and private sector, as Nilanjana Dasgupta, a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts, pointed out.[116]

The left-leaning American press was quick to lavish attention on behavioral gender studies as long as they could be used to support progressive policies. Citing research by Cosmides and Tooby in the *Journal of Evolution and Human Behavior* in 2008, which showed that men were more prone to risky behavior than women, the popular *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof could not help but wonder if sexual biology had played a role in the 2008 financial disaster—whether "we would be in the same [financial] mess today if Lehman Brothers had been Lehman Sisters." To Mr. Kristof, there was an obvious systemic danger in a financial system built and operated entirely by "men sitting in front of screens making financial bets."[117]

Indeed, the study in question had found that while men could not be trusted to make prudent long-term bets in the company of other males, women's risk-taking appeared to be far more rational and resistant to peer pressure. "Across cultures," Kristof took away from the study, women prefer "high-status men, while a woman's reproductive prospects depend much less on her social status. Thus, when men of similar status gather, they jockey for an edge and jostle for the alpha role and try to get ahead with high-stakes gambles." The positive upshot of this behavior, Kristof continued, was that "boasting about these financial bets might make a great pickup line." The downside was that "the bank goes bust." Cosmides and Tooby, wrote Kristof,

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[114] Ms. Eagly is known for developing social role theory in the late '80s, which held that modern gender stereotypes are the result of a feedback loop in which people see and then repeat gendered divisions of labor. See: C. L. Ridgeway, 'Small-group Interaction and Gender', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, (2001), pp. 14185-14189.
[115] Kristof, 'Our Racist, Sexist Selves'.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

were shedding light on a type of "evolutionary hangover" in which the sexual division of labor that was once so beneficial to hunter-gatherer societies was out of place in modern society.[118]

The "evolutionary hangover" to which Mr. Kristof referred was known as "mismatch" in evolutionary parlance, and it was this mismatch that tended to confuse EP's adversaries, regardless of how often or clearly it was defined. "The evolved structure of the human mind is adapted to the way of life of Pleistocene hunter-gatherers," wrote Tooby and Cosmides in *The Adapted Mind*, and "not necessarily to our modern circumstances."[119] Animals and environments that would have posed grave and common dangers in our evolutionary past—such as snakes and heights, for instance—routinely ranked higher on lists of modern phobias than things that were far more likely to lead to death in the 20th century, such as cars and guns.[120]

Evolutionary psychologists also cited mismatch as the reason why modern humans overindulged in sugary foods despite their negative physiological effects. The specialized gustatory mechanism responsible for the perception of sweetness, explained Donald Symons, was shaped by natural selection in an environment where sweet, sugary foods were an exceptionally valuable and nutritious commodity. Those who craved these foods more than others therefore had a survival advantage. In modern societies where refined sugars were regularly available, however, having a sweet tooth was largely "dysfunctional."[121] It was mismatch that made so many of our Stone Age adaptations fail so miserably in the modern age, and it was mismatch that fueled much of the friction between men and women in an increasingly egalitarian American society.

Distortion

When evolutionary psychology began to make a name for itself in the early 1980s, few if any behavioral scientists believed that sex differences were owed entirely to either nature or nurture. There was a general and growing consensus within scientific circles, however, that nature played a slightly larger role, which was cause for concern among social scientists who feared the repercussions of this claim. As the Harvard biologist Ruth Hubbard observed in 1984,

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[118] N. Kristof, 'Mistresses of the Universe', *The New York Times* [New York], (7 February, 2009).
[119] J. H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, J. Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind*, p. 5.
[120] Buss et al, 'Evolutionary Psychology: Controversies, Questions, Prospects, and Limitations', pp. 110-126.
[121] D. Symons, *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 138-9.

universities were largely uninterested in entertaining other points of view, and were instead engaged in a positive feedback loop that was artificially tilting the scale of public opinion toward nature and away from nurture. "There is a tendency for a department to perpetuate the kind of research it is already doing," Ms. Hubbard said, regarding the eagerness with which gender scientists were conducting their research. "There's a heavy self-selection toward people who think the same way."[122] Over the course of the next two decades, however, the left-leaning social scientists overcorrected. The self-selection and inward-facing, incestuous science Ms. Hubbard had bemoaned in 1984 still existed, but now it was the environmentalists and radical behaviorists who were in charge, and they were on a mission to bring nurture roaring back into the equation.

To observers like the political scientist Laurette T. Liesen, this constituted less of an overcorrection and more of a necessary fix for a problem whose origins could be traced to the arrogance of the evolutionists, many of whom had welcomed the fame that had come from being a best-selling author (Robert Wright, Steven Pinker, and David Buss, for instance) while being "dismissive of feminist criticisms and perspectives" regarding gender roles and the division of labor. These men "bolster their arguments for the evolved, biological basis of social behavior," Liesen wrote, by "arguing against feminists' claims that social behavior is changeable and flexible and that greater equality for women is necessary." David Buss was particularly guilty of not acknowledging "what feminist perspectives have already brought to the evolutionary sciences over the last twenty-five years," wrote Dr. Liesen, while Steven Pinker was taken to task for not addressing "specific criticisms by feminist evolutionists or other feminists" in his best-seller *The Blank Slate*.[123]

By claiming that EP was essentially a thinly-veiled deterministic framework bent on excusing gender inequality by casting it as an unavoidable byproduct of evolution, Liesen deployed a common straw man argument:

> Feminist evolutionists see behavior resulting from an ongoing interaction between the organism and its environment. Rather than assuming that human behavior is fixed within evolved psychological mechanisms, they see evolutionary change as dynamic and ongoing, with great potential for change for men, women, and their social and political environments…Unlike evolutionary psychologists, feminist evolutionists take into consideration women's reproductive interests as well as how

[122] R. Hubbard quoted in *Science for the People*, 16/4 (July-August, 1984), p. 22.
[123] L. T. Liesen, 'Women, behavior, and evolution: Understanding the debate between feminist evolutionists and evolutionary psychologists' *Politics and Life Sciences*, 26/1 (17 September, 2007), pp. 51-65.

> the interaction of resource availability, social structures, and male behavior itself can result in sexual inequality and oppressive conditions for women. Instead of seeing these patterns of behavior as unlikely to change, feminist evolutionists see human behavior as much more flexible, variable, and open to the possibility of greater sexual equality. In other words, human behavior is currently evolving.[124]

It was distortions like this, predicated on a profound and likely willful misreading of evolutionary psychology, that underpinned the feminist downplay of the discipline. Not all feminists viewed their mission as inherently incompatible with evolutionary science, however. Dubbed "feminist evolutionists" by Liesen, these women (and the occasional man) inhabited fields ranging from evolutionary biology and sociobiology to primatology and behavioral ecology, and believed that science could not only survive the incorporation of female perspectives and experiences, but thrive as well.[125]

Even feminist evolutionists, however, were frequently and justifiably critical of EP's dichotomous take on male and female behaviors. "Many evolutionary psychologists have not taken feminist criticisms seriously," Liesen claimed. Since evolutionary psychologists believed that the basic elements of human psychology were forged during the Pleistocene, this meant that human behavior was "considered relatively inflexible," and that the "status quo is here to stay," Liesen continued. "It is certainly no wonder that feminists do not use evolutionary psychology to support their goal of greater equality for women…Not only do women not have to accept the status quo of sexism and sexual inequality, feminist evolutionist research supports women in their efforts to create those conditions that can better promote and protect their reproductive interests and sexual equality."[126]

Evolutionary psychologists had grown accustomed to deflecting what they believed to be bad-faith attacks from within and outside of academia, but the most difficult criticisms to dismiss came from people like Liesen, whose influence in feminist circles put a wide target on the field's back. EP's evocation of an evolved, gendered psychology was simply too easy to misinterpret and distort. "There is not really a controversy about evolutionary psychology," Glenn Geher and Daniel Gambacorta wrote in a 2010. Instead, it was a "controversy about the idea that men and

[124] Liesen, 'Women, behavior, and evolution', pp. 51-65.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

women evolved via organic evolutionary forces to engage in differentiated behavioral patterns."[127]

Guilty by Association: "More Harm Than Good"

Those who opposed evolutionary psychology's conclusions regarding the divergent psychologies of men and women had a powerful historical weapon at their disposal. At first glance, EP's findings sounded eerily similar to those discussed by 19th century Darwinists during a bygone era of unabashed sexism. And although scientists throughout the 1980s and '90s routinely found no differences in overall intelligence between the sexes,[128] they had uncovered significant disparities in temperament, some of which seemed to fit uncomfortably well with Darwin's assessment over a century earlier. "Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness" along with her superior "powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation," Darwin had observed in *The Descent of Man*, while "man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness"[129]—a deduction verified by several meta-analyses conducted in the 1990s, one of which found that women exhibited higher levels of "extraversion, anxiety" and "trust" along with "tender-mindedness," while males tended to be more aggressive and "assertive."[130]

Darwin's analysis of the different temperaments of men and women was accepted by many of his contemporaries, including Havelock Ellis, whose 1894 book *Man and Woman* had described a litany of physical and psychological differences between the sexes. But unlike many of Darwin's peers, Mr. Ellis, as Marco Del Giudice notes, "took pains to acknowledge possible biases, strike a balance between nature and nurture, and reject the idea of female (or male) inferiority."[131]Although evolutionary psychologists claimed to approach this topic with the same vigilance for bias and the equivalent rejection of presumed inferiority that had tempered Mr.

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[127] G. Geher, D. Gambacorta, 'Evolution is Not Relevant to Sex Differences in Humans Because I Want it That Way! Evidence for the Politicization of Human Evolutionary Psychology', *The Journal of the Evolutionary Studies Consortium*, 2/1 (2010), pp. 32-47.
[128] R. Colom, 'Negligible Sex Differences in General Intelligence', *Intelligence*, 28/1 (February, 2000), pp. 57-68.
[129] C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Part II, New York: American Dome (1902), p. 725.
[130] A. Feingold, 'Gender differences in personality: a meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 116/3 (1994), pp. 429-56.
[131] 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology: Nature, Scope, and Solutions', C. L. Frisby, R. Redding, W. O'Donohue (eds.), Switzerland: Springer Nature (2023), pp. 755-63.

Ellis' cautious analysis, to their critics, they may as well have been operating in the 19th century—a period in which Ellis' refined attitude toward sexual dichotomies was something of an anomaly. Most of Darwin's contemporaries were far less progressive, and his analysis of not only gender but race was frequently corrupted by his followers, many of whom had enough clout to influence an entire generation of intellectuals. Francis Galton for instance, with his "extraordinary prejudices," as Kevin Laland puts it, "ascribed almost all differences between human beings to heredity," as opposed to "education or opportunity."[132]

Galton therefore took Darwin's relatively casual conjectures on behavioral sex differences past the boundaries of reason, going so far as to state that the "inability of women to distinguish the merits of various wines confirmed the inferiority of female intellectual ability."[133] Feminists like Deborah Cameron, who authored *The Myth of Mars and Venus* in 2008, therefore found it "shocking" when modern Darwinian feminists spoke of the evolved differences between the minds of men and women. "I cannot help hearing echoes [in such statements] of every misogynist thinker—Aristotle, Rousseau, Nietzsche, the fascists of the early twentieth century—who ever proclaimed the same doctrine," Cameron wrote in 1997. "Even dressed up in new Darwinist clothes, how can such concepts be compatible with feminism?"[134]

These types of historical connections, paired with the far more recent misappropriations of evolutionary science that had underwritten the eugenics movement, were what led people like Roy Baumeister, a psychologist at Case Western Reserve University, to question whether evolutionary psychologists should even be studying sex differences in the first place. Unlike wary scientists who leaned away from these topics because any exposed differences were assumed to be cultural in origin, Baumeister's critique was based entirely on what could go wrong with good data. Scientific conclusions could not be abused by the public if there were no conclusions to begin with, he posited in a piece entitled "Should We Stop Studying Sex Differences Altogether?" in *American Psychologist* in 1988. Baumeister argued that researchers like Alice Eagly (who had suggested that exposing small differences between the sexes could potentially help disabuse sexists of the notion that there were any meaningful differences to

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[132] K. Laland, *Sense and Nonsense: Evolutionary Perspectives On Human Behaviour*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2002), pp. 34-38.
[133] Ibid.
[134] D. Cameron, 'Back to Nature', *Trouble and Strife*, 36 (Winter, 1997/98), pp. 6-15.

exploit) were being too optimistic,[135] and that this approach to sex research "asks too much of the average person"—adding that "past evidence is not encouraging" given America's well-documented struggle with misogyny and the media's affinity for oversimplification and exaggeration.[136]

In support of his skepticism, Baumeister cited the media's reaction to a recent study that had shown a three-percent difference in math performance in favor of men—a finding that was immediately exaggerated by newspaper articles claiming women simply were not fit for careers in STEM. "The difference between small and large differences is not always duly recognized in the mass media," Baumeister lamented with a tone of dejection. Even scientific results that showed *no* differences were of little use, he continued, since they almost certainly would not be published by major news outlets to begin with. "Findings of no difference may be relatively immune to exaggeration, but they do not make for exciting press releases. Null results are no more cherished by writers of headlines than by journal editors."[137]

For realists like Mr. Baumeister, the only way to ensure and safeguard the social equality of the sexes was to stop looking for differences altogether. "If we psychologists continue to talk about male versus female characteristics," he cautioned, "we perpetuate and legitimize that distinction. We lend the prestige of our scientific and intellectual perspective to the way of thinking that divides the social world into men and women." There were likely some benefits to be gleaned from studying sex differences, but for Baumeister, the negatives would almost certainly outweigh the positives. "Does the study of sex differences, the scientific comparison of men with women, contribute importantly to our knowledge of human behavior?" he asked somewhat rhetorically. The innate curiosity Baumeister and his colleagues felt in studying sex differences, and the enthusiasm this brought to their research, was itself likely due to internalized biases, he concluded:

> Although research may eventually alter the content of these stereotypes, it is likely to sustain the existence of separate stereotypes. Psychology needs to consider carefully whether further, increased study of sex differences is in the best interests of the scientific and the feminist political enterprises...Politically, the study of sex differences may do more harm than good. By seeking, reporting, and discussing

[135] See: A. H. Eagly, 'Reporting sex differences', *American Psychologist* , 42 (1987), p. 756.
[136] R. F. Baumeister, 'Should We Stop Studying Sex Differences Altogether?' *American Psychologist*, 43/12 (1988), pp. 1092-95.
[137] Ibid.

> sex differences, psychologists lend scientific prestige to the distinction between men and women. It endorses a way of looking at the world in which men and women are fundamentally different. The hope that people will be surprised when there are no differences itself acknowledges that differences are to be expected. The hope that these null findings will persuade society to give up thinking in terms of such differences seems slim.[138]

Behavioral differences between the sexes may have been real. They may have even been largely determined by evolution, and evolutionary psychologists may have possessed the type of rare moral fortitude and discipline required to carry out their research in a dispassionate and objective manner. But people like Mr. Baumeister had seen the extent to which the public was willing to pervert good science for bad aims, and the social and political risks were simply too great, especially when the conversation narrowed to women in science.

WOMEN IN SCIENCE

"Knowledge Has Become Gendered"

Growing up in the early 1970s, the novelist Eileen Pollack was enamored with science and mathematics. She attempted to enroll in the only accelerated physics and calculus courses that her small, rural high school had to offer, but despite her enthusiasm and demonstrated aptitude, she was rejected without explanation. When Ms. Pollack pressed her principal for answers, she was told that since "girls never go on in science and math," her seat in an accelerated course would be a waste of space.[139] Undeterred, Pollack decided to craft her own curriculum. When she arrived at Yale as an undergraduate, however, she found that her autodidacticism had left her unprepared for courses that were overflowing with confident young men. The "boys in my introductory physics class," she recalled, "yawned as our professor sped through the material, while I grew panicked at how little I understood." Pollack frequently "debated whether to raise my hand and expose myself to ridicule, thereby losing track of the lecture and falling further behind."[140]

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[138] Ibid.
[139] E. Pollack, 'Can You Spot The Real Outlier?' *New York Times Magazine* [New York], (6 October, 2013), p. 31.
[140] Ibid.

Pollack persevered—eventually graduating *summa cum laude* in 1978 after having excelled in courses on quantum mechanics and gravitational physics—but her struggle against an unfamiliar and hostile academic infrastructure was emblematic of a wider pattern within the sciences.[141] Despite a marked increase in the size and scope of women's studies departments throughout major liberal arts colleges across the country, women remained widely underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields as late as 2008.[142] Female college freshmen were far less likely than their male counterparts to express an interest in STEM majors, and only twenty percent of bachelor's degrees in STEM fields were awarded to women—a gap that grew more pronounced in graduate school and ultimately the workplace.[143,144] American students in regional and international math competitions were overwhelmingly male, and between 1974—when the United States first entered the International Mathematical Olympiad—and 2008, only three women had been sent to compete, while countries like Bulgaria had sent twenty-one over the course of a similar timeframe.[145] Despite the significant gains women had made in a variety of male-dominated fields, the hard sciences remained an elusive target. "In an era when women are increasingly prominent in medicine, law, and business," a 2010 report by the American Association of University Women asked, "why are so few women becoming scientists and engineers?"[146]

Few doubted that American popular culture was at least partly to blame. This was, after all, an era in which Teen Talk Barbie—a best-selling children's doll released by Mattel in 1992—featured a voice box that alternated between the phrases "Math class is tough!" and "Want to go shopping?"[147] But there seemed to be a deeper and more insidious cultural issue at play within the scientific establishment, which was unlikely to be resolved by reprogramming a toy's voice box.[148] Throughout the 20th century, science had cultivated an aesthetic that was

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[141] Ibid.
[142] C. Hill et al, 'Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics', American Association of University Women, (February, 2010), consulted online (23 March, 2023), https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/03/why-so-few-research.pdf.
[143] Ibid.
[144] In one nation-wide 2009 poll of boys and girls aged eight to seventeen, only five percent of girls said they were interested in pursuing an engineering career as opposed to twenty-four percent of boys. See: C. Hill et al, 'Why So Few?'.
[145] Pollack, 'Can You Spot The Real Outlier?', p. 31.
[146] C. Hill et al, 'Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics'.
[147] M. Donegan, 'The Feminist Moment We Didn't Know We Needed', *The Nation* [New York], (3 August, 2023)
[148] 'Mattel Says It Erred; Teen Talk Barbie Turns Silent on Math', *The New York Times* [New York], (21 October, 1992), p. D4.

rugged and competitive, and by extension aggressive and masculine.[149] This gendered barrier to entry was reinforced by the notion that a core tenet of Western science—objectivity—was itself a "male way of relating to the world," according to the historian of science Elizabeth Fee. Men and science were considered "cold, hard, impersonal," and "objective," while women were viewed as "warm, soft, emotional," and "subjective."[150] The Harvard biologist Ruth Hubbard made the same case in 1990, when she wrote that "knowledge has become gendered," and that "the scientific way to know has been labeled 'objective' and identified as masculine" whereas "artistic, intuitive, and empathic ways of knowing are considered 'subjective' and feminine." Since the "Western world-view values objectivity over subjectivity and men's knowledge over women's," Hubbard continued, "'feminine' ways to know are by their nature inferior."[151] Science had become—or perhaps had always been—a testosterone-driven enterprise that viewed nature through a cold, misshapen lens.

Up against an androcentric scientific establishment hostile to women, some women continued to fight for a seat in the traditional lab, while others chose to infiltrate and subvert the status quo. "It is especially necessary for a feminist methodology in science because the scientific method rests on a particular definition of objectivity, that we feminists must call into question," Hubbard wrote.[152] Those who chose to stay and climb the traditional ladder were frequently (and not altogether irrationally) accused of harboring ulterior motives, with the assumption that their rejection of traditional objectivity would stand in the way of their science. "It is important to stress that though feminist evolutionists are concerned about the lives of women and would like to see greater equality between the sexes," wrote Laurette Liesen, "they are scientists first."[153]

People Versus Things: A Tale of Two Human Natures

Regardless of who or what was to blame for women's underrepresentation in science, the problem persisted, and a growing chorus of adaptationists began arguing that sexist Barbie dolls

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[149] J. Tonn, 'Gender,' *Encyclopedia of the History of Science,* (September, 2020), consulted online (4 June, 2024), https://doi.org/10.34758/epsh-qt73.
[150] E. Fee, 'Is Feminism a Threat to Scientific Objectivity?', *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 11/2 (November, 1981), pp. 84-92.
[151] R. Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (1990), p. 8.
[152] R. Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', *Hypatia*, 3/1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 5-17.
[153] Liesen, 'Women, Behavior, and Evolution', pp. 51-65.

were only a small part of the equation. The roots of the problem could be traced to innate, gendered differences in temperament—to the "underlying structure of interests," as one study by Jo-Ida Hansen and others put it in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* in 1993.[154] A decade later, the clinical psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen made similar claims in *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain*, which argued that men tended to be more interested in things while women tended to be more interested in people. Baron-Cohen's argument held up under intense scrutiny over the years: According to a meta-analysis conducted 2009, generally speaking, women were "more likely than men to indicate interest in social and artistic activities," whereas men were "more likely than women to indicate interest in scientific, technical, and mechanical activities"—suggesting that the "relatively low numbers of women in some fields of science and engineering may result from women's preference for people-oriented careers over things-oriented careers," and that these divergent interests "may play a critical role in gendered occupational choices and gender disparity in the STEM fields."[155]

Culture still played an important—if not essential—role in these disparities, the evolutionists argued. Nature and nurture were in a constant state of epigenetic flux, and no serious scientist claimed otherwise. "Obviously, boys and girls come into the world with a smattering of different genes and hormones," wrote the neuroscientist and author Lise Eliot in 2009. "But actually growing a boy from those XY cells or a girl from X cells requires constant interaction with the environment, which begins in the prenatal soup and continues through all the dance recitals, baseball games, middle-school science classes, and cafeteria dramas that ceaselessly reinforce our gender-divided society."[156]

Although biology and environment were both involved, the actual science behind the biology—at least the kind that was easily accessible to the public—offered no easy answers as to where the line between these two camps lay. Honest and measured answers regarding the complex and dynamic interplay between nature and nurture were hard to find and even harder to understand, and like many journalists who struggled to separate the signal from the noise in the wake of the Lawrence Summers controversy, Amanda Ripley found herself left with a "nagging"

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[154] J. Hansen et al, 'Gender Differences in the Structure of Interests', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 42/2 (April, 1993), pp. 200-211.
[155] R. Su et al, 'Men and Things, Women and People: A Meta-Analysis of Sex Differences in Interests', *Psychological Bulletin*, 135/6 (November, 2009), pp. 859-884.
[156] L. Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2009), p. 7.

question: “Is it true, even a little bit, that men are better equipped for scientific genius?” she asked herself. “Or is it ridiculous—even pernicious—to ask such a question in the year 2005?” Ripley turned to the physician-psychologist Leonard Sax for clarification. The sex-based differences that played a role in these divergent interests (and ultimately career outcomes) ran deep, according to Sax. “If you have a man and a woman looking at the same landscape, they see totally different things,” Sax claimed during an interview with Ripley for *Time* in 2005. “Women can see colors and textures that men cannot see. They hear things men cannot hear, and they smell things men cannot smell.”[157]

None of this indicated general superiority or inferiority, stressed Sax, who had recently published *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Difference*. “The female will remember the color and texture of a particular plant and be able to warn people if it’s poisonous. A man looking at the same thing will be more alert to what is moving in the periphery…Which is better? You need both.” As Ripley observed during her interview, in a world that was split between those who believed that “sex differences are innate and should be embraced” and “those who insist that they are learned and should be eliminated by changing the environment,” Sax was “one of the few in the middle—convinced that boys and girls are innately different and that we must change the environment so differences don’t become limitations.” Scientists like Sax believed there were no limits to what boys and girls could learn and achieve, but in order for them to reach their full potential, their education had to reflect the fact that they were not biologically equivalent. “The reason women are underrepresented in computer science and engineering is not because they can’t do it. It’s because of the way they’re taught.”[158]

Beneath Sax’s evenhanded rhetoric, however, others saw a more nefarious pattern at work. The University of Pennsylvania linguist Mark Liberman, for instance, viewed Sax’s research as part of a larger rhetorical strategy that buoyed a socially conservative agenda under the guise of female empowerment. Sax—along with other popular science writers like the neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine (who had published *The Female Brain* in 2006)—pointed to a “sort of female triumphalism,” Liberman wrote, paired with “negative images of males.” This had “started out as a way to validate traditionally feminine characteristics (like gossip and

[157] A. Ripley, ‘Who Says A Woman Can’t Be Einstein?’, *Time* [New York], (27 February, 2005).
[158] Ripley, ‘Who Says A Woman Can’t Be Einstein?’.

empathy), and to devalue traditionally masculine characteristics (like aggression and stoicism)," but had become "tinged with stereotyped ideas of what men and women are like." These types of books, regardless of the author's intent, were fueling a culture war. "For the left, it's a way to promote and support women," Liberman charged. "For the right, it's an argument for more strongly differentiated sex roles. And because it generally treats females as not only different from males, but also 'better'…it seems to protect itself in advance against the charge of discrimination against a historically oppressed group."[159,160]

These types of squabbles over the impact and intent of popular science books on gendered psychology were a distraction from what many believed should have been an uncontroversial and value-free scientific consensus. "Yes, boys and girls are different," Lise Eliot wrote. "This fact, obvious to every previous generation, comes as a bewildering revelation to many parents today. Raised in an era of equal rights, we assumed—or at least hoped—that differences between the sexes are made, not inborn…Until we have kids of our own, at which point the differences are impossible to ignore." Echoing Sax, Eliot stressed that no sex should be considered superior. There were plenty of ways in which girls were better off than boys, who were more likely to suffer from developmental and learning disorders like autism and dyslexia, Eliot pointed out. "It's clear neither sex beats the other," she concluded. "So what's all the fuss?"[161]

Humpty Dumpty Determinism and the Rejection of Traditional Science

One reason for "all the fuss" was that any type of science that purported to uncover sex-based differences in temperament was considered dangerous. Scientists who flaunted these theories were reprimanded for engaging in "neurosexism,"[162] and although male scientists were

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[159] M. Liberman, 'Interview: The new fashion for biological determinism', *Language Log*, (10 August, 2008), blog post consulted online (4 May, 2024), https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=467.
[160] Liberman's concerns were well-founded. The Right hailed Sax as a hard-truth-telling savior. Here is Susan Hamilton writing for the neoconservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*: "For the past few decades, progressive parents have valiantly tried-and certainly have been urged to try-to raise their children in more gender-neutral ways…Parents and teachers bucking this androgynous education trend will be gratified to have at their disposal an arsenal of objective, scientific data of just the type Sax provides." See: S. Hamilton, 'Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences', *The Weekly Standard* [Washington], (5 June, 2006), p. 43.
[161] Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, pp. 2-4, p. 14.
[162] C. Fine, 'Will Working Mothers' Brains Explode? The Popular New Genre of Neurosexism', *Neuroethics*, 1/1 (7 February, 2008), pp. 69-72.

the most common targets of the constructionists' wrath, scientists who happened to be female were not spared rebuke when they engaged in similar research and arrived at the same conclusions. "I remember well at the beginning of my own scientific career, during a seminar about the effects of sex hormones on brain cells," Eliot recalled, "some prominent scientists stood up to protest the findings as 'dangerous' and 'pointless' given their potential for misuse. Just imagine, the argument continued, what would happen if neuroscientists started publishing articles about differences between the brains of blacks and whites."[163]

A far more existential concern, however, was that the entire foundation of the science that had produced these theories was flawed and unreliable—having been established and pursued by testosterone-addled men who were blind to their own androcentric bias. The solution to the women-in-science problem was not to make more women adhere to a crooked model of masculine objectivity; but to make the model more feminine.[164] Leanna Standish, a physiological psychologist struggling to form a collective for women in science at Smith College in 1982, was one such feminist-scientist who believed that traditional science created a hostile environment for women, many of whom tended to thrive on a type of human connection that was absent in the lab. "Women who devote themselves to science struggle in an environment poorly structured to meet their intellectual and emotional needs," Ms. Standish wrote in 1982. "The scientific workplace was designed for and by selves-in-separation," and "for women, work and human connection cannot be easily or happily separated." It was clear to women like Standish that the "male world of science and technology is not conducive to the intellectual, emotional or instrumental development of women. We must not be afraid to say that we are psychologically starving here."[165]

This psychological starvation could theoretically be satiated by telling better and truer stories about nature, according to Ruth Hubbard. "In science, as in the arts," Hubbard wrote in 1990, "we create stories and images about nature, including people, and transmit them through language," and a "writer who misrepresents people's life experiences is as 'wrong' as a scientist who misrepresents or misinterprets cultural beliefs about nature." Feminism was the counterbalance that science needed: "The political insights feminism provides can lead us to

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[163] Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, p. 14.
[164] Fee, 'Is Feminism a Threat to Scientific Objectivity?', pp. 84-92.
[165] L. Standish, *Science for the People*, 14/5 (September/October, 1982), p. 14.

more accurate, hence truer, accounts of nature than we now have."[166] Hubbard believed the entire premise of modern, Western science was broken. The idea of reductionist science—"breaking nature into smaller and smaller bits"—Hubbard claimed, "ignores, loses, or misreads their connections." Scientists engaged in reductionism "in the hope that once they get to understand the ultimate bits, they will be able to put them together and understand nature. But, as with Humpty Dumpty, that is going at it the wrong way around."[167] Adding, "The decision to disbelieve all scientific explanations is not to be sneered at."[168]

As a young woman interested in pursuing a career in science, the author Barbara Stanford had experienced such sneering firsthand. Writing in *Science for the People* in 1986, Stanford described feeling deeply dispirited in the lab, where she found that a strict adherence to reductionist thinking was unfamiliar, stifling, and even cruel. "My own subconscious decision against a career in science was made when I discovered that the initiation rite required for admission to high school science courses was the cold-blooded murder of a frog," Ms. Stanford recalled. "It was not just the blood and sliminess that bothered me," she continued. "Underneath the act of dissecting the frog, I dimly perceived a view of the world which I could not assent to. I could not accept the premise that one could only understand a frog by taking it apart—that the essential constituents of a live frog were present in the pieces of a dead frog. My world view said that a living being is more than the sum of its parts."[169]

Like other women whose budding interest in science had been tempered by an aversion to rigid reductionism, Ms. Stanford rebelled against a discipline that systematically minimized the more ephemeral and emotional aspects of inquiry into the natural world. Her relationship to the dead and deconstructed frog felt "as real and important as, or more important than, the relationship among the organs of the frog." Stanford voiced her reservations to anyone who would listen, but she was met with a series of condescending barbs and taunts. Dismissed as a "squeamish girl," she was told that her aversion to reductionism rendered her "not fit for a career in science"—a reaction that forced her to conclude that the "solution to the problem of sexism in

[166] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 3-5, p. 9.
[167] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 4-5.
[168] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 3-5, p. 9.
[169] B. D. Stanford, *Science for the People*, 18/1 (January/February, 1986), p. 7, 27.

science is not to provide women with models to help them become successful in traditional scientific ways, but for women to take the lead in the transformation of science."[170]

For women who harbored a deep admiration for both traditional scientific inquiry and the unique perspective that their femininity had to offer, reconciling these two worlds proved difficult. Few women embodied this tension more than Carla Fehr—a traditional scientist and ardent feminist—whose work studying sex differences through an evolutionary lens routinely triggered attacks by her fellow feminists, many of whom painted her as a traitor to the cause. "It is ironic that [Robert] Trivers, whose work has been a root of so much feminist concern, was a biologist who got me thinking about feminism by introducing me to the idea that females, including women, could have their own interest and could employ adaptive mating strategies to meet those interests," wrote Dr. Fehr, who had struggled to reconcile the fact that Trivers and his fellow evolutionary psychologists had propagated theories that had, fairly or not, been used to support harmful generalizations of women. "It was especially troubling that those stereotypes," wrote Ms. Fehr, "particularly as they apply to the sexual division of labor, create barriers to the participation of women in academic science careers."[171]

Much like Dr. Eliot, Dr. Fehr's sex had not spared her from the "powerful feminist critiques" that plagued evolutionary psychology. "When I lecture on evolution and gender," Fehr wrote, the "response from some feminist scholars is outright hostility that a feminist would even consider the topic." Faced with such critiques, Ms. Fehr would often push back by arguing that deliberately avoiding potentially harmful conclusions was shortsighted. "It may be the case that if feminist scholars simply ignore [evolutionary psychology] research it will go the way of phrenology," Ms. Fehr mused. "But, I admit to a deep curiosity regarding what evolutionary accounts of human social behavior might look like if research were conducted from a feminist perspective in communities informed by developments in feminist epistemology. I also feel some urgency about the harm that could arise from non-feminist EP research, and so I am keen to support people who, with expertise on gender in science and feminist epistemology, are in a position to improve the practices and products of the science itself."[172]

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[170] Ibid.
[171] C. Fehr, 'Feminist Engagement with Evolutionary Psychology', *Hypatia*, 27/1 (Winter, 2012), pp. 50-67.
[172] Fehr, 'Feminist Engagement with Evolutionary Psychology', pp. 50-67.

The feminist-psychologist Carol Tavris agreed that there was no reason for feminism and science to clash. "In general, I don't think feminism and science are inherently antagonistic, any more than conservatism and science are," Tavris said during an interview with Michael Shermer in 1999. "Many feminists regard science as a hopelessly patriarchal institution; I see it simply as a set of tools and attitudes that, like any human creation, can be used intelligently or stupidly." Science, Tavris continued, had "justly deserved the criticisms of feminists, but to throw out the whole institution is like saying, 'well, the law and medicine are biased against women, so let's get rid of all laws and doctors.' For me, science provides information that can be used to further the goals of feminism, and feminism is a way of improving science."[173]

Pop Science Contortions: "Sex Differences in the Brain Are Sexy"

Feminism and science may not have been "inherently antagonistic," as Tavris claimed, but the American media machine certainly acted as though they were, and a great deal of the "fuss" that Lise Eliot spoke of could be attributed more to bad journalism than bad science. It was not uncommon for the media to oversimplify data from studies that purported to expose even small differences in mathematical aptitude between girls and boys. When Camilla Benbow and Julian Stanley published a paper in the early 1980s that highlighted the biological reasons why boys tended to outperform girls in math, a range of articles with baiting headlines quickly sprang up in periodicals ranging from the *New York Times* and *Discover* to *Newsweek* and *Time*, most of which suggested that scientists had found a "math gene" that was more prominent in young men than young women—a far cry from what the research actually showed.[174]

The American public predictably prioritized easy entertainment over difficult conversations, and the press delivered. "Sex differences in the brain are sexy," Eliot wrote, since they offer an "easy explanation for the bewildering Mars/Venus gaps we find so amusing: why men can't multitask and women can't read maps; why men love The Three Stooges and women have their chick flicks." Whenever researchers "put a bunch of men and women in MRI machines and find some difference between their brains, we say, 'Aha!'—as if that explains everything." This was partly ascribable to what statisticians referred to as the "file-drawer effect"—the "fact that a study finding a statistically significant difference between men and

[173] C. Tavris interviewed by Michael Shermer, *Skeptic*, 7/1 (1999).
[174] *Science for the People*, 13/5 (September/October 1981), p. 6.

women is simply more interesting and, therefore, more likely to be published than a study finding no difference (leaving the more boring no-difference result to languish in researchers' file drawers).” The real danger, Eliot argued, was that popular science authors and the press consistently exaggerated sex differences as opposed to stating the facts.[175]

The media's dilution of complex and nuanced scientific topics occasionally forced scientists to join the public conversation for the sake of clarification. These well-meaning interventions, however, tended to overcorrect the problem, and were frequently plagued by the same type of oversimplification they sought eradicate. During the media frenzy that followed the release of the Benbow and Stanley study, for instance, John Durkin (a doctoral candidate in biophysics at Harvard University) and Jon Beckwith (a professor of genetics at Harvard Medical School) entered the fray in order to assure Americans that the sex-difference research they had grown so accustomed to reading was little more than a shameful political exercise engineered by power-hungry men. “Sex role research is most easily explained as a social and political phenomenon, not a scientific one,” explained Beckwith and Durkin. “Once again the scientific community has come forth with an apology for the status quo (in this case, male domination), and once again, it has done so with great success.” There was no such thing as a man with a dispassionate and unbiased interest in the divergent psychologies of men and women, they argued, since any interest one could have in such research was a “natural result of the domination of science funding, science and the media by the more privileged sectors of the society, and, in particular, by white males.”[176]

According to Beckwith and Durkin, “objective science” as it related to sex differences in the brain was an oxymoron, and any science that purported to be value-free in this regard was simply a con man’s ruse. The “very choice of questions” scientists chose to ask was inevitably “influenced by their social biases,” they wrote, and the “assumptions which underlie studies into these complex areas of human behavior inevitably reflect the prejudices of those doing the studies.”[177] For those whose adherence to the Standard Social Science Model remained unshaken by the growing number of studies that pointed to the biology behind the divergent interests of

[175] Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, pp. 10-15.
[176] J. Beckwith and J. Durkin, *Science for the People*, 13/5, (September/October, 1981), p. 32.
[177] Ibid.

men and women, their only recourse was to attack the motives of the scientists behind the studies. And as long as these studies were coming from the labs of mostly white men whose biases had rendered them incapable of truly objective thought, the results were not to be trusted—especially in the hands of the press.

CONCLUSION

Worlds Apart

When Lawrence Summers pondered out loud the possibility that women were less biologically suited for positions in STEM fields, he was wading into a controversy that had less to do with banal differences between the sexes and more to do with specific dichotomies that generated harmful stereotypes. This was no longer a relatively low-stakes debate over which sex was more genetically inclined to remember the fastest route to the store, or whether women could be trusted more than men to make prudent financial decisions; it was a debate whose outcome would presumably help reinforce or dismantle obstacles that for decades had held women back from obtaining teaching positions, lab appointments, federal grants, and the respect of their male peers in a variety of quantitative fields.

Evolutionists believed that, generally speaking, women approached science differently because they approached the *world* differently, by showing more of an interest in people rather than things. The irony was that a vocal segment of women—the "difference" feminists, as Suzanne Kelly referred to them—largely agreed. Ms. Stanford's disheartening experience in a cold and sterile lab as a young woman longing to connect with a dismembered frog fit with evolutionary psychology's claim that men and women viewed the scientific enterprise from two opposing ends of the empirical spectrum—with men preferring cold calculation and women preferring a "warmer" type of compassionate subjectivity.

Scientifically-inclined women across the country were beginning to realize what Ms. Stanford had learned in her high school lab: the entire scientific establishment was not hostile to women because it was dominated by men; it was hostile to women because it had been *shaped* by men, whose biased biology had led them to craft an inherently flawed intellectual framework that was incapable of seeing nature's true form. There was nothing objective about scientific

objectivity; it was a rigged game orchestrated by mostly white, Western males, and the rules needed to be changed.

This game had been played the same way for centuries, however, and the rules proved difficult to amend. This left women with two options: change course or adapt. Those who viewed science's unwelcoming environment as an insurmountable problem (or at least one unworthy of their time) hung up their lab coats and tacked toward the humanities, where they felt they could conjure a truer and more authentic image of the natural world. ("As our political awareness has increased," Hubbard wrote, "many of us scientists who are feminists have turned from doing scientific experiments to the social studies of science and science criticism.")[178] Those who stayed, however, were frequently subjected to ridicule and scorn whenever they engaged in research that could potentially expose the biological components of sex-lined behavior.

To be a Darwinian feminist like Carla Fehr was to walk a delicate line between traditional, dispassionate observation and subjectivity. The evolutionists were quick to note, however, that if anything, these studies consistently painted women as being more "evolved"—and even perhaps "superior"—to men, who were more prone to a series of mental and physical ailments ranging from depression and autism to addiction and extreme risk-taking. Most of the traits associated with an evolved male psychology—such as aggression and dispassionate calculation—had certainly been useful millions of years ago, but could be highly maladaptive in the modern environment. Traditionally "feminine" traits, on the other hand—such as sociability and kindness—were of far more use in the modern world.

And yet—despite a wealth of evidence that showed no evolved female inferiority—sex-based differences in temperament remained taboo. The rise of postmodernist thought within America's leading universities had surely played a role in the Left's rejection of gendered psychology, and there were certainly those who believed that Darwinian evolution itself was fundamentally "sexist" and therefore inapplicable to the modern study of men and women, as the philosopher Michael Ruse observed in 1998.[179] But much of the Left's pushback against these

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[178] The back cover of Hubbard's *The Politics of Women's Biology* (1990) reads: "Ruth Hubbard is a Professor Biology Emerita at Harvard who has moved from research in photobiology to the feminist critique of science." See: Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 1-3.

[179] M. Ruse, *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science*, Noretta Koertge (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press (1998), pp. 119-127.

claims could not be attributed to a sincerely-held and Marxist-driven belief that they were inherently flawed, nor could it be traced entirely to what Allan Bloom described in *The Closing of the American Mind* as the "dangerous political consequences of idealism."[180]

The widespread aversion to evolutionary explanations of gendered behavior instead had more to do with the politics of fear than the politics of socialism; with the desire to prevent discrimination as opposed to the desire to craft a perfect world. Lawrence Summers was scolded not because his beliefs were necessarily false, but because his position of power within America's most prominent university made it all the more likely that these dangerous claims would reach a wider audience through the press, which inevitably gave a "warped sense of the typical differences between the vast majority of boys and girls, and men and women," observed Lise Eliot. "Sex differences between the mean male and female are nowhere near as great as those between the extremes, but it's only the extremes that make headlines…These are the noticeable differences that set people off and fuel the idea that children's abilities are limited from the outset by the X or Y chromosomes they inherit."[181] This was problematic, Eliot noted, because of the influence these exaggerations could have on "parents, teachers, and children themselves." Adding, "Kids rise or fall according to what we believe about them, and the more we dwell on the differences between boys and girls, the likelier such stereotypes are to crystallize into children's self-perceptions and self-fulfilling prophecies."[182]

There were other dangers as well. Scientists like Sax did not simply offer explanations for the women-in-science problem; they also offered solutions, which inevitably came tinged with political undertones. Sax's remedy for women's underrepresentation in science, for instance, was same-sex education—a suggestion that was fiercely contested by groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, which featured Sax's *Why Gender Matters* in a campaign to "Teach Kids, Not Stereotypes" that reached the U.S. Department of Education in 2012.[183] A healthy caution against these types of repercussions, however, occasionally devolved into a subtle form of science denialism that came peppered with ad hominem attacks. When Deborah Tannen suggested that biology could help explain why men frequently talked over women, for

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[180] A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York: Simon & Schuster (1987), p. 67.
[181] Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, p. 13.
[182] Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, pp. 10-15.
[183] 'Preliminary Findings of ACLU "Teach Kids, Not Stereotypes" Campaign', American Civil Liberties Union (20 August, 2012), consulted online (8 October, 2023), https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/doe_ocr_report2_0.pdf.

instance, she was labeled an "apologist for men" and stood accused of supplying conservatives with precious material that could fuel their agenda.

Neither the studies nor their authors were the primary culprit, however. Regardless of the integrity of the underlying science or even the motives of the researchers, there was bound to be distortion in the press, for the simple fact that most people lacked the knowledge or patience (or both) to read and comprehend scientific studies in their entirety. "Very few people actually read original scientific books and papers, as opposed to the news reports about them," remarked the linguist Mark Liberman in a 2008 blog post, and this was true of science journalists as well. "As far as I can tell, science journalists mostly don't read the original papers…Instead, they rely on press releases." And even these could be distorted by scientists craving attention: "The people who write press releases, even at universities and scientific societies," Liberman continued, "rarely resist the temptation to spin things for maximum audience appeal, even when this crosses the boundary into misrepresentation or outright falsehood."[184] The velocity of the spin behind these misrepresentations tended to increase whenever the press shifted its focus to the only subject its audience enjoyed more than sex-based differences in temperament: sex-based differences in mating strategies.

[184] M. Liberman, 'Interview: The new fashion for biological determinism', *Language Log*, (10 August, 2008), blog post consulted online (4 May, 2024), https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=467.

CHAPTER TWO
MATING STRATEGIES

The discriminatory nature of sexual choice undermines all egalitarian utopias. Women might like the idea of all men being able to have equal amounts of sex, but no individual woman would be willing to forgo her power of sexual choice to allow an unattractive, unfit man to copulate with her.

- Geoffrey Miller, *The Mating Mind*, 2001[185]

It's hard to explain to men the oppressive power of hearing all your life that wanting sex as much as men do makes you a bad person. It makes you want to keep those thoughts to yourself.

- Meredith Small, *The Mating Game*, 1999[186]

INTRODUCTION

Questions of Sex, Freedom, and Happiness

When David Buss was asked by his fellow evolutionary psychologist Glenn Geher in 2006 whether he believed that his book *Sex, Power, and Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives* (1996) had helped bridge the gap between evolutionary psychology and mainstream feminism, Buss replied that it had been like "throwing a pebble into a black hole."[187] There was simply too much animosity and vitriol surrounding discussions of the evolved and divergent mating strategies between the sexes, and the political risks of acknowledging these differences produced a type of willful ignorance of evolutionary psychology (and by extension, science) that was patently illiberal and anti-intellectual—an ignorance that evolutionary biologists like David Sloan Wilson viewed as a frustratingly familiar barrier to social progress. "Evolution is here to stay as a theory that can help us understand the human condition, along with the rest of the living world," Wilson wrote in 2009. "With understanding comes the capacity for improvement."[188] Mr. Wilson was not someone who could be accused of harboring a blind admiration for

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[185] Miller, *The Mating Mind*, p. 337.
[186] M. Small, 'The Mating Game: Are we losers? Putting a mating theory to the test', *The Rutland Daily Herald* [Rutland], 31 March, 1999, p. 5.
[187] G. Geher, 'Why Is Evolutionary Psychology Controversial?', *Psychology Today*, (1 January, 2020), consulted online (22 March, 2022), https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/darwins-subterranean-world/202001/why-is-evolutionary-psychology-controversial.
[188] D. S. Wilson, 'Evolutionary Psychology and the Public Media: Rekindling the Romance', *HuffPost* [New York], (25 July, 2009).

evolutionary psychology, which he had taken to task on numerous occasions throughout the 1990s—attacking everything from the field's overemphasis on massive modularity to its minimization of adaptive traits benefitting both sexes. Yet he had a blunt message for those who rejected out of hand EP's analysis of human mating strategies as regressive and sexist: "Sexual behaviors that benefit one member of the pair at the expense of the other—and even at the expense of the species as a whole—are a fact of nature. Get used to it…Blanket statements to the effect that evolutionary psychology writ large is bad science or intrinsically more difficult than other kinds of science are dumb; I challenge people who make such statements to back them up with hard numbers."[189]

The people to whom Wilson was extending this challenge were, to a large extent, the same people whose unwavering adherence to the social science model of human behavior had created the black hole into which David Buss had thrown his book. This was especially true regarding feminist narratives surrounding men's mating strategies, a common theme of which was that the hardships and hurdles women seemed to face in their pursuit of a mate were the direct consequence of an almost conspiratorial, repressive regime run by men. Throughout the 1980s, self-described "radical feminists" such as Andrea Dworkin routinely took aim not only at sexist men but sex itself, which became viewed as inherently derogatory, harmful, and demeaning—the "pure, sterile, formal expression of men's contempt for women," as Ms. Dworkin put it in her 1987 book *Intercourse*.[190] Dworkin became the public face of a new type of visceral, feminine rage that was palpable on everything from op-ed pages and magazine covers to late-night talk shows and cable news programs,[191] and her self-professed mission to destroy everything from prostitution to pornography (both of which she believed benefited an oppressive patriarchy) led her to form an unlikely and awkward relationship with right-wing religious leaders and politicians, which in turn led some of her followers to wonder whether women like Dworkin were acting less in the service of women and more for themselves.[192]

This new strain of feminism spearheaded by Dworkin was fierce, aggressive, and unapologetic. Best-selling books such as Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1991, argued that the

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[189] Ibid.
[190] M. Goldberg, 'Not the Fun Kind of Feminist', *The New York Times* [New York], (22 February, 2019).
[191] N. Gibbs, 'The War Against Feminism', *Time* [New York], (9 March, 1992).
[192] Goldberg, 'Not the Fun Kind of Feminist'.

relative success of the women's movement had exposed the innate fragility of a deep-seated patriarchal system run by nostalgic and malevolent men. According to Faludi, these men, longing for a bygone era in which they exercised unchecked power, were trying to convince women that although feminism may have succeeded in leveling the gender playing field, this newfound freedom and equality had come at the expense of women's happiness and fulfillment. Women were free yet miserable, the male architects of the backlash insisted, and the result was that women had been thrown into an identity crisis—tricked into striving for a life they neither wanted nor needed.[193] "Behind this celebration of the American woman's victory," Susan Faludi wrote in the introduction of *Backlash*, "another message flashes. You may be free and equal now, it says to women, but you have never been more miserable."[194]

Regardless of whether women were more or less content within this new social ecosystem, their newfound freedoms had undoubtably come at a cost, through hard-fought battles that played out simultaneously in the judicial system and the media. As Nancy Gibbs wrote in *Time*, the early 1990s was an era that could be defined by "date-rape trials, harassment hearings, abortion battles and gender wars"—all of which were playing out in tabloid-fashion in front of a national audience that seemed addicted to intersexual drama, which was unfolding even at the highest levels of American power and governance. "It was the showdown between Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill that unveiled the depth of passion that women still feel about discrimination in private and public life," Ms. Gibbs wrote. "The fact that a majority of women as well as men wound up disbelieving Hill did not change the fact that the episode was a defining moment in the backlash debate."[195] The literal trials and tribulations of women like Ms. Hill during the early 1990s were the result of a nationwide reevaluation of feminism, which had lost some of its initial spark and universal appeal. "Whereas feminism was hip and fashionable in the '70s, antifeminism became socially acceptable in the '80s," Ms. Gibbs observed. "First the fundamentalist right, then the White House—and ultimately Hollywood, television and many journalists—held feminism responsible" for women's collective anger and sadness, which resulted in an uptick in teenage suicides and eating disorders.[196]

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[193] S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, New York: Crown (1991), Introduction.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Gibbs, 'The War Against Feminism'.
[196] N. Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, New York: HarperCollins (2002), Introduction.

Further complicating matters was the fact that the backlash to what was viewed as a corrosive and pseudo-fascist feminist movement was encouraged and promoted just as much by women as by men, even as sexual harassment claims rose by seventy percent between 1981 and 1989.[197] For those hoping to reverse feminism's march toward equality, the movement and its underlying ideology was painted as a cancerous disease of the mind that needed to be eradicated, and popular radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh (who popularized the term "Feminazi" in the early '90s) leapt at the opportunity to normalize the feminist backlash as it spread throughout the country.[198]

Seductive Science

The popularization of evolutionary psychology, which in the 1990s was riding high on a wave of best-selling books and popular magazine spreads, seemed to peak at the turn of the millennium. By 2001, EP (or in some cases adjacent scientific fields that were indistinguishable to the public) had captivated the minds and filled the bookshelves of millions of Americans, many of whom expressed a particular interest in the field's exploration of what the anthropologist Kim Hill once referred to as "very sexy topics," such as the competitive and occasionally scandalous mating tactics of men and women.[199] Books like *The Mating Mind* by Geoffrey Miller*, The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Hate* by David Buss, and *A Natural History of Rape* by Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer were all released months apart from one another in the year 2000 to great fanfare and controversy. These "sexy topics" were key to the field's popularity, but instead of embracing the fact that the public had taken an interest in evolutionary science, some seasoned scientists rolled their eyes. Mr. Hill, whose career had focused on hunter-gatherer tribesmen in Paraguay, for instance, could not help but scoff at both the public's obsession with mating behavior and the giddiness with which evolutionary psychologists seemed to embrace their newfound fame and provocateur status. "It's all about sex and violence," Hill complained.[200]

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[197] Gibbs, 'The War Against Feminism'.
[198] M. Hesse, 'Rush Limbaugh had a lot to say about feminism', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (19 February, 2021).
[199] S. Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?', *Newsweek* [New York], (19 June, 2009).
[200] Ibid.

Others worried that EP's newfound popularity and the resulting public pushback from scientists like Mr. Hill risked distorting its focus and mission. "Most people who choose to work in evolutionary psychology," the cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber wrote in a blog post, are "attracted to it by the media image of the field," along with its "focus on mate choice and related topics," and as a result show "little interest for the central aspects of human cognition." Sperber implored his fellow evolutionary psychologists to not let their discipline's newfound hype and popularity degrade its science: "Isn't there a risk," Sperber asked, "of evolutionary psychology becoming a mere sub-field of psychology largely focused on issues that, even if biologically central, are psychologically shallow, and of evolutionary themes gaining grounds in psychology in general but in loose manner and without the benefit of serious evolutionary scholarship? So, fellow evolutionary psychologists, let's ignore [the attack], but not the reasons why it occurs."[201]

Sperber was not alone in fearing that the media's fondness for EP was forcing evolutionary psychologists to dilute the complexity of their work. The endless stream of exposés and cover articles exploring the biological basis of cheating husbands and jealous wives, coupled with "risqué late-night talk shows discussing evolutionary rationales for the sexual indiscretions of politicians," was a dangerously simplistic platform from which to communicate detailed scientific ideas, argued Eric Smith, Monique Mulder, and Kim Hill in 2001. "There is a common weakness to these exposés," they wrote, and a "tendency to engage in 'just-so' story telling only loosely aligned with evolutionary logic, let alone to rigorous data. Sometimes, it appears that authors are tempted to sacrifice accuracy and intellectual caution for media attention. We suspect that there are few current areas of evolutionary and ecological research where the popular : primary literature ratio is so high."[202]

It was the growing popularity of this "sexy" science and the intellectual concessions its approachability demanded that worried the Left the most. In many of the country's most popular magazines and newspapers, evolutionists were arguing that although the battle of the sexes was real, it was a battle that pitted men against men and women against women—with men seeking to control resources through physical competition with other males, and women seeking access

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[201] D. Sperber, 'Evolutionary Psychology Under Attack', International Cognition and Culture Institute, (23 June, 2009), blog post consulted online (16 December, 2022), http://cognitionandculture.net/blogs/dan-sperber/evolutionary-psychology-under-attack.

[202] E. Smith, M. Mulder, K. Hill, 'Controversies in the evolutionary social sciences: a guide for the perplexed', *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 16/3 (March, 2001).

to high-status men through character assassination of their fellow females.[203] These were wildly unpopular arguments to make against a cultural backdrop of "date-rape trials" and "harassment hearings," as Nancy Gibbs put it, as they threatened to undermine the dominant narrative that female rivalries could be traced almost entirely to male meddling. Many on the Left who had refused to entertain adaptationist explanations of heterosexual mating habits, however, conspicuously changed their tune when scientists began looking at the origins of homosexuality through a Darwinian lens.

The distinct political identities that animate the work of historians like Alan Brinkley and Richard Hofstadter are less discernible in this chapter, where traditional associations between one's political orientation and one's respect for scientific authority are somewhat muddled. In the debate over the validity of analyzing mating habits through an evolutionary lens, individuals and groups shifted and realigned their positions depending on the specific issue at hand—with little regard for the typical, binary political tribalism that had defined much of 20th century America. Much like with DNA recombination (in which strands of DNA are broken and rejoined to maintain the fitness of the genome), political tribes during this period regularly swapped ideological segments and recombined them in ways that served their immediate interests. Many on the Left who had previously denounced scientific explanations of human behavior were suddenly receptive to scientific explanations of homosexuality, for instance, while many on the Right who had questioned the scientific basis of evolution appeared willing to embrace evolutionary science if it could be used to rationalize their sexual instincts.

On the other hand, this chapter reinforces the historical narrative—laid out by authors like Steven Goldman in *Science Wars*—that many of the grievances aimed at scientific authority in the United States could be traced to a wider denunciation of Western culture. In this case, the false belief that patriarchal mating habits were uniquely intertwined with Western culture fueled the Left's claim that the entire field of evolutionary psychology needed to be discredited and disavowed. Goldman's claim that smug scientists and hubris are often to blame for the public's ever-present rejection of scientific expertise, however, is at odds with much of the evidence presented in this chapter. Although evolutionary psychologists could be stubborn and hyper-focused, they were rarely self-satisfied and seldom pressed their views on the public.

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[203] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 331.

FEMALE MATING STRATEGIES

Trivers and Symons Set the Stage

In 1972, Robert Trivers paved the way for evolutionary psychologists to study the mating strategies of men and women through his theory of parental investment. Inspired by the curious mating patterns and domestic rituals of pigeons,[204] Trivers built on Darwin's theory of sexual selection in order to show how the disparate mating strategies of men and women were shaped by the relative levels of each sex's parental investment. From a genetic standpoint, Trivers postulated, it was females who had far more to lose than males if their offspring failed to reproduce, and therefore it was women who invested more time, resources, and energy into finding a sexual partner whose genetic contribution was worth the physical and emotional pain of pregnancy and motherhood—thus the persistent stereotype of the coy and hyper-selective female who rejects the sexual advances of eager yet subpar men.

Males, on the other hand, whose biology allowed them to mate with a virtually limitless number of females, co-evolved to compete with one another for the attention of the discerning female.[205] Donald Symons then expanded on Trivers' theory in his 1979 book *The Evolution of Sexuality*, which, as a contemporary review by Sarah Hrdy in the *Quarterly Review of Biology* put it, broke a longstanding and unspoken taboo by invoking evolutionary theory to explain the "feelings, desires, states of mind, perceptions, dispositions to fantasize, and physiological reactions which together constitute human sexuality."[206]

The unification of theories put forth by Trivers and Symons laid the groundwork for evolutionary psychologists to study how males and females engaged in an elaborate dance of competition, seduction, and deception in order to maximize the fitness of their offspring. "There

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[204] "The conflict-free monogamous bird family was a fantasy of bird scientists," Trivers once wrote in a reflection of what had piqued his interest in the species. "All you had to do was watch an actual bird couple—up close and personal—and you could see the truth. Why would a male force his partner (for life) into sleeping on the sloping roof every night instead of the gutter, where all the other pigeons slept including himself? Does it have anything to do with the fact that in the gutter next to her would be another 'monogamous' *male* sitting close to *his* partner? [emphasis original]" R. Trivers quoted in D. Buss (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Human Mating*, online ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press (2022), pp. 11-15.

[205] Buss, 'Introduction to Human Mating Strategies', *The Oxford Handbook of Human Mating*, online ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press (2022), pp. 1-7.

[206] S. Hrdy, 'The Evolution of Human Sexuality: The Latest Word and the Last', *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 54/3 (September, 1979), pp. 309-314.

is a powerful link between intersexual and intrasexual selection," wrote David Buss in *The Adapted Mind*. "Males should evolve over time to compete with each other most strongly to obtain those resources and display those qualities that females express in their selective choices," while females should be expected to "evolve over time to compete with each other to display those cues that males express in their selective choices." As a consensus among evolutionary psychologies emerged, it began to make intuitive sense that in addition to looking for physical characteristics that signaled strength and the ability to ward off threats, females would also be drawn toward more subtle behavioral characteristics that demonstrated a desire to invest in resources that would help facilitate the long-term rearing of a child, such as building stable shelters and obtaining food.[207]

Pursuing Men With Status and Power

The modern male's desire to obtain and secure valuable resources was often far from subtle, however. The stereotypical image of a powerful man, sitting atop his vast fortune and flaunting his ill-gotten power and status, had been a cornerstone of American media since the Robber Barons of the Gilded Age were depicted straddling piles of cash and taunting their competitors. Although the Gilded Age came to embody a uniquely American idea of greed and testosterone-driven financial conquest, evolutionary psychology's claim that similar behavior could be found in other cultures across the world—even those separated from the United States by vast amounts of time and space—was greeted with widespread skepticism. In order to understand not only the human male's thirst for wealth and power but also his insatiable need to display his spoils, evolutionary psychologists placed the spotlight not on men but on women, whose evolved sexual preferences, they claimed, led directly to the evolution of the male's never-ending quest for power, resources, and status.[208]

Throughout the 1980s, evolutionary psychologists were engaged in largescale, cross-cultural studies they hoped would confirm their hypothesis that females placed a heavy premium on status and power in a mate. Studies showed that women across all cultures preferred to mate with men who demonstrated that they were either in direct control of economic resources or

[207] D. Buss, 'Mate Preference Mechanisms: Consequences for Partner Choice and Intrasexual Competition', *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 251-252.
[208] D. Buss interviewed on *The Joe Rogan Podcast* #1959, (23 March, 2023) 1hr: 33min.

possessed the behavioral characteristics that would increase the chances of obtaining those resources in the future, such as "ambition, industriousness, social status," and "self-confidence." Men who lacked resources *and* the typical behavioral characteristics associated with obtaining them were still considered to be of high value as long as they were in a position that would likely lead to the procurement of these resources in the future, e.g., a dedicated medical student.[209]

Writing in *The Adapted Mind*, Bruce Ellis stressed the universal importance of a male's socioeconomic status to women seeking a mate. Citing research from the International Mate Selection Project, which was completed in 1990 using data from over 10,000 people within thirty-seven cultures spanning six continents and five islands, Ellis wrote that women showed a markedly stronger desire to mate with men who could demonstrate that they were in possession of financial wealth rather than men who were simply physically attractive. The inverse was found to be true regarding men's evaluation of women, whose good looks mattered far more than their economic status. For evolutionary biologists who had spent their careers studying other species, this made sense. Men with greater access to resources were more likely to be able to invest and engage in activities that would benefit a child, such as education, nurturing, and feeding. The elevated social status within a group or tribe that tended to be associated with increased access to resources also allowed an industrious man to control those resources in order to direct them more toward his family than the families of others.[210]

The cross-cultural methodology of these studies made it difficult for cultural-relativists and ardent behaviorists to engage in their usual refutations. According to David Buss, the International Mate Selection Project data on which this particular study was based had sourced its information from cultures ranging from "coast-dwelling Australians to urban Brazilians to shantytown South African Zulus"; from nations where polygyny was the rule to nations where monogamy was the norm; where cohabitation outside of marriage was encouraged as well as where it was discouraged; and where socialism or communism was the economic status quo as well as where capitalism reigned supreme. The results did not waver: Women universally placed

[209] Buss, 'The Great Struggles of Life'.
[210] B. Ellis, 'The Evolution of Sexual Attraction: Evaluative Mechanisms in Women', *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 268-270.

a man's ability to acquire financial resources at the top of the list of characteristics to which they were attracted.[211,212]

When presented with this evidence, progressive feminists often claimed that this dynamic was purely a symptom of pre-existing patriarchal structures as opposed to a referendum on human nature. Since men had consolidated power and wealth through generations of sexist exploitation, the argument went, women had no choice but to mate with powerful men in order to gain access to their resources. "It is hardly surprising if women prefer men richer than themselves in a world where the vast majority of communities distribute wealth so unequally between the sexes," wrote Debbie Cameron, author of *The Myth of Mars and Venus*, in 1997. "Women, by and large, *are* the poor: that in itself seems sufficient to explain why they so frequently marry men who are richer than they are [emphasis original]."[213] Research suggested, however, that the inverse was in fact true. According to Steven Pinker, women with "large salaries, postgraduate degrees, prestigious professions, and high self-esteem" placed a "*greater* value on wealth and status in a husband than other women do [emphasis original]." This preference was found to hold even among of leaders of feminist organizations, as well as within societies that had remained largely untouched by western influence, such as the Bakweri in Cameroon, where "the women are wealthier and more powerful than the men, and they still insist on men with money."[214]

In highlighting the female desire for male socioeconomic status, evolutionary psychologists were careful not to diminish the importance of male physicality. In the ancestral environment on which evolutionary psychologists based their claims, it was the physically powerful, tall, and dominant men who were best able secure resources. "The higher a male is in dominance (i.e., the greater his ability to displace others through coercion from positions or commodities they both want)," wrote Bruce Ellis in *The Adapted Mind*, the "greater his access to

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[211] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 106.

[212] Whether the average American spent any time wondering whether female attraction to high-status males was due more to nature or nurture was irrelevant to those actively seeking mates in the United States, who knew how the game had to be played. One analysis of eight hundred "lonely hearts advertisements" taken out by singles in newspapers in 1977, for instance, found that women used their ads to promote their attractiveness and seek financial security, while men reciprocated by touting their financial security and expressing their desire for a physically attractive mate. See: A. Harrison, L. Saeed, 'Let's make a deal: An analysis of revelations and stipulations in lonely hearts advertisements', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35*/4 (1977), pp. 257–264.

[213] Cameron, 'Back to Nature', pp. 6-15.

[214] S. Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, New York: Penguin Press (1998) p. 482.

a variety of fitness-enhancing resources."[215] The ability to prevail in a physical contest was best advertised to females through direct combat with other males, the potential success of which was often predicted by the sheer size of the man's body, muscle tone, masculine face, athletic ability, and a high shoulder-to-hip ratio that could aide in warding off threats.[216] While the introduction of culture eventually allowed females to base their choice of mate on more than just their physical appearance, these core evolutionary standards still held true, evolutionary psychologists claimed, with females across all modern cultures preferring relatively tall and toned men with symmetrical facial features.[217]

Maximizing Beauty and Minimizing Rivals

A predominantly male cadre of evolutionary scientists lecturing the public on the supposed biological underpinnings of women's lust for male power was predictably ill-received in progressive circles, where narratives championing female independence and liberation tended to be predicated on the notion that a woman could not only survive but thrive without the help of a husband's salary. The glaring incongruities between what evolutionary psychologists claimed to be the natural order of gendered mating strategies and a progressive movement that platformed female individualism and empowerment was not lost on frustrated journalists like Sharon Begley, whose tongue-in-cheek summary of evolutionary psychology's take on female mating patterns poked fun at the apparent callousness of a male's opinion. "Women attracted to high-status, wealthy males were fitter," Ms. Begley summarized in a widely-circulated *Newsweek* piece in 2009. "Such men could best provide for the kids, who, spared starvation, would grow up to have many children of their own…We in the 21st century, asserts evo psych, are operating with Stone Age minds."[218]

The broad brush with which journalists like Ms. Begley painted EP's stance on gendered mating patterns inevitably sowed exaggeration and stirred confusion. Words like "universal" became conflated with "all"—a rhetorical misstep that Nancy and Randy Thornhill took pains to point out as they deflected accusations of sexism stemming from a paper they had published in 1992, in which they claimed that men and women had sex-specific, "species-typical sexual

[215] B. Ellis, 'The Evolution of Sexual Attraction: Evaluative Mechanisms in Women', *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 270-5.
[216] Buss, 'The Great Struggles of Life'.
[217] Miller, *The Mating Mind*, pp. 190-4.
[218] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.

psychologies" when it came to mating strategies. The co-authors conceded that despite the universality of these divergent traits, there was "tremendous variability within the sexes in all aspects of sexual behavior," and that "high phenotypic variance within a sex does not imply that no psychological machinery occurs in all members of that sex and that sex alone." Women whose "lifetime numbers of unique sexual partners exceed those of most men are not acting in the absence of sex-specific psychological adaptations."[219]

Such caveats failed to assuage the moral and practical concerns of anthropologists and popular science writers like Meredith F. Small, who pulled from her personal life in an attempt to undermine EP's claims. "As a woman, these researchers believe, I should look for a man of high status who will invest all his money and goods in our kids," Dr. Small wrote in a 1999 essay entitled "Are We Losers? Putting a Mating Theory to the Test." According to Small, evolutionary psychologists were wrong because despite being aware of their theory, she had "nonetheless chosen to spend the last decade with an artist, a man with no money and few goods beyond a bunch of paint brushes." Even Small's partner embodied evidence that EP's conclusions were baseless. "As a man, the theory suggests, he should have looked for a young, fertile woman with a tight waist and big hips," Small wrote. "But no. He has chosen me, a women much older than himself" who "hasn't seen a decent hip-to-waist ratio in years."[220]

The adaptationist narrative was also rejected by an increasingly popular cohort of feminist writers and intellectuals like Naomi Wolf, whose book *The Beauty Myth* was released in 1990 and quickly rose to the top of the best-seller list amidst a flurry of media appearances and discussion groups. The "myth," according to Wolf, was that the "quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists," and that "women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it." In maintaining this myth, evolutionists had made three false claims: That "strong men battle for beautiful women," that beautiful women "are more reproductively successful," and that "women's beauty must correlate to their fertility." "None of this is true," Wolf asserted. Instead, beauty acted as "currency system like the gold standard," and "like any economy, it is determined by politics." In the "modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact," Wolf continued. "In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an

[219] Thornhill and Thornhill, 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', pp. 404-416.
[220] Small, 'The Mating Game', p. 5.

expression of power relations in which women must *unnaturally* compete [emphasis added] for resources that men have appropriated for themselves."[221]

Evolutionary psychologists were not blind to the impact of "culturally imposed physical standards," and they conceded that intrasexual competition among women was exacerbated by societal pressures, media framing, and sexism. "Extremely attractive women are a tiny fraction of the population, yet images of these women are presented at a misleadingly high frequency," wrote David Buss, which often led to a vicious cycle in which women take "drastic measures to try to increase their attractiveness," and as a result suffer from "body image problems, eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, or depression."[222] As Naomi Wolf wrote, since 1969, popular fashion magazines such as *Vogue* had been focusing just as much on the female body as on what was covering it. Suddenly, an entire sub-genre of American beauty culture was "developed by naming a 'problem' where it had scarcely existed before, centering it on women's natural state, and elevating it to *the* existential female dilemma [emphasis original]," according to Wolf, who noted that between 1968 and 1972 there was a seventy percent increase in the number of diet-related articles in American media.[223]

In addition to causing a marked rise in mental health problems and eating disorders such as bulimia,[224] cultural pressure to be thin could have professional repercussions as well. In the '90s, women were entering a workforce where their weight was oftentimes inversely proportional to their wages, with one study finding that among white females, "a difference in weight of two standard deviations (roughly 65 pounds) is associated with a difference in wages of nine percent," according to John Cawley.[225]

Still, those who insisted that the American female's obsession with maintaining a youthful appearance was due entirely to Western cultural brainwashing were faced with the uncomfortable fact that identical behavior could be found in every culture throughout the world. A series of studies carried out in 1988 and 1996 showed that women across cultures relied on some form of "appearance enhancement" as their primary means of attracting a mate, and that women, far more than men, would openly slander and defame their sexual rivals by spreading

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[221] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, p. 12.
[222] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 389.
[223] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, p. 67.
[224] E. Stice, H. Shaw, 'Role of body dissatisfaction in the onset and maintenance of eating pathology', *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 53/5 (November 2002), pp. 985-993.
[225] J. Cawley, 'The Impact of Obesity on Wages', *The Journal of Human Resources*, 39/2 (Spring, 2004), p. 451.

rumors that their target was promiscuous and therefore undesirable.[226] These tactics, evolutionary psychologists argued, were direct manipulations of a man's desire to ensure paternity through a faithful mate.[227] Women were also found to be far more likely than men to use various forms of character assassination as opposed to physical violence, and publicly labeling sexual rivals as "fat" or "ugly" proved to be an effective strategy when it came to directing a man's attention away from a competing female, regardless of the claim's validity.[228]

This evidence was being presented in an environment where the prevailing attitude was that female beauty standards were entirely culturally-constructed—that women had been tricked into competing against one another by a patriarchal society bent on breaking women down. The SSSM's invocation of culture as the bedrock upon which every human behavior was based became especially pronounced when the conversation turned toward female perceptions of beauty. As Cosmides and Tooby wrote in *The Adapted Mind*, culture had become the "universal glue and explanatory variable" that united all social science explanations of mating behavior during the last half of the 20th century, and for devoted cultural relativists, the only answer to the question "why do women want to look younger?" was that "youthful appearance is valued in our culture."[229]

By 1980, a quiet consensus began to emerge within once-skeptical anthropological circles that some female beauty standards were indeed universal, and that although these standards tended to vary from culture to culture, even the most drastic variations fell within the confines of universal signals for youth and fertility, such as tight skin, thick hair, full lips, toned muscles, a low waist-to-hip ratio, and even a "sprightly gait," according to a meta-analysis conducted in 2009.[230] In fact, the oppressive nature of American beauty standards paled in comparison to the far harsher standards of most non-western cultures, according to the evolutionists. "The *really* sexist societies drape women in chadors from head to foot [emphasis original]," wrote Steven Pinker in 1998. "Throughout history the critics of beauty have been powerful men, religious leaders, sometimes older women, and doctors, who can always be counted on to say that the latest beauty craze is hazardous to women's health. The enthusiasts are women themselves." The

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[226] D. Buss, L. Dedden, 'Derogation of Competitors', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7 (1990), pp. 395-422.
[227] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 155.
[228] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 287-8.
[229] Cosmides, Tooby, *The Adapted Mind,* p. 41.
[230] Buss, 'The Great Struggles of Life'.

reason for this, Pinker argued, was "simple economics and politics." Adding, "Women in open societies want to look good because it gives them an edge in competing for husbands, status, and the attention of powerful people. Men in closed societies hate beauty because it makes their wives and daughters indiscriminately attractive to other men, giving the women a measure of control over the profits from their own sexuality."[231]

Coy Women and Aggressive Men

While makeup and the latest fashion could mask physical flaws, it was more difficult to mask temperament. Throughout American literature and film, women had routinely been portrayed as the coy, cautious, and dismissive counterpart to the sexually-aggressive and promiscuous man. A founding principle of proper social etiquette held that a woman should never appear too eager to accept a man's advances, and a "chase" was often expected by both parties. These presumably antiquated cultural standards became a target of second-wave feminism, which advertised female sexual liberation and freedom as a means of subverting male oppression. A renewed appreciation of Marxist literature in the 1970s eventually converged with the feminist movement to propose that female coyness and male eagerness were culturally constructed traits and could therefore, at least in theory, be dismantled.

In their refutation of the data showing that females tended to be far more coy than men, the self-proclaimed feminist scientists Anne Fausto-Sterling, Patricia Adair Gowaty, and Marlene Zuk turned to the work of Meredith Small and her experience studying animals—leaning on broad generalizations in an attempt to counteract what they viewed as evolutionary psychology's more dangerously broad generalizations. In *Female Choices: The Sexual Behavior of Female Primates*, Ms. Small had "found evidence of sexually active female primates whose behavior is far from coy," they wrote:

> In many—if not most—species of monkeys and apes, females are having a lot more sex than seems necessary to produce their usual one or two offspring per year. Some females solicit sex by approaching a male and pushing their hind ends in his face—hardly 'coy' behavior. Others initiate a game of sexual tag, running to a male, slapping him, and retreating for a short distance. The traditional view holds that males should always be ready, willing, and able, while females—good Victorians all—need persuasion, either gentle or otherwise. How can such a viewpoint account for these sexually pushy female apes and monkeys? There is no widely accepted

[231] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 487.

> answer, but Small suggests that the immediate pleasure all primates derive from sex can explain the pattern. Others propose that by copulating with several males, a female can disguise the paternity of her offspring, perhaps gaining protection, or at least freedom from harassment, by multiple males each of whom hopes he is the father. Whatever the explanation, Small's work lays to rest the myth that females don't want, don't need, and don't get any recreational sex.[232]

These were seductive and increasingly popular narratives that, to all but perhaps the Christian Right, made a great deal of sense. Parallels between the animal kingdom and modern human societies could only go so far, however, and through two experiments conducted in 1978 and 1982, Russell Clark and Elaine Hatfield decided to test the true malleability of these cultural mores and sexual taboos. They concluded that men and women "responded as [the] traditionalists would expect them to," as the vast majority of men they studied quickly and enthusiastically accepted direct sexual invitations from women, while not a single woman took men up on the same offer posed in the exact the same way.[233]

A similar study spearheaded by Peggy La Cerra in 1994 suggested that women were less interested in a potential partner's looks than his ability to care for a future child: La Cerra and her team set up a slide show of a man in five different scenarios. The first slide showed a man standing alone. In the second slide, the man is interacting positively with an 18-month-old child—making eye contact with the child, smiling, and showing a protective stance. The third slide portrayed the man ignoring a crying child, and the fourth slide showed the man and child both calm but indifferent toward each other. The fifth slide simply showed the man vacuuming a rug. On a scale of -5 (very unattractive) to +5 (very attractive) women overwhelmingly favored the second slide in which the man showed a genuine interest in the child, and gave the lowest rating to the slide that showed the man ignoring the child in distress. To ensure that this preference was unique to women, La Cerra ran the test again, this time swapping the sexes so that men were rating women in the same conditions. The result amounted to "What child?" as the men ranked the woman standing alone to be just as attractive as the women interacting with the child.[234]

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[232] A. F. Sterling, P. A. Gowaty, M. Zuk, 'Review: Evolutionary Psychology and Darwinian Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 23/2 (Summer, 1997), pp. 402-417.
[233] R. D. Clark, E. Hatfield, 'Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers', *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 2/1, (1989), pp. 39-55.
[234] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 116-117.

These types of studies buoyed the hypothesis that women, by withholding sex from a potential mate, were guarding against deception and protecting their future offspring. Women, in other words, had not been coerced by society into being coy and selective. Instead, over the course of millions of years, females had evolved a finely-tuned cad-detection strategy in order to ensure that a man was willing to invest material and emotional resources in the rearing of a future child. It was the man's responsibility to display these traits to a woman, who, by limiting her sexual access, was increasing her value by making her suitor's most sought-after sexual prize a scarcer (and therefore more worthy) investment.[235]

Numerous cross-cultural studies showed that men exhibit a dogged persistence in mating with new females frequently, continuously, and oftentimes aggressively. The fact that women had evolved to display the inverse of this behavior in their pursuit of men is what evolutionary psychologists labeled "strategic interference," wherein intersex conflict occurs because one sex's criteria for securing a mate are incompatible with the other's. This dynamic is on display in the modern environment whenever men lie about their wealth or status to ensnare a mate, or when women lie about their age.[236] A shared evolutionary interest in deception, however, is where any significant overlap between male and female mating strategies appeared to end, and the ways in which the field delineated between the mating tactics of men and women became a flashpoint of controversy during a time when women were extolling the virtues of female camaraderie, entering a male-dominated work force at an unprecedented rate, and intermingling with testosterone-addled men in that cesspool of hormonal confusion known as the college campus.

"No Means No" versus "Yes Means Yes" at Antioch College

Tensions between evolutionary psychology and the fast-changing social mores surrounding sexual consent came to a head in the 1990s, when questions of what constituted consent on college campuses were being reframed. The dictum "no means no" had been the de facto rule of sexual engagement on campus throughout the 1980s, but beginning in the '90s, a new and more restrictive rule known colloquially as "yes means yes" (which held that sexual partners needed to engage in a constant dialogue of affirmative consent) began to emerge in

[235] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 308-310.
[236] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 305.

response to a rise in unwanted sexual encounters reported by women. Although popular within liberal arts colleges across the country, these new rules were most famously associated with Antioch College—a small school in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where students spearheaded affirmative consent after an incident in which university administrators were accused of moving too slowly to remove a student accused of rape. Dubbed the "Antioch College Sexual Offense Policy," this new code of conduct set the bar of consent significantly higher than it had been in the past. "Do not take silence as consent; it isn't," the policy stated. Instead, students were told they could only proceed with their sexual advances if, for instance, the other student replied, "Yes, I want to kiss you also."[237] This one-page document eventually morphed into a range of official educational and administrative materials on campus in the form of lectures, student presentations, and even skits where students would act out various scenarios where affirmative consent would be necessary.[238] American society outside of Antioch's walls seemed skeptical of the college's new and seemingly draconian take on consent, however, and as word of the new rules escaped the campus and spread to major media outlets, the perceived oversensitivity of Antioch's students was lampooned across the political spectrum, including on popular television programs like Saturday Night Live.[239]

The denigration of these new rules was not confined to late-night sketch shows either. Women like Katie Roiphe, then a 25-year-old doctoral candidate at Princeton who had recently published *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus*, believed this type of campus "hysteria" was being peddled by "rape-crisis feminists" who were unwittingly doing their movement a disservice by treating women as perpetual victims. "The image that emerges from feminist preoccupations with rape and sexual harassment is that of women as victims, offended by a professor's dirty joke, verbally pressured into sex by peers," Roiphe told a *Newsweek* journalist in 1993. "This image of a delicate woman bears a striking resemblance to that '50s ideal my mother and the other women of her generation fought so hard to get away from. They didn't like her passivity—her excessive need for protection—but here she is again, with her pure

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[237] 'Ask First at Antioch', *The New York Times* [New York], (11 October, 1993), p. A16.
[238] 'The Reinvention of Consent', *The New York Times* [New York], (30 December, 2018), p. F16.
[239] In one *Saturday Night Live* sketch, male and female contestants on a fictional game show titled "Is It Date Rape" had to decide whether hypothetical situations constituted rape. The woman, played by a humorless and exceedingly proper Shannen Doherty, always responded with an emphatic "yes," often before the host had even finished asking the question. Chris Farley played the stereotypical fraternity "bro" who always answered "no." See: 'Ask First at Antioch', *The New York Times* [New York], (11 October, 1993), A16.

intentions and her wide eyes. Only this time it is the feminists themselves who are breathing new life into her." Labeled both a "traitor" and the "Clarence Thomas of women" by Gail Dines, a professor of sociology and women's studies at Wheelock College, Ms. Roiphe soon found herself ostracized from feminist circles on campus.[240]

The one thing all parties seemed to agree on during this crisis of consent was that men and women viewed the rules of sexual engagement (as well as what constituted acceptable dating behavior) through remarkably different lenses. "Men and women just think differently," Antioch's president Alan Guskin remarked in the midst of the controversy, "and we've got to help the students understand the differences."[241,242] Evolutionary psychologists wanted to help students understand these differences as well, but perhaps not in the way Mr. Guskin had intended. Studies such as those carried out by Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh in 1988 found that roughly forty percent of female university undergraduates in the United States had at least once said "no" when they wanted to say "yes" to a sexual advance,[243] which suggested that the coercive and boorish male behavior that women loathed and were fighting to eliminate was not only to some extent "natural" but had in fact been sought after by women through the same evolutionary mechanisms of female mate choice that had made a chiseled jaw line attractive.[244] This was, in other words, the apotheosis of Richard Dawkins' "selfish gene" metaphor, in which the gene's survival trumps its human carrier's comfort. If maximizing the chances of successful gene replication meant choosing a man who would pass along his coercive and discourteous approach to procreation to a potential son (who would then mimic the aggressive behavior of his father in order to pass along his mother's genes to a new generation), then this was a price that evolutionary psychologists believed women were subconsciously willing to pay.

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[240] Staff editorial, 'Sexual Correctness', *Newsweek* [New York], (24 October, 1993).
[241] Ibid.
[242] In *How The Mind Works*, Steven Pinker told the story of Andrew Martinez, an infamous Berkeley student who became known around campus as the "Naked Guy" for attending class and even the dining hall completely nude, in a self-described protest against the sexually-repressive nature of Western society. He was expelled after female students claimed his actions amounted to sexual harassment—a charge that would have been difficult to imagine if the sexes had been reversed. See: Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 472.
[243] C. L. Muehlenhard, L.C. Hollabaugh, 'Do women sometimes say no when they mean yes?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54/5, (1988), pp. 872-9.
[244] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence: A Primer for Policymakers and Public Policy Advocates*, R. Bloom, N. Dess, (eds.) Westport: Praeger Publishers (2003), p. 92.

MALE MATING STRATEGIES

"Science Is Not Personal" (Men Crave Youth)

In 2008, the behavioral scientists Alan Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa released *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters*, which argued, among other things, that men are primarily attracted to young, large-breasted women who show signs of high fertility. When an excerpt from the book ran in a summer issue of *Psychology Today*, the publication's editor in chief, Kaja Perina, was inundated with angry letters calling into question not only the book's scientific validity but also the magazine's decision to publish something so inflammatory. Miller and Kanazawa attempted to lower the temperature on the debate by reminding readers of the importance of scientific objectivity. "We didn't write it to be incendiary," they assured their hostile audience. "You have to remember that science is not personal. It's about generalizations."[245]

The idea that men were genetically programmed to pursue young and nubile females as opposed to being culturally coerced into this behavior seemed quite personal, however, since it challenged the idea that women of all ages had equivalent cultural value. By claiming that men placed a premium on youth and beauty as opposed to personality and intelligence, evolutionary psychologists were accused of codifying stereotypes that ultimately harmed women. "Evolutionary psychology is a cranky and despotic Cyclops, its single eye glaring through an overtly masculinist lens," wrote the science journalist Natalie Angier in response to David Buss' book, *The Evolution of Desire* (1994).[246] Sharon Begley echoed this sentiment in her *Newsweek* piece with a snarky summary: "Men attracted to young, curvaceous babes were fitter because such women were the most fertile; mating with dumpy, barren hags is not a good way to grow a big family tree."[247]

Eye-grabbing and provocative summaries of evolutionary psychology's take on men's mating strategies like those of Ms. Begley's, although generalizations themselves, were not entirely off base. Writing in *The Adapted Mind*, Donald Symons offered a slightly more

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[245] K. Dizon, 'Evolutionary psychology proves a divisive topic', *The Chicago Tribune* [Chicago], (5 December, 2007), p E5.
[246] 'Jealous', *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* [Fort Worth], (5 June, 2000), p. 40.
[247] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.

restrained but similarly damning summary of the field's consensus regarding the type of women males had evolved to pursue. “Human males universally seem to be maximally sexually attracted, other things being equal, to certain physical correlates of female nubility,” Mr. Symons wrote, “i.e., to certain physical characteristics indicative of a human female who has recently begun fertile menstrual cycles and who has not yet borne a child.”[248] Although anthropologists would occasionally find exceptions to this rule, Symons was confident that “no society will be found in which most men perceive 38-year-old women as more sexually attractive than 18-year-old women,” and that the only reason older women had been able to successfully find mates was that modern cosmetics had allowed them to hide their true age. “In modern contracepting societies,” wrote to Symons, “women can maintain a relatively youthful appearance far longer than was possible in the EEA [the “Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness,” i.e., the Pleistocene epoch], hence in these societies the effect of age on women's sexual attractiveness is much less marked than it was in the past or is today among band-level peoples (whose environments in some respects resemble the EEA).”[249]

Adaptationists believed that men had their sights perpetually set on the youthful attributes of women not because of subliminal advertising campaigns, but because they were subconsciously searching for signs of fertility and reproductive value. Physical traits such as “smooth, clear, and unblemished skin, lustrous hair, white teeth,” and the “absence of gray hair”; behavioral characteristics such as a “sprightly and graceful gait, high energy level, alacrity”; and a positive reputation regarding the “age, health, condition, appearance, behavior, and prior sexual conduct of a female” were all believed to be universally attractive to heterosexual males, according to David Buss.[250] Even the female breast, long considered to be merely a sign that a mother could feed her child, did not escape scrutiny from evolutionary psychologists, who saw youth as the driving force behind every male advance. “It seems likely that male choice shaped breasts not to distinguish girls from women, but to distinguish young women from older

[248] D. Symons, ‘On the Use and Misuse of Darwinism in the Study of Human Behavior’, *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 143.
[249] Ibid.
[250] D. Buss, ‘The Psychology of Mating and Sex’, *The Adapted Mind*, p. 250.

women," Geoffrey Miller wrote. "Here, the informative thing about breasts is the way they droop with the effects of age and gravity."[251,252]

The behaviorists remained defiant. In her *Newsweek* piece, Sharon Begley accused scientists like Symons and Buss of sidestepping the impact of culture, especially its role in the promotion of a single, ideal waist-to-hip ratio. It was absurd, Ms. Begley wrote, to claim that "men have a mental module that causes them to prefer women with a waist-to-hip ratio of 0.7." Evolutionary psychology's misstep, according to Begley, was that it had "failed to rule out the possibility that the preference was not innate—human nature—but, rather, the product of exposure to mass culture and the messages it sends about what's beautiful." If males had truly evolved to pursue only the most fertile women, Ms. Begley continued, then "AARP-eligible men should marry 23-year-olds, which—Anna Nicole Smith and J. Howard Marshall notwithstanding—they do not, instead preferring women well past their peak fertility."[253] When confronted with studies that suggested otherwise, social scientists on the Left seemed to worry less about the accuracy of the data and more about the potential effects on "impressionable young women," who they feared would begin "scurrying for a measuring tape and a how-to book on bulimia," as Ms. Begley put it.[254]

Other prominent journalists echoed this sentiment. Syndicated newspaper columnists like Donna Britt scoffed at the premise of a *Time* cover piece titled "Infidelity: It May Be in Our Genes," which seemed to suggest that even a philandering president of the United States was just another example of a boy being a boy. Ms. Britt rejected the idea that, as she described it, "guys seem more programmed to trade in their early spouses for newer, more exciting models," and that "young women—also at the mercy of that old black magic called [genetic] encoding—willingly comply," because she had "heard too many real-life love stories to buy it." Britt's own life experience also suggested this new science was more of a ruse than a rule: "I once passed on an invitation to fly to the Caribbean with a rich, handsome ex-TV star whom I'd had a crush on. Why? I didn't love him and knew he'd never be serious enough for a commitment."[255]

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[251] Miller, *The Mating Mind*, p. 243.
[252] Evolutionary psychologists rarely disputed the fact that "universal" beauty standards fluctuated across cultures. In areas where food was scarce, for instance, men were found to prefer women who carried more fat relative to women in societies where food was more easily accessible—a sign that a potential female mate would have fuel to spare for future offspring. See: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 136-9.
[253] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.
[254] Ibid.
[255] D. Britt, 'What's Love Got To Do With It Honey', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (15 August, 1994).

Ms. Begley and Ms. Britt had fallen into the trap of generalization, where the biological "rules" of human behavior could be discredited with an anecdote. While Ms. Begley—a journalist whose job was to distill complex data into short and catchy exposés—could be forgiven for incorporating anecdotal evidence into her work, it was more difficult for evolutionists to look the other way when people like David J. Buller—a Northern Illinois University philosophy professor who presumably knew that the laws of human nature were not necessarily invalidated by outliers in the data—employed the same tactics. In a 2005 interview with *Scientific American* shortly after he had published a scathing critique of evolutionary psychology in his book *Adapting Minds* (not to be confused with *The Adapted Mind*, which was its target), Buller seemed to share Ms. Begley's aversion to this "deeply problematic" field that was receiving so much fawning attention from major newspapers and popular media. Buller took special issue with the field's conclusions regarding mate preferences—specifically the idea that "males have this ineluctable preference to mate with nubile females, and that females have this ineluctable preference to mate with high status males." Evolutionary psychologists were quick to cherry-pick examples of male Hollywood stars opting for younger female mates, Buller argued, but had failed to acknowledge the plethora of older males who chose mates of a similar age. "Look at Paul Newman—a very high-status male," Buller noted, who had "remained monogamously married to a woman his own age." In taking a swipe at evolutionary psychology's alleged propensity for cherry-picking convenient data, Buller seemed to be unaware that he had done the same.[256]

Communication Breakdown

Much of the downplay of evolutionary psychology that came from authors like Ms. Begley, Mr. Buller, and Ms. Britt could be traced to poor communication. Given the speed with which EP's research and conclusions on male mating strategies were so widely and enthusiastically read by the public, evolutionary psychologists occasionally struggled to find their footing as they attempted to communicate relatively esoteric scientific ideas and jargon that could be easily misunderstood by the average reader. Boilerplate terminology and phrasing such as "human universals," for instance, tended to sow confusion when uttered outside of the academic circles to which they were usually confined. A "human universal (as cataloged by

[256] J.R. Minkel, 'Psyching Out Evolutionary Psychology', *Scientific American* [New York], (4 July, 2005).

evolutionary psychologists or any other biologically informed scientist)," an exasperated Gad Saad wrote in 2009, "does not imply that every single individual on earth will adhere to this universal. This is not what is meant by universal."

> That Katie Holmes is taller than Tom Cruise does not invalidate the fact that men are taller than women. That Ashton Kutcher is married to Demi Moore does not invalidate the fact that men on average prefer to date nubile younger women more so than older post-menopausal women. That your friend Roxanne is dating a starving artist does not invalidate the fact that women around the world prefer high-status men as prospective partners more so than low-ranking, lazy, apathetic, and submissive men.[257]

In *The Adapted Mind*, Donald Symons took aim at the field's critics in the social sciences and their allies in the media for rejecting, out of hand, the hypothesis that men's attraction to young women had more to do with culture than biology. To Symons and his peers, these skeptics were painting themselves into an intellectual corner. "Whenever a social scientist attributes something like the human male's sexual attraction to nubile females to cultural conditioning, social learning, socialization, etc., and whenever a social scientist begins a discussion of such matters with the phrase 'In our culture…' (gratuitously implying that things are different elsewhere)," Symons wrote, "he implicitly rejects a nativist conception of human nature and embraces an empiricist conception." Adding, "As long as social scientists continue to make assumptions about human nature that have essentially no chance of being correct, even seemingly mundane findings of evolutionary psychology will be scientifically significant."[258]

Symons stressed that evolutionary psychologists were simply applying basic Darwinian and economic principles to the laws of sexual attraction, and that their overarching goal was to "recognize certain features of organisms as components of some special problem-solving machinery." This was not a new, fringe approach to understanding human nature; it had been foundational to evolutionary biology for centuries. The adaptationist program, with its focus on "structural, physiological, behavioral, or psychological phenotypic features that have been shaped by selection," was therefore also foundational to EP, which took this methodology and applied it to the nature of the human brain, and by extension the mind. Human perceptions of physical attractiveness were merely created and sustained through a variety of "specialized

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[257] Saad, 'The Never-Ending Misconceptions About Evolutionary Psychology'.
[258] Symons, 'On the Use and Misuse of Darwinism in the Study of Human Behavior', p. 145.

mechanisms" in the brain, Symonds wrote, as opposed to more generalized mechanisms designed for cultural learning.[259]

Culture still played a role, however, and even Charles Darwin had assumed that beauty standards tended to vary among cultures—occasionally going so far as to make claims that would have aligned neatly with the rhetoric of some of the most stringent cultural relativists a century later. But Darwin lacked the ability to perform the types of experiments that would eventually undermine the claim that beauty always lay in the eye of the beholder. Mr. Symons and his fellow adaptationists, on the other hand, had small yet persuasive allies to help make their case: babies. Infant studies played an important role in pushing back against the myth that beauty standards were entirely culturally constructed, and studies on increasingly younger children were beginning to deflate the longstanding assumption that men's obsession with "classically attractive" females could be unlearned. One study of sixty twelve-month-old infants in 1990, for example, found that the subjects reacted far more favorably toward female strangers wearing lifelike masks that were deemed conventionally attractive by adults, versus masks that were manipulated to be unattractive. A similar study, which had observed infants playing with dolls of differing levels of attractiveness, produced the same result.[260]

Another study conducted in 1995, in which subjects from various ethnic and cultural groups spanning thirteen countries were all found to largely agree on the attractiveness of certain female facial characteristics, helped cement the cross-cultural requirement of universal attractiveness.[261] Given the political environment in which the study was published, however, the researchers felt the need to warn against misuse. "The possibility of an underlying evolutionary function in attractiveness perceptions does not imply that those who possess more desirable faces are naturally entitled to more social resources or advantages," they wrote. Studies such as these, which shed light on the biological foundations of physical attraction, the authors added, could in fact *increase* fairness and kindness while advancing progressive goals, by helping people better understand what they were truly looking for in a partner:

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[259] Symons, 'On the Use and Misuse of Darwinism in the Study of Human Behavior', pp. 155-6.
[260] J.H. Langlois, et al., 'Infants' Differential Social Responses to Attractive and Unattractive Faces', *Developmental Psychology*, 26/1, (1990), pp. 153-9.
[261] M. R. Cunningham, A. Roberts, et al, 'Their Ideas of Beauty Are, on the Whole, the Same as Ours', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68/2, (February, 1995), pp. 261-79.

> The more that we understand the underlying logic of physical attractiveness, the more that we may be able to provide an enlightened response to it. Physical attractiveness may be demystified if a pretty face is merely seen as a symbol for desirable internal qualities, such as fitness as a beneficiary, sexual partner, mentor, friend, or compatriot, and that such qualities may be better assessed through means other than visual inspection. By understanding both the stimulus and response factors involved in the perception of physical attractiveness, we are in a better position to focus attention on the beauty inherent in all people.[262]

For scientists and adaptationists who were interested in viewing human behavior through an evolutionary lens, a more equitable world was more likely to be forged through a more vigorous and thorough understanding of our biology and temperament, not through the suppression of uncomfortable and potentially harmful truths.

A "Grand Conspiratorial Agenda" (Men Crave Variety)

If there was a facet of evolutionary psychology's analysis of men's mating strategies that generated as much controversy as the claim that men were programmed to crave a youthful mate, it was the claim that men were programmed to crave *many* youthful mates. Male promiscuity was a central feature of EP's take on male mating patterns, and the theory that men in every culture sought more sexual variety than women was one of EP's strongest (and most detested) hypotheses.[263] Fears that this new science would lead to an epidemic of men cheating on their wives were widespread, and some even worried that the upshot of this type of "normalization" would be dire. In response to the *Time* piece "Infidelity: It May Be in Our Genes," for instance, the popular radio commenter and syndicated columnist Cal Thomas, writing under the headline "Some Preposterous Claims That Infidelity Likely Is Genetic," asked what seemed to be on the minds of most Americans: "If genes are responsible for those who commit adultery, then how long will it be before some evolutionary psychologist claims that genes cause crime? If that were true, we should empty the prisons, because how could the poor inmates be held responsible for their actions?"[264]

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[262] Ibid.
[263] "Men are slime," as one graduate student of David Buss put it to him during a lecture. See: D. Buss, 'Confessions of an evolutionary psychologist', *Daily World* [Opelousas], (4 July, 1999), p. 24.
[264] C. Thomas, 'Some preposterous claims that infidelity likely is genetic', *The Kansas City Star* [Kansas City], (16 August, 1994), p. 15.

Fears and slippery-slope arguments aside, the science refused to budge. Several studies set out to test the hypothesis that men were hard-wired to be more promiscuous than women, one of which was published in 2003 by David Schmitt of Bradley University along with more than a hundred members of the International Sexuality Description Project. In the most comprehensive analysis of human sexual promiscuity to date, Bradley and his team surveyed over 16,000 people across fifty-two countries spanning North America, South America, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The results were unambiguous: When men in every surveyed culture pursued short-term mates, they were driven almost entirely by a desire for quantity over quality, whereas females were motivated almost entirely by partner quality as opposed to quantity—a result that fit perfectly with Trivers' theory of parental investment.[265]

Most of the study's critics did not question its underlying legitimacy. Instead, they questioned why such a potentially harmful study needed to be conducted at all. After the research was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, some scientists accused Schmitt of "wishful thinking" and chastised the study for endangering society. "Arguments about evolved dispositions have the implication of defending the status quo," said Alice Eagly, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University, in an interview for *The Washington Post*. "They have implications for power and status." Even Pamela Regan, a fellow evolutionary psychologist at California State University in Los Angeles, had reservations that she owed to her experience teaching men in a classroom environment. "I have heard people say, 'I can't help it, I am a man—I have to spill my seed'…that's using science to justify your bad behavior." The Ohio State University psychologist Terri Fisher was similarly concerned, given her experience teaching young men about sexual variety. "I bet a lot of males might leave class and talk to their girlfriends and say, 'You know what I learned in class? It's natural I don't want to commit to you and that I feel attracted to other women—it's because I am a man,'" Fisher said.[266]

The study's legitimacy was further bolstered by the fact that its results aligned with observations that had been made over a decade earlier by Margo Wilson and Martin Daly. Writing in *The Adapted Mind*, Wilson and Daly reflected on the history and social implications

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[265] D. P. Schmitt et al., 'Universal Sex Differences in the Desire for Sexual Variety: Tests From 52 Nations, 6 Continents, and 13 Islands', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85/1 (2003), pp. 85-104.
[266] S. Vedantam, 'Desire and DNA: Is Promiscuity Innate?', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (August, 2003), p. A1.

of their work. “One result of this chronic aspiration,” they wrote, is that “even in monogamous societies, a few relatively successful men have typically been able to be effectively polygamous, whether simultaneously or serially, by multiple marriage or concubinage.” The rise of agriculture at the end of the Pleistocene epoch, along with the social inequalities that stemmed from the diversification of labor that followed, had helped foster an environment in which “extreme polygyny and extreme sequestering of women” became the norm. And while the modern man may not be as brazenly greedy in his sexual demands as the despotic rulers who had confined and guarded women in harems, the underlying impetus to mate with as many women as possible while limiting their access to other males was still largely intact in the modern world.[267]

To argue that this type of bestial male behavior was natural was to run against the grain of a society that was prone to conflating the natural with the good. Donald Symons was one of many evolutionary psychologists whose theories regarding the origins of male promiscuity were met with public hostility—a reaction he chalked up to the layman’s inability to see how traits that were once beneficial in our ancestral environment could lose their clout in the modern world.[268,269] Many of EP's critics suffered from this “fundamental conceptual error,” Symons wrote, because they failed to widen their view of human nature in order to comprehend that it had evolved over millions of years—not thousands—and that the past two-thousand years amounted to little more than a fleeting and negligible blip in the grand scheme of human evolution.[270]

The fear that these conclusions would be misconstrued and used by men to excuse their sexual debauchery was understandable. This was, after all, the era of Hugh Hefner’s “sex-positive utopianism,” in which the “no-prudes-here giddiness and aspirational promiscuity” that had catapulted *Playboy* to national fame had also facilitated the rise of “1980s sex comedies, 1990s lad magazines, liberal excuses for Bill Clinton’s priapism and the sweeping cultural

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[267] M. Wilson, M. Daly, ‘The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Chattel’, *The Adapted Mind*, p. 301.
[268] Symons, ‘On the Use and Misuse of Darwinism in the Study of Human Behavior’, pp. 138-9.
[269] There were, of course, risks that came with the type of boundless promiscuity that defined male mating habits in the ancestral environment, many of which persisted in modern society. The increased chance of being infected by a sexually transmitted disease, being subjected to violence at the hands of jealous husbands and fathers, and the reputational damage that came from showing no desire to invest in offspring had likely acted as a check on unrestrained mating and parenthood as humans evolved. See: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 160.
[270] Symons, ‘On the Use and Misuse of Darwinism in the Study of Human Behavior’, pp. 138-9.

triumph of pornography," as one *New York Times* columnist wrote of the period.[271] There were plenty of men who seemed eager to use this new science as an excuse to break the rules of a society that placed a heavy premium on monogamy, and there were plenty of media outlets ready to egg them on. *Playboy* subscriptions soared during the '90s, and its editorial pages were riddled with overt oversimplifications of men's desires that were just as much of a tease as the nude women between the paragraphs. To many men, *Playboy* was more than just a magazine, it was "a lifestyle."[272]

For men eager to capitalize on America's newfound embrace of liberalized sexuality, evolutionary psychology—coupled with its tacit endorsement by major press publications—seemed to offer a rare and all-too-tempting stamp of scientific approval. There was a vast distance, however, between what American men read in *Playboy* and what evolutionary psychologists were actually attempting to communicate, and these types of translational issues existed even in less provocative and agenda-driven publications such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Discover*. The core problem, according to evolutionists like Gad Saad, was that the public kept resorting to the naturalistic fallacy, in which research into what is natural and therefore "true" is morally indistinguishable from rhetoric that excuses or justifies bad behavior.

This type of moral confusion was especially pronounced in Sharon Begley's widely-read *Newsweek* piece, which had taken aim at EP for perniciously offering sexually promiscuous men a "get-out-of-jail-free card."[273] But to suggest that Mr. Saad and other evolutionary psychologists were attempting to "justify and condone" men's infidelities by merely explaining that "on average men display a greater desire for sexual variety than do women" was, as Mr. Saad put it, "as intelligent a comment as to argue that by seeking to understand the causes of cancer, oncologists are seeking to 'justify and condone' the existence of cancerous cells." Evolutionary psychologists, Mr. Saad went on to assure the field's skeptics, were "no different from any other type of scientist. They seek to pursue interesting scientific questions unencumbered by any grand conspiratorial agenda."[274]

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[271] R. Douthat, 'The Quest for a New Vision of Sexual Morality', *The New York Times* [New York], (27 March, 2024).
[272] 'Playboy in Popular Culture', *The New York Times* [New York], (28 September, 2017).
[273] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.
[274] Saad, 'The Never-Ending Misconceptions About Evolutionary Psychology'.

An Apolitical Discipline

Despite repeated efforts to show that evolutionary psychologists were not operating with ulterior motives in the pursuit of a "grand conspiratorial agenda," Mr. Saad and his fellow evolutionists found themselves struggling to disabuse their antagonists of the notion that they were on a secret, conservative mission. The notion that evolutionary psychology was nothing but a front for a right-wing plot to re-engineer society to favor men proved hard to shake, despite the fact that its practitioners were no less politically liberal than their critics. One study that analyzed the political and social attitudes of 168 psychology Ph.D. students in the United States found that those who self-identified as "adaptationists"—and therefore would have presumably been sympathetic to evolutionary theories of behavior—were far less politically conservative than the average American citizen and no more conservative than graduate students who aligned themselves more with the behaviorist camp.[275]

The stubborn persistence with which progressives painted evolutionary psychology as an inherently conservative enterprise could be partly traced to the field's historical connection to sociobiology, which itself had been the unwitting victim of a guilt-by-association smear campaign that drew tenuous connections between Edward Wilson's new synthesis and the right-wing distortions of social Darwinism. Ever since Wilson had upended the status quo of radical behaviorism in 1975 by suggesting that human behavior was to some extent biologically determined, he had been attacked by the Left for his supposedly political motivations and undertones. As the Cambridge philosopher Bernard Williams observed during the controversy, regardless of how apolitical sociobiologists actually were, and regardless of how careful they were to stress that scientific truths regarding human nature should be separated from social policy, most liberals came to view Mr. Wilson's new science as intrinsically conservative.[276]

The conservative tag placed on behavioral science was difficult to remove, and throughout the 1980s, being a pro-science liberal while arguing that human behavior contained a strong genetic component was considered philosophically incoherent. Wilson's sociobiology, Mr. Williams wrote, had nonetheless struck an unintentional blow to these philosophical barriers by managing to be "both scientistic and conservative." This was an "extraordinarily potent combination of characteristics," Williams added, since "most conservative outlooks are

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[275] J.M. Tybur et al., 'Testing the Controversy', *Human Nature,* 18 (October, 2007), pp. 313-328.
[276] Williams referenced in R. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems*, New York: Routledge (1987), pp. 224-225.

antiscientific" and "many scientistic outlooks are deeply radical." When a field emerges that "can be at once scientistic and conservative, it can speak to quite a lot of our needs." Therefore, "however many disclaimers Dawkins puts in, however many disclaimers Wilson puts in, however many admirable hygienic and analytic observations we have managed to achieve, I still think that, on the whole, we had better watch out."[277]

Years later, evolutionary psychologists had failed to mollify worried observers like Mr. Williams, and EP was still under fire for pushing what its adversaries believed to be a right-wing political propaganda. One critic was the famed zoologist and feminist Anne Dagg, who questioned whether evolutionary psychology was in fact "truly scientific," since it "so readily reflects political rather than academic" principles. "Darwinian psychologists seem to have a right-wing bias," Dr. Dagg insisted. "They favor the status quo."[278] Those who had accused Darwinian psychologists of harboring a right-wing bias adopted a strikingly different tone, however, when the evolutionists turned their attention to the biological origins of homosexuality.

HOMOSEXUALITY

The Politics of Homosexuality

Two years before Bill Clinton's tenure in the White House was marred by his affair with a twenty-two-year-old intern named Monica Lewinsky (apparently even the President of the United States was willing to risk humiliation and ostracization in pursuit of a young woman), he signed off on a Department of Defense policy that became known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," which prohibited openly gay men and women from serving in the military. Although some liberal Democrats took this as a win (since gay men and women had previously been prohibited from serving altogether), many progressives felt that the new rules came up short—that they amounted to a slightly less offensive attack on an immutable element of human nature.[279]

Those on the Left who had disparaged adaptationist evaluations of sexual desire therefore found themselves in an awkward position when faced with similar explanations of homosexuality, whose defenders could have potentially benefited from an evolutionary stamp of

[277] Williams quoted in R. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems*, pp. 224-5.
[278] Dagg quoted in J.M. Tybur et al., 'Testing the Controversy', *Human Nature,* 18 (October, 2007), pp. 313-328.
[279] M. Thompson, 'Why Is the Military Polling the Troops About Gays?', *Time* [New York], (12 July, 2010).

approval in a country where most people still believed that being gay was a choice. Those eager to make the case for a genetic component of homosexuality felt that it would undermine the uglier and more overt forms of homophobia that plagued the United States throughout the 1980s and well into the '90s. Suddenly, certain shades of genetic determinism seemed less threatening and even helpful, as long as it could be used to erode the notion that homosexuality was a lifestyle choice born from loose morals and a corrupt culture. The Left's pivot to and sudden embrace of the glaringly adaptationist position that homosexuality was an in-born, biological trait as opposed to the result of social conditioning revealed the extent to which progressives were willing to cherry-pick Darwinian science for political gains. Not all progressives were on board, however, and some gay rights advocates expressed reservations about research into the evolution of homosexuality not because they distrusted the science, but because they believed that exposing the genetic basis of homosexuality could potentially do more harm than good.

In 1973, roughly ninety percent of American adults believed homosexuality was immoral—a sentiment buoyed by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, which at the time classified homosexuality as a disorder.[280] In 1977, the same year Harvey Milk made history after he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors as an openly gay man, only thirteen percent of the American public believed homosexuality was something a person was born with.[281] Even by the 1990s, the question of whether or not gay people posed a moral risk to society was still far from settled, despite the significant progress liberals had made on this front over the course of the previous two decades.

Psychologists like Paul Cameron were able to leverage their scientific credentials and reputations in order to create foundations like the Family Research Institute, which he then used to promote traditional family values and denigrate homosexuality.[282] These were mainstream sentiments, and they were echoed and promoted by some of the country's top elected officials, as when George H. W. Bush's vice president Dan Quayle appeared on ABC News in 1992 and proclaimed that not only was homosexuality "more of a choice than a biological situation," it

[280] 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology', pp. 781-785.
[281] J. McCarthy, 'Gallup First Polled on Gay Issues in '77. What Has Changed?', Gallup Poll Social Series, (6 June, 2019).
[282] 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology', pp. 781-5.

was “the wrong choice”—a more blatant expression of the subtler anti-gay rhetoric that had been on display at the Republican National Convention in Texas a month earlier.[283]

This hostile environment was in some ways an offshoot of the American Right's stance on homosexuality going into the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s, which, since it disproportionately affected gay men, was leveraged as propaganda by social conservatives who wanted to expose homosexuality's inherent sin. And it was not just conservatives who seemed to show a pronounced interest in whether or not homosexuality was natural. Liberals were also angling to control the narrative surrounding genetic research into homosexuality, with the hope that conclusive evidence of its genetic origins would lend credence to their claim that gays were simply “born that way.” In general, most liberals endorsed scientific research into the genetic basis of homosexuality because they believed a positive result would ultimately confirm their assumptions that it was an inborn trait, while social conservatives feared that it would discredit their longstanding position that being gay was a choice—a bedrock doctrine of American conservatism that had provided political cover for an anti-gay agenda tenuously built on Christian fundamentalism.[284] At least for the moment, the age-old political divide between liberals promoting evolution and conservatives seeking to discredit it held firm.

In Search of the “Gay Gene”

Although social acceptance of homosexuality had progressed by 1980, it was still largely viewed as something resembling a pathology—a burden to carry regardless of whether nature or nurture was its author. This was true even in liberal circles, especially for concerned parents who had come of age believing that culture was the sole determinant of whether or not their child would grow up to be gay. Regardless of whether the “blame” lay at the feet of biology or upbringing, people on both sides of the political aisle were, to a certain extent, looking for a smoking gun—making any research regarding the origins of homosexual behavior politically risky from the start.

In 1975, the American Psychological Association (APA) began to soften its tone on homosexuality. Beginning with a resolution stating that “homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities,” the

[283] D. De Witt, ‘The 1992 Campaign’, *The New York Times* [New York], (14 September, 1992), p. A17.
[284] ‘Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology’, pp. 781-5.

APA made a solid effort to chip away at the stigma of being gay. Throughout the 1980s, the APA submitted research and testimony to the federal judiciary in opposition to state sodomy laws,[285] and in 1985 a task force on "non-homophobic research" sought to teach psychology professionals how to identify and check their heterosexual biases.

Signs of a political overcorrection soon began to emerge, however, and in 1991 the APA released a paper entitled "Avoiding Heterosexist Bias in Psychological Research," which held that America was inherently "heterosexist" and therefore impervious to the types of structural changes required in order to eliminate research bias. Members were told to "anticipate distortions or misinterpretations of findings by the lay public and in the popular media." Scientific research on "lesbian, gay male, and bisexual populations" was often "disseminated to the general public through the popular media," the brief continued, which hinted at the "possible discovery of a presumed 'cause' for homosexuality." These reports were often "followed by immediate discussion of how to prevent or 'cure' a homosexual orientation," and researchers should therefore "anticipate and prevent" any misinterpretations of their research results, the APA warned.[286]

Scientists tried their best to insulate themselves from accusations of bias, but much of the early research into the evolved origins of homosexuality was conducted by researchers who knew that no amount of professed objectivity would shield them from the onslaught of political attacks headed their way. After a major study of roughly 1,500 homosexual men and women conducted by the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research in 1981 concluded that homosexuality was determined far more by nature than nurture, and was "as deeply ingrained as heterosexuality," the study's administrators made it clear that they were aware of the tangled political mess into which they had stepped. "I expect the study to be condemned from both sides—by the radical gays for even looking into the subject and by the analysts who may say we're trying to paint a glowing picture of homosexuality," said Dr. Alan Bell, who had overseen the project. His advice to concerned parents hoping to raise heterosexual children was traditionally progressive in both content and tone: "You may supply your sons with footballs and your daughters with dolls," Bell said, but "no one can guarantee that they will enjoy them." Adding, "We cannot recommend

[285] G. Herek et al., 'Avoiding Heterosexist Bias in Psychological Research', *American Psychologist*, 46/9 (September, 1991).
[286] Ibid.

anything beyond the care, sympathy and devotion that good parents presumably lavish on all their children anyway."[287] Dr. Bell's message was a quintessential representation of how most evolutionary psychologists viewed the larger pursuit of behavioral scientific knowledge: Scientific discoveries regarding the human temperament and the evolutionary origins of behavior should never automatically be perceived as an invitation to alter one's morals.

Over a decade later in 1993, the geneticist Dean Hamer and his colleagues at the NIH took Dr. Bell's research a step further, and published data in the journal *Science* that presumably linked male homosexuality to a string of genes on the Xq28 region of the X chromosome—a finding celebrated by gay rights advocates as the final blow to the pernicious notion that homosexuality was a choice.[288] This was a form of genetic determinism progressives could finally embrace, but scientists cautioned the public to temper their enthusiasm. "Sexual orientation is too complex to be determined by a single gene," insisted Dr. Hamer, who had acted as the lead author of the report. "The main value of this work is that it opens a window into understanding how genes, the brain and the environment interact to mold human behavior," he continued. But for many left-leaning scientists like Dr. Simon LeVay, the chairman of the Institute of Gay and Lesbian Studies in California, the potential positive social impact of these studies was simply too great to ignore. "For so long people have been thinking there is some genetic element for sexual orientation and this is by far and away the most direct evidence there has been," Dr. LeVay said. "It's the most important scientific finding ever made in sexual orientation."[289]

Even progressive scientists who had opposed similar genetic studies in the past could not help but share Dr. LeVay's enthusiasm for the study's result. "It's a good piece of work," said Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling of Brown University, a developmental geneticist who, according to *The New York Times*, had previously been a vocal opponent of using genetics to study human behavior. "Hamer is appropriately cautious about the meanings you can glean from it," she added, "and he admits that there may be more than one path to the endpoint of

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[287] J. Brody, 'Kinsey Study Finds Homosexuals Show Early Predisposition', *The New York Times* [New York], (23 August, 1981).
[288] *Evolutionary Ethics and Contemporary Biology*, G. Boniolo, G. De Anna (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006), pp. 86-7.
[289] N. Angier, 'Report Suggests Homosexuality Is Linked to Genes', *The New York Times* [New York], (16 July, 1993), p. A1.

homosexuality."[290] Some gay rights activists, including Darrell Rist, who had co-founded the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, were less enthusiastic, not because they doubted the study's validity, but because they saw the potential for harm. "I don't think it's an interesting study," Mr. Rist stated flatly during an interview after the results had been published. "Intellectually, what do we gain by finding out there's a homosexual gene? Nothing, except an attempt to identify those people who have it and then open them up to all sorts of experimentation to change them."[291]

Without even attempting to discredit the actual science behind the study, the Christian Right predictably pushed back against what they believed to be an assault on their religious values.[292] American conservatives, most of whom were already skeptical of channeling federal funds into what they viewed as an array of pointless studies pertaining to human sexuality, were also eager to point out that LeVay and Hamer were both openly gay, which the Right claimed would have tainted their research with bias.[293] These types of ad hominem attacks from conservatives—launched not only on the character of the scientist but on the characteristics they were born with—were eerily reminiscent of the Left's attacks on evolutionary psychology, especially when it came to men studying mating behaviors that seemed to favor men. ("Let's not speculate on the motives that (mostly male) evolutionary psychologists might have in asserting that their wives are programmed to not really care if they sleep around," Sharon Begley had remarked wryly in *Newsweek*.)[294]

Douglas Futuyma and the Naturalistic Fallacy

While people like Mr. Rist expressed a wary indifference to research into the genetic origins of homosexuality, others were far less sanguine. Douglas Futuyma, a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, believed this type of presumably helpful research still posed political and social risks. Dr. Futuyma, an award-winning evolutionist and staunch anti-creationist who had recently published a book on evolutionary biology and identified as gay, wrote in 1980 that even books like Edward

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[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] H. Jacobs, 'Don't ask, don't tell, don't publish', *Embo Reports*, 13/5 (13 May, 2012).
[293] 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology', pp. 781-5.
[294] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.

Wilson's *On Human Nature*—which many of Wilson's contemporaries felt was placid and anodyne almost to a fault—were "ready made for the forces of oppression," and amounted to "little more than Social Darwinism clad in new jargon." Books like Wilson's were utilized by malevolent actors in order to "rationalize sexism, xenophobia (including racism), and capitalism," Futuyma believed, "whether its authors intend such rationalizations or not."[295]

Still, one of Wilson's arguments in *On Human Nature*—that homosexuality may indeed be natural and therefore far from the pathological perversion conservatives often portrayed it as—gave Futuyma pause. Perhaps this was one of the rare instances in which genetic determinism could be harnessed in order to effect positive social change. "As a gay person, I can only applaud Wilson's humanitarian concern," Futuyma wrote, before returning to his attack:

> I consider the traditional Judeo-Christian view of homosexuality to be barbaric, and I consider the oppression of gays, in Christian and non-Christian societies alike, an evil that demands moral outrage. However, I find Wilson's argument scientifically unsatisfying and *politically dangerous* [emphasis added], and precisely because this is one of the rare sociobiological arguments that arrives at an appealing libertarian conclusion, I would like to analyze it with the confidence that I will not be accused of fearing the awful truths that sociobiology threatens to reveal.[296]

Although Futuyma expressed reservations about the underlying science, he mostly lamented the potential political repercussions that could arise from proving that *any* type of human behavior—even the "good" kind—was natural. "Insofar as any deterministic theory of the origin of homosexuality panders to 'gay guilt' [e.g., gays feeling as though their sexuality is somehow their 'fault'], it is, I feel, psychologically and politically counterproductive," Futuyma wrote. "Above all else, gay people need to cultivate self-acceptance, and to cleanse themselves of the notion that they need to blame their orientation on anyone or anything, for this implies that their orientation is a fault." Futuyma then flipped the script and insisted on something that evolutionary psychologists would end up preaching for the next three decades, namely that science should not necessarily have an impact on morality, values, or ethics:

> Insofar as the sociobiological theory of homosexuality serves as an argument for gay rights and social acceptance, it is unfortunately a flawed and indeed dangerous argument. It is dangerous because it is certainly within the realm of possibility that tomorrow's research could disprove the hypothesis that homosexuality has any

[295] D. Futuyma, *Science for the People*, 12/1 (January-February, 1980), pp. 10-15.
[296] Ibid.

> biological foundation whatever, and where then lies the argument for gay rights? It is a flawed argument because it accepts and rests on the same profoundly non-sensical assumption that supports heterosexual bigotry: that 'what is biologically natural is good; what is not, is bad'—the notion that our morals, ethics, and laws should be shaped to fit our biological urges…Women, racial minorities, and gay people are entitled to freedom from discrimination not because of their biology, but because of our idealistic conception of the dignity of the individual. Whatever our biological evolution has been, our ethics are part of our cultural evolution, in which we have come to strive for humanitarianism and to combat oppression out of respect for human dignity.[297]

Mr. Futuyma's declaration that science should be separated from one's morals fell perfectly in line with one of evolutionary psychology's (and even sociobiology's) core tenets, which held that "setting boundaries on human behavior is the job of law, custom, and etiquette, not evolutionary psychology," as Geoffrey Miller proclaimed in *The Mating Mind*.[298] But neither those in favor of finding a "gay gene" nor those opposed to its discovery seemed to be terribly concerned with the merits or credibility of the underlying science, which was immediately politicized and fought over. Instead, they were concerned with the data's potential for harm. For progressives like Futuyma, whether or not the science was fundamentally sound was irrelevant to its social implications. If there was a chance that these scientific pursuits could be politicized and harnessed by bad actors on the Right, it was the Left's responsibility to beat them to the punch.

Team Switch

The traditional Right-Left political lines that had blurred during the controversy over genetic research into homosexuality became utterly unrecognizable when scientists trained their sights on bisexuality and transsexuality, as liberals began leaning on anti-science intimidation tactics that may as well have been taken directly from the conservative Republican playbook.

Psychologists like John Michael Bailey, who had long been interested in the biological basis of homosexuality and bisexuality, were used to being attacked from the Right. When Mr. Bailey embarked on a two-year study in 2001 that sought to assess the varying levels of genital arousal in lesbians and bisexuals in different sexual scenarios, his goal was to determine whether "female sexual orientation is target specific"—i.e., whether females who identified as gay or

[297] D. Futuyma, *Science for the People*, 12/1 (January-February, 1980), pp. 10-15.
[298] Miller, *The Mating Mind*, p. 427.

bisexual would become aroused exclusively at the sight of other females as opposed to men.[299] When news of the study reached Dave Weldon, a Republican Congressman from Florida, his response captured the spirit of his party's opposition to any research that appeared to play God. "The NIH [National Institutes of Health] couldn't find the money to look into [the] relationship between kids with regressive autism and the mandatory MMR vaccine, but they can pay people $150,000 to watch pornography," Mr. Weldon fumed in an interview with *The Washington Times*. "This is disgusting, and is a clear example of distorted priorities at the NIH. The NIH message to parents of autistic children: Don't look to us for help."[300] Right-leaning conservative media outlets delivered the news using a similar tone, and the all-caps headline for a piece that ran in *The New York Post*—"FEDS' PAY-FOR-PORN AROUSES CRITICS"—was indicative of the satirical coverage that followed: "Uncle Sam wants you—to get all hot and bothered…A true-blue, federally funded study is paying women 20 to 40 up to $75 to watch porn flicks."[301]

If Dr. Bailey had expected to find some political cover from the Left, however, he was mistaken. After the publication of a study in which Bailey and his team had concluded that "men who identified themselves as bisexual were in fact exclusively aroused by either one sex or the other, usually by other men," the Left voiced its concern.[302] This was one of a small but growing number of studies that had relied on physiological measurements of arousal as opposed to self-reported surveys, and the results did not fall in line with the Left's progressive orthodoxy. "The last thing you want," said Dr. Randall Sell of Columbia University after reviewing the results of the study, "is for some therapists to see this study and start telling bisexual people that they're wrong, that they're really on their way to homosexuality."[303] Just as conservatives had questioned Hamer's motives, Bailey, who was heterosexual, was attacked by progressives who questioned his motives for studying homosexuality.[304]

The primary concern for Dr. Sell and those on the Left, however, was that these types of studies could potentially impede or reverse the acknowledgement and acceptance of bisexuals, who had only recently begun to gain representation in mainstream American media for the first

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[299] Researchers in 2000 had found that unlike female sexuality, which was fluid and tended to oscillate over the course of one's lifetime, male sexual orientation was relatively static and tended to calcify during early childhood. See: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 127.
[300] 'Federally funded study measures porn arousal', *The Washington Times* [Washington], (23 December, 2002).
[301] R. Delfiner, 'Feds' Pay-for-porn Arouses Critics', *The New York Post* [New York], (24 December, 2002).
[302] B. Carey, 'Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 July, 2005), p. F1.
[303] Ibid.
[304] J. M. Bailey, 'Ideological Bias in Sex Research', in 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology', pp. 779-800.

time in the 1990s, when empathetic storylines involving bisexual characters were beginning to appear on the covers of major magazines as well as hit television shows like *Sex and the City*. "I'm not denying that bisexual behavior exists," Bailey said in an interview after the study's conclusion in 2005. "But I am saying that in men there's no hint that true bisexual arousal exists, and that for men arousal is orientation."[305]

Dr. Bailey's problems grew worse in 2007, when he arrived at a meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research in Vancouver to find that he was a pariah. Bailey had come under fire once again; this time for his research into transgenderism, which he had discussed at length in *The Man Who Would Be Queen* in 2003. The ensuing controversy had lasted roughly two years, which he would eventually dub "the hardest of my life."[306] Bailey, however, was an easy target for those who claimed he was nothing more than a provocateur. He had gone on record expressing his affinity for breaking intellectual taboos, and his history of researching topics that were considered "off limits" for most academics had invited skepticism and scorn from Democrats and Republicans alike. To critics like Deirdre McCloskey, a professor of economics, history, and English at the University of Illinois, Mr. Bailey had "stepped into the public arena with enthusiasm to deliver a false and unscientific and politically damaging opinion."[307]

It was the "politically damaging" element that was the most worrisome for those who took issue with Bailey's interest in transsexuality, however. In *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, Bailey's thesis that some men who "want to cross genders are driven primarily by an erotic fascination with themselves as women" ran "counter to the belief, held by many men who decide to live as women, that they are the victims of a biological mistake—in essence, women trapped in men's bodies," as Benedict Carey wrote in *The New York Times*. Although the book was welcomed in some progressive circles and was even nominated for an award by the Lambda Literary Foundation (which promoted gay, bisexual, and transgender books), it was mostly regarded as a threat to progressive values.[308]

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[305] Carey, 'Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited'.
[306] B. Carey, 'Criticism of a Gender Theory, and a Scientist Under Siege', *The New York Times* [New York], (21 August, 2007).
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.

Only days after Mr. Bailey's book was released, Lynn Conway, a transgender computer scientist at the University of Michigan, sent an email to her colleagues comparing it to Nazi propaganda, and argued that Bailey's work would ultimately provide a platform for discrimination and abuse. The attacks against Mr. Bailey grew increasingly vicious and personal, due in part to a relatively new online search platform known as Google. Harnessing the power of Google's algorithms, Dr. Conway catalogued every accusation that had been leveled against Mr. Bailey on a website whose metadata ensured that it was the first page people saw when they searched for either Bailey or his book. It also linked to a separate website run by Andrea James, who had uploaded pictures of Bailey's two middle-school-aged children next to sexually explicit captions. When pressed, Ms. James told a journalist that since Dr. Bailey had exploited and endangered a vulnerable population, she was simply returning the favor.[309]

In a review of *The Man Who Would Be Queen* in *Reason*, Deirdre McCloskey launched a full-blown attack: "If you hated the 1960s and its 'homosexual agenda' (thank *you*, Justice Scalia), you are going to love Bailey's theory. As the guys down at the VFW hall say, queers are just sissy guys; and a guy who wants to become a woman is either just another homo or just another loony. Bailey, to be fair, doesn't share all the scientific and political ideas of his allies the veterans, the homophobes, and the religious right. He wouldn't attack gays and gender crossers with a lead pipe, and I guess he doesn't think God hates fags." But Bailey, Ms. McCloskey continued, "revives the long-dead notion—as scientifically dead as the psychoanalysis that spawned it—that gender crossers are repressed homosexuals…It's politically irresponsible. You might as well revive the long-dead notion that Jews are genetically programmed for making money."[310]

Not everyone fell for the attacks. Dr. Alice Dreger, an ethics scholar and long-time advocate for bisexuals and transexuals with a history of opposition to genetic sex research, initially sided with Dr. Bailey's critics and "presumed that [he] was guilty." After reading his book and looking at his methods, however, she changed her mind. "The bottom line is that they tried to ruin this guy," Dreger said, "and they almost succeeded."[311] Dreger's tacit endorsement of Bailey, however, did little to placate his critics, who continued to bombard Northwestern with

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[309] Ibid.
[310] D. McCloskey, 'Queer Science', *Reason* [Los Angeles], (November, 2003).
[311] Carey, 'Criticism of a Gender Theory, and a Scientist Under Siege'.

complaints to the point that his research lab was brought to standstill. Two researchers who had stuck by Bailey during the controversy were "advised by a government grant officer that they should distance themselves from Dr. Bailey to improve their chances of receiving financing." Other colleagues he had considered close friends refused to come to his defense. "They saw what I was going through, I think, and wanted no part of it," Bailey concluded. He resorted to taking anti-anxiety medication to cope.[312] "What happened to Bailey is important, because the harassment was so extraordinarily bad and because it could happen to any researcher in the field," said Dr. Dreger after the dust had settled. "If we're going to have research at all, then we're going to have people saying unpopular things, and if this is what happens to them, then we've got problems not only for science but free expression itself."[313]

CONCLUSION

Genetics All The Way Down

Deirdre McCloskey's claim that Bailey's work was as "politically irresponsible" as reviving the "long-dead notion that Jews are genetically programmed for making money," although absurd on its face, carried a shred of validity in a country that was still recovering from decades of irresponsible and occasionally deadly pseudoscience. As Richard Redding argued in *American Psychologist* in 2001, however, the separation of psychological research into homosexuality from both public policy and social advocacy should have been neither complicated nor difficult. Psychologists should "engage in advocacy qua psychologists only when there is strong empirical evidence bearing on the social policy issue in question." To the "extent that child custody laws are grounded in empirically false assumptions about the negative effects of gay parenting," for example, "psychologists have an important role to play in bringing relevant research to lawmakers' attention." However, "to the extent that these laws are based on moral views about homosexuality, psychologists have no role to play qua psychologists because psychology can neither validate nor invalidate moral beliefs."[314]

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[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] R. E. Redding, 'Sociopolitical Diversity in Psychology: The Case for Pluralism', *American Psychologist*, 56/3 (March, 2001), pp. 205-215.

When it came to studying the roots of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transsexuality, the Left felt comfortable flirting with a certain type of genetic determinism when it advanced their cause. When the science meshed with a preexisting political dogma, it was celebrated; when it endangered progress, it was downplayed. This incoherence was on display during debates over the validity of research into the mating habits of straight men and women as well, and it was occasionally difficult to determine whether evolutionary psychology's critics suffered more from a misunderstanding of basic words or from falling victim to the naturalistic fallacy. In order to make broad claims about human nature, adaptationists dealt in generalizations as opposed to inalienable rules, and frequently employed phrases such as "in general" or "on average" when referring to large populations. Yet to critics like the philosopher Richard Hamilton, these terms may as well have meant "always." Evolutionists "seem obsessed with monogamy and its transgressions," Dr. Hamilton wrote in 2008. "Despite recent reluctant acknowledgements that women can also be sexually active, evolutionary psychology remains stuck within the framework of 'coy' females and 'predatory' males. Women, it is argued, are naturally faithful, while men are naturally promiscuous."[315]

Another, more systemic issue was that EP's adversaries frequently jumped to the conclusion that the field did not adequately take Western cultural biases into account, as evidenced by another attack from Hamilton: "Evolutionary psychologists tend to treat Western-style monogamy as the norm," he wrote. "Even in a Western context, we might ask what unites the bridegroom who sleeps with a bridesmaid, a couple who decide to stay together for their children's sake, turning a blind eye to each other's indiscretions, and a pair of middle-aged 'swingers'."[316] The unifying thread running through each of Hamilton's scenarios, evolutionary psychologists argued, was the selfish gene, which was always "searching" for ways to maximize its fitness. Sometimes this meant sleeping with a bridesmaid, while other times it meant remaining in a loveless marriage in order to provide a more stable environment in which a child—technically nothing more than a walking vehicle for the parents' genes—would be more likely to survive. The easiest puzzle for adaptationists to solve, however, was that of the "middle-aged 'swingers'," who walked a thin line between immediate pleasure and long-term stability.

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[315] R. Hamilton, 'The Darwinian Cage: Evolutionary Psychology as Moral Science', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 25/2 (2008), pp. 105-122.
[316] Ibid.

Most evolutionary psychologists acknowledged the circumscribed nature of their field, but insisted that they were no more restricted than scientists working in other subgenres of psychology. "Evolutionary psychologists use our limited knowledge about the past to generate hypotheses," wrote Robert Kurzban. But their "hypotheses about human psychology can be tested in the very same way that other hypotheses about human psychology can be evaluated." Science does not "stop being science" simply because a hypotheses is "derived from an evolutionary analysis."[317] Many of their claims, however, did not sit well with an increasingly progressive American culture that had only begun to make real progress in bolstering female empowerment and independence, and the "decent hip-to-waist ratio" that Ms. Small and Ms. Wolf dismissed as sexist pseudoscience was, according to the evolutionists, only one of several physical factors that females had evolved to exhibit in order to attract mates. And if there was one narrative that threatened feminism's march toward gender equality more than the claim that women craved men with money, it was that women were genetically predisposed to enhance and advertise their physical appearance in order to capture a man's attention, oftentimes though direct competition with other women.

These arguments were taking place against the backdrop of a new and subversive ideology that became known throughout academia as the multiculturalist movement, whose emphasis on intersectionality and cultural relativism made blanket discussions of male versus female mating habits taboo. With roots in academia dating back to the immediate postwar period, this increasingly popular set of ideologies took hold in the 1970s and upended the notion that truth—especially "Western" truth pertaining to human behavior—could be truly objective. (Suddenly, the identity of the person making the point seemed to matter more than the point being made.) This was especially true in the context of traditionally marginalized groups such as women, whose lived experience in an oppressive society was believed to have imbued them with an epistemological clarity that others lacked.[318]

This new "standpoint" epistemological framework did not bode well for a group of predominantly white males who were trying to convince the public that they had uncovered

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[317] R. Kurzban, 'Alas Poor Evolutionary Psychology: Unfairly Accused, Unjustly Condemned', *Human Nature Review*, 2 (2002), pp. 99-109.
[318] See: P. Collins, 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', *Social Problems*, 33/6 (1 December, 1986), pp. S14-32.

inalienable truths about human mating strategies. At its core, the multicultural movement strongly implied that only homosexuals could ever truly understand homophobia, or that only women could understand female oppression and all of the adjacent dating tensions that came with it—all of which ran counter to EP's underlying premise of universalism and objective truth.

Although it may have been true that this new, postmodernist movement amounted to the intellectual equivalent of a "headlong plunge into the sand," as Norman Levitt once put it,[319] the most vocal critics of evolutionary psychology were looking at the field upright with their eyes wide open. They had seen what similar-sounding rhetoric had led to in the past, and the sense of moral responsibility that led many on the Left to discredit adaptationist evaluations of human mating behaviors had far more to do with stopping the spread of *dangerous* knowledge than it did with stopping the spread of *false* knowledge. The threat of personal harm superseded the threat of epistemological harm in the minds of these critics, whose concerns grew more pronounced as the evolutionists shifted their focus from dating and sex to the consequences of dating and sex: living as a family.

[319] N. Levitt, 'Why Professors Believe Weird Things: Sex, Race, and the Trials of the New Left', *Skeptic*, 6/3 (1998).

CHAPTER THREE
FAMILY LIFE

Mothers are more attached to their children, on average, than are fathers. That is true in societies all over the world and probably has been true of our lineage since the first mammals evolved some two hundred million years ago.

- Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate,* 2002[320]

The very idea that people can form a coherent, comprehensible picture of nature rests on assumptions not all cultures share.

- Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, 1990[321]

INTRODUCTION

"A Family Matter"

Shortly after the conclusion of a New Year's Eve party in 1989, Nicole Brown Simpson fled through the doors of the Los Angeles mansion she shared with her husband, O.J. Simpson, and hid in a bush. "He's going to kill me," she told police officers after they responded to her 911 call. When confronted by the police, Mr. Simpson acted as though the real crime was that his privacy had been invaded. "The police have been out here eight times before, and now you're going to arrest me for this?" he reportedly yelled at the officers standing in his home. "This is a family matter. Why do you want to make a big deal out of it when we can handle it?" The police disagreed and placed Mr. Simpson under arrest, but despite the fact that Mrs. Simpson had to be hospitalized for her injuries, he served no jail time.[322]

On October 25th, 1993, the police received another call from Ms. Simpson, who was now divorced. "He's back," she said. "The kids are up there sleeping and I don't want anything to happen."[323] Less than eight months later she was stabbed to death. When police arrived at the scene they found the body of Nicole's friend, Ron Goldman, lying a few feet away.

The murder trial and subsequent revelations of domestic abuse that had taken place inside the Simpsons' seemingly idyllic Los Angeles home captivated the nation, in part because despite its celebrity sheen, the beatings and psychological abuse exposed by the case were shockingly

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[320] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 357.
[321] R. Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (1990), p. 7.
[322] 'Police Records Detail 1989 Beating That Led to Charge', *The Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles] (17 June, 1994).
[323] 'The Simpson Murder Case: Nicole Simpson's 911 Calls', *The Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles] (23 June, 1994).

common.[324] From 1993 to 2001, there were an estimated 691,710 instances of "intimate partner violence" (defined as violence perpetrated by current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends) in the United States—the vast majority of which involved men harming women. Roughly thirty-three percent of female murder victims were killed by an intimate partner between 1976 and 2000.[325]

Mr. Simpson was a morbidly jealous man, and evolutionary psychologists claimed to know why men like him—and the all-too-familiar circumstances surrounding their abuse of women—were so common. In *The Adapted Mind*, Margo Wilson and Martin Daly defined sexual jealousy as an evolved, multi-tiered psychological system that could be "activated by a perceived threat that a third party might usurp one's place in a sexual relationship."[326] This "ubiquitous male mindset" amounted to an evolved method of control, which helped solve "adaptive problems of male reproductive competition and potential misdirection of paternal investments." Men like Simpson, in other words, lay claim to women like "songbirds lay claim to territories, as lions lay claim to a kill, or as people of both sexes lay claim to valuables."[327]

Those who rejected this argument in favor of a purely behaviorist model of jealousy appeared to believe that acknowledging the biological foundations of jealous emotions would lead to blanket exonerations of violently jealous men. These were valid concerns, since men who murdered their partners in a fit of jealous rage already enjoyed broad legal protections, many of which were sympathetic to a murderer's plight as long as the defendant was a man who witnessed his wife's infidelity. It was therefore reasonable to assume that injecting Darwinian rhetoric into an already-biased legal system would only help expand these protections at the expense of the victims.

Whether they knew it or not, however, most social scientists and those who worked in adjacent fields (such as law) were actually aligned with the Darwinian claim that jealous violence was really about control. "Extreme jealousy is a powerful tool for control in two distinct ways," argued the legal scholar Donna Coker. "First, by calling on the social understanding available to the man who punishes a woman who has humiliated him by making him a 'cuckold,'

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[324] Simpson was eventually acquitted, but he was on trial for murder, not domestic abuse—the existence of which was never in dispute.
[325] C. M. Rennison, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence: 1993-2001.
[326] M. Wilson, M. Daly, *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 303-5.
[327] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 289.

the abusive man draws upon one of our most powerful cultural stereotypes; the blameworthiness of his violence is thus mitigated. Second, it serves to directly control his wife's daily behavior by monitoring who she sees, who she talks to, how she dresses, who her friends are, or whether or not she has any friends." The "controlling behavior may not pay off in the long run," Coker continued, "but it is clearly reinforced in the short run: it insures compliance, it maintains dominance, it feels powerful, and it diminishes the woman's ability to leave."[328] Wilson and Daly would have likely agreed.

The connection between domestic abuse and marriage was difficult for sociologists to ignore. Although not every volatile marriage ended in violent disaster, there was a menacing air of oppression within relatively stable households as well, which was almost always suffered by women as opposed to men. This begged a question: If, as the equality feminists argued, any significant differences between the sexes were merely illusory, why were men always beating and oppressing women inside the home and not the other way around? In 1979, the sociologists R. Emerson and Russell Dobash blamed a patriarchy rooted in the West—arguing in the aptly titled *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* that the key to reducing domestic violence was to interrogate the institution of marriage and the nuclear families it tended to produce. "Control of husbands over their wives," they wrote, is "historically and socially constructed," and the "beginning of an adequate analysis of violence between husbands and wives" should be the "consideration of the history of the family."[329]

Evolutionary psychologists argued that one would be wise to begin their analysis even further back in time: during the Pleistocene epoch. If the struggle for women's liberation had any chance of succeeding and enduring the inevitable shifts of culture, it would have to be informed by an honest assessment of what nature—not just nurture—had wrought. It was true, as the Dobashes wrote, that a "greater understanding of [intimate partner] violence will be achieved through a careful consideration of the nature of the social settings and situations in which it occurs."[330] The problem according to the adaptationists, however, was that the type of violent

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[328] D. Coker, 'Heat of Passion and Wife Killing: Men Who Batter/Men Who Kill', *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice*, 2 (1992), p. 71.
[329] R. Emerson Dobash and R. Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, New York: The Free Press (1979), p. 15.
[330] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 14.

spousal abuse the Dobashes sought to eradicate occurred not just in Western societies but throughout the world, and therefore within a virtually unlimited number of "social settings and situations." To place the blame for domestic abuse squarely at the feet of the Western world—which was arguably the safest hemisphere in which a woman could exist—was to ignore centuries of global history.

The political fault lines of this cultural debate were usually easy to discern. When the Republican president Richard Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act in 1971, he claimed it was the government's job to "cement the family in its rightful position as the keystone of our civilization."[331] By the 1990s, married couples were voting for Republican candidates at rates that dwarfed those of single voters,[332] and during the Republican National Convention in 1992, Pat Buchanan accused Bill Clinton of advocating for "unrestricted abortion on demand" while painting liberals as "prophets of doom." Buchanan also played to the Republican trope that it was actually Hillary Clinton (as opposed to her president-husband) who was responsible for the sweeping social engineering campaigns coming from the White House. "What does Hillary believe?" Buchanan asked his Republican audience. "Well, Hillary believes that twelve-year-olds should have the right to sue their parents, and Hillary has compared marriage and the family as institutions to slavery and life on an Indian reservation." He then connected the dots for conservatives who were eager to attack a larger enemy: "This, my friends, is radical feminism."[333]

Conservatives were playing their usual role by promoting marriage and domesticity at feminism's expense, and liberals predictably pushed back against what they believed to be the harmful glorification of an oppressive patriarchal institution. The target of the Left's ire soon shifted, however, from marriage and jealous violence to the value-free science that helped explain their universal existence.

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[331] C. Conaboy, 'Maternal Instinct Is a Myth That Men Created', *The New York Times* [New York], (28 August, 2022), p. SR4.
[332] C. Emba, 'Manliness, Cat Ladies, Fertility Panic and the 2024 Election', *The New York Times* [New York], (16 August, 2024), Transcript of interview with E. Klein, accessed online (20 August, 2024).
[333] P. J. Buchanan, 'Culture War Speech', Address to the 1992 Republican National Convention, Houston, TX, (17 August, 1992), Compiled online by E. C. Miller on 11 July, 2013 for The U.S. Oratory Project, consulted online (18 May, 2022), https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text.

Much of this chapter aligns with one of Andrew Jewett's primary claims in *Science Under Fire*; that Americans tend to challenge scientific authority when it appears to threaten their moral intuitions. However, the history of evolutionary psychology demonstrates that this relationship is *proportionate and scalable*. Evolutionary explanations of uniquely reprehensible behavior (such as violent jealousy or infanticide) elicited significantly louder cries of disapproval than evolutionary explanations of female mating habits, for instance, and the intensity of the outrage depended on the state-specific legal system under which one happened to live. In Texas—where judicial leniency toward violent jealousy was built into the legal system—progressively minded citizens had greater cause to resent scientists for stressing the universality of domestic abuse than did their counterparts in more progressive states like California.

The dynamics of the opposition to EP during this period also temper the historiographical narrative that evolutionists and social constructionists held strictly opposing ideologies. Both camps believed that domestic abuse was almost entirely a male problem, for instance, and that jealous men grew violent because they were ultimately seeking control over women. The adaptationists and the constructionists differed dramatically, however, in their identification of the *origins* of these problems, and the latter consistently failed to explain how this boorish behavior could have been coincidentally constructed across every known culture past and present.

This chapter also reframes the historical debate over the motivations of those who tend to challenge scientific expertise, by showing how public perceptions of evolutionary analyses were driven less by formal academic theory and more by a sense of personal vulnerability. Women and their male allies pushed back against scientific explanations of violent jealousy with such intensity not because they had been influenced by postmodern or Marxist theory, but because they felt personally vulnerable. Unlike in the sociobiology debates, the ideological battle lines in the era of EP were drawn according to one's position on the potential consequences of a specific scientific study, rather than on the inherent legitimacy of the study itself.

JEALOUSY

"A Dangerous Passion"

In 2000, David Buss released *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex*, which aimed to illuminate the "dark side of sexual treachery, the mysterious puzzle of romantic love, and the central role of jealousy in our intimate relationships."[334] The book was a synthesis of research conducted by Buss and his colleagues over the course of a decade, and one of its goals was to counter the era's prevailing attitude that behaviorist models of morbid jealously should be "shielded from the harsh glare of scientific scrutiny," which Buss argued was a fatal mistake. "Is the woman who has her freedom and sense of safety crushed by a jealous husband better off unequipped with the knowledge of how to prevent her torment?" Buss asked rhetorically. "Is the man obsessed by unrequited love better off failing to understand the underlying reasons for his rejection? Ignorance may sometimes be bliss, but it can also cause needless anguish." In order to "understand the power of this extraordinary emotion," Buss insisted, "we must trace it to its origin, long before capitalism, long before agriculture and cash economies, long before writing and recorded history, and long before humans fanned out and colonized every habitable continent."[335] One of the book's more controversial arguments was that there was a "gulf between the sexes in emotional reactions to infidelity," and that while most men agonized over the thought of their female partner becoming sexually intimate with another man, the majority of women viewed emotional infidelity as the greater threat.[336]

When presented with Buss's evolved jealousy hypothesis, Dr. David DeSteno and his colleagues at Northeastern University joined Dr. Peter Salovey of Yale University in questioning the methodology of a study that had relied exclusively on the subjective analysis of its subjects. Forcing people to decide whether sexual infidelity was more or less distressing than emotional infidelity created an unrealistic paradigm that was bound to artificially highlight differences between the sexes, Buss's critics contended. Dr. DeSteno instead touted his own study, which had allowed subjects to rate on a seven-point scale how distressing it would be if they were confronted with different types of infidelity—a methodological pivot that appeared to close the

[334] D. Buss, *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex*, New York: The Free Press (2000), p. 2.
[335] Buss, *The Dangerous Passion*, pp. 2-9.
[336] Buss, *The Dangerous Passion*, p. 3.

gender gap by showing that males and females were *both* more distressed by sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity. When asked about the resistance to his study, Buss was unsurprised and undeterred. "People have always been resistant to evolution," he said, before reminding his audience that "we're in the midst of a scientific revolution in the field of psychology." It "took four-hundred years for the Catholic church to forgive Galileo…Will it take longer for this? I don't know, but it's going to happen."[337]

The Dangerous Passion fell into a category of literature that the popular *Salon* sex columnist Courtney Weaver described as "decidedly politically incorrect." That men "may have evolutionary excuses for the most fundamental of actions has always been an attractive idea," Ms. Weaver wrote, since "the closer we are to the cave men, the more likely it is that women will be treated like, well, cave women." What were Americans—not just feminists—to do with Buss's reliance on a study that "maintains domestic violence is a male evolutionary function to control the female partner and deter her from infidelity? And, more horrifically, that it might succeed?"[338]

In her own review of *The Dangerous Passion*, Dr. Janet Hyde, a professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin and author of *Half the Human Experience: The Psychology of Women*, attempted to allay the concerns of people like Ms. Weaver by offering an answer to her rhetorical question: Tell better stories. Citing the work of sociologist Ira Reiss—who in 1986, according to Hyde, had suggested that jealousy was nothing more than a "boundary-setting mechanism for what the group (the culture, the subculture, the tribe) feels are important relationships"—Hyde argued that feminists needed to develop their own narratives of pathological jealousy that would better serve their agenda.[339] Whereas people like Buss saw "cross-cultural universals as evidence for evolutionary determination," Hyde continued, sociologists like Reiss had viewed these universals as "evidence that all societies have had to deal with certain social problems and have developed roughly similar norms for dealing with them." Reiss's narrative—theoretically predicated on the same types of raw data Buss had collected—suggested it was possible for feminists to "tell an entirely different story" about the

[337] E. Goode, 'Jealous? Maybe It's Genetic. Maybe Not', *The New York Times* [New York], (8 October, 2002), p. F1.
[338] C. Weaver, 'Heartburn', *The New York Times* [New York], (13 February, 2000).
[339] J. S. Hyde, 'Another Good Evolution Story', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26/2 (June, 2002), p. 170.

origins of jealous behavior while staying true to the facts. Hyde then suggested that if jealous behavior were in fact driven by biology, it would be traceable to a specific gene on a specific chromosome:

> We live in the era of the Human Genome Project, and a good chunk of the human genome has been mapped already. The evolutionary theorists need to specify the intervening mechanisms. Which genes on which chromosomes control jealousy? What proteins are synthesized by those genes? How does that affect neurotransmitter secretion? Hormone secretion? And how do those turn on the emotion of jealousy? If the evolutionary theorists could specify these intervening mechanisms, they would have a good scientific theory. Right now, they just do not have it…Feminist psychologists need to begin telling their own fascinating tales about jealousy and other sexual phenomena and then testing them with carefully collected empirical data. Only when we can tell tales with Buss's flair will we compete for the general public's attention and imagination.[340]

Buss had relied on more than just rhetorical flair to make his case, however. His claims were based on a study he had conducted with a team of researchers in 1992, in which over five hundred college students were polled. Over eighty percent of surveyed women claimed that emotional infidelity would be more upsetting than physical infidelity (as opposed to just forty percent of men), and these results were confirmed in controlled laboratory settings as well. They were also strikingly similar to those found in the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, and Korea.[341] Buss had also not suggested that there was a specific gene (or set of genes) that could "turn on the emotion of jealousy," although this was a common theme during an era in which there seemed to be "a gene" for every conceivable mood and ailment. In her critique of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, for instance, Debbie Cameron had fallen into a similar trap: "Obviously, our genetic endowment sets limits on what we can do. No social conditions or learning experiences will produce humans who can fly, or read minds," Cameron allowed. "But it's quite a leap from this common-sense observation to the notion that there's a gene for everything, right down to such specific emotions/behaviors as 'sexual jealousy'." If "there isn't a gene," Cameron continued, "then you can't argue that the characteristic is a product of natural selection."[342]

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[340] Ibid.
[341] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 326-7.
[342] According to Cameron: "As a culture we have become alarmingly credulous about claims that this or that—homosexuality or criminality or whatever—is 'in the genes'. Any finding that tends to support this notion will

This was precisely what the evolutionists were arguing, however, and painting a holistic picture of violent jealousy that incorporated both nature and nurture was important, they insisted, since there were devastating real-world consequences that hinged on biological and psychological semantics. The United States had a long history of exonerating violently jealous men who, in the eyes of the court, had committed their crimes only because they had been thrown into such a blind rage of "morbid jealousy" that they were deemed temporarily (but legally) insane. More disturbing, however, was the fact that most men who murdered their partners in a jealous rage were treated leniently because they were *not* considered to be insane. Hiding in the penumbras of the American legal system was the premise that violence inflicted by a man on a cheating spouse was little more than an unfortunate yet understandable reaction to the most ancient and heinous of provocations, and judges across the United States regularly signaled their approval by letting convicted wife-beaters walk free.[343] As late as 1974 in Texas, if a man murdered his wife in the heat of the moment after having discovered her in bed with another man, he could be released without consequence under the state's "reasonable man" standard.[344] Even as late as 1992, men tended to be treated far more leniently if they relied on the "heat of passion" defense in the courtroom, and men who cited adultery as a provocation for their violent crime often had their murder charge downgraded to manslaughter.[345]

Men Beating Women: A Universal Problem

This misogynistic judicial leniency was not some cruel anomaly of Western culture, however. Legal traditions in societies ranging from Europe and Asia to Africa and Melanesia all contained similar protections, most of which extended a great deal of sympathy to murderous men thrown into a violent, jealous rage.[346] If anything, these problems were relatively tame in the West relative to the rest of the world, where in many cultures beating an adulterous wife was considered to be not only a protected right but a moral duty.[347] For evolutionary psychologists, the universality of jealous men resorting to violence, paired with the ubiquity of legal protections

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receive blanket media coverage, often not merely uncritical of the scientists but actually exaggerating their claims." See: Cameron, 'Back to Nature', pp. 6-15.

[343] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 305.

[344] C. Weaver, 'Heartburn', *The New York Times* [New York], (13 February, 2000).

[345] D. Coker, 'Heat of Passion and Wife Killing: Men Who Batter/Men Who Kill', *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice*, 2 (1992), p. 71.

[346] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', pp. 303-5.

[347] B. Smuts, 'Male Aggression Against Women: An Evolutionary Perspective', *Human Nature*, 3/1 (1992), pp. 1-44.

for their actions across cultures, was enough to begin asking how and why this seemingly maladaptive trait had evolved. How could the violent actions of jealous men—deemed barbarous and abhorrent by a vocal majority of people across the globe—have been selected by nature for the benefit of the batterer? Men beating women seemed like a uniquely ugly phenomenon; one that lay outside the boundaries of other types of aggressive behavior aimed at foreign armies or even home invaders. "My own research on men's use of violence against women has been guided by asking why men's motives and emotions should be such as to inflict harm on women they have loved and wanted," Margo Wilson wrote in 2005.[348]

Dr. Wilson's desire to understand why this type of behavior was so prevalent was not driven purely by a scientist's quest for value-free data; she was adamant that this behavioral problem would be best addressed through a more thorough understanding of what the problem actually was and how it began. Wilson and her fellow adaptationists believed that social scientists had failed the victims of domestic abuse by refusing to view jealous violence through the lens of natural selection, out of fear that painting this barbarous behavior as "natural" would excuse the perpetrators and blame the victims. The unfortunate truth, wrote Wilson, was that when "positive inducements" fail to keep a woman from straying, "coercive control is an effective tactic in many contexts," and it is "little wonder that men who see women as scarce and contested resources often wish to limit their partners' autonomy." Viewing jealous violence as an evolved extension of property guarding, Wilson continued, would also help identify the most vulnerable women, who could then, at least in theory, be removed from uniquely dangerous environments.[349]

Some environments were certainly more dangerous than others. "Young wives are at greater risk than older wives of being killed by husbands," Wilson wrote, while "wives in de facto marital unions are at greater risk than those in registered unions, and recently estranged wives are at greater risk than co-resident wives." Evolutionary psychologists also predicted that men—especially those who were less physically attractive and therefore had lower mate value—would tend to exhibit more pronounced guarding behavior toward younger partners who were ovulating and therefore had more reproductive value.[350] Anticipating pushback, Wilson was

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[348] M. Wilson writing in V. Griet., *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?: Debating Feminism and Evolutionary Theory*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield (2005), Preface.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 330-4.

quick to reassure her audience that these conclusions should "not be interpreted as support for a male-centered patriarchal view of marital relations and institutions, because the violence itself is facilitated by such institutions." She continued with an assertion: "A masculine proprietary inclination to use violence against wives is amenable to change—we know this from cross-cultural variation in wife beating and in wife killing."[351]

Those who suggested that this type of mate guarding was the result of Western cultural brainwashing struggled to explain not only why such behavior existed in cultures untouched by Western influence, but also why it tended to be even *more* pronounced in distant parts of the world. Throughout human history, Wilson and Daly observed, "millions of men have guarded and constrained 'their' women by practices that seem to depart from those of despots only in degree." Traditions ranging from genital mutilation and the use of chastity belts to "veiling, chaperoning, purdah, and the literal incarceration of women are common social institutions of patrilineal societies," they added. (Notably, these restrictive traditions tended to apply almost exclusively to women who were young enough to reproduce.)[352] Social status also played a role. The higher a woman's status, the more likely she was to be confined and guarded in places like China, where foot binding practices had acted as a direct means of physical control over a woman's movements, and by extension her ability to sleep with other men. These were merely cultural variations on a universally oppressive theme, however, and the "repeated convergent invention of claustration practices around the world and the confining and controlling behavior of men even where it is frowned upon," Wilson and Daly observed, "reflect the workings of a sexually proprietary male psychology."[353]

When it came to jealous men beating or killing their female partners, evolutionary psychologists broke with their longstanding dictum of separating science from social policy, going so far as to submit unsolicited advice to lawmakers about the various ways in which their research could help enact policies and legislation that would reduce domestic violence. In *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence: A Primer for Policymakers and Public Policy Advocates*, David Buss and Joshua Duntley pointed to empirical studies showing that men who were

[351] M. Wilson writing in V. Griet., *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?,* Preface.
[352] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', pp. 301-2.
[353] Ibid.

rejected by women often fantasized about murdering the woman who scorned them—a finding that was confirmed with disturbing frequency across every known culture. Cliché film dialogue—such as "If I can't have her, no one can"—seemed to be rooted in the reality of a jealous man's mind, and the first six months after the end of a relationship were considered to be the most dangerous for a woman, especially if she agreed to meet with her scorned lover "just one last time." With this data in hand, Buss and Duntley urged policy makers to direct more funds toward helping women who were more likely to find themselves in these particularly perilous situations—to "identify the circumstances in which evolved homicide mechanisms are most likely to be activated and to direct special efforts at educating people about these circumstances."[354] To their critics, however, Buss and Duntley were merely giving cover to those who would blame the victim. Mentioning that certain environments and scenarios (such as meeting a recently scorned lover "one last time" in a private setting) posed a unique danger to women seemed to suggest that any harm leveled on a woman who had been adequately warned of this danger would ultimately be her fault—akin to blaming a victim of sexual assault for having the audacity to don a revealing outfit.

Barbara Smuts—a prominent anthropologist and psychologist—seemed uniquely positioned to broker a peace deal between the adaptationists and the sociologists on this front, and in *Male Aggression Against Women: An Evolutionary Perspective*, she struck a centrist tone without ceding any scientific ground. Although it was true that a "biological, evolutionary perspective on relations between the sexes" did not "necessarily depend on deterministic assumptions, nor does it inevitably draw conclusions that support the status quo," it was also true that "male aggression against females often reflects male reproductive striving." Therefore, a "responsible evolutionary analysis is both political and conditional" and "potentially radical" in its implications, wrote Smuts. To the "extent that this evolutionary framework proves useful in helping to identify the conditions that favor male aggression toward women, it can also contribute to the formulation of strategies to alter those conditions." Acknowledging this genetic reality "in no way implies that male domination of women is genetically determined or that frequent male aggression toward women is an immutable feature of human nature." Echoing Daly, Buss, and Duntley, Dr. Smuts argued that the real challenge was to "identify the situational

[354] D. Buss and J. Duntley writing in *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence: A Primer for Policymakers and Public Policy Advocates*, pp. 125-6.

factors that predispose members of a particular society toward or away from the use of sexual aggression," and that an "evolutionary framework can be very useful in this regard."[355]

Most feminists disagreed. In a joint response to *Male Aggression Against Women* published in *Feminist Studies*, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Patricia Adair Gowaty, and Marlene Zuk dismissed Smuts as "yet another Darwinian feminist" who believed that an "evolutionary account of human variation can lead to radical political conclusions."[356] Males, they wrote, "are not always violent, aggressive creatures. In fact among both animals and humans, they exhibit a continuum of behaviors—from nasty to nice." In building their case against Smuts, the authors turned to other species. In recent years, Patricia Gowaty and her colleagues had "begun to detail this continuum in Eastern Bluebirds," the authors noted, and had found that although males were "almost never physically aggressive to bluebird females," they had been known to "defend scarce nesting sites" in "exchange for sex." When nesting sites were not in short supply and the females had no reason to "trade sex for lodging," the male bluebirds would become less aggressive and more nurturing, and would even help the females feed their young.[357] Those who were truly interested in reducing incidents of domestic abuse, the authors argued, should therefore be less concerned with irrelevant biological adaptations and more concerned with encouraging women to "use their kin groups and female networks" to "protect themselves while continuing the fight for economic and social sex equity."[358]

But even the strongest and most supportive female networks could not alter the fact that jealous men had evolved to view women as property that needed to be guarded, countered the adaptationists. "An evolutionary perspective on competition among males suggests an obvious hypothesis," Dr. Wilson wrote—that the "human male psyche has evolved to treat sexual or romantic partners, to some degree, as alienable property."[359] In their essay on mate selection and the guarding of females in *The Adapted Mind*, Wilson and Daly spoke of men, entitlement, and property:

> Having located an individually recognizable and potentially defensible resource packet, the proprietary creature proceeds to advertise and exercise the intention of defending it from rivals. Proprietariness has the further implication, possibly

[355] B. Smuts, 'Male Aggression Against Women: An Evolutionary Perspective', *Human Nature*, 3/1 (1992), pp. 1-44.
[356] Fausto-Sterling, Gowaty, Zuk, 'Evolutionary Psychology and Darwinian Feminism', pp. 402-417.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.
[359] M. Wilson writing in the V. Griet., *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?,* Preface.

> peculiar to the human case, of a sense of right or entitlement. Trespass by rivals provokes not only hostility but a feeling of grievance, a state of mind that apparently serves a more broadly social function. Whereas hostile feelings motivate action against one's rivals, grievance motivates appeals to other interested persons to recognize the trespass as a wrong against the property holder and hence as a justification for individual retaliation or a grounds for more collective sanctions. Proprietary entitlement thus rests upon a social contract: Property owners reciprocally acknowledge and cooperatively enforce one another's claims.[360]

Evolutionary psychologists believed that men had evolved this proprietary instinct toward women in order to ensure paternity, which, unlike maternity, was never truly certain. "Male mammals attempt to monopolize females and their reproductive capacity just as creatures contest any limited resource," wrote Daly and Wilson. "But men, unlike most male mammals, make significant parental investments, too, and the combination of this paternal investment with an asymmetrical risk of cuckoldry (misattribution of parenthood) produces a powerful selective force favoring the evolution of motives that effectively guarantee one's paternity of one's putative offspring."[361] In the ancestral environment, men whose partners secretly mated with other men were dealt a devastating evolutionary blow. According to Steven Pinker, the "victim of cuckoldry is worse off than if he had failed to breed at all," since he has now "devoted his worldly efforts to the genes of a competitor."[362,363] It was therefore unsurprising that men across the world viewed and claimed women as property, wrote Wilson and Daly, and although the more subtle characteristics of mate-guarding varied depending on the specifics of one's culture and environment, there was an undeniable "ubiquity" to the male mindset that females were to be controlled—a mindset that was reflected through social constructions such as marriage, adultery laws, and the veneration of female chastity.[364]

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[360] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 289.
[361] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 290.
[362] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 466.
[363] Paternity concerns, according to evolutionary psychologists, are also why grandfathers are expected to be more wary of their son's children as opposed to their daughter's children, due to a "double whammy" of not being sure whether their son is really their son and not being sure if their son is really the father of *his* children. Women whose daughters produced children, however, could be relatively certain of their biological grandmother status. See: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 235-40.
[364] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 289.

Relativity

In *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, the Dobashes focused almost exclusively on Western culture and the myriad manifestations of female subjugation that came with it. "Within legal and religious institutions," they wrote, the "only legitimate position for women in most Western societies has been in the family."[365] The "subordination of women was explicitly established in the institutional practices of both the church and the state," and had been "supported by some of the most prominent political, legal, religious, philosophical, and literary figures in Western society, for instance Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, Fichte, Blackstone, Saint Augustine, John Knox, Calvin, and Martin Luther. In one way or another, they each advocated a patriarchal relationship between men and women and especially between husbands and wives."[366] (Conspicuously absent from this list of misogynists was anyone who had operated outside the sphere of significant Western influence, such as the Chinese foot-binders who sought to make women immobile, the guardians of the harems throughout the Ottoman Empire, the purdah practitioners of ancient India, or the men who forced the widespread sequestration of women in Confucian societies throughout China and Japan.)

The Dobashes ended their book on a somewhat helpless note, since the robust social engineering projects that would be required in order to eliminate domestic abuse in the West, they lamented, were likely mere pipe dreams. "The way to begin to dramatically reduce the number of marriages likely to become violent is to work on the subordination, isolation, and devalued status of women in society and to change the hierarchical family that characterizes Western society," they wrote. "Are the authorities in the West prepared to go as far as the Soviets did in their experiments in social change carried out in Central Asia during the mid-1920s? In order to destroy the tribal patriarchy and the ideology that supported it they sought first to destroy the old family order."[367] Although *Violence Against Wives* focused exclusively on the cultural and religious foundations of misogynistic violence, Islam—a religion to which roughly twenty percent of the world's population belonged,[368] and whose connections to what would have been dubbed "domestic abuse" in the West were difficult for even the most ardent religious

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[365] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 33.
[366] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, pp. 6-7.
[367] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 241.
[368] H. Kettani, 'World Muslim Population: 1950–2020', *International Journal of Environmental Science and Development*, 1/2 (June, 2010).

relativists to ignore—received only a brief mention near the conclusion, where the Dobashes highlighted the brave Muslim women who had fought valiantly against their male oppressors. Little attention was paid to the crushing Islamic patriarchal structures that had led to their subjugation to begin with.

The curious omission of non-Western patriarchal practices was almost certainly not an oversight, since social scientists who shied away from evolutionary explanations of mate guarding and domestic violence were routinely on the lookout for cultural evidence outside of the United States that would help prove their case. Donna Coker—who in 1992 had recently graduated from Stanford Law School and was pursuing a career in criminal law with a focus on intimate partner violence—was one such cultural relativist who was determined to tackle the problem of domestic abuse without bringing natural selection into play; relying instead on a tenuous unification of contemporary social science and feminist theory.[369] For Coker, evolutionary explanations of domestic abuse had "reinforce[d] the belief that intervention can have little deterrence or prevention impact," and had provided harmful fodder for the heat-of-passion laws that routinely allowed violent men to return home.[370]

Any role that biological evolution played in this vicious cycle was negligible, Coker implied, since Western culture and the biased laws it produced were the most damaging and dominant variables. "To provide the protection for abused women that the criminal justice system and this society should provide," Coker wrote, "we must recognize the culturally reinforcing nature of the overlap between how abusive men think and how the legal doctrine works." As it stood, the American legal system and the language with which it was written encouraged violent men to act without restraint, with the expectation that a carefully-crafted "heat of passion" defense would shield them from any real consequences in a court of law. "There is a remarkable similarity between the social understandings that underlie important elements of voluntary manslaughter's heat-of-passion doctrine and the excuses and justifications that abusive men give to explain their violence," for instance that they were "out of control" when they became violent. These excuses "significantly mirror the understanding of violence

[369] 'Donna Kay Coker Biography', consulted online (2 November, 2024), https://miami.app.box.com/v/cv-donna-coker.
[370] D. Coker, 'Heat of Passion and Wife Killing', p. 71.

that informs voluntary manslaughter/heat-of-passion law," wrote Coker, who saw broad cultural failures lurking behind every case of domestic assault.[371]

Coker did not need to look beyond North America in order to further her claim that domestic abuse—and its treatment within the legal system—was a matter of circumstance and environment. She had conducted empirical research and interviews in the Navajo Nation (which occupied parts of Arizona and New Mexico), where she witnessed communities still reeling from the incursion and violence of white settlers. "While battering is a phenomenon of gender subordination, it may also be a function of racism, poverty, and conquest," Corker concluded. "Ignoring the importance of these oppressive structures in the lives of battered women results in interventions that ultimately fail the women whose lives are most affected by those structures: poor women and women of color." Unlike "Anglo adjudication" practices, the Navajo peacemaking process created a "forum in which the oppressive systems that impact the life of the batterer, including systems of racism and colonization, are recognized without minimizing the harm done [to] the battered woman and without blaming her for the batterer's violence."[372]

Colonialism was an especially significant variable for Coker. "The material, psychological and spiritual circumstances of Navajo people—circumstances that are a direct result of colonization—are related to both the occurrence of domestic violence and women's responses to such violence," she wrote. "Colonization has diminished Navajo women's social and economic status," which, when combined with "material deprivation and the subordination of Navajo cultural and political life" created "social conditions that foster domestic violence." In a clarifying footnote, Coker insisted she was not arguing that "colonization's effects provide a total explanation for the occurrence of domestic violence," or that the "Navajo context is unique vis-a-vis women's status or the experience of violence against women." But traditional Navajo culture was "largely based on notions of gender egalitarianism and is matrifocal," and this dynamic had been ravaged by Western influence. "This is not an argument that Indian people or Navajos, in particular, are peculiarly vulnerable to the existence of domestic violence," Coker wrote. "In fact, domestic violence appears to be widespread throughout the world."[373]

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[371] Ibid.
[372] D. Coker, 'Enhancing Autonomy for Battered Women: Lessons from Navajo Peacemaking', *UCLA Law Review*, 47 (1999), pp. 1-2.
[373] Coker, 'Enhancing Autonomy for Battered Women: Lessons from Navajo Peacemaking', p. 16.

For Coker, however, the universality of domestic violence simply indicated that Western culture had spread its moral rot far and wide—either directly through violent conquest, or indirectly through the implementation of exploitative economic and cultural practices. Citing research conducted by Barbara Chester, Coker argued that "an increase in domestic violence is related to the removal of Indian people from their ancestral lands, [the] prohibition against religious and spiritual practices," and the "rapid transition from hunting, gathering, and subsistence farming to a cash-based economy."[374] Although Coker stopped short of excusing Navajo men's violent behavior, she was willing to extend a greater degree of sympathy to batterers who had been negatively influenced by Western culture. It was "important to recognize the relationship of battering to poverty, racism, and conquest in the lives of some men who batter," Coker continued, and feminist scholarship must "explore this connection" because "interventions that recognize oppressive structures in the lives of battering men may discourage some men from battering." To "ignore racist and economic oppression in the lives of men who batter is to ignore their importance in the lives of battered women."[375]

The legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw had expressed a similar sentiment eight years earlier when she wrote that "where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles." Domestic abuse should therefore be approached and treated differently depending on the community in which it took place, Crenshaw insisted. "Activists who have attempted to provide support services to Asian and African-American women report intense resistance from those communities," wrote Crenshaw. Within the Asian community in Los Angeles, for instance, "saving the honor of the family from shame is a priority."[376]

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[374] Coker, 'Enhancing Autonomy for Battered Women', p. 26.
[375] Coker, 'Enhancing Autonomy for Battered Women', p. 12.
[376] K. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43/6 (July, 1991), pp. 1241-1299.

Women Guarding Men

Evolutionary psychologists believed that females were just as prone to jealousy as men, although they argued that "men's and women's proprietary feelings toward their mates are likely to have evolved to be qualitatively different," which made the consequences markedly different as well.[377] Unlike men, who engaged in jealous behavior in order to restrict a woman's mating opportunities, women exhibited jealous behavior in order to reduce the likelihood that their partner would divert valuable resources to another woman and eventually her children, the adaptationists argued.[378] And although men were more likely than women to "conceal" a partner by limiting her access to other men (and to use threats of violence to enforce these boundaries), women reported a far greater desire to elicit jealousy from their partner as a means of gauging the strength of the relationship.[379] Studies also showed that female jealously was directly proportional to the physical attractiveness of a potential female rival, whereas men's jealousy tended to be proportional to the social status of a rival male.[380]

The sexual politics of mate guarding and resource allocation also suggested that women had more to lose than men if they decided to engage in an affair—a conclusion absent from past studies that had failed to take into account the underlying psychological differences between men and women. Lacking a sex-based evolutionary analysis, these studies, although "informative about the equality of the sexes in experiencing jealousy," wrote David Buss, had "posed the question too globally." An analysis that incorporated evolved psychology "leads to the prediction that although both sexes will experience jealousy, they will differ in the weight they give to the cues that trigger jealousy. Men are predicted to give relatively more weight to cues to sexual infidelity, whereas women are predicted to give relatively more weight to cues to a long-term diversion of investment, such as emotional involvement with another person."[381]

The prevailing attitude in the United States regarding the root causes of domestic abuse had been distorted by a willful ignorance of the evolved biological mechanisms of jealous violence, according to Wilson and Daly, who believed a more multifaceted approach was needed in order to solve these types of problems in the modern world. This distortion was buoyed by a

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[377] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', pp. 292.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 330-1.
[380] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 318, 323.
[381] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 318.

stubborn aversion to placing men and women in separate categories, which stemmed from a well-meaning but counterproductive desire to render both sexes equal in all categories of behavior. Researchers had failed to "separate men's versus women's responses" to abuse in their analyses, which painted the issue as a human problem when it was in fact an overwhelmingly male problem.[382]

The popular press was largely to blame for this distortion. In their dismissal of any significant differences between jealousy in men and women, journalists often employed straw man arguments by claiming that evolutionary psychologists were not adequately taking culture and environment into account, given the variability with which jealousy manifested itself in other parts of the world. "In some countries, notably Germany and the Netherlands, the percentage of men who say they find sexual infidelity more upsetting than the emotional kind is only 28 percent and 23 percent," Sharon Begley wrote in *Newsweek*. "Which suggests that, once again, it depends…It is much more likely that both men and women are wired to detect behavior that threatens their bond, but what that behavior is depends on culture." Adding, "In a society where an illicit affair portends the end of a relationship, men should indeed be wired to care about that. In a society where that's no big deal, they shouldn't—and, it seems, don't…So much for the handy 'she's wired to not really care if I sleep around' excuse."[383,384]

Begley could also not help but point out that the majority of evolutionary psychologists making claims about the desires and proclivities of men were themselves men. "Men's and women's jealousy modules supposedly differ," Begley wrote, in that a "woman's jealousy module is tuned to emotional infidelity, but she doesn't much care if her mate is unfaithful," whereas a man, "being a promiscuous cad, will probably stick with wife No. 1 and their kids even if he is sexually unfaithful, but may well abandon them if he actually falls in love with another woman." Begley then highlighted the identity of the scientists behind the claims: "Let's not speculate on the motives that (mostly male) evolutionary psychologists might have in asserting that their wives are programmed to not really care if they sleep around."[385]

People like Begley were "dead right to be suspicious," the social psychologist and popular science writer Carol Tavris had argued ten years earlier, since "biological research has

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[382] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', pp. 304.
[383] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.
[384] Begley's use of the word "excuse" is telling.
[385] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.

been used for centuries to justify pernicious social policies and elitist beliefs." However, "feminists and egalitarians need not fear good research, even in biology," since "information itself is neither sexist nor racist; it is neutral."[386] Tavris's fellow feminist-scientist Ruth Hubbard disagreed. "The pretense that science is objective, apolitical and value-neutral is profoundly political because it obscures the political role that science and technology play in underwriting the existing distribution of power in society," Hubbard wrote in 1988. "Science and technology always operate in somebody's interest and serve someone or some group of people. To the extent that scientists are 'neutral' that merely means that they support the existing distribution of interests and power."[387] For Hubbard, science could never be truly objective; it was all about serving power. This was especially true when it came to any "science" that attempted to explain either the existence of traditional marriage or the gendered divisions of labor these unions tended to produce in the American home.

MARRIAGE AND PARENTING

A Fish Without a Bicycle

Andrea Dworkin once wrote that there were five ways in which a man could obtain sex from a woman. He could "steal it (rape), persuade her to give it away (seduction), rent it (prostitution), lease it over the long term (marriage in the United States), or own it outright (marriage in most societies)."[388] Most American men chose Dworkin's fourth option,[389] but whether or not women should adhere to what became viewed as an antiquated and oppressive institution was a matter of public debate throughout the 1980s and '90s, when men were being branded less as an answer to women's problems and more as a needless inconvenience. Feminist anthems touting female independence and rebellion against patriarchal power structures, such as Madonna's "Express Yourself" and "Material Girl" (suggesting that while men are replaceable, money is forever) dominated the airwaves. A best-selling bumper sticker that read a "woman

[386] C. Tavris interviewed by M. Shermer, 'The Measure of a Woman', *Skeptic*, 7/1 (1999), consulted online (12 March, 2021), https://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/11-02-09/#feature.
[387] Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', pp. 5-17.
[388] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 119.
[389] S. L. Brown, et al. 'The Rising Midlife First Marriage Rate in the U.S.', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 84/4 (2022), pp. 1220-33.

without a man is like a fish without a bicycle" seemed to capture the mood of every major media outlet,[390] some of which declared 1992 the "Year of the Woman," as a record-setting forty-seven women were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. These groundbreaking victories continued throughout the 1990s with a series of firsts for women, as Janet Reno became the first female attorney general in 1993, Shannon Faulkner became the first female cadet to join a prominent military academy, Madeleine Albright became the first female Secretary of State, and Condoleezza Rice became the first Black woman to act as national security advisor.[391]

The last decade of the 20th century, in other words, was a good time to be a young feminist, as the "daughters of second-wave feminism came of age and chose new paths unavailable to their mothers," such as attending college or joining the workforce, according to Allison Yarrow.[392] The stone-age morals of the 1970s (when, for instance, Richard Nixon had vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act in 1971 over concerns that it was a "family-weakening bill") and the overt misogyny of the New Right movement that had flourished under the Reagan administration during the 1980s were in retreat—unable to compete with the powerful rhetoric of third-wave feminists, whose cause had been propelled to the national stage by a series of high-profile sexual harassment cases like those of Anita Hill and codified by legislation like the Violence Against Women Act (1994).[393]

As with most battles, however, the combat lines became blurred, and an overcorrection began to emerge as the feminist push for equality began to chafe against the science of human nature. News stories that threatened feminist narratives by touting the science-backed benefits of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles were met with flurries of anger and denial, and just as the Right had routinely discarded science that did not mesh with a predetermined social narrative, the Left began to dabble in their own form of science denialism. The political teams temporarily switched sides, as left-leaning liberals grew more comfortable dismissing evolutionary science, and right-leaning conservatives grew more comfortable embracing evolution as a means of bolstering their pitch for traditional family values. Meanwhile, evolutionary psychologists engaged in their usual tightrope walk—straining to deliver their

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[390] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 480.
[391] A. Strauss, 'Key Moments Since 1992, "The Year of the Woman"' *The New York Times* [New York], (2 April, 2017).
[392] A. Yarrow, 'How the '90s Tricked Women Into Thinking They'd Gained Gender Equality', *Time* [New York], (13 June, 2018).
[393] Conaboy, 'Maternal Instinct Is a Myth That Men Created'.

scientific conclusions dispassionately while reiterating to a perpetually confused audience that nature should not dictate social policy.

The Science of Pair-Bonding

Although marriage had evolved into a relatively casual affair by the 1980s—stripped of the religious pomp and overt misogyny that had defined it throughout most of its history—it still carried the whiff of an institution that strongly favored men at the expense of women.[394] Whereas evolutionists tended to stress that monogamous pair-bonding was a "strained compromise between male and female" that was "perhaps not the best of all possible worlds, but one in which most of our ancestors evidently found themselves,"[395] the rhetoric within feminist and left-leaning academic circles throughout the 1990s painted marriage as less of a compromise and more of a trap, predicated on outmoded laws and archaic religion. Marriage and the nuclear family it tended to produce were therefore assumed to be little more than figments of the Western imagination. In non-western and more primitive (read: "pure") societies, the Left assumed, marriage remained a trivial and far more equitable affair.[396]

Evolutionary psychologists, however, studied marriage and the formal trappings of pair-bonding through a wide cross-cultural lens, and argued that far from being an aberration of Western society, marriage was in fact ubiquitous across cultures and had likely been that way—in one form or another—throughout most of human history.[397] "In the contemporary West, we are inclined to see the mating game as a great marketplace of autonomous actors," wrote Wilson and Daly. "But in kin-based societies," people often take a "strong manipulative interest in the marital transactions of other people. The extensive role of kin in the arrangement and conduct of marriages makes the human case unique among animal mateships, and multiplies the potential conflicts among the parties involved."[398] Through gene-culture coevolution, marriage was therefore believed to have "evolved" as an institution because it had consistently led to an "increase in the quality of the woman a man would be able to attract," according to David Buss. "Men who are willing to promise long-term resources, protection, and investment in children are

[394] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 478.
[395] R. M. Ellsworth, 'Book Review: The Human That Never Evolved', *Evolutionary Psychology,* 9/3 (2011), pp. 325-335.
[396] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, pp. 431-2.
[397] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 423.
[398] Wilson, Daly, 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel', p. 310.

appealing to women," therefore "men who are willing to commit to the long term have a wider range of women from which to choose." An additional benefit for men was that marriage increased the chances that a man could ensure paternity through repeated (and presumably exclusive) sexual access.[399]

Although the social economics of supply and demand were always at play in courtship rituals and decisions to wed, there were significant variations on this theme throughout the world. Evolutionary psychologists drew attention to the fact that in Sweden, for instance, premarital sex was rarely stigmatized because Swedish women were "far less economically reliant on men than in most other cultures"—making the material benefits of marriage less appealing to women who already enjoyed easy access to money and resources. In Sweden, it was the taxpayer—not the husband—who reliably provided women with the socioeconomic freedom they desired.[400] Cultural variations such as this were modern exceptions that proved the ancestral rule, however, and evolutionary psychology's analysis of the nuclear family was focused less on the socially constructed institution of marriage and more on the evolved mechanisms behind pair bonding and family dynamics.

Simplicity Breeds Resentment

By 1984, a high school teacher named Barbara Beckwith had lost her patience with what she viewed as the popular press' uncritical and fawning admiration for sex-difference research. It was bad enough that scientific journals regularly sided with researchers who favored genetic explanations of gender disparities, she wrote, but the fact that the press was disseminating raw data to "non-scientists" and "non-academics" without providing the proper context posed an even greater threat to equality. "In 1981, *Newsweek* devoted six pages to the behavioral sex differences in an article titled 'How They Differ - and Why.' *Discovery* ran 'The Brain: His and Hers' that same year," followed by an "8-article feature" in *Science Digest* in 1982, "asking 'Are Sexual Standards Inherited?' and answering with an enthusiastic yes," Beckwith observed. "Such coverage panders to conventional sex-role prejudices by telling readers 'science' supports their biases. Popular magazines use genes-and-gender theories as justification for keeping things as they are." Beckwith believed the popularization of genes-based sex research had "justified male

[399] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 135-8.
[400] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 152-4.

sexual violence," especially when it was delivered through publications like *Cosmopolitan*, which had recently published an article that offered to "provide a new perspective on human rape, wife-beating and other forms of sexual aggression." The message this piece sent to its mostly female readership, Beckwith concluded, was that "rape and wife-beating are dismissible as gene-based and fun."[401]

Ms. Beckwith may have exaggerated the extent to which these articles encouraged violence against women, but she was right to note their prevalence. Relatively anodyne evolutionary explanations of sex-linked behavior were routinely simplified and distorted in a country whose popular press habitually ran snappy and misleading headlines rather than nuanced explanations of complex human behavior.[402] In 1986, an unpublished Harvard-Yale marriage study—in which researchers found that a white, college-educated woman's chances of getting married decreased dramatically after age thirty—leaked to the press. Seeking to capitalize on the drama that would doubtlessly ensue, *Newsweek* ran a cover story entitled "The Marriage Crunch," which summarized the study by stating that by age forty, a single female was "more likely to be killed by a terrorist" than to find a husband. The pushback from feminists was swift and fierce. "The popular media have invented a national marital crisis on the basis of a single academic experiment" of "dubious statistical merit," wrote Susan Faludi. *The Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman expressed a similar sentiment: "How gleefully they warn that an uppity woman may be overqualified for the marriage market…Reach too high, young lady, and you'll end up in the stratosphere of slim pickings."[403] Reflecting on the controversy in a 1992 interview with *Time*, Faludi revealed that she had been sitting on a flight to a friend's wedding when she happened upon the *Newsweek* piece, whose sour tone had left a pit in her stomach. "I hadn't been worrying about marriage," Faludi recalled, "but suddenly I felt glum and grouchy." Faludi was less concerned with the study's implications than she was with the fact that it had fueled a nationwide panic, as "fear of spinsterhood stormed into the popular culture, giving birth to a whole generation of desperate movie heroines, frantic sitcom spinsters," and "myriad self-help books."[404]

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[401] B. Beckwith, *Science for the People*, 16/4 (July-August, 1984), pp. 18-23.
[402] In the Internet Age, these types of deceptive editorial tactics would eventually be dubbed "clickbait."
[403] D. McGinn, 'Marriage by the Numbers', *Newsweek* [New York], (4 June, 2006).
[404] Gibbs, 'The War Against Feminism'.

Taking the press to task for sensationalized reporting was common practice in progressive circles, but Faludi had a history of challenging the science behind the headlines as well. In 1982, she had decided to investigate an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that "urged women to re-evaluate their goals in light of findings that a woman's fertility plunged after age 30," which had been picked up by the popular press. Faludi's interview in *Time*—published under the headline "The War Against Feminism"—suggests that she was inclined to push back against not only the tyranny of the patriarchy but the "tyranny of the biological clock" as well, as she triumphantly reported that the *New England Journal of Medicine* article had drawn on a "French study of women with infertile husbands who had tried to get pregnant through artificial insemination"—as if this rendered the article's larger point moot. According to *Time*, Faludi also sought and "found fault with the stories about women with Harvard M.B.A.s dropping out to go home and raise their children," the "Good Housekeeping ads of the New Traditionalist," and the "notion of the Mommy Track."[405]

Science that did not fit the feminist narrative, even if it was sourced from respected publications like the *New England Journal of Medicine*, was automatically suspect and occasionally dismissed outright. Andrea Dworkin shared Faludi's disdain for the marriage game, for which there was no obvious remedy. "In marriage," wrote Dworkin, a "woman not only provides sex for the male; she also cleans his house. She does housework whether or not she also works for a wage outside the house. She does housework whether she lives in a capitalist or a socialist country. She does housework because she is a woman, and housework is stigmatized as women's work. Not coincidentally, it is also the most menial, isolating, repetitious, and invisible work there is."[406]

Feminists like Faludi and Dworkin had reason to believe that these types of articles and exposés were inherently flawed—that they were little more than the remnants of a deteriorating scientific framework that for centuries had been dominated by men and riddled with masculine bias. The second-wave feminist movement with which Faludi was associated had indeed unmasked demonstrably biased and sexist research pursued by male scientists in the past, who, according to feminist narratives, had tricked Americans into believing that women were not

[405] Gibbs, 'The War Against Feminism'.
[406] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, pp. 121-2.

simply different from men but inferior as well. Since the 1970s, female scientists had flooded the ranks of the nation's leading scientific institutions, where they were on a mission to correct a systemic imbalance in male-centered research that had focused almost exclusively on male animals as test subjects—namely "that prototypic human, the white laboratory rat," as Hubbard put it.[407] These new "Darwinian feminists" may have brought their own gender biases into the lab, but this was deemed a necessary evil that would correct a longstanding and deeply entrenched imbalance.[408] According to Alice Eagly, this shifting dynamic extended to the study of family life as well. Science that had purported to uncover truths about maternal instincts was questioned and reevaluated, while some feminists went so far as to claim that any science that revealed even small innate differences between the sexes was either "prescientific and obviously faulty" or "riddled with artifacts, methodological deficiencies, and unexplained inconsistencies."[409]

The race was on to bring an unapologetically feminine perspective to the behavioral science behind family dynamics, with the hope that new methodologies and angles of inquiry would produce results that were at odds with common preconceptions about women and their role in the household. "The subject of women's biology is profoundly political," wrote Ruth Hubbard in 1990. "The predominantly male scientists who have described our biology have done so at least in part to explain why it is 'natural' for us to function as we do in society."[410] Carol Tavris told a similar story: The women who joined the sciences—especially the field of psychology—"began to examine the way in which questions and therefore answers had been biased," and they "started asking questions that had never been asked before. They wanted to know why, in studies that compared men and women, women were always considered the deviant, abnormal, pathologically disturbed sex."[411]

The spirit and purpose of this new female-driven science was to eradicate harmful stereotypes by showing that the sex differences unearthed by mostly male researchers were in fact illusory. Feminist scientists and psychologists were therefore largely uninterested in

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[407] Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', pp. 5-17.
[408] Fausto-Sterling, Gowaty, Zuk, 'Evolutionary Psychology and Darwinian Feminism', pp. 402-417.
[409] A. H. Eagly, 'The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men', *American Psychologist*, 50/3 (1995), pp. 145-158.
[410] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, p. 2.
[411] C. Tavris interviewed by M. Shermer, 'The Measure of a Woman', *Skeptic*, 7/1 (1999), consulted online (22 April, 2023), https://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/11-02-09/#feature (25 March, 2023).

conclusions that would render women superior to men in the eyes of the public. Instead, they hoped to find no differences at all, which, as Ms. Eagly put it, would be "congenial to many feminist psychologists not only because they would challenge gender stereotypes but also because sameness was thought to increase women's chances for equal opportunity in the society."[412] Ms. Eagly was initially optimistic about where this new shade of empiricism would lead, and believed that "properly analyzed to remove artifacts," research into sex differences would "yield null findings or, at least, differences that could be described as trivially small."[413] The results, however, were not what the Darwinian feminists had hoped for, and instead "produced findings that conform to people's ideas about the sexes," Eagly wrote in 1995.[414]

Parenting

When Harvard president Lawrence Summers questioned the limits of culture in reshaping traditional gender roles after his visit to the Israeli Kibbutzim, he was tapping into a line of inquiry that had been gnawing at anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists for years. The anthropologists Joseph Shepher and Lionel Tiger, for instance, had spent years studying the behavior of three generations of Israelis before publishing their observations in *Women in the Kibbutz* (1975), which argued that the community's noble mission to break free from the "central social formulae of the Western tradition" through the development of a "novel social organization" based on the "ideals of pure equality" had "failed to create the sociosexual conditions they had hoped for." In its place remained a "strong, general, and cumulative tendency of women and men to become less, rather than more, similar in what they do and evidently want to do." These findings "startled us," wrote Shepher and Tiger. "The overwhelming majority" of women they observed and interviewed "acted against the principles of their socialization and ideology" and "against the economic interest of the kibbutzim, in order to be able to devote more time and energy to private maternal activities." In other words, they were "trying to accomplish what women elsewhere have been periodically urged to reject by critics of traditional female roles." Despite the fact that the "major social patterns of capitalist Europe" were "denied or at least challenged by the kibbutz way of life," the mothers in these

[412] Eagly, 'The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men', pp. 145-158.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.

communities routinely fought against the experimental grain by "seeking an association with their own offspring."[415]

These types of observations eventually made their way from insular academic circles into popular discourse, with help from books like *The Mating Mind* (2010) by Geoffrey Miller. Like all other primates, Miller wrote, humans had evolved largely due to the unique bond that exists between a mother and her children. Fathers tended to be "marginal" characters in the family unit—choosing instead a life of emotional detachment as they "roamed around living their squalid, sexually frustrated lives" in the hope that they would "eventually grow up enough for some group of women to take them in."[416] The fact that women played such an outsized role in rearing children suggested that they had evolved psychological traits that were more conducive to protecting the helpless young children in their care, such as a heightened sense of disgust that allowed them to avoid food pathogens, elevated levels of fear that would have alerted them to dangerous situations, and a stronger "spatial location memory" that enabled them to find and gather food more effectively.[417] "Roughly ninety percent of single parents are women," wrote David Buss. "Either men are reluctant to take a large role in direct parenting or women prefer to take a larger role. Most likely, the outcome reflects the evolved decision rules of both sexes, with men tilting their investments toward mating and women tilting their investments toward parenting."[418]

It was not unheard of for men to take an interest in parenting, of course, but historically this had been at the expense of their daughters' freedom. Fathers guarding their daughters from eager and unfit men was a staple of modern and prehistorical societies, and was regularly expressed by assigning stricter curfews, policing clothing, and showing greater despair when their daughters—as opposed to their sons—became sexually active.[419] Evolutionary psychology's "daughter guarding hypothesis" posited that this behavior would have had several evolutionary advantages, as parents safeguarded their daughter's sexual reputation and subsequently her mate value. One 1989 study of nearly one hundred cultures found that girls

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[415] L. Tiger and J. Shepher, *Women in the Kibbutz*, New York: Harcourt Publishers (1975), pp. 6, 26, 272.
[416] Miller, *The Mating Mind,* pp. 188-192.
[417] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), pp. 71-81.
[418] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 209.
[419] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 214.

were universally guarded more than boys,[420] and men residing in non-Western countries were by far the worst offenders when it came to safeguarding their daughters' "purity." "They may lock her up, cloak her from head to toe, and extirpate her interest in sex by the horrible custom known by the euphemism 'female circumcision' (it is a circumcision in the same sense that Lorena Bobbitt performed a bris)," wrote Steven Pinker. "When the measures fail, they may execute an unchaste daughter to preserve what they call, ironically, the family's 'honor.'"[421]

Resistance

To highlight the innate, biological nature of motherhood was to run afoul of convention, since social Darwinism's early embrace of motherly instinct had struck a lasting blow to the idea that any amount of maternal instinct was in fact real. As the journalist Chelsea Conaboy has pointed out, "as more women demanded their own identities under the law," social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer had pushed back by insisting that a woman's true calling was motherhood, and psychologists like William McDougall had doubled down on the idea that women who became mothers were simply too enamored with their offspring to be of much use to society. Motherhood, through the eyes of most Darwinians throughout the 20th century, was simply too powerful a distraction.[422] Men like McDougall also believed that intelligence and parental instinct were inversely proportional, and therefore fought against women's education. This unfortunate history, paired with the fact that "throughout the 20th century, a chorus of psychoanalysts, psychiatrists and child development experts declared mother love to be as important to the emotional development of children as vitamins are to their physical development,"[423] created an environment in which more subtle claims pertaining to the biological underpinnings of motherhood were treated with a healthy dose of skepticism.

The line between skepticism and denial was thin, however, and left-leaning academics routinely pushed the idea that a mother's heightened concern for her children relative to that of a father's was largely a modern social construction fueled by sexist headlines.[424] Male supremacists relied on spurious genetic arguments to convince women that they were

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[420] D. Buss et al, 'Controversies, Questions, Prospects, and Limitations', *American Psychologist*, 65/2 (February-March 2010), p. 118.
[421] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 447.
[422] Conaboy, 'Maternal Instinct Is a Myth That Men Created'.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, pp. 431-2.

"biologically too good, too bad, or too different to do anything other than reproduce and serve men sexually and domestically," wrote Andrea Dworkin.[425] Once the "baby is born," according to Dworkin, it "does not belong to her. It belongs to a man. It belongs to one who did not and cannot produce it. This ownership is systematized in law, theology, and national mores; it is sanctioned by the state, sanctified in art and philosophy, and endorsed by men of all political persuasions."[426]

Ruth Hubbard voiced a similar concern: "When we hear scientific assurances that the domestic roles and tasks to which women have been relegated correspond to our innate biological propensities," Dr. Hubbard wrote in *The Politics of Women's Biology*, "we must ask whether the tasks have been adapted to women's biology or whether the notions of women's biology have been shaped to make us acquiesce in these tasks." As long as the "overwhelming majority of scientists are men who are rooted in the ruling class," Hubbard continued, "science will supply the 'objective' supports and technical innovations needed to sustain patriarchal, ruling-class power."[427] The idea that women were naturally better suited for a life of domesticity and childcare was a harmful myth that was born in Darwin's day and had been upheld through over a century of misogynistic lies and deceit. "Just as in the nineteenth century medical men and biologists fought women's political organizing for equality by claiming that our reproductive organs made us unfit for anything but childbearing and childrearing," Hubbard wrote, and "just as Freud declared women to be intrinsically less stable, intellectually inventive and productive than men," beginning in the 1970s, there had been a "renaissance in sex differences research that has claimed to prove scientifically that women are innately better than men at home care and mothering while men are innately better fitted than women for the competitive life of the market place [*sic*]."[428]

If a scientific understanding of motherhood had any chance of coexisting alongside feminism's march for fairness and equal opportunity, it was most likely going to be spearheaded by the new Darwinian feminists, who did not shy away from promoting the political and moral benefits of a female-driven approach to science as long as it acted as a counterbalance to the preexisting bias from men. Whereas outmoded evolutionists like Edward Wilson seemed to

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[425] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 113.
[426] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 118.
[427] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, p. 18.
[428] Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', pp. 5-17.

suggest that sexual equality could only be achieved through "extreme social repression" and an untenable reduction of personal liberty, Darwinian feminists believed it was possible to "weave the problem of social change into their work" in order to "come up with practical approaches to altering some of the least palatable aspects of gender inequity." "Feminist Darwinism" was about more than understanding how humans functioned—it was about informing politicians on how best to reduce gender inequality. For Darwinian feminists, human behavior was ultimately at the mercy of politics as opposed to biology. "Worried about teenage pregnancy? Then give working-class women more earning power and better long-term life choices," advised Fausto-Sterling, Gowaty, and Zuk.[429]

The counterbalance provided by the Darwinian feminists, however, failed to alter the scientific consensus regarding gendered behavior that had formed when the field was dominated by men. "The outcomes of empirical research on sex differences pose a special challenge to psychologists who wish to claim that this research has disconfirmed people's stereotypes about gender," Alice Eagly wrote in 1995. "The hope that research would counter cultural stereotypes was central to the endeavor of many feminist empiricists because of the power that gender stereotypes possess to foster traditional roles for women." This methodological pivot however, produced results that conformed to "stereotypic expectations that women are communal and men are agentic."[430] Eagly thought it odd that feminists tended to instinctively reject data that pointed toward sex differentials (most of which arguably painted women more favorably than men), but she nonetheless understood the hesitance to embrace stereotypes regardless of how positive they were. The "favorability of the female stereotype may be a mixed blessing because the particular kinds of positive characteristics most often ascribed to women, primarily 'niceness–nurturance' qualities, probably contribute to the exclusion of women from certain kinds of high-status roles (e.g., those that are thought to require toughness and aggressiveness). At any rate, the sex differences that scientists have documented do not tell a simple tale of female inferiority."[431]

[429] Fausto-Sterling, Gowaty, Zuk, 'Evolutionary Psychology and Darwinian Feminism', pp. 402-417.
[430] Eagly, 'The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men', pp. 145-158.
[431] Ibid.

The Brutal Nature of Neonaticide

Women's higher levels of investment in their children certainly did not indicate inferiority, but it did come with a dark side. According to Steven Pinker, neonaticide was a form of "triage" that was utilized by mothers in the ancestral environment, where they had to instinctively "decide" whether the continuation of their genetic material was best served by nursing a potentially unfit child for up to four years. A newborn's first year was especially precarious, and if a Pleistocene-era mother had entertained hopes of becoming a grandmother, she would have had to have made some "hard choices"—which included deciding whether or not to allow a newborn baby with poor hopes of survival to live. "We are all descendants of women who made the difficult decisions that allowed them to become grandmothers in that unforgiving world," Pinker wrote, "and we inherited that brain circuitry that led to those decisions."[432]

This brutal cost-benefit analysis had been on full display occasionally in our modern environment, despite the fact that society's tolerance for child abandonment—to say nothing of neonaticide—had been left behind in the savannah. In June of 1997, for instance, an eighteen-year-old student named Melissa Drexler was charged with murdering a baby she had delivered moments earlier in a bathroom stall during her senior prom. Adding insult to injury, prosecutors claimed that after the murder, Drexler had promptly returned to the party, where she danced with her boyfriend.[433] A similar high-profile incident occurred in New Jersey months prior to the Drexler case, when Amy Grossberg and her boyfriend delivered and then promptly murdered their newborn son during their prom.[434] The media's focus on these events and the callousness of those involved implied that they were isolated incidents, when in fact these types of tragedies were quite common. According to one 2002 report citing FBI statistics, five infants under the age of one were murdered every week in the United States, while thousands more were abandoned alive in dumpsters.[435] The media painted these mothers as deranged monsters devoid of basic humanity, and the public seemed to agree. A 2002 report by Lynne Marie Kohn and Thomas Scott Liverman, however, suggested that most Americans directed their outrage less toward the

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[432] S. Pinker, 'Why They Kill Their Newborns', *The New York Times* [New York], (2 November, 1997), p. F52.
[433] R. Hanley, 'New Jersey Charges Woman, 18, With Killing Baby Born at Prom', *The New York Times* [New York], (25 June, 1997), p. A1.
[434] Ibid.
[435] L. M. Kohm, T. S. Liverman, 'Prom Mom Killers: The Impact of Blame Shift and Distorted Statistics on Punishment for Neonaticide', *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 9/43 (October, 2002), pp. 43-71.

mothers who murdered their babies and more toward American society—with experts and non-experts alike pointing their fingers at everything from inadequate mental health and abortion services to a deeper, more systemically problematic "moral climate" that chastised extramarital sex. The usual tribal politics was also at play: The Right claimed that neonaticide was virtually indistinguishable from abortion, while the Left blamed the patriarchal structures that forced young women to make rash decisions.[436]

Neither the Left nor the Right seemed willing to entertain an evolutionary analysis of neonaticide, however. The report authored by Kohn and Liverman featured a quote from Michael Weissenstein, who five years earlier had written in the *Houston Chronicle* that neonaticide could be at least partially understood if one acknowledged that it was, to a certain extent, "built into the biological design of our parental emotions." The "capacity for neonaticide," Weissenstein continued, "might be evolution's way of letting unprepared parents focus their energy on children who would be more likely to survive."[437] The report's dismissal of Weissenstein's claim was riddled with the type of knee-jerk science denialism and confusion that often made evolutionary explanations of bad behavior difficult to absorb. "We find this utterly ridiculous, totally unscholarly and a stretch of the absurd," Kohn and Liverman wrote. "In this line of reasoning, any heinous act can be explained by a 'biological design,' which ultimately (even if unintentionally) blames the design creator rather than the person who did the evil act of murder."[438] In failing to separate what is right from what is natural, Kohn and Liverman had fallen victim to the naturalistic fallacy, and their unconditional rejection of Weissenstein's relatively banal suggestion—that genes could have played a role in the murders—illustrates the extent to which the average American was simply unwilling to entertain evolutionary explanations of dangerous behavior.

CONCLUSION

When Pat Buchanan delivered his speech at the Republican National Convention in 1992, he depicted America as a nation under attack by a new, radical ideology. "The agenda that

[436] Kohm, Liverman, 'Prom Mom Killers', pp. 55-63.
[437] Weissenstein quoted in Kohm, Liverman, 'Prom Mom Killers', pp. 59-60.
[438] Kohm, Liverman, 'Prom Mom Killers'.

Clinton and Clinton would impose on America—abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units—that's change, all right. But it is not the kind of change America needs. It is not the kind of change America wants. And it is not the kind of change we can abide in a nation that we still call God's country." For Buchanan and many of his fellow Republicans, feminists represented an existential threat not only to the traditional family, but to the fabric of the nation. "This election is about more than who gets what," he continued. "It is about who we are. It is about what we believe, and what we stand for as Americans." The "cultural war" taking place in the United States—as "critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself"—was a battle for the "soul of America."[439]

The Clinton-era feminists whom Mr. Buchanan admonished were engaged in an existential battle of their own, however, which pitted an inaugural cohort of feminist-Darwinians against a scientific establishment dominated by men. "If feminists are to make a difference in the ways science is done and understood," Ruth Hubbard preached, "we must not just try to become scientists who occupy the traditional structures, follow established patterns of behavior, and accept prevailing systems of explanation."[440] Most feminist-scientists were driven by a desire to correct an imbalance, and were therefore uninterested in artificially tilting the scales toward a similarly biased type of "female science" that would supposedly expose women's innate, biological superiority over men. Some, however, were in fact interested in establishing a new scientific order, which equality feminists like Carol Tavris warned was a mistake. "Superiority feminism" was "understandably appealing to many women, who have been the recipient of misogynistic attitudes and practices for millennia," Ms. Tavris said during an interview with the science writer Michael Shermer in 1999. But this shift would have "as many pernicious consequences as the myth of male superiority." The type of equality feminism practiced by Tavris may not have been "as popular a view in some feminist circles," she conceded, but it was the best strategic (and moral) course of action.[441]

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[439] P. J. Buchanan, 'Culture War Speech', Address to the 1992 Republican National Convention, Houston, TX, (17 August, 1992), https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text.
[440] Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', pp. 5-17.
[441] C. Tavris interviewed by M. Shermer, 'The Measure of a Woman', *Skeptic*, 7/1 (1999), consulted online (25 March, 2023), https://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/11-02-09/#feature.

If equality feminism were to win the day, however, it would have to wrestle with the fact that the vast majority of domestic abuse cases involved men hurting women and not vice versa. The circumstances surrounding Nicole Simpson's tragic fate seemed almost tailor-made for an adaptationist's cautionary tale: A young, recently estranged spouse who was forced to remain in contact with a perpetually jealous and volatile scorned lover was stalked and killed after she became entangled with another man. To the social constructionists, Ms. Simpson's murder was the upshot of an unchecked patriarchal structure gone awry; to the evolutionists, it reflected the dark and deadly interplay between an evolved proprietary instinct and an exacerbating environment. Both sides seemed to be in alignment with the Dobashes when they wrote that the "problem lies in the domination of women,"[442] but neither the adaptationists nor the behaviorists could agree on which variable—nature or nurture—played the more dominant role. Theories that were predicated on the existence of a universal human nature were downplayed or dismissed by sociologists who believed the mind was endlessly malleable, and theories that relied entirely on the behaviorist model were rejected by adaptationists since jealousy ultimately stemmed from the brain, which had evolved under the strains of natural selection.

Dobash and Dobash stood out from their social science colleagues in an important way, however: They believed that men and women had fundamentally different biologies, and that these differences mattered if Americans were to have an open and honest discussion about domestic abuse. The "use of neutral, or equalitarian, terms like 'marital violence' or 'spouse assault'" by equality feminists did victims more harm than good, they argued, since "these terms imply that each marital partner is equally likely to play the part of perpetrator or victim in a violent episode, that the frequency and severity of the physical force used by each is similar; and that the social meaning and consequences of these acts are the same. None of this is true." The Dobashes therefore did not "subscribe to twists of equalitarian terminology that mask centuries of oppression of women and contribute to their further oppression by neutralizing the very word that describes the continued practice of wife-beating."[443]

The proprietary instincts exhibited and acted upon by men like O.J. Simpson—although universal—certainly appeared to be more of a man problem than a human problem. But as always, the adaptationists were plagued by bad communication rooted in a misunderstanding of

[442] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 243.
[443] Dobash, Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, pp. 11-12.

evolutionary mismatch. Violent jealous behavior felt intuitively maladaptive to those who resisted viewing jealously through an evolutionary lens, especially when it led to violence in modern environments, where the rule of law usually delivered at least some punishment and word of impropriety spread quickly. It seemed obvious that the social ostracization and related costs that came with beating or murdering a woman would have surely offset any adaptive advantage that stemmed from inhibiting her ability to stray. "Killing a wife," admitted David Buss, "seems genuinely puzzling from an evolutionary perspective."[444] It was only when one took into account the absence of social mores and taboos within the ancestral environment that this behavior began to make sense.

Although domestic abuse occurred outside of wedlock, marriage was understandably considered to be a strong catalyst for intimate partner violence. "A battered wife has a life smaller than the terror that destroys her over time," wrote Andrea Dworkin. "Marriage circumscribes her life. Law, social convention, and economic necessity encircle her. She is roped in…Her pride depends on believing that her husband is devoted to her…The husband's violence against her contradicts everything she has been taught about life, marriage, love, and the sanctity of the family."[445] Marriage and the myth of motherhood were similarly entangled in the minds of social constructionists, who accused evolutionary psychologists of having tried to "prove that women's disproportionate contributions to child- and homecare are biologically programmed because women have a greater biological 'investment' in our children than men have," Hubbard wrote. "Men, in theory, could have many more children than women can, but in most societies equal numbers of men and women engage in producing children, though not in caring for them. These kinds of absurdities are useful to people who have a stake in maintaining present inequalities."[446]

In Hubbard's world, these "absurdities" were part of a larger ruse, which had been crafted by men who were too afraid to compete with women. "The ideology of woman's nature" would "have us believe that a woman's capacity to become pregnant leaves her always physically disabled by comparison with men," she argued. "The scientific underpinnings for these ideas

[444] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 328.
[445] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 102.
[446] Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', pp. 5-17.

were elaborated in the nineteenth century by the white, university-educated, mainly upper class men who made up the bulk of the new professions of obstetrics and gynecology, biology, psychology, sociology and anthropology," and who "used their theories of women's innate frailty to disqualify the girls and women of their own race and class who would have been competing with them for education and professional status. They also realized that they might lose the kinds of personal attention they were accustomed to get from mothers, wives, and sisters if women of their own class gained access to the professions."[447]

The types of accusations Hubbard leveled at Western science may have resulted from what Noretta Koertge referred to as the "blandishments of postmodernism" in *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science* (1998),[448] and they may have even been traceable to what Paul Gross and Norman Levitt referred to in *Higher Superstition* as the Left's reaction to the "melancholy chronicle of Communism in America."[449] Not all those who questioned these narratives were under communism's spell, however, and the blandishments of postmodernism did not keep Andrea Dworkin from observing that a woman "does housework" for her husband regardless of "whether she lives in a capitalist or a socialist country." The "notion that capitalism, instead of systematized male supremacy from which all men profit, is the source of women's misery," she wrote in 1993, "is not borne out by that final authenticator, history."[450]

Dworkin was especially displeased with Jimmy Carter, who she believed had put politics before human rights during a trip to Saudi Arabia in 1978. "I hear on newscasts that Mr. Carter was enchanted by Saudi Arabia, that he had a wonderful time," Dworkin wrote. "I remember that the use of contraceptives in Saudi Arabia is a capital crime. I remember that in Saudi Arabia, women are a despised and imprisoned caste, denied all civil rights, sold into marriage, imprisoned as sexual and domestic servants in harems. I remember that in Saudi Arabia women are forced to breed babies, who had better be boys, until they die."[451]

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[447] Ibid.
[448] N. Koertge, *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science*, N. Koertge (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press (1998), pp. 255-8.
[449] P. Gross, N. Levitt, *Higher Superstition*, p. 73.
[450] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 121-2.
[451] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, p. 98.

The United States may have been an objectively better place to deliver and care for a child than Saudi Arabia, but there was certainly a troubling lack of support for young mothers who were hesitant to keep their newborns, and evolutionary psychologists argued that viewing infanticide through a binary moral lens of right-or-wrong, although legally appropriate, was needlessly limiting.[452] Despite being depicted as a crackpot in the Kohn and Liverman report, Mr. Weissenstein had tapped into a relatively simple concept that had been floating around the behavioral sciences for years; that mothers had evolved to evaluate the fitness of their offspring through a harsh and seemingly cruel cost-benefit analysis. "One might think it is a form of Darwinian suicide and proof that other cultures' values are incommensurable with ours," wrote Steven Pinker, but this simply was not the case.[453] Pinker argued that far from being a psychotic aberration of Darwinian biology, neonaticide "has been practiced and accepted in most cultures throughout history," and while "mothers who kill their older children are frequently psychotic, depressed or suicidal," mothers who "kill their newborns are usually not."[454]

Modern civilization, with mental hospitals and in-patient care facilities for the disabled, had managed to soften the edges of these barbaric practices, although beneath this gilded sheen of humanity lay the reality of our cruel nature. Throughout the 20th century, babies deemed fit enough to live but sick enough to waste resources were routinely abandoned in a manner that was only slightly less cruel than disposing of them in dumpsters. Children with Down syndrome were frequently either abandoned or severely neglected, and the relatively fortunate children who were institutionalized as opposed to being written off entirely were rarely visited. (A 1976 census showed that twelve percent of all institutionalized children never received a single visit from a parent, while twenty-two percent were visited only once a year or less.)[455] These institutions may have helped mitigate humanity's most barbaric impulses, but Americans still struggled to rid themselves of one of evolution's most devastating psychological adaptations: a thirst for violence.

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[452] S. Pinker, 'Why They Kill Their Newborns', *The New York Times* [New York], (2 November, 1997), p. F52.
[453] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 443.
[454] Pinker, 'Why They Kill Their Newborns'.
[455] Census data cited in Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, (Kindle edition, 2019), p. 203.

CHAPTER FOUR
VIOLENCE

Violence is neither in our evolutionary legacy nor in our genes.
- UNESCO, *Seville Statement on Violence*, 1991[456]

If there is any hope for changing the world for the better, from reducing family violence to reversing overpopulation and international conflict, economists, educators, and political leaders will need to base their interventions on a sound understanding of what people are really like, not on some fairy-tale version of what we would like them to be.
- Douglas Kenrick, *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life*, 2011[457]

INTRODUCTION

The Most Beastly Nature

Less than twenty-four hours before Charles Whitman gunned down thirteen people from the rooftop of a University of Texas building in Austin in 1966, he had contemplated the strange nature of his abrupt shift from an otherwise normal and sensible man into someone burdened by intense cravings for violence. "I don't really understand myself these days," Mr. Whitman lamented in his suicide note. "I am supposed to be an average reasonable and intelligent young man. However, lately (I can't recall when it started) I have been a victim of many unusual and irrational thoughts." A former Eagle Scout who had scored in the 99th percentile on the Stanford-Binet IQ test as a child, Whitman insisted that upon his inevitable demise scientists should study his brain in order to help prevent others from suffering his fate. After he was shot to death by police during his murderous rampage, the medical examiner found a large tumor pressing on his amygdala—the region of the brain associated with the regulation of anxiety, aggression, and decision-making.[458] Whitman's story was similar to that of Phineas Gage, the infamous railroad worker whose behavior was drastically altered after an explosion forced a meter-long iron bar through his brain. Gage, who had always exuded good humor and kindness, quickly devolved into an insufferably mean and irritable scoundrel.[459]

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[456] Ed. D. Adams, *The Seville Statement on Violence*, UNESCO (1991).
[457] D. T. Kenrick, *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life*, New York: Basic Books (2011), p. 7.
[458] D. Eagleman, 'The Brain on Trial', *The Atlantic* [Washington], (July-August, 2011).
[459] K. Driscoll, J. Leach, 'No Longer Gage', *BMJ*, 317/7174 (19 December, 1998), pp. 1673-4.

Cases like Whitman's and Gage's highlight the extent to which human behavior is highly dependent on even the slightest changes in brain chemistry. Since the brain evolved through natural selection like every other organ in the body over the course of millions of years, it should have been uncontroversial to conclude that the human propensity for violence is largely an evolved trait—a manifestation that was subjected to the same environmental pressures that formed everything from the circulatory system to the most intricate workings of the eye. Making this anodyne claim during a time when the behavioral scales had tipped almost entirely away from nature and toward nurture, however, was in fact controversial, due to fears that acknowledging the biological component of violent behavior would somehow excuse the actions of men like Whitman and Gage, rather than simply help explain them.

Animalism also played a role. Humans have always resisted the notion that they are nothing more than animals—the "third chimpanzee," as Jared Diamond put it in 1991.[460] In the United States, this resistance had historically come from the religious Right, where Darwin's proclamation that man had evolved from beast was anathema to Christian dogma. Even Darwin's progressive supporters had struggled tirelessly to form delineations between humans and animals. George Romanes, for instance, was one of the many evolutionary biologists in Darwin's day who harnessed the excitement over new insights into animal behavior in order to establish a hierarchy of mental ability, with animals at its base and humans at its pinnacle.[461] As Kevin Laland has written, opposition to the idea that humans were simply primal beasts unable to control their worst impulses became embedded in American society across the political spectrum. It also helped usher in an era of behaviorism most famously attributed to John Watson, who in 1924 boldly proclaimed that if he were given a dozen "healthy infants" along with his own "specified world to bring them up in," he would be able to "take anyone at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."[462]

The notion that the human mind was infinitely malleable (and therefore perfectible) was uniquely appealing to a nation still reeling from a century of unprecedented violence and war.

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[460] J. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*, New York: Penguin Press (1991).
[461] Laland, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 44.
[462] Watson quoted in Laland, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 53.

People were eager to believe that the barbarism of the Nazis, the genocidal viciousness of the Hutu militias, and the wanton cruelty of Stalin's purges could somehow be permanently tossed into the dustbin of history through the proliferation of enlightenment ideals and liberal education. Social scientists and public intellectuals holding out for a global utopia in which violence was the exception rather than the rule were therefore blindsided when Konrad Lorenz released *On Aggression* in 1963, which held that violence and war were in fact the natural state of human affairs. In 1967, a zoologist at the London Zoo named Desmond Morris added fuel to the fire when he published *The Naked Ape*, which applied a standard ethological analysis to violent human behavior in a way that gave even the most ardent adaptationists pause.[463]

These authors were writing about humans as they were, as opposed to "some fairy-tale version of what we would like them to be," as Douglas Kenrick put it. This fairy tale seemed especially out of touch with reality as evolutionary psychology began to find its footing in the late 1980s, when violence was a pervasive and inescapable part of American life. A series of crime spikes in the '90s, paired with a string of high-profile murder cases, gang violence, and an endless litany of violent overseas conflicts ranging from the Balkans to Darfur, made it difficult for even the most fervent behaviorists to argue with a straight face that violent behavior was due entirely to culture. Yet this was the orthodoxy to which the Left clung, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, out of fear that any acknowledgement of evolution's role in forging murderers and warlords would somehow absolve them of responsibility.

The fairy-tale house in which most behaviorists were still attempting to live had been built by the work of people like Margaret Mead, who had misled (either intentionally or inadvertently, depending on the source) an entire generation of social scientists and intellectuals into believing that violence was culturally constructed as opposed to genetically determined. Mead's depictions of island utopias where sex roles were reversed, violence and jealousy were virtually non-existent, and camaraderie was the norm had instilled in behaviorists a sense of hope that the ugliest elements of human nature were nothing more than learned traits that could be extinguished with the right amount of social conditioning.[464]

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[463] Laland, *Sense and Nonsense*, pp. 61-4.
[464] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 26.

But Dr. Mead was wrong. The Samoan islanders she studied engaged in rape and murder at rates that surpassed those in the United States—an inconvenient truth brought to light by an admirer of Dr. Mead named Derek Freeman.[465] Dr. Freeman was born in New Zealand, where his exposure to Mead's work with the people of Samoa had inspired him to chart a similar path as an anthropologist. Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) had a particularly strong impact on the budding scientist, who eventually launched a separate investigation of the islanders.[466] After forty years of conducting his own research in the field (including six in Samoa), however, Freeman found that Mead's conclusions were almost completely backwards.

After Freeman released *The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* in 1983, in which he directly challenged Mead's depiction of Polynesian youth as profoundly peaceful, the pushback was immediate, harsh, and unrelenting. According to his obituary in the *New York Times*, over a thousand of his detractors convened a special session at the 82nd annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Chicago in 1983, where a motion was passed to denounce Freeman's book as "poorly written, unscientific, irresponsible and misleading." Although Freeman had not been invited to the session, his response was defiant: "To seek to dispose of a major scientific issue by a show of hands," he said, "is a striking demonstration of the way in which belief can come to dominate the thinking of scholars."[467]

History was kinder to Dr. Freeman than his fellow academics, and subsequent research by evolutionary psychologists confirmed that aggression, murder, war, and rape all existed not only in Samoa but in every human culture—even those without access to television or other forms of Western media that could have had a cultural impact.[468] The research that ultimately led to Dr. Freeman's vindication, however, was marred by bad-faith attacks that prioritized fear-based politics over scientific truth, in a country where any attempt to link violence to evolution was viewed as little more than a rightwing, racist dog whistle.

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[465] Mead's folly according to Steven Pinker: "Mead said that nonchalant sex made the Samoans satisfied and free of crime; it turned out that the boys tutored one another in rape techniques. She called the Arapesh 'gentle'; they were headhunters. She said that the Tshambuli reversed our sex roles, the men wearing curls and makeup. In fact the men beat their wives, exterminated neighboring tribes, and treated homicide as a milestone in a young man's life which entitled him to wear the face paint that Mead thought was so effeminate." See: Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, pp. 426-7.

[466] J. Shaw, 'Derek Freeman, Who Challenged Margaret Mead on Samoa, Dies at 84', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 August, 2001), p. 32.

[467] Shaw, 'Derek Freeman, Who Challenged Margaret Mead on Samoa, Dies at 84', p. 32.

[468] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 26.

The debates surrounding evolutionary explanations of violence—particularly rape—reveal attitudes and historical pressures that are rarely fully integrated into the historiographical literature. While historians like Erika Milam convincingly argue that Cold War anxieties shaped how the origins of violence were perceived, this chapter shows that these anxieties persisted well beyond the Cold War's peak, when urban crime and school shootings loomed larger in the public imagination than wars between superpowers. Studies suggesting that violence was, to a certain extent, "in our genes," provoked anger and fear not because they necessarily increased the likelihood of nuclear annihilation, but because these studies appeared to harken back to evils that predated the Cold War altogether, namely Nazism and eugenics.

The uniquely intense backlash to studies suggesting rape resulted from genetic adaptation further complicates the narrative that large-scale, geopolitical forces were chiefly responsible for the public's negative reaction to potentially dangerous science, and gives weight to Andrew Jewett's argument in *Science Under Fire* that Americans are far more sensitive to science that threatens their immediate moral and civic ideals, as opposed to more abstract notions of justice. The events detailed in this chapter also underscore the *scalability* of moral outrage, as Americans appeared far more willing to push back against any science that seemed to be in service of particularly heinous acts of violence.

This chapter complicates more traditional accounts of anti-scientific sentiment put forth by historians such as Steven Goldman and Jamie Cohen-Cole, however, whose emphasis on anti-foundationalism and postmodern rebuttals fails to explain why the fiercest critics of the rape-as-adaptation hypothesis were clearly uninterested in methodology, or even scientific integrity, for that matter. Their refusal to entertain adaptationist explanations of heinous violence against women was instead fueled by lived experience, and the stories of women who were brave enough to tell them. It is also difficult to fully account for the causes and consequences of this backlash without considering the powerful role of the popular press, whose embellishments and distortions heightened the sense of risk among women concerned about the normalization of crude male behavior.

AGGRESSION AND MURDER

"The Slaughter of the Innocent Marches Unabated"

In the winter of 1993, a senator from New York named Daniel Moynihan published a widely-circulated essay titled "Defining Deviancy Down" in *American Scholar*, whose subtitle captured the fatigue of an entire nation: "How We've Become Accustomed to Alarming Levels Of Crime and Destructive Behavior." After highlighting several examples of a society gone awry —deaths from firearms surpassing deaths from motor vehicles in Texas for the first time in decades, high rates of juvenile crime, skyrocketing drug use, etc.—Moynihan turned to the words of New York State Supreme Court Judge Edwin Torres to make his case: "The slaughter of the innocent marches unabated: subway riders, bodega owners, cab drivers, babies; in laundromats, at cash machines, on elevators, in hallways." This "numbness, this near narcoleptic state can diminish the human condition to the level of combat infantrymen, who, in protracted campaigns, can eat their battlefield rations seated on the bodies of the fallen, friend and foe alike. A society that loses its sense of outrage is doomed to extinction." Violence in America had become "normalized."[469]

America in the 1980s and early '90s was indeed a uniquely violent place. Although shockingly violent events dominated the news (e.g., the Oklahoma City bombings in 1995 in which 168 people were killed and 800 were wounded, or the Columbine massacre in 1999 in which twelve students and a teacher were gunned down in a suburban high school), the real horrors were more mundane. In 1992 alone, more than 26,000 people were murdered in the United States, while an additional six million were victims of violent crime.[470] The racial disparities were also impossible to ignore. Forty-five percent of those arrested for violent crimes were Black (even though this demographic constituted roughly twelve percent of the country's population), and close to four percent of Black men suffered violent deaths as opposed to just half of one percent of white men. Government officials like Louis Sullivan, a Black physician who was the Bush administration's Secretary of Health and Human Services from 1989 to 1993, wanted to treat this epidemic of violence as a public health issue by studying the environments in

[469] D. Moynihan, 'Defining Deviancy Down', *The American Scholar*, 62/1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 17-30.
[470] In 1990, there were 2,245 murders in New York City alone. See: M. Ford 'What Caused the Great Crime Decline in the U.S.?', *The Atlantic* [Washington], (15 August, 2016).

which most violent crime took place, so that government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels could intervene through the implementation of social and counseling programs.[471]

Occasionally, the link between an individual's environment and their propensity for violence was easy to trace. When federal investigators discovered a connection between violent crime and exposure to leaded gasoline, for instance, Congress introduced legislation that phased out its production and sale, and homicide rates dropped as a result.[472] Direct connections between environment and behavior like this were difficult to find and even harder to prove, however, which led some Americans to believe that the violent crime spikes that dominated the news were due more to systemic problems pertaining to Black "culture," or worse, genetics. Regardless of where one stood on the root cause of the violence, Americans across the political spectrum believed that a more hard-lined approach to deterrence and punishment was necessary, and as a result Congress passed a series of tough-on-crime bills that appeared to disproportionately target the Black population.

The headline-grabbing rhetoric surrounding racial violence, fueled by high-profile cases like the O.J. Simpson murder trial, piqued the American public's interest in the implications of an evolved violent psychology, which was frequently evoked by defense attorneys in order to garner sympathy for those convicted of horrific crimes.[473,474] The progressive Left seemed torn between embracing the premise that violence was hard-wired and therefore to some extent exculpatory, and rejecting the idea that the human mind was incapable of change. This type of cognitive dissonance could be traced to 1963, when the ethologist Konrad Lorenz released *On Aggression*. Lorenz had already stoked the ire of social scientists by releasing two widely-circulated books on animal behavior in the 1950s, both of which touched briefly on humans. However, as Henry Plotkin has noted, *On Aggression* elevated Lorenz's pariah status by dropping any semblance of congeniality and embracing a kind of pessimism about violent human behavior that made it seem inescapable. Lorenz even appeared to lean into his new role as the bearer of bad news by suggesting that humans were in fact *more* murderous and destructive than

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[471] J. Williams 'Violence, Genes, and Prejudice', *Discover* [Waukesha], (1 November, 1994).
[472] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, p. 25.
[473] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, pp. 1-16.
[474] This was the case when the defense team for Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, the terrorist who bombed the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania in 1998, relied on the expert testimony of a psychiatrist to convince the jury that the defendant was less pure evil and more a victim of his environment. See: *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, pp. 1-16.

animals.[475] These ideas were compounded by writers like Robert Ardrey, a Hollywood screenwriter and part-time anthropologist who released *The Social Contract* in 1970—a highly influential text that argued that humans, like every other "sexually reproducing species," are inherently aggressive, socially unequal, and built for conflict.[476]

The Left's moral dilemma regarding the legitimacy of evolved psychology was exacerbated by the proliferation of twin studies during the 1980s, which put anti-hereditarians in an awkward position as they sought to determine the root causes of violence. As Gideon Lewis-Kraus has written, on one hand, these studies proved that a variety of ailments, including schizophrenia and autism, were heritable and therefore not the result of bad parenting—a scientific conclusion embraced by liberals in their fight against socioeconomic inequality. On the other hand, these conclusions made it difficult to claim that other widely observable traits such as aggression did not contain a heritable component as well. Right-leaning conservatives pounced on the ideological inconsistency of progressive liberals by noting that an "à-la-carte approach to scientific findings was intellectually incoherent," as Lewis-Kraus put it.[477] Although technically accurate, this was a devilish accusation given the Right's proclivity for doing the exact same thing.

A Man Problem

EP's foundational text on violence was *Homicide: Foundations of Human Behavior* (1988) by Martin Daly and Margo Wilson. "Killing one's antagonist is the ultimate conflict resolution technique," Daly and Wilson wrote, "and our ancestors discovered it long before they were people."[478] Although Daly and Wilson's *Homicide* made the case that murder and aggression were products of both evolution and environment, they stopped short of claiming that murder was an adaptation. Instead, it was an evolutionary byproduct—an unfortunate yet indirect result of humans vying for power, status, and sexual monopolies. For Daly and Wilson, murder was the upshot of competition gone too far. David Buss and Joshua Duntley, however, tacked

[475] H. Plotkin, *Evolutionary Thought in Psychology: A Brief History*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons (2004), pp. 99-101.
[476] R. Ardrey, *The Social Contract*, London: Collins (1970), p. 3.
[477] G. Lewis-Kraus, 'Can Progressives Be Convinced That Genetics Matters?', *The New Yorker* [New York], (6 September, 2021).
[478] M. Daly, M. Wilson, *Homicide: Foundations of Human Behavior*, London: Routledge (1988), Preface.

toward a slightly different course by arguing that homicide could be viewed as a fitness-maximizing adaptation.[479]

Although evolutionary psychologists tussled over the precise adaptive mechanisms behind violence, they agreed on one thing: Men, not women, were the problem. On average, men committed murder twenty-six times more often than women, according to data obtained by Daly and Wilson from fourteen countries with divergent cultures.[480] During the 1980s and '90s, however, the average American did not need academic studies to teach them that males tended to be more violent than females, which seemed clear to anyone who watched or read the news and was inundated with stories of violent men robbing people on the streets, murdering their wives at home, and engaging in violent conflicts overseas. The primary culprit appeared to be testosterone—the same troublesome hormone responsible for the human male's obsession with sexual variety, sociopolitical dominance, and an unyielding appetite for risky and destructive behavior.[481] Evolutionary psychologists theorized that men had evolved to produce higher levels of testosterone as a mating strategy. Since high levels of testosterone in the bloodstream had been linked to compromised immune systems, the theory was that within the ancestral environment, only the healthiest males could have afforded to produce excess amounts of the hormone, since those with weaker immune systems would have had to suppress its production in order to stave off infection. The resulting physical characteristics (including a more rugged, masculine facial structure) were then selected by females.[482]

In addition to adorning men with rigid jaw lines and chiseled cheekbones, these higher testosterone levels resulted in males exhibiting higher levels of aggression and violence than women across every culture and social hierarchy—with poor men of low reproductive value being especially prone to violence.[483] Evolutionary psychologists also argued that since infants depended more on maternal care than paternal care, women were less likely to engage in violent behavior that would jeopardize their safety and subsequently the safety of their child—a hypothesis that was confirmed by Anne Campbell in 1999 and again in 2002, when she was able

[479] D. Jones, 'Human behaviour: Killer instincts', *Nature*, 451 (2008), pp. 512-15.
[480] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 497.
[481] M. Batrinos, 'Testosterone and Aggressive Behavior in Man', *Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 10/3 (30 June, 2012), pp. 563-8.
[482] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 114.
[483] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 279-281. Also see: Wilson and Daly (1985).

to show that females tended to be more fearful than males in situations that threatened their physical safety.[484,485]

Men's physicality also played a role in the evolution of their violent tendencies, with their larger body size, greater upper-body muscle mass, superior height, and stronger bones allowing them to end conflicts more effectively with force rather than words.[486] According to evolutionary theory, the only factor that mattered more than physical strength in the ancestral environment for males was having a *reputation* for strength, and the evolved desire to advertise one's ability to dominate others helped explain why so many young men become violent shortly after reaching puberty. During the Pleistocene, when people lived in relatively small groups and tribes, establishing a reputation as a powerful, dominant male was essential in order to secure future mates and monopolize resources.[487] Aggression and its physical trappings may have also evolved more prominently in males so that they could protect valuable resources such as food, negotiate status within a dominance hierarchy by displacing rivals, and deter mates from sexual infidelity.[488]

Females had also evolved to be aggressive, although according to evolutionary psychologists, this aggression tended to take the form of character assassination as opposed to physical assassination. The scientific consensus during the 1970s and '80s that young women were less aggressive than young men had been based on the conclusions of psychologists who had only looked for examples of physical abuse—a methodology that shifted during the '90s when a team of researchers began to study the more subtle forms of aggression commonly expressed by eleven- and twelve-year-old girls. This research found that although young women were markedly less likely than boys to engage in physical confrontations, they were far more likely to engage in psychological warfare, and would frequently attempt to ruin the reputations of their rivals by spreading rumors, sending vicious e-mails, and gossiping to one another within earshot of a chosen victim. "Girls very much value intimacy, which makes them excellent friends

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[484] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, pp. 279-282.
[485] Studies have shown that children are significantly more fearful of male strangers than female strangers, which suggests that males have been the more violent and dangerous sex for hundreds of thousands of years. See: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 87.
[486] W. Lassek, S. Gaulin, 'Costs and benefits of fat-free muscle mass in men: Relationship to mating success, dietary requirements, and native immunity', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 30/5 (2009), pp. 322-328.
[487] D. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 6th ed., New York: Routledge (2019), p. 285.
[488] D. Buss and J. Duntley writing in *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, pp. 119-20. Also see: Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, 6th ed., pp. 276-278.

and terrible enemies," noted Marion Underwood, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas. "They share so much information when they are friends that they never run out of ammunition if they turn on one another."[489] These types of Machiavellian female dynamics were thrust into the national spotlight at the turn of the millennium with the release of a series of popular books—including *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (2002) and *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* (2002)—[490] along with Tina Fey's blockbuster hit *Mean Girls* (2004), which quickly became a cultural phenomenon due to its vivid and all-too-relatable depictions of ruthless, gossip-driven female rivalries.

Despite aggression's ubiquity across cultures, races, and genders (to say nothing of its overwhelming presence in American media and film), it was still presumed to be forbidden fodder for evolutionists and curious psychologists like Adrian Raine, who, during his childhood in the United Kingdon, seemed to possess the physical attributes and behavioral traits that his own research would later associate with murderers. "I was taken to [the] hospital aged five to have my stomach pumped because I had drunk a lot of alcohol," Mr. Raine recalled during an interview with *The Guardian*. "From age nine to eleven I was pretty antisocial, in a gang, smoking, letting car tires down, setting fire to mailboxes, and fighting a lot, even though I was quite small." Raine also had an unusually low heart rate, a riboflavin deficiency, and had been born at home instead of in a hospital, which were all indicators of a violent future.[491] Although Raine beat the odds and never turned violent, he did become preoccupied with the *idea* of violence—specifically how certain types of people (such as himself) were more genetically predisposed than others to commit violent acts. The environment in which Raine was raised and educated, however, was inhospitable and at times openly hostile to those who opined that violence had anything to do with genetics, and after earning a doctorate in psychology from the University of York in 1982, he found it difficult to obtain employment. "Biological explanations [of violence] were not popular at that time," according to Raine, whose research was rejected by every academic journal and institution he approached. "I sent out 67 job applications, to universities as far away as Papua New Guinea, and I got 67 rejections."[492]

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[489] M. Talbot, 'Girls Just Want to Be Mean', *The New York Times* [New York], (24 February, 2002), p. F24.
[490] Ibid.
[491] T. Adams, 'How to spot a murderer's brain', *The Guardian* [Manchester], (11 May, 2013).
[492] J. Fischman, 'Criminal Minds', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* [Washington], (12 June, 2011).

Discouraged yet determined, Raine eventually made his way to the University of Pennsylvania in 2007, where he felt as though his taboo musings on the link between heredity and violent crime would find a more receptive audience. By the mid-1990s, Raine was busy administering PET brain scans to prisoners convicted of murder—eager to find brain-violence connections in a burgeoning field that was still inextricably linked to the disgraced disciplines of phrenology and eugenics.[493] "The sociologist would say if we concentrate on these biological things, or even acknowledge them, we are immediately taking our eyes off other causes of criminal behaviour—poverty, bad neighborhoods, poor nutrition, lack of education and so on," Raine pointed out. "All things that need to change. And that concern is correct."[494]

Still, Raine was adamant that "social scientists can actually win" by taking biology and genetics into account while pursuing the root causes of violence. By detecting early-onset brain impairments that can lead to violent behavior, Raine argued, society could take concrete steps to help at-risk youth avoid the types of environments that can trigger dormant violent tendencies.[495] Raine was one of the pioneers of neurodevelopmental criminology, but his research continued to be plagued by pushback as a result of his field's proximity to notoriously flawed and dangerous science that looked remarkably similar on paper—a flawed but forgivable conflation that Raine was careful to note. "All of this brings up tremendously difficult ethical questions," he told Josh Fischman in a profile for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2011. "But I don't think I'd be doing my job unless I said that we need to start talking about them. It's time we start this discussion."[496]

In Search of an Ideological Loophole

The entire intellectual machinery of the United States was teeming with people who refused to have the discussion Mr. Raine was advocating. To suggest that aggression, let alone homicide, was an evolved adaptation as opposed to a reflection of a failed society was to run afoul of social science dogma, and no amount of evidence appeared to make Raine's antagonists more willing to find common ground with either neurodevelopmental criminologists or the evolutionary psychologists who informed their analyses. Even some seasoned proponents of

[493] Adams, 'How to spot a murderer's brain'.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid.
[496] Fischman, 'Criminal Minds'.

highlighting evolution in discussions of human behavior refused to entertain the idea that violence was natural because of the political repercussions, despite the universality of murder not only among humans but among a variety of species separated from humans through millions of years of evolution. "Killing members of one's own species, contrary to widely held beliefs by many, turns out to be widespread in insect species, mammalian species, and primate species," wrote David Buss and Joshua Duntley in 2003:

> It occurs in stingless bees, scorpions, spotted hyenas, lions, langur monkeys, and chimpanzees. Male lions, when they usurp a resident male, routinely kill (or attempt to kill) the lion cubs sired by the displaced male…No animal biologist, to our knowledge, doubts that male lions have evolved adaptations designed to perform these kinds of killings. When it comes to humans, however, even evolutionists get leery about invoking adaptations for homicide, even when confronted with killings that occur in contexts remarkably similar to those witnessed in other species…The idea that humans might have evolved adaptations whose dedicated function is to murder other humans seems to be so abhorrent that it has not been seriously entertained, scrutinized, or examined.[497]

Even Steven Jay Gould, who had spent a significant portion of his career tussling with sociobiologists in the press, warned against both the politicization and dismissal of Darwinian explanations of violent behavior in 1998. "Those who recruit Darwin to support a particular moral or political line should remember that, at best, evolutionary biology may give us some insight into the anthropology of morals—why some (or most) peoples practice certain values, perhaps for their Darwinian advantage," Gould wrote. "But science can never decide the morality of morals. Suppose we discovered that aggression, xenophobia, selective infanticide and the subjugation of women offered Darwinian advantages to our hunter-gatherer ancestors a million years ago on the African savannahs. Such a conclusion could not validate the moral worth of these or any other behaviors, either then or now."[498]

The fact that the vast majority of violent crimes were committed by men also placed equality feminists, who tended to skew left, in an awkward position. Having painted themselves into a rhetorical corner by declaring that men and women were essentially biologically equivalent, equality feminists were unable to legitimately utilize troves of data pointing to sex-linked aggressive behavior, much of which was directed toward the very women they sought to

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[497] Buss and Duntley writing in *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, pp. 121-2.
[498] Gould, 'Let's Leave Darwin Out of It'.

protect. “Feminist advocates for the protection of women from violence and for women's autonomy have achieved goals that improve women's circumstances by increasing public awareness, by creating social and economic opportunities, and by imposing costs on perpetrators and supporters of the subjugation of women,” wrote Margo Wilson in 2005. “However, they have not made significant contributions to a scientific understanding of male-female conflict. Indeed, such an understanding has been discouraged by the censoring of efforts perceived as antithetical to the political agenda and the ascendancy of their viewpoint.”[499]

Overcorrecting Frederick Goodwin’s Fumble

In 1992, the head of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, Frederick Goodwin, gave a speech during a meeting of the National Institute of Mental Health advisory committee, in which he compared the violence perpetrated by young males in American cities (many of whom were Black) to the violent behavior exhibited by young male rhesus monkeys. Goodwin, who was also the Bush administration's senior mental health official and had spent decades studying primate behavior, appeared to be oblivious to the ugly and uniquely American history he was unearthing when he suggested that the epidemic of violence taking place in the nation’s inner cities was the result of a lack of “civilizing” factors that tended to keep young monkeys in check in the jungle. “Maybe it isn't just the careless use of the word when people call certain areas of certain cities ‘jungles’,” Goodwin pondered out loud in front of a shocked audience. “That is the natural way of it for males, to knock each other off.”[500]

The overcorrection to Goodwin’s reckless generalization was swift. In calling for Goodwin’s ouster, two Democratic congressmen resorted to their own generalizations by taking aim at the idea that studying primate behavior could be of *any* use in understanding human violence. Primate behavior was a “preposterous basis” for any illumination of human behavior in general, they claimed, despite the fact that human DNA is more than ninety-eight percent identical to that of a chimpanzee. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), whose members had come to view human behavior almost entirely as a product of circumstance and learning, joined the congressmen in calling for Goodwin’s removal. It was not what Goodwin had said (which was technically correct); it was how he had said it. Goodwin was “undeniably

[499] M. Wilson writing in G. Vandermassen, *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?,* Preface.
[500] B. Rensberger, ‘Science and Sensitivity’, *The Washington Post* [Washington], (29 February, 1992).

careless and insensitive in the way he put it," said one scientist who wished to remain anonymous during an interview with *The Washington Post* in the aftermath of the debacle. "We have to be very careful in how we say this work applies to human beings. It is very easy to misunderstand."[501]

Progressives also feared that an overreliance on evolutionary explanations of violence could lead to a dystopian legal system, in which punishments were doled out based on the perpetrator's biology. "It doesn't take an overactive imagination to envision parole boards screening prisoners for biological markers before deciding their fate," Robert Wright pointed out in the aftermath of the Goodwin controversy, "just as Goodwin had suggested that using biological markers might help determine which children needed anti-violence therapy." The "good news" for Goodwin, Wright continued, was that his "remarks were essentially on target: he was right to compare violent inner-city males—or any other violent human males—to nonhuman primates." The bad news, however, was that his careless delivery had alienated any potential allies in his quest to fight violent crime.[502] Communication and optics mattered when it came to prying human behavior loose from the clutches of the radical behaviorists, and people like Frederick Goodwin were not helping.

A University of Maryland Conference is Cancelled: "The Bad Old Days Aren't Over"

In the same year that Mr. Goodwin delivered his careless remarks, David Wasserman, a professor at the University of Maryland's Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, began organizing an academic conference that aimed to investigate and discuss links between genetics and crime. Originally titled "Genetic Factors in Crime: Findings, Uses and Implications," the conference was initially embraced by Wasserman's colleagues on campus, and he was able to secure a $78,000 grant from the NIH. As word of the conference grew and the brochures that had been distributed around campus began to pique the interest of the public, however, Mr. Wasserman and his fellow organizers found themselves on the receiving end of pointed criticisms from the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, and eventually members of their own university. Although the conference's goal was to investigate potential links between genetics and individual temperament, the research was still stubbornly wed to population

[501] Ibid.
[502] R. Wright, 'The Biology of Violence', *The New Yorker* [New York], (5 March, 1995).

genetics—a discipline that had been tainted by decades of flagrantly racist pseudoscience that depicted Blacks as being intrinsically more violent than whites.[503]

For some, the conference's dangerous implications reached beyond the confines of American racism. During an interview on Black Entertainment Television, the Bethesda psychiatrist Peter Breggin insisted that "once you discuss [crime] in terms of abnormalities of behavior, you're back in Nazi Germany."[504] Breggin also claimed that the conference would "promote biological and psychiatric intrusions upon presumably dangerous people."[505] George Buntin Jr., the executive director of the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, seemed to agree, arguing that the conference would implicitly make things worse for Black people, who were already being disproportionately arrested and charged for violent crimes. "People used to say there are genetic reasons why African Americans are not as literate as European Americans, and it's hogwash," Buntin reminded his audience. "For the University of Maryland to host a conference, sponsored by federal funds, to even discuss this is giving those who promulgate that research a sense of legitimacy that they don't deserve."[506]

As the controversy reached a fever pitch, the NIH pulled its funding without warning, and the conference was postponed indefinitely. Those who had defended the conference were quick to accuse the NIH of caving to political pressure and prioritizing optics at the expense of academic freedom and scientific inquiry. "We are absolutely staggered that [the] NIH would take the position they took," Gary Stephenson, a spokesman for the university, said. "This university has hosted a number of conferences on racism and sexism, among other things," and that "doesn't mean we endorse racism or sexism." Adding, "We see this as an issue of academic freedom," but instead it became a "matter of politics interfering with the historic mission of a university."[507]

As he scrambled to revive the conference, Wasserman stumbled upon what he believed to be a smoking gun. Before the controversy and during the conference's initial review, the NIH had not voiced a single concern over either the content or tone of the conference, whose purpose,

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[503] C. Babington, 'U-MD. Cancels Conference on Genetic Link to Crime', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (5 September, 1992).
[504] Ibid.
[505] P. J. Hilts, 'U.S. Puts a Halt To Talks Tying Genes to Crime', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 September, 1992), p. A1.
[506] Babington, 'U-MD. Cancels Conference on Genetic Link to Crime'.
[507] Ibid.

speakers, and scope had not deviated from the funding proposal, much of which was replicated in the brochure that led to the conference's downfall. In fact, the NIH had considered the proposal to be "superb" and had praised the organizers for incorporating a range of speakers with diverse views—from those who believed genes played a role in crime to those who not only doubted the connection but insisted that even attempting to find one was dangerous. Wasserman was unwavering in his attack on what he believed to be the political motivations and intellectual cowardice of the NIH. The decision to cancel the conference was "not formed out of concern for the black community," Wasserman stated. "This is an election year, remember, and the Bush people are very sensitive."[508] Arthur Caplan, the director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Minnesota, mirrored Wasserman's accusation. "In plain English," Caplan said, the NIH "yanked the funds because some people told [them] the topic of the genetics of crime is politically incorrect."[509] Gary Stephenson agreed: "This is political correctness in motion."[510]

The NIH eventually reversed its decision and awarded the conference a $133,000 grant.[511] Although the NIH decided that the conference was no longer a moral or political threat, the same could not be said for some of those in attendance at the Aspen Institute in Maryland in 1995, who accepted their invitations only to use the event as a platform from which to voice their disapproval. "I don't believe that the concern is that [Black males] are killing themselves off," said Katheryn Russell, a criminology professor at the University of Maryland, during a panel discussion. "This is just another mechanism for controlling lower classes…doping people up under the guise of solving the crime problem."[512] Paul Billings, a professor at Stanford University and the chief of internal medicine at the Palo Alto Veteran Affairs Medical Center, could not help but wonder if the conference's organizers were unwittingly helping to revive eugenicist talking points. "How do we know the bad old days are over?" Billings asked during a panel discussion. "I would argue that the evidence is that the bad old days aren't over."[513] As

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[508] Williams 'Violence, Genes, and Prejudice'.
[509] Ibid.
[510] P. J. Hilts, 'U.S. Puts a Halt To Talks Tying Genes to Crime', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 September, 1992), p. A1.
[511] P. Maass, 'Crime, Genetics Forum Erupts in Controversy', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (23 September, 1995).
[512] Ibid.
[513] S. Fulwood, 'Scholars Gather to Debate Genetics-Crime Research', *The Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles], (23 September, 1995).

conference attendees were about to break for coffee, a Howard University economics professor named Rodney Green stood up and urged everyone in the room to "consider whether this conference should continue." What the presenters had discussed during the morning session had been nothing more than a "racist presentation under the guise of genetics," Mr. Green continued, and the conference was little more than an advertising campaign for the "legitimacy of Nazism." It was "pseudo-science" and "garbage."[514]

The public seemed to agree. Less than an hour after Mr. Green implored his fellow attendees to disavow the conference, roughly thirty protestors stormed the Aspen Institute and began shouting, "University of Maryland conference, you can't hide. We know you're pushing genocide" for forty-five minutes.[515] As the protestors eventually tired and the conference resumed, the legal scholar Andrew Futterman tried to regain control and instill a sense of calm. "I don't think the issue of racism is meant as a personal thing," he said. "It comes out of an historical analysis and a fear. There has been a long history of abuse of this kind of science, and it's not a good history. There has been racist abuse. When people complain about the racist nature of this science, it's not about people being racist, but policy being racist."[516]

Reflecting on the controversy, David Wasserman insisted that his motives had been pure. "Scientists were brought to this subject by legitimate curiosity," he claimed. "They did not wake up one day having been mugged and say, 'Let's see if there is a gene responsible for crime.' Scientists see themselves as increasing understanding of human behavior—though they may be naive about the implications of their research and the political agendas it might further."[517]

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[514] Maass, 'Crime, Genetics Forum Erupts in Controversy'.
[515] Genocide rhymes were popular among anti-hereditarians, who chanted a similar line toward Edward Wilson after dumping a bucket of water over his head during a 1978 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. See: U. Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000), pp. 21-5.
[516] Maass, 'Crime, Genetics Forum Erupts in Controversy'.
[517] Williams 'Violence, Genes, and Prejudice'.

WAR

Destructive Science

Henry Plotkin once wrote that the 1970s was a "politically peevish period" when it came to discussions of war and intergroup conflict. Although the stunning barbarity of World War II had begun to fade from public imagination, the Civil Rights movement in the United States, coupled with an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam, seemed to underscore the idea that the perceived benefits of armed conflict were outweighed by the sheer destruction and dehumanization that inevitably followed in its wake.[518] The Left began to evaluate scientists and their once-trusted institutions through a more skeptical lens, as they became associated with dystopian government programs that many believed were oppressing rather than liberating people overseas. Resistance to American militarism was the most pronounced on college campuses where students and professors skewed left, and where overwhelmingly progressive administrations were loath to claim—either directly or indirectly—that humans were evolutionarily programmed to fight and kill.

In addition to souring the public on American militarism, the Vietnam War made some academics question and scrutinize what they believed to be an intrinsic connection between the American war machine and the production of knowledge in the academy. For academics like Ruth Hubbard, the war had shaken their faith not only in the objectivity of science, but in the existence of universal truth as well. "Like many scientists, I assumed I was probing nature and that that was an unquestionable good and reason enough to go on doing it," Dr. Hubbard wrote of her work before the war, but the "Vietnam War and the women's movement led me to look closely at these assumptions." War had forced Hubbard to "see that science and the universities help maintain differences in wealth and power between nations and between the ethnic, racial, and economic groups within them," and she eventually came to believe that "nature is part of history and culture, not the other way around."[519]

It was into this increasingly skeptical and war-wary atmosphere that *Science for the People*—a widely-circulated progressive magazine that sought to disentangle science and its questionable claims of objective truth from American imperialism and militarism—was born; its

[518] Plotkin, *Evolutionary Thought in Psychology*, p. 122.
[519] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 1-3.

popularity fueled by outrage over the elite scientist's role in the escalation of violent American misadventures at home and overseas. "Outraged by the U.S. war in Vietnam" and "in a period of heightened political and social awareness," the editors wrote of the paper's genesis, "progressive scientists and technologists joined together" to launch an "organized radical critique of science and technology under U.S. capitalism," and to "demystify the work of scientists in the capitalist system," launch an "investigation into alternative modes for scientific productive capacity," and "challenge [the] basis of the imperialist state." Above all, the magazine took issue with the "role of science and technology in an increasingly militarized capitalist society." Although activism against the militarization of science began to recede in the 1970s after America withdrew from Vietnam, progressives in academia perceived a quiet resurgence as the Pentagon strengthened its ties to universities through research grants beginning in the mid-70s.[520]

The Seville Statement: "Violence is neither in our evolutionary legacy nor in our genes"

Ruth Hubbard was not the only prominent scientist eager to reevaluate the connections between science, war, and human nature during the 1970s. A growing number of scientists had grown wary of a world that was constantly engulfed in violent turmoil, and in 1986 they gathered in Seville, Spain, where an international meeting of scientists organized by UNESCO released the Seville Statement on Violence. Drafted by twenty scientists from across the globe (many of whom were also members of the International Society for Research on Aggression), this "message of hope" was officially adopted in 1989. "Instead of preparing for war," the statement read, the world should "use the money for things like teachers, books, and schools, and for doctors, medicines, and hospitals." Warfare, the scientists claimed, was as correctable as any other socially-constructed nightmare (such as slavery), and with sufficient education and conditioning, humans would eventually be able to eradicate this menace from the world stage as well:

> Some people say that violence and war cannot be ended because they are part of our natural biology. We say that is not true. People used to say that slavery and domination by race and sex were part of our biology. Some people even claimed they could prove these things scientifically. We now know they were wrong. Slavery has been ended and now the world is working to end domination by race and sex…It is scientifically incorrect when people say that war cannot be ended

[520] *Science for the People*, 13/4 (July-August 1981), pp. 2-6.

> because it is part of human nature. Arguments about human nature cannot prove anything because our human culture gives us the ability to shape and change our nature from one generation to another…*It is scientifically incorrect when people say that war is caused by 'instinct.'* [emphasis added] Most scientists do not use the term 'instinct' anymore because none of our behavior is so determined that it cannot be changed by learning…The fact that warfare has changed so radically over time indicates that it is a product of culture. Its biological connection is primarily through language which makes possible the coordination of groups, the transmission of technology, and the use of tools…It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behavior is genetically programmed into our human nature…Violence is neither in our evolutionary legacy nor in our genes.[521]

By 1989, the Seville Statement had been endorsed by the American Anthropological Association, the American Psychological Association, and Psychologists for Social Responsibility. *Psychology Today* even drew from the statement for a special issue devoted to war and peace in June of 1988.[522] To its authors and signatories, the statement's broad generalizations and oversimplifications of human nature appeared to be necessary evils that would allow the average reader to understand its message, since those who believed that violence was unnatural (and therefore extinguishable through cultural conditioning) would presumably be more inclined to fight for peace.

To mark the Seville Statement's ratification and amplify its message, UNESCO released a brochure claiming that its statement "was based on the latest scientific evidence," that "war is a social invention, and that peace can be invented to replace it." According to UNESCO, the brochure's intended audience was "secondary school teachers, youth leaders, and others who want to work for peace by challenging the myths used to justify violence and war." The brochure centered a quote from Margaret Mead ("Warfare is only an invention—not a biological necessity"), and encouraged teachers to adopt its message in the classroom. "The following suggestions" should be "integrated into any teaching program that is already underway," lectured the brochure. "Young people welcome the opportunity to share in the creation of an optimistic vision for the future. The myth that war is part of human nature is an obstacle to the development of such a vision. By discussing the Seville Statement on Violence and the scientific evidence

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[521] Ed. D. Adams, *The Seville Statement on Violence*, UNESCO (1991).
[522] D. Adams, 'The Seville Statement on Violence and Why It Is Important', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 29/3 (Summer, 1989).

supporting it, you can help them remove this obstacle and work together on the creation of a vision of peace for the future."[523]

As the statement's popularity and reach grew, its core tenets were introduced into a wide range of textbooks and school curricula in the United States. David Adams, one of the statement's signatories, captured this new ethos when he wrote in 1989 that it was a necessary correction to a pessimistic culture that seemed to believe war was inevitable. Scientific studies had "found that young people who believe that war is intrinsic to human nature are less likely to believe that they can do anything for peace, and they are less likely to take action for peace," Adams wrote. Instead of calling for a more nuanced discussion of how violence is influenced by genetics, however, Adams instead called for "changes in the way we teach social science," in order to push students away from the "myth that war is intrinsic to human nature."[524]

Darwinian Science Strikes Back: War as Adaptation

If the public needed to be misled with a white lie in order to bring about an end to world war, that was a price scientists like David Adams were willing to pay. Evolutionary psychologists, however, were not. In their refutation of the Seville Statement, the adaptationists granted that its overarching message—that humanity is not necessarily fated to endure an endless cycle of violence until extinction—was sound. Scientists like Steven Pinker believed that in their desire to resonate with a global audience, however, the statement's authors had done themselves and their document a disservice, by pandering to the ignorance of the masses and making provably false claims.

The "moral certainty" of the statement's text, Pinker wrote, stemmed from three commonly accepted yet flawed assumptions about the implications of an innate human nature. "First, if the mind has an innate structure," Pinker wrote, "different people (or different classes, sexes, and races) could have different innate structures," which could "justify discrimination and oppression." Second, "if obnoxious behavior like aggression, war, rape, clannishness, and the pursuit of status and wealth are innate, that would make them 'natural' and hence good." Third, "if behavior is caused by the genes, then individuals cannot be held responsible for their actions." Apart from a "few cynical defense lawyers and a lunatic fringe who are unlikely to read

[523] *The Seville Statement on Violence*, UNESCO (1991).
[524] Adams, 'The Seville Statement on Violence and Why It Is Important'.

manifestos in *The New York Review of Books,* no one has actually drawn these mad conclusions," Pinker insisted. "Rather, they are thought to be extrapolations that the untutored masses *might* draw, so the dangerous ideas must themselves be suppressed."[525]

Despite pushback from scientists like Pinker, the Seville Statement's message and spirit managed to capture the hearts and minds of academics across the United States, and by the mid-1990s—a decade after the statement's finalization—it was still considered taboo to suggest that warfare and intergroup conflict were products of human nature. Although few anthropologists disputed the fact that warfare existed in pre-industrial societies untouched by western influence, their field seemed to collectively grade more primitive warfare on a curve, by suggesting that ancient and non-western violence had been inherently less brutal and abhorrent than its more recent manifestations within the modern nation-state.

Dissenting anthropologists like Lawrence Keeley, who released *War Before Civilization* in 1996 and had watched this trend unfold, were disheartened by their colleagues' "pacification of the past," which they believed amounted to an elevation of politics over truth. Western scientists and academics, Keeley believed, having been shocked by the extreme violence of industrialized warfare, were still blinded by the myth of the Noble Savage, despite the fact that primitive warfare—which involved weapons designed for torture, bloodthirsty village raids, large-scale rape and pillaging, and genocide—had in many ways been just as barbaric and cruel as its modern equivalent. "In the past few decades, the hypothesis of unserious, ritualized primitive war has thus been transformed," Keeley wrote, "through the consistent de-emphasis of prehistoric violence by archeologists and later through the explicit arguments of some social anthropologists—into a neo-Rousseauian concept of prehistoric peace."[526]

The 18th century Rousseauian dictum to which Mr. Keeley referred—that warfare was an invention of Western culture—was indeed at odds with world history. "Since the beginning of time," the Harvard archaeologist Steven LeBlanc asserted, "humans have been unable to live in ecological balance. No matter where we happen to live on earth, we eventually outstrip the environment. This has always led to competition as a means of survival, and warfare has been

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[525] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, pp. 46-47.
[526] C. Lehmann-Haupt, 'Even in Eden, It Seems, War Was Hell', *The New York Times* [New York], (18 July, 1996), p. C17.

the inevitable consequence of our ecological-demographic propensities." Humans, in other words, had evolved to crave war for the same reason they had evolved to crave sweet foods; it was simply the most biologically-efficient way to survive.[527]

In making their case that warfare and violent intergroup conflict were natural byproducts of an evolved human temperament as opposed to aberrations of culture, evolutionary psychologists pointed to the nature of our closest relatives. "Among the more than 5,000 species of mammals, only two have been observed to form coalitions that kill conspecifics: chimpanzees and humans," observed David Buss, who added that there were "profound adaptive benefits to engaging in warfare" that often outweighed the risk of death.[528] This appeared to be a universal truth, and although culture could dictate the unique ways in which war was waged, humans across every known culture—from the smallest foraging tribes to the most modern nations—all antagonized and often dehumanized those outside of their designated clan.[529] "Territorial expansion and defense by tribes and their modern equivalents the nation states is a cultural universal," wrote Edward Wilson, and the "contribution to survival and future reproductive potential, especially of tribal leaders, is overwhelming, and so is the warlike imperative of tribal defense." Although it may be "comforting to say that war, being cultural in origin, can be avoided," Wilson continued, the truth was that this "conventional wisdom is only a half truth. It is more nearly correct—and far more prudent—to say that war arises from both genes and culture and can best be avoided by a thorough understanding of the manner in which these two modes of heredity interact within different historical contexts."[530]

Warfare was also driven almost exclusively by testosterone, and risky violent behavior was found to increase when a surplus of men (especially lower-status men) were forced to find mates either by killing higher status males or raiding their environments—a behavioral thread that connected ancient Viking raiding parties to the modern urban gangs whose microsocieties of low-value males operated on a strict code of machismo and chest-thumping bravado.[531] Strong and confident men won wars, the evolutionary argument went, and those who won wars won access to females. The positive feedback loop of natural selection therefore favored the genes of

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[527] J. Horgan, 'Countering Students' Fatalism Toward War', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55/31 (April, 2009), p. B10.
[528] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 290.
[529] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 509.
[530] E. Wilson, *Consilience*, New York: First Vintage Books (1998), pp. 185-6.
[531] Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology*, p. 296.

those who survived conflict, while the genes of those who were killed died with them on the battlefield (unless they had managed to procreate before the fight).

Somewhat paradoxically, evolutionary psychologists also argued that the innate human desire to kill members of an out-group was shaped partially by altruism, since warriors routinely fought not only for the survival of their genes but for the genes of their compatriots as well—a phenomenon predicted and explained by Robert Trivers' theory of reciprocal altruism. The genes driving the altruistic behavior exhibited by soldiers in combat were then passed down to future generations, who were able to form stronger relationships both on and off the battlefield.[532]

Not all anthropologists agreed that being an aggressive, war-hungry male offered an evolutionary advantage. Writing in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2009, the anthropologist Stephen Beckerman of Pennsylvania State University argued that the most aggressive members of the Waorani people of Ecuador, despite having perhaps the "highest rate of homicide of any society known to anthropology," had "lower indices of reproductive success than their milder brethren."[533] During a follow-up interview the following month in *Newsweek*, however, oversimplification diluted Mr. Beckerman's message. "The badass guys make terrible husband material," Beckerman summarized for *Newsweek*'s lay audience. "Women don't prefer them as husbands and they become the targets of counterraids, which tend to kill their wives and children, too." Beckerman's overarching "message for the evolutionary-psychology guys" was that "there was no single environment in which humans evolved"—rendering any attempt to form a coherent theory about the evolution of aggression moot. The interviewer, Sharon Begley, warmly embraced Beckerman's position before offering a generalization of her own: "The notion that being a brave warrior helps a man get the girls and leave many offspring *has been toppled* [emphasis added]," Begley wrote, before taking liberties with Beckerman's analysis in order to conclude that "there is no universal human nature as evo psych defines it."[534]

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[532] Liesen, 'Women, behavior, and evolution', pp. 51-65.
[533] S. Beckerman et al., 'Life histories, blood revenge, and reproductive success among the Waorani of Ecuador', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106/20 (19 May, 2009), pp. 8134-8139.
[534] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.

The Noble Savage as "Romantic Nonsense"

The hypothesis that men had evolved to fight one another had hardly been "toppled," however, and debates between evolutionary psychologists and skeptical anthropologists continued to flourish in the press, where the tone remained largely civil despite constant needling from journalists itching for a brawl. Conversations surrounding the immutability of warfare could be trickier behind the closed doors of the academy, however, where professors had to worry about impressionable young students. In 2007, John Horgan, the Director of the Center for Science Writings at the Stevens Institute of Technology, decided to gauge the public's take on the inevitability of war by asking over two hundred students at Purdue University a straightforward question: "Will humans ever stop fighting wars, once and for all? Why or why not?" Over ninety percent of respondents replied "no," and the few who answered "yes" were just as pessimistic. "Yes, but it will only happen under the same one religion, because one's beliefs are a driving force," replied one student. "Yes. Humanity will end wars once everyone is killed," said another.[535] Horgan, a self-described "old-fashioned liberal peacenik," was disheartened and slightly disturbed by the dark fatalism of his students, which he—much like the authors of the Seville Statement—feared would contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy of endless destruction. "If you believe wars are inevitable, you are more likely to support hawkish politicians and policies," he wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* two years later.[536]

In an effort to disabuse his students of their bleak worldview, Mr. Horgan called to their attention several scholars who, despite their expertise in the darker elements of human nature, had persuasively argued for a brighter vision of the future. The anthropologist Jonathan Haas of the University of Illinois at Chicago, for instance, had highlighted the fact that war, far from being a static constant, waxed and waned throughout history. "If war is deeply rooted in our biology, then it's going to be there all the time," Mr. Haas once said. "And it's just not." Horgan also mentioned the work of Carol and Melvin Ember, two anthropologists who at the time oversaw Yale University's Human Relations Area Files—a trove of data on 360 cultures past and present. Although ninety percent of the cultures catalogued in the database had engaged in war at least once, the Embers had found strong correlations between "rates of warfare and

[535] J. Horgan, 'Countering Students' Fatalism Toward War', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55/31 (April, 2009), p. B10.
[536] Ibid.

environmental factors, notably droughts, floods, and other natural disasters that provoke fears of famine," Horgan reassured his young audience. The primatologist Frans de Waal of Emory University was also cited as an example of a scientist whose work offered "grounds for optimism," since he had demonstrated that "shifts in environmental conditions can reduce primate violence"—a claim echoed by the Stanford biologist Robert Sapolsky.[537] "The message that I hammer home in class is that—contrary to the impression created by news headlines—humanity as a whole is much less warlike than it used to be," Horgan wrote. "In other words: Things are getting better! World Wars I and II and all the other horrific conflicts of the 20th century resulted in the deaths of fewer than three percent of the global population…That is an order of magnitude less than the rate of violent death for men in the average primitive society, whose weapons consisted only of clubs and spears rather than machine guns and bombs."[538]

Neither Horgan nor any of the scientists he cited were proposing anything that contradicted the work of evolutionary psychologists, many of whom took pains to highlight the complex and dynamic interplay between genes and environment that led to the outbreak of war. "My overarching goal," Horgan claimed, "is to persuade my scientifically oriented students to see war not as a permanent part of the human condition, stemming from our genes or original sin, but as a potentially solvable scientific problem."[539] Adaptationists made a similar claim; that although the urge to wage war may be in our genes, humans were not necessarily powerless to stop it. But in order to harness the might of science to solve these types of seemingly intractable problems, scientists had to be honest with the "untutored masses" (as Steven Pinker might have phrased it) about what the problem actually was and how it originated.

This was a tall order in the United States, where tribal politics encouraged people to pick an ideological team and never look back. For decades, the Left's team had been that of social science, while the Right's had been laissez-faire genetic determinism. Evolutionary psychology dismissed this false dichotomy by forging its own centrist path and advocating for value-free science—a rogue move that failed to resonate with large swaths of the American public. As Robert Kurzban has noted, Americans strongly resisted the idea that this type of science could ever be truly value-free; that a scientist who claimed war was in any way "natural" was not

[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid.
[539] Ibid.

angling to affect social policy. "Possibly because biological approaches to human behavior have been appropriated for political purposes in the past," Mr. Kurzban wrote in 2002, "many evolutionary psychologists have been very careful to emphasize the distinction between science, which can help us to understand what is, and morality, which concerns questions about what ought to be." Evolutionary psychologists, he continued, "deny that anything they could discover about what is would tell us what ought to be."[540]

Despite his very public distaste for what he believed to be a dangerous and performative denial of evolution's role in warfare, even Steven Pinker was an avid optimist when it came to humanity's future—going so far as to write an entire book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), about the undeniable decline of violence over time. One could be optimistic about the future without lying about the past, however. "Many intellectuals believe that primitive warfare is rare, mild, and ritualized, or at least was so until the noble savages were contaminated by contact with Westerners," Pinker wrote. "But this is romantic nonsense. War has always been hell."[541] In *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, Harold Fishbein and Nancy Dess made the case that much of this "romantic nonsense" stemmed from the Right's decades-old obsession with the inherent nature of violence, which made it difficult to convince those on the Left that an evolutionary analysis of violence and war could in fact help usher in and protect progressive policies. It was possible to be "evolutionarily-aware" and progressive at the same time, Fishbein and Dess claimed, despite the fact that evolution and behavior "with respect to violence reduction" was still linked to conservative talking points.[542]

Even the Right, however, appeared skeptical of an evolutionary analysis of warfare. Since "individualism is embraced more firmly on the Right than on the Left," Fishbein and Dess wrote, conservatives would likely reject the idea that warfare had evolved for the benefit of the non-kin group as opposed to the individual or family unit, if they even accepted evolution at all.[543] An evolutionary analysis of violence and large-scale conflict was therefore a uniquely difficult sell in America, as it threatened both progressive and conservative dogma. This was especially true when the conversation turned from group violence and warfare to the far more personal and terrifying phenomenon of rape.

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[540] Kurzban, 'Alas Poor Evolutionary Psychology', pp. 99-109.
[541] Pinker, *How The Mind Works*, p. 509.
[542] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, Westport: Praeger Publishers (2003), p. 242.
[543] Ibid.

RAPE

Toward an Evolved Explanation for Rape

The heated rhetoric surrounding evolutionary psychology's stance on the biological components of aggression and warfare paled in comparison to the drama that unfolded when evolutionists turned their attention to rape, which an overwhelming majority of Americans viewed as the most wicked manifestation of a deranged, patriarchal culture gone awry. Unlike war and murder, whose biological origins could at least be debated somewhat openly and in good faith, rape was in a category of its own. It was a violent crime so uniquely terrible and inexcusable that to imply that it was even slightly hardwired into the male psyche was to commit political and professional suicide.

Rape was universally vilified and denigrated across the United States in part because the average American seemed to view it as a product of circumstance. The social sciences painted the rapist as a man who had been conditioned to hate women, and books like Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975) had played an important role in shifting the blame for rape from the victim to the rapist. The more radical feminists took this message a step further, however. In 1987, seven years before President Clinton signed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) into law, Andrea Dworkin published *Intercourse*, in which she claimed that "violation is a synonym for intercourse"—a quote that quickly became associated with the mythical and largely satirical chant, "All sex is rape" (which was not Ms. Dworkin's intended message).[544] The book's true purpose, according to Dworkin, was to help raise awareness "about the use of intercourse to socialize women to accept inferiority."[545] These more extreme elements of radical feminism—what Steven Pinker once referred to as its "lunatic

[544] J. Lybarger, 'Finally Seeing Andrea', *Boston Review* [Boston], (23 February, 2019).
[545] This was from a response Dworkin sent to the *New York Times* after a particularly negative review of *Intercourse* was published. Ms. Dworkin accused the reviewer and the newspaper of having misrepresented her work on several occasions, and said in May of 1987 that she would "check back in a decade to see what you all [the *Times* writers and editors] think. In the meantime, I suggest you examine your ethics to see how you managed to avoid discussing anything real or even vaguely intelligent about my work and the political questions it raises." See: 'Reviewing Andrea Dworkin', *The New York Times* [New York], (24 May, 1987).

fringe"—were derided in more moderate circles for their overreach and misandrist overtones, from which most Americans recoiled.[546]

Both the moderate and more radical feminists agreed on one thing, however: rape was a socially constructed product of a sexist culture. As the 1970s drew to a close, evolutionary scientists began to question this consensus, as they grew more comfortable applying Darwinian principles to areas of human behavior that had been considered off-limits since the end of the Second World War. Teaming up with the evolutionary biologists Katherine Noonan and Richard Alexander, along with the psychologist Richard Hagen, Donald Symons decided to utilize Trivers' theory of parental investment in order to formulate a theory of rape that included natural selection. In the resulting book, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (1979), Symons treaded lightly, and reassured his audience that the data available to scientists studying rape were not "even close to sufficient to warrant the conclusion that rape itself is a facultative adaptation in the human male."[547] Instead, Symons argued, rape was the *result* of adaptive male mating strategies predicated on a strong desire for sexual variety, not the cause.[548] Symons believed, in other words, that rape was most likely a byproduct of evolution as opposed to a direct adaptation.

Over the course of the next four years, evolutionists began to question Symons' hypothesis, which had mostly fallen in line with the sociocultural assumption that rape was motivated exclusively by violence and control, as opposed to a desire to reproduce. In a 1983 paper entitled "Forcible Rape: An Evolutionary Perspective," Lea Shields and William Shields attempted to bridge this gap by staking out a centrist position, in which they claimed that although rape was unquestionably an act of violence, the "frequency and patterns of rape observed in nature" were "either equally or more consistent with the sociobiological predictions than with the sociocultural predictions."[549] A decade later, Nancy Thornhill and her husband Randy Thornhill took this hypothesis a step further, by suggesting in a 1992 paper that rape was the result of a "rape-specific psychological adaptation" that had rendered it an effective method of reproduction.[550]

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[546] Pinker cites chants of "all sex is rape, that all women should be lesbians, or that only ten percent of the population should be allowed to be male." See: Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 340-2.
[547] Symons quoted in G. Vandermassen, 'Evolution and Rape: A Feminist Darwinian Perspective', *Sex Roles*, 64 (2011), pp. 732–747.
[548] G. Vandermassen, 'Evolution and Rape: A Feminist Darwinian Perspective', pp. 732–747.
[549] W. Shields, L. Shields, 'Forcible rape: An evolutionary perspective', *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 4/3 (1983), pp. 115-136.
[550] Thornhill and Thornhill, 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', p. 363.

It took another eight years, however, for the rape-as-adaptation hypothesis to escape the confines of academic journals and enter the public sphere, where Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer published *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* in 2000. Dedicated to the "women and the girls" in their lives, *A Natural History of Rape* argued that the "social science theory of rape is based on empirically erroneous, even mythological, ideas about human development, behavior, and psychology," and that it "contradicts fundamental knowledge about evolution."[551] Margo Wilson defended the authors' motives and mission in the book's forward: "As scientists, [Thornhill and Palmer] value knowledge and assume that trying to understand everything about why rape occurs is far more beneficial for women in the long term even if the scientific inquiry inspires anxiety and revulsion."[552]

"Anxiety and Revolution" Ensue

When Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer released *A Natural History of Rape*, most readers appeared to assume that it was nothing more than a rogue theory authored by fringe academics. There was some truth to this, since, in the words of Steven Pinker, Thornhill and Palmer had effectively "threatened a consensus that had held firm in intellectual life for a quarter of a century."[553] The claim that rape was purely about power and control over women as opposed to sex and reproduction—a theory codified by Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*—had rarely, if ever, been called into question. Despite their polemic approach to an unorthodox theory, however, Thornhill and Palmer were in fact established and credentialed scientists employed by reputable institutions. But their résumés did little to placate a growing number of livid feminists and social scientists, whose anger only grew as the press took advantage of the controversy by offering Thornhill and Palmer spots on popular media outlets like *Dateline* NBC.[554]

Even "hard" scientists whose work had routinely been at odds with social science threw their hands up in exasperation. Jerry Coyne, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Chicago, quickly leapt to discredit and disavow the "irresponsible" and "tendentious" book,

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[551] R. Thornhill, C. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, Cambridge: MIT Press (2000), p. xiii.
[552] Thornhill, Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape,* Forward.
[553] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 359-361.
[554] Goode, 'Human Nature: Born Or Made?'.

which he claimed was the "worst efflorescence of evolutionary psychology that I've ever seen." He even went so far as to accuse Thornhill and Palmer of attempting to advance a hidden moral agenda. "Thornhill and Palmer's attempts to gain control of rape counseling, laws, and punishments, despite the weakness of their science, reveal their larger goal," Coyne wrote, which was ultimately the "engulfment of social science and social policy by the great whale of evolutionary psychology." Coyne saw a larger pattern of malevolence and deceit lurking behind the authors' work as well. "This attempted takeover is not new," he wrote. "It was first suggested in 1978 in E.O. Wilson's *On Human Nature*, and more recently in his *Consilience*, Wilson extended the program to nearly every area of human thought, including aesthetics and ethics. We are witnessing a new campaign for the Darwinization of Everything."[555]

Other academics such as Dr. Mary Koss, a professor of public health at the University of Arizona whose research touched on rape, challenged Thornhill's and Palmer's thesis without necessarily questioning its foundation or motives. Although evolution almost certainly played a role in rape, Dr. Koss said, "it is not proper to set up evolutionary and social causation as opposites." Instead, "you have to think about how they work together." Dr. Koss drew the line, however, at Thornhill's and Palmer's suggestion that young men should be taught about the potential evolutionary origins of rape. The book's authors had "obviously never stood up before a group and given a rape prevention talk," Dr. Koss ribbed. "If you even imply to a male audience that all men are potential rapists, they go berserk." Asked whether or not young women should consider the risks of dressing provocatively around men, Dr. Koss said such ideas were "absolutely, perfectly unacceptable."[556] Writing in *The New York Times* shortly after the book's release, the Emory University primatologist Frans de Waal mimicked Koss' tone with a sarcastic quip: "In other words, if we can make boys see the Darwinian light and girls wear baggy pants, we will rid the world of a lot of nasty male behavior."[557]

Randy Thornhill, who in 2000 was a 55-year-old evolutionary biologist and professor at the University of New Mexico with thirty-two years of experience in the field, believed in the virtually limitless power of science to effect positive social change—once going so far as to say

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[555] Coyne, 'Of Vice and Men'.
[556] E. Goode, 'What Provokes a Rapist to Rape?', *The New York Times* [New York], (15 January, 2000), p. B9.
[557] F. B. M. de Waal, 'Survival of the Rapist', *The New York Times* [New York], (2 April, 2000), p. G24.

during a press tour for *A Natural History of Rape* that "if you've got a social problem, science is the only thing that can give us the answer."[558] Both Thornhill and Palmer were steadfast in their commitment to elevate objective science above the emotional squabbles of politics in order to solve the rape problem, but that commitment eventually transformed into a hardened stubbornness that ultimately undermined their position.

In the face of unrelenting criticism, Thornhill and Palmer grew defiant—noting that the deluge of negative reactions they received would have been excellent fodder for an "interesting study of illogicality" if the stakes had not been so high, and if the sociocultural explanations of rape did not have "such serious consequences."[559] Those who insisted, in spite of clear evidence to the contrary, that rape was only about power and control were playing a dangerous game, they warned. These types of emotional rebuttals were not simply "presented as a political slogan," but instead were "presented as a serious statement about the causes of rape, and as such it is the basis for attempts to prevent the crime of rape." The politicization of their research had real-world consequences, Thornhill and Palmer insisted, especially when it occurred in places like the University of Wisconsin, Texas A&M, and Tulane University, where students were taught that since "sexual assault is all about power, not sex," the "age or appearance of the victim is irrelevant."[560]

Thornhill's and Palmer's unapologetic approach to delivering their adaptationist views may have helped solidify their base, but it failed to win over the centrists, let alone the behaviorists. "Instead of belittling the social sciences, as the authors do for about fifty pages, it would have been more productive to join forces and consider a wide range of perspectives on an ugly behavior that has harmed so many," wrote Frans de Waal in a skeptical review of the book. "If women feel offended by this book, let me say that I, and with me probably most men, resent the foisting of the crimes of a minority onto us as something that we would just as eagerly do if the opportunity arose. Why can't evolutionary psychology put a little less evolution and a little more psychology into its thinking?"[561]

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[558] M. Rosenfeld, 'The Male Animal: Two Scientists Explain Rape as a Natural Behavior and Cause an Unnatural Uproar', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (28 January, 2000), p. C1.
[559] C. Palmer, R. Thornhill, 'Straw Men and Fairy Tales: Evaluating Reactions to A Natural History of Rape', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 40/3 (August, 2003), pp. 249-255.
[560] Ibid.
[561] F. B. M. de Waal, 'Survival of the Rapist', *The New York Times* [New York], (2 April, 2000), p. G24.

A Natural History of Rape had some success in shifting the conversation toward adaptation on college campuses. Evan Beeman, Director of the Campus Violence Protection Program at the University of California, Davis, said he had been inspired to question the long-held assumption that rape was strictly about power as opposed to sex after reading the book: "I think we're afraid to admit it might be about both."[562] Thornhill and Palmer also made sure to highlight an endorsement they had received from a rape victim. "Finally. Finally, somebody is coming around to my way of thinking on the motivations of rape," the victim wrote. "During my quest [to determine the motives of the rapist], I came across a lot of people who liked to quote the so-called experts and say things such as, 'It's a crime of violence, not sex' and 'It's a control thing.' Boy, did I hate those people. In my mind, they were wrong."[563]

Throughout this ordeal, Thornhill and Palmer leaned into their self-appointed role as truth-tellers—comparing their situation to that of the child in *The Emperor's New Clothes* who dares to point out the obvious. For them, Hans Christian Andersen's classic fable perfectly illustrated a "disturbing aspect of human behavior: the willingness of people to abandon the evidence of their senses and agree with what other people are saying, especially when to do so helps people be accepted and avoid being branded as ignorant." Their goal, the authors insisted, was not to "embarrass people who have repeated the 'not sex' slogan," but was instead "simply to influence people to, in John Hartung's words, 'get real about rape'." Adding, "If no thinking person ever seriously thought that rapists were not sexually motivated, then let's rid our rape prevention handbooks of this claim and start, like the child in the story, to say what we see with our eyes."[564]

Some feminists agreed that it was time to acknowledge the possibility that natural selection could have a played a role in rape. "Feminism will have to forsake this hostility if it wants to retain its intellectual credibility," Griet Vandermassen wrote in a reflection of the controversy.[565] But even those who were relatively sympathetic to the book's argument felt as though the controversy surrounding *A Natural History of Rape* was both overblown and counterproductive. There was room for feminism to live alongside the rape-as-adaptation theory, and any argument that failed to adequately engage with the other side—even if its purpose was to

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[562] Beeman quoted in Palmer, Thornhill, 'Straw Men and Fairy Tales', pp. 249-255.
[563] Survivor quoted in Palmer, Thornhill, 'Straw Men and Fairy Tales', pp. 249-255.
[564] Palmer, Thornhill, 'Straw Men and Fairy Tales', pp. 249-255.
[565] G. Vandermassen, 'Evolution and Rape: A Feminist Darwinian Perspective', *Sex Roles*, 64 (2011), pp. 732–747.

bring balance to the debate—was doing a shared and important cause a disservice. "The predominantly hostile press coverage [*A Natural History of Rape*] received makes it hardly surprising" that those who wished to "demonstrate their sympathy for rape victims or women in general" felt the need to "dismiss the book as sexist, reactionary pseudo-science," Ms. Vandermassen wrote."[566]

Vandermassen expressed a common frustration with the book among Darwinian scientists: Despite having managed to show that the gap between cultural and genetic explanations of rape was smaller than previously thought, it had overshot its target. But the gap remained, and it needed to be bridged sooner rather than later. The "long-standing animosity between feminist and evolutionary scholars is a cause for concern," Ms. Vandermassen observed. "If we aim at a deeper understanding of the causes of rape, we will have to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries" and embrace "an integrative approach" that incorporates "knowledge from evolutionary, genetic, developmental, and cultural levels of analysis." Only then "will we arrive at a comprehensive explanation of why (some) men rape."[567]

Prelude to a Firestorm

Mr. Palmer may not have been used to the public backlash he and Mr. Thornhill encountered after *A Natural History of Rape* was released, but Mr. Thornhill certainly was. Eight years earlier in 1992, Randy Thornhill and his wife Nancy Thornhill had published a paper titled "The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality" in *The Journal of Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. At the end of the piece, the journal's editors encouraged "qualified professional readership" to submit commentary that would be printed in a subsequent issue. It was an invitation the journal's readership eagerly accepted.[568]

Although some of the objections stuck to the science and revolved around the paper's methodology, most of the respondents chose instead to focus on the moral implications of the piece, while raising concerns that the authors were perhaps not as committed to guarding against the potential ill effects of their thesis as they had claimed. Many of those who replied—including Kathleen Akins of the Palo Alto Research Center and Mary Windham from the Department of

[566] Ibid.
[567] Ibid.
[568] The journal published a litany of replies in the Open Peer Commentary section. See: 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', pp. 376-403.

Philosophy at Miami University—succumbed to the naturalistic fallacy. Since the Thornhills had presented rape as an evolved act and therefore had treated it like "any other naturally occurring phenomenon (say lightning)," Akins and Windham wrote in a joint response, the "only practical social implication" was that "if you don't want to be hit by lightning, don't play golf in a thunderstorm." Adding, "If the legitimate scientific interests of a researcher lie within a morally sensitive area, such an investigation cannot pretend to duck the moral issues behind a pretense of 'just doing science.'" Researchers such as these were obligated to "address the question with unusual scientific care and sensitivity."[569]

Writing from the Department of Psychology at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Betty Bayer and Robert Steele highlighted the essay's "phallocentric" focus on the male perpetrators instead of the female victims. "When women talk about what it means to be raped and what it means to live in fear of being raped by men, they are articulating an understanding of what it means to live in a rape culture," Bayer and Steele wrote, before invoking Freud's concept of "derealization" in order to paint the Thornhills' analysis as one that "removes and distances men's raping women from women's experiences of being raped." From the vantage point of evolutionary psychology, they claimed, rape suddenly became less about a "terrifying experience in women's lives, but rather a men's mating strategy"—making "rape and men their dual subjects" as opposed to women. Worse, the Thornhills had reinscribed the "very strategies men have relied upon historically to deprive rape of its brutal reality and to de-emphasize the horror of rape," and in doing so had erased the "meaning and experience of rape for women." The Thornhills' paper therefore "serves the purpose it identifies: men's historical domination of women. As such, the work perpetuates male rape culture."[570]

John Dupre of the Department of Philosophy at Stanford University wrote in to say that this was "not just bad science but *harmful* science [emphasis added]." After accusing the authors of exposing a right-leaning political bias, Dupre suggested it was no coincidence that within the behavioral sciences, where "most participants remain male and ambitious," evolutionary psychologists had concluded that women prefer ambitious men. "Despite the Thornhills' suggestion that the knowledge they seek will show how to reduce sexual violence," Dupre wrote, "it seems quite clear that the biologicization of rape and the dismissal of social or 'moral' factors

[569] 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', pp. 376-403.
[570] Ibid.

will both tend to legitimate rape and to deflect attention from social factors (such as the depiction of women in the media and advertising, and the compliance of the legal system) that are plausibly hypothesized to promote sexual violence." Adding, "Whatever the intent of the authors, their claims will undoubtedly be taken to show that since rape is a 'natural' phenomenon, its reduction or elimination is an unrealistic goal."[571]

Finally, Andrew Futterman and Sabrina Zirkel wrote from the Department of Psychology at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts to accuse the Thornhills of perpetuating the idea that rapists are themselves victims of "uncontrollable biological forces," and that this would inevitably lead to the assumption that there are "substantial limits to the treatment of rapists" in society. They then suggested that research into the biological motivations for rape was somehow engaged in a zero-sum contest with sociological research, and that by placing the spotlight on biology "we are directed away from developing more comprehensive social programs that redress systematic causes of rape (e.g., sexism)." The Thornhills' conclusions would also promote the idea that the "status quo is somehow inevitable and that attempts at social change are ultimately futile…Such social problems are not inevitable, however, and we should not allow ourselves to be lulled into complacency about them by those who would suggest otherwise."[572]

Nancy and Randy Thornhill Push Back

In response to the deluge of criticism they received after their paper's publication, Nancy and Randy Thornhill shot back that the "sociocultural" theory of rape was not a "valid, ultimate alternative," and accused their critics of missing the forest for the trees. From a neurological standpoint, they argued, rape was no different from every other type of human behavior—good and bad—that had evolved at the mercy of both nature and nurture. Since all behavior was the product of "psychological mechanisms processing environmental information," which in turn requires adaptations that are themselves the products of natural selection, logic dictated that rape was at least partly an adaptation. The "only alternative ultimate theory of phenotypic design is divine creation," the Thornhills asserted. "And that is a myth, not a scientific deduction."[573] The Thornhills were also quick to note that their critics had failed to adequately wrestle with the

[571] Ibid.
[572] Ibid.
[573] 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', pp. 404-416.

implications of one of evolutionary psychology's most important tenets: mismatch. "Data on the current reproductive consequences of rape are irrelevant to the hypothesis that there is a psychological adaptation to rape," they reminded their peers. "Current adaptiveness is not a legitimate theoretical expectation of any adaptation."[574]

The Thornhills also felt as though their critics were not acting in good faith; by taking advantage of the positive media coverage they would inevitably receive for taking up arms against a "dangerous" study. Most of the responses, the Thornhills argued, were performative, and few (if any) of their critics would likely have fallen victim to the naturalistic fallacy had the debate taken place behind closed doors. "In the target article we felt it unnecessary to remind readers of the naturalist fallacy because it is treated extensively in the literature of human evolution and the literature of philosophy," they wrote:

> Dupre (last paragraph) calls our target paper 'harmful' science because we portray rape as a natural phenomenon, which could imply that it is inevitable, even moral or good. He goes on to say that since our claim is not true, its propagation should be strongly resisted. Our claim is true: Rape is a product of nature, a natural phenomenon. As we discussed above, rape reflects psychological adaptation and thus the natural processes of historical selection and ontogeny. It does not follow that rape is inevitable or good. We suggested in the target article that rape may be controllable if the design of its underlying psychology is understood. Nature simply is, and what ought to be is inferred by people. Brownmiller & Mehrhof (last sentence) succumb to the naturalist fallacy when they suggest that we dignify rape by discussing it in terms of adaptation. Akins and Windham endorse the naturalist fallacy in their point that the target article treats rape without making moral judgments…Our response is not the forum for discussing our own ideologies about rape. But given that we suggest in the target article that our approach may help identify environments that could reduce rape, it follows that we would like to see rape eliminated.[575]

Nancy and Randy Thornhill concluded their defense by arguing that sociocultural explanations of rape—the "social science/academic feminist's view of rape," as they put it—were as ineffective as they were empirically false. The "naïve illusion" of the sociocultural premise, which held that "we need only fix the way boys are socialized and rape will disappear," could "only be an effective social tactic in an environment of ignorance." "Those who feel that the social problem of rape can be solved by changing the nature of men through naive and arbitrary

[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid.

social adjustments should 'get real about rape' because their perspective is a danger to us all." The Thornhills then accused their opposition of clinging to a dangerous, false belief as part of a last-resort effort to protect their field along with their reputations. "It is certainly in the interests of proponents of the sociocultural theory to have their colleagues and the public believe that they have identified a remedy for rape and are working toward implementing it."[576]

Body Over Mind

In the politically-charged academic environment in which the Thornhills operated and published, one's gender could be a blessing or a curse, and there was an unspoken rule that only women could credibly take public positions that were patently anti-feminist and escape with their reputations intact. This dynamic fueled both the reverence and disdain for conservative Republican activists like Phyllis Schlafly, a "strong-willed writer, lawyer and mother of six" who raised a grassroots coalition of "stay-at-home moms" and anti-feminists in order to block the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution in 1972, according to *The Washington Times*.[577] Conservatives, who viewed Ms. Schlafly's gender as an impenetrable shield that could deflect feminist attacks, were eager to enlist women who could take controversial stances on emotionally-charged topics—with the onerous and arguably sexist implication that women were incapable of being sexist. Only a woman could sit on a stage at Bates College and say, as Ms. Schlafly did in 2007, that "by getting married, the woman has consented to sex, and I don't think you can call it rape."[578]

The Left accused the Thornhills of similarly shielding themselves from attack by co-authoring their paper as a husband-and-wife team. Ms. Thornhill's gender was highlighted by Val Dusek, a member of the Philosophy Department at the University of New Hampshire, who spoke publicly about what most of his peers were likely fuming over in private: The fact that one of the two Thornhills was female, along with the fact that they were often interviewed by women as opposed to men, was evidence of their hidden malevolence and deception. "Their legitimization of rape is more subtle," Dusek wrote. "Today sociobiologists are sought out by the

[576] Ibid.
[577] V. Richardson, '"Mrs. America," Phyllis Schlafly miniseries, a feminist hit job, daughter Anne Schlafly Cori says', *The Washington Times* [Washington], (14 April, 2020).
[578] Richardson, 'Mrs. America*'*.

media to dispense their expertise on rape,"[579] he continued, and while *Playboy* had been lucky enough to secure an interview with the eminent Edward Wilson,[580] *Science Digest* had "made do with Randy and Nancy Thornhill." By interviewing "both members of a married couple," Mr. Dusek argued, *Science Digest* was angling to "absolve itself of sexism as did *Playboy* by using female authors in its six-month series on sociobiology." And in choosing to platform female writers, Dusek continued, these publications and the "mass media" in general were able to "calm their readers" by "explaining that violence and rape are biological universals and are not problems of the American culture of violence against women."[581]

The media's proclivity for broadcasting dangerous ideas under the guise of scientific inquiry was a uniquely American problem, according to Dusek, who felt as though the United States had engendered a culture that revered the media to the point that its opinions went unquestioned and unchallenged. The press had a perceived moral authority that it leveraged in order to "justify traditional views of the relationships between the sexes," which was ultimately a problem that stemmed from the "power of the authority of science in matters of personal problems." Closeted sexists who wished to "defend power relations between the sexes" inevitably sought cover behind a "new science that gives a stamp of scientific knowledge to sexist claims," according to Dusek. The evocation of evolved psychology in these settings, he continued, "denies the overwhelming violence of rape, and in doing so, it legitimates a system of ideas concerning the naturalness of power imbalances between men and women that feminists have been struggling to dismantle since the inception of the women's movement." Adding, "We need to understand the motivations for rape, not in a context which presumes them to be a biological fact of life and therefore immutable, but as a behavior whose roots are social and psychological, thereby allowing the possibility of change."[582]

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[579] At the time, scientists like the Thornhills were still widely considered to be sociobiologists, despite the fact that they considered themselves to be evolutionary psychologists.
[580] See: 'Why Men Rape', *Playboy*.
[581] V. Dusek, *Science for the People*, 16/1 (January-February, 1984), pp. 10-16.
[582] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Dusek's implication—that a "biological fact" did not allow for the "possibility of change"—was the root of the fear that permeated the rape-as-adaptation debates, as well as the debates surrounding the evolved origins of war and aggression. Dr. Thornhill, who had spent much of his scientific career studying insects, believed these types of critiques resulted from a "very limited understanding of how evolutionary biology applies to people," and that it was only a matter of time before people realized their error and changed their tune. "It takes people a long time to pull back from what is politically correct," Thornhill said in 2000.[583] The heightened stakes of the rape debates had merely prolonged the usual transition from fearful politics to dispassionate analysis, argued Kurzban, who insisted that Thornhill and Palmer had simply made another standard-issue "scientific claim…not a claim about morality." If a scientist had "found that certain viruses were designed to kill people, this would not be sociopathic," Kurzban said. "A hypothesis about adaptations is distinct from claims about how one ought to behave, and therefore no scientific finding could 'legitimize' any behavior."[584]

The intense blowback to the rape-as-adaptation hypothesis, however, had little to do with a "very limited understanding" of what was being proposed. The vast majority of those who wrote in to voice their concerns were themselves behavioral scientists, and were therefore doubtlessly well aware of the difference between a scientific claim and a moral proclamation, as well as the difference between a reason and an excuse. Their impassioned rejection of the evolved rape hypothesis therefore had less to do with confusion and more to do with fear—fear that most people (and especially young men) were intellectually and emotionally unequipped to process an adaptationist's analysis of a problem that continued to ruin the lives of countless women every year.

This was "not just bad science but *harmful* science [emphasis added]," as John Dupre put it, and no amount of disclaimers or disavowals would prevent the "biologicization of rape" from wreaking havoc on an impressionable society. "Whatever the intent of the authors," Dupre wrote, "their claims will undoubtedly be taken to show that since rape is a 'natural' phenomenon, its

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[583] E. Goode, 'What Provokes a Rapist to Rape?', *The New York Times* [New York], (15 January, 2000), p. B9.
[584] Kurzban, 'Alas Poor Evolutionary Psychology', pp. 99-109.

reduction or elimination is an unrealistic goal."[585] The adaptationist's approach to rape was therefore also "irresponsible," charged Jerry Coyne, who believed the evolutionary psychologists had finally overplayed their hand and exposed their "larger goal" of influencing public policy. Even relatively sympathetic academics such as Mary Koss feared the impact that this type of rhetoric would have on impressionable young men, who would "go berserk" if presented with such forbidden fruit.

Dupre, Coyne, and Koss were not alone in their shared belief that the mere discussion of the *possibility* that rape was an adaptation was dangerous. Throughout the 1980s, many on the Left felt as though the adaptationist evaluation of forced copulation was dangerous even when it was strictly applied to animal behavior. "Rape of females is frequently justified as 'natural' by applying the concept to lower animals such as ducks," wrote Eileen Van Tassell in response to a 1980 article in *Science* titled "Sociobiology of Rape in Mallards: Responses of the Mated Male." This type of "nonsense," Van Tassell continued, "reduces rape to a biological phenomenon and effectively removes it from the realm of willful choice or morality. How convenient."[586,587]

The anthropomorphizing of animal behavior had long been a thorn in the side of evolutionists and social scientists alike, and whether or not animals were ever truly capable of "raping" another animal had been widely debated in anthropological circles for years. But even those who argued that widespread forced copulation in the animal kingdom was essentially equivalent to human rape were not suggesting that this "justified" rape for homo sapiens. For a brief moment, the Left appeared to be just as skeptical of Darwin's utility as the Right.

The Left's focus on the identity of the scientists making these claims was another way in which the political teams temporarily switched sides. The Right had frequently called into question the validity of scientific claims that had come from women, whose motives had been equally suspect. Now the secular Left was using a scientist's identity as evidence that they harbored a hidden agenda. The fact that Nancy Thornhill happened to be a woman was repeatedly weaponized against her by people like Dusek, who believed that she and her husband were using her gender to evade criticism during the rape debates. During the Maryland

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[585] 'The Evolutionary Psychology of Men's Coercive Sexuality', p. 383. The journal published a series of replies in the Open Peer Commentary section.
[586] E. Van Tassell, *Science for the People*, 12/1 (January-February, 1980), pp. 16-19.
[587] Exactly for whom this type of analysis would have been "convenient" is difficult to determine, although Ms. Van Tassel seems to be implying that there was a secretive cadre of rapist-scientists in the United States bent on justifying their crimes by scrutinizing the behavior of ducks.

conference controversy, Peter Breggin could not help but wonder how Wasserman—a Jew—was not more concerned about the implications of his proposed conference, which could have acted as a breeding ground for the types of dangerous ideas that had led to the persecution of his family. (Breggin, who was also Jewish, asked Wasserman to imagine whether he would have felt comfortable hosting a conference on "Genetic Factors in Junk Bond Dealing," at a time when several prominent Jewish financiers were making headlines for their dubious financial practices.[588]

The fear of misunderstanding and misappropriation, although far more pronounced in the downplay of the rape-as-adaptation hypothesis, was just as prevalent in the debates over the roots of aggression. People like Peter Breggin appeared less concerned with the credibility of the science behind the conference's formation and more with the possibility that it would put people "back in Nazi Germany." Robert Wright worried that the sheer discussion of such topics would lead parole boards to begin evaluating "prisoners for biological markers before deciding their fate." George Buntin Jr., the executive director of the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, strongly insinuated that the those who were interested in the biological markers of aggression were analogous to those who "used to say there are genetic reasons why African Americans are not as literate as European Americans." [589] The university's initial decision to host the conference was tantamount to a blatant endorsement of "stereotyping and racism," argued Dr. Maisha Bennett.[590] Samuel Bette, a former Howard University journalism professor, went even further, telling *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that the conference was an "effort to use public money for a genocidal effort against African Americans."[591]

This was a far cry from what the conference organizers had intended, and it was an even farther cry from what the evolutionists had intended when they opined on the biological roots of warfare, which, as they continuously pointed out, affected humans of all races, cultures, and creeds. Indeed, the universalist approach to understanding the instinct to wage war stood as the antithesis to racist thought. This was a *human* problem—not one that belonged to particularly

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[588] Williams, 'Violence, Genes, and Prejudice'.
[589] C. Babington, 'U-MD. Cancels Conference on Genetic Link to Crime', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (5 September, 1992).
[590] P. Hilts, 'U.S. Puts a Halt To Talks Tying Genes to Crime', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 September, 1992), p. A1.
[591] Williams, 'Violence, Genes, and Prejudice'.

bloodthirsty nations or tribes. The ubiquity of warfare, however, is also what drove the pessimism of people like the Purdue student who told John Horgan that war would only cease "once everyone is killed."

These fatalistic attitudes were in turn what drove respected institutions like UNESCO to issue a series of white lies in the form of the Seville Statement, whose well-meaning message of hope was peppered with scientifically inaccurate claims that likely did more harm than good. Diverting funds from war preparation to "teachers, books, and schools," as the Statement prescribed, would have done little to bring about an end to world war, especially if the teachers to whom these funds were diverted were not being honest with their students about the human proclivity for violence. Wishing the problem away was doing no one any favors.

The evolutionists were not blind to the dangers of discussing the biology of violent behavior in public, but they felt strongly that the real danger lay in *not* having these discussions. "We should never again read a textbook in psychology, or engage in a public discussion of violence, that is not informed by evolutionary reasoning," wrote Nancy Dess and Richard Bloom.[592] Before *A Natural History of Rape* was released, Thornhill and Palmer had published an article entitled "Why Men Rape" in *The Sciences*, in which they argued that "prevention efforts will founder until they are based on the understanding that rape evolved as a form of male reproductive behavior."[593] Any attempt to reduce violence that was based strictly on the sociocultural approach was doomed to fail, argued the evolutionists, since nature was always lurking beneath culture. Federal initiatives such as the Healthy Marriage Initiative, whose goal had been to reduce crime (and by extension poverty), for instance, had failed to produce any real results, despite the fact that it had cost Americans taxpayers nearly a billion dollars.[594]

Still, those who feared that these types of candid discussions would somehow trigger a race science revival had American history on their side. "Good" science had routinely been hijacked and misused for cruel ends by well-meaning academics in the not-so-distant past, and although it was unlikely that even the most cynical observer of the rape debates would be "lulled into complacency," as Andrew Futterman and Sabrina Zirkel feared, it was not implausible that

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[592] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence,* p. viii.
[593] M. Rosenfeld, 'The Male Animal: Two Scientists Explain Rape as a Natural Behavior and Cause an Unnatural Uproar', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (28 January, 2000), p. C1.
[594] G. Lewis-Kraus, 'Force of Nature', *The New Yorker* [New York], (13 September, 2021).

these discussions could lead people to believe that the sociocultural elements of rape and violence were less important than they really were.

Americans did not need to travel to the era of eugenics (which, incidentally, had been a progressive movement) in order to appreciate the dangers of racially-tinged determinist rhetoric, which was still very much alive in the United States and was being peddled by scientists with elite credentials. The Florida State University geneticist and president of the Behavior Genetics Association, Glayde Whitney, for example, was heralded as a besieged truth-teller by right-leaning Republicans in the mid-'90s for claiming that racial disparities in violent crime had a genetic component. (Conservatives were finally forced to disavow Whitney after he exposed himself as a Holocaust-denier and penned the foreword to Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke's autobiography).[595]

As much as the American Right was adept at cherry-picking evolutionary science when it suited their agenda, its members were equally skillful at denigrating it when it posed a threat. Following the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, the Republican House Majority Whip, Tom DeLay, blamed the teaching of evolution in schools—training his sights on American classrooms that "teach children that they are nothing but glorified apes who are evolutionized out of some primordial soup of mud by teaching them that evolution is a fact."[596] Liberals played their usual role and leapt to defend Charles Darwin against this nonsensical slander on the House floor,[597] but the Columbine murderers were viewed as disturbed, rogue actors whose glaringly despicable actions had deviated from a universal, human norm. It was far more difficult for the Left to defend natural selection when it was utilized to explain the existence of the far more common forms of violence that played out every day at home and abroad.

Making the case for an evolved and universal human tendency for violence was a thankless task in a country that was continuously plagued by school shootings and other acts of extreme violence, and in order to prove that violence was natural—that there were "profound adaptive benefits to engaging in warfare," as David Buss wrote—evolutionists would have to prove that hate and xenophobia were natural as well. It was simply not the case, the evolutionists argued, that the "badass guys make terrible husband material," as Stephen Beckerman phrased it

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[595] 'Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology', p. 653.
[596] Tom DeLay quoted in *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, p. 243.
[597] M. Grunwald, 'Culture Wars Erupt In Debate on Hill', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (18 June, 1999).

in *Newsweek*. Warriors were in fact revered and cherished members of most modern societies and prehistoric tribes, and their elevated status did not stem entirely from the fact that they were obtaining and protecting precious resources—it came from the fact that human beings were evolutionarily predisposed to hate and fear the "other."

CHAPTER FIVE
HATE & FEAR

I don't think racism is a mental illness…because one hundred percent of people are racist.

- Paul Fink, former president of the APA, 2005[598]

Pathological bias is no more or less scientific than major depression.

- Gary Belkin, deputy chief of psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital, 2005[599]

INTRODUCTION

American Turbulence

America during the second half of the 19th century was a hotbed of nativist hatred and xenophobic violence. At the height of its influence in the 1850s, the fervently anti-immigrant Know Nothing party boasted over one hundred congressmen and eight governors, and controlled majorities in six state legislatures.[600] The brunt of the party's wrath was directed toward Catholics and immigrants (tens of thousands of whom were entering the United States every year), but anyone who was not white and Protestant was equally suspect. These attitudes were occasionally codified through legislation, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the United States and denied citizenship to those who were already there.[601] Meanwhile, thousands of Black Americans were being lynched by white mobs across thirty-three states,[602] as any lingering hopes for a successful postwar reconstruction were dashed.

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[598] S. Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (10 December, 2005).
[599] Ibid.
[600] L. Boissoneault, 'How the 19th-Century Know Nothing Party Reshaped American Politics', *Smithsonian Magazine* [Washington], (26 January, 2017), consulted online (2 June, 2023), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/immigrants-conspiracies-and-secret-society-launched-american-nativism-180961915.
[601] 'An act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to the Chinese', May 6, 1882; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives, consulted online (28 May, 2024), https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act#:~:text=It%20was%20the%20first%20significant,immigrating%20to%20the%20United%20States.
[602] Black men were by far the most common victims of lynch mobs, but no group was immune. An investigation by C. Seguin and D. Rigby found that there were "4,467 total victims of lynching from 1883 to 1941. Of these victims,

These types of prejudices were far more restrained but no less entrenched across the Atlantic, where in Victorian England it was far from evident that all humans belonged to the same species. Even the most progressive scientists and intellectuals of Darwin's day took the marked physical differences of people living in disparate regions of the world as evidence that their evolutionary stories had diverged some time ago—an assumption sustained by pronounced differences in culture.[603] Whether or not people living in distant parts of the world could even successfully breed with people of European descent was a topic of legitimate debate,[604] and these attitudes facilitated the rise of countless xenophobic and outright racist social movements in the United States—the effects of which were still being felt as the 20th century drew to a close.

For those interested in the causes and effects of inter-ethnic turbulence, the United States was an ideal laboratory, in which the limits of multiethnic and multicultural cohabitation could be tested. When a Jewish-American immigrant named Israel Zangwill coined the term "melting pot" in a 1908 play of the same name, he was suggesting that the massive influx of immigrants—many of whom came steeped in their own unique culture—would result in the emergence of a single, cohesive American identity. Zangwill's *Melting Pot* was staged at a time when immigration had reached record highs, as America was inundated with roughly eighteen million new arrivals between 1890 and 1920, almost all of whom were white Europeans.[605]

Although European immigrants had endured prejudice upon their arrival, their familiar skin tone had eased their integration at a time when the only color line that really mattered lay between black and white. This monochrome color dynamic began to shift, however, during the second half of the 20th century, when America experienced a second wave of immigration from Asian and Latin American countries, which strained the elasticity of the melting pot model.[606]

4,027 were men, 99 were women, and 341 were unknown gender (although likely male); 3,265 were black, 1,082 were white, 671 were Mexican or of Mexican descent, 38 were American Indian, 10 were Chinese, and 1 was Japanese." See: C. Seguin, D. Rigby, 'National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941', *Socius*, 5 (6 May, 2019).

[603] Not all Victorian evolutionists who flirted with what would eventually be dubbed "racism" were alike. Unlike Darwin, Francis Galton (who happened to be Darwin's cousin as well as his contemporary) was an unabashed bigot who regarded Africans as less intelligent than Europeans, and predicted that natural selection would eventually eliminate the uncivilized peoples of the world—not because they lacked the educational infrastructure to compete with enlightened civilizations, but because they lacked the inherent brain power required for assimilation. See: Laland, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 38.

[604] R. Wright, 'The Perversion of Darwinism', *The New York Times* [New York], (31 July, 1994), p. G7.

[605] W. Booth, 'One Nation, Indivisible: Is It History?', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (22 February, 1998), p. A1.

[606] 'The "Second Great Wave" of Immigration: Growth of the Foreign-Born Population Since 1970', U.S. Census Bureau, (26 February, 2014), consulted online (16 December, 2021),

The assimilationist rhetoric of the early 20th century soon gave way to an emphasis on the preservation of culture and identity, in what became referred to as the "salad bowl" model of cultural integration. Universities toed the line and began to develop separate student associations for Blacks, Asians, and Latinos.[607]

In 1994, the influential philosopher K. Anthony Appiah delivered a lecture at the University of California, San Diego, in which he argued that there has "never been a common culture in the United States." (The fact that America was multilingual and multireligious, paired with the vast cultural chasm between the North and South, had impeded the formation of a coherent American culture, he believed.)[608] Further complicating matters was the fact that the Civil Rights Movement had failed to reconcile racial tensions that had existed ever since Black people were brought to the United States as slaves in 1619. A *Time* magazine survey from 1987 found that over ninety-two percent of Blacks and eighty-seven percent of whites agreed with the statement that "racial prejudice is still very common in the US."[609,610]

The stubbornness of these ethnic and racial rifts was not lost on curious social and behavioral scientists, and by the end of the millennium two competing schools of thought were vying to control the narrative surrounding the origins of racial categorization and inter-ethnic animosity. As the anthropologist Lawrence Hirschfeld has written, psychologists tended to believe that the human desire to divide people by race reflected a "spontaneous impulse to categorize similar things together," which led them to believe that racial categorization had less to do with an innate desire to dominate others and more to do with cognitive mechanisms that had evolved in order to make sense of a complex world. Anthropologists and sociologists (and even most historians), on the other hand, tended to view racial categorization as a conscious

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https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2014/02/the-second-great-wave-of-immigration-growth-of-the-foreign-born-population-since-1970.html#:~:text=Less%20than%205%20percent%20of,and%202012%2C%20reaching%2040.8%20million.

[607] W. Booth, 'One Nation, Indivisible: Is It History?', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (22 February, 1998), p. A1.

[608] See: K. Anthony Appiah, 'Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections', The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, University of California, San Diego, (27 and 28 October, 1994), consulted online (20 May, 2024), https://philpapers.org/archive/apprci.pdf.

[609] *Time* survey (2 February, 1987) referenced in Aboud's *Children and Prejudice* (1988), p. 1.

[610] The North was relatively tolerant of the "other" compared to the South, which was so saturated with bigotry that a southerner "almost had to be mentally ill to be tolerant," as the Harvard psychologist Thomas Pettigrew once put it. E. Eakin, 'Bigotry as Mental Illness Or Just Another Norm', *The New York Times* [New York], (15 January, 2000), p. B9.

method of establishing hierarchical power structures, through which dominant groups could oppress and control minorities.[611]

Toward an Evolutionary Explanation of Hate & Fear

Research into the origins and implications of prejudice was rejuvenated after World War II, as academics bore down on their mission to unravel the dark psychology and vicious tribal hatred that had fueled two world wars and the Holocaust.[612] One of the most popular books to wrestle with the biological roots of prejudice was Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), which argued that increasing intergroup contact and communication was essential if ethnic tensions were to be reduced at home and overseas. It was an instant best-seller, and a mass-market, pocket-sized paperback edition was placed alongside best-selling novels in the country's most prominent bookstores.[613] Allport's "contact hypothesis" became the foundation upon which evolutionary and social scientists would base their research on intergroup conflict over the course of the next five decades,[614] and its optimistic prognosis was a welcome reprieve from a competing (and far more pessimistic) narrative championed by people like Carleton S. Coon—an influential multi-regionalist who argued in *The Origin of Races* (1962) that there was a hierarchy of geographical regions in which intelligence had evolved. "If Africa was the cradle of mankind, it was only an indifferent kindergarten," Coon wrote. "Europe and Asia were our principal schools."[615,616]

In 1981, Pierre L. van den Berghe, a professor of anthropology and sociology at the University of Washington, published *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, which built on Allport's work to argue that racism and inter-ethnic conflict was universal. Written in the midst of the sociobiology debates, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* also pushed back against the dominant anthropological narrative that inter-ethnic conflicts were merely proxy fights over economic resources—a narrative pushed by books like *The Ethnic Myth* by Steven Steinberg.[617]

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[611] L. Hirschfeld, 'The Conceptual Politics of Race: Lessons from Our Children', *Ethos*, 25/1 (1997), pp. 63-92.
[612] '*Ideological and Political Bias in Psychology*', pp. 177-8.
[613] According to Thomas Pettigrew and Kerstin Hammann, by 2012, Allport's book had been cited in scholarly journals more than 15,000 times. See: T. Pettigrew, K. Hammann, 'Gordon Allport's The Nature of Prejudice', *Classics of Social Science*, (January, 2014), pp. 174-8.
[614] T. Pettigrew, K. Hammann, 'Gordon Allport's The Nature of Prejudice', pp. 174-178.
[615] R. Wright, 'The Perversion of Darwinism', *The New York Times* [New York], (31 July, 1994), p. G7.
[616] The term "multi-regionalist" applied to people who believed human evolution led to inherent and drastic differences in intelligence between the races.
[617] W. Newman, 'Review: The Ethnic Myth', *Social Forces*, 61 (1982-1983), p. 291.

Despite its universalist message, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* was still considered hazardous. As the University of Connecticut sociologist William Newman put it, although Steinberg "openly acknowledges the affinity between biosocial thinking and racist doctrines, and cautions that such connections need not be inevitable," in the "hands of the uninitiated this could become a very dangerous book."[618] Writing for the *International Migration Review*, David Lopez of the University of California, Los Angeles, argued that *The Ethnic Phenomenon* could be "approached in two ways: as the sociobiology of ethnicity, or as a contribution to our understanding of ethnicity in spite of the author's biosocial orientation. I fear that many will simply not approach it at all," since the "ideological associations of sociobiology are so antithetical to the beliefs of liberal and progressive social scientists."[619]

More people were willing to approach van den Berghe's book than Newman had anticipated, but those who did routinely fell victim to the naturalistic fallacy. In her review for *Transforming Anthropology*, for instance, Evelyn Newman Phillip of the University of South Florida suggested that *The Ethnic Phenomenon* was little more than a thinly-veiled attempt to excuse and facilitate racial oppression. In an effort to "demonstrate that systems of colonization, slavery, middlemen minorities, caste, consociationalism, and assimilation serve the needs of the powerful to ensure survival of their kinship group," Philip wrote, van den Berghe "sanitizes the brutalities of systems such as colonization and slavery."[620]

In 1988, van den Berghe ceded the behavioral spotlight to Frances Aboud, whose book *Children and Prejudice* became a leading and authoritative source on the intrinsic nature of prejudice. "Prejudice in children can be viewed as not simply a miniature version of adult prejudice," Aboud wrote, "but as a reflection of their age-related level of functioning."[621] Or, as Lawrence Hirschfeld put it more bluntly: "Children form racial categories by opening their eyes and looking."[622] Young children "readily learn to distinguish race in much the same way that they learn about other perceptually salient human property—say, being tall or blond," Hirschfeld continued. "The reason that children learn about being tall, blond, or black before they learn

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[618] Ibid.
[619] D. Lopez, 'Review: The Ethnic Phenomenon', *International Migration Review*, 17/2 (Summer, 1983), pp. 353-4.
[620] E. Phillip, 'Review: The Ethnic Phenomenon', *Transforming Anthropology*, 2/2 (1991), p. 15.
[621] F. Aboud, *Children and Prejudice*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1988), preface.
[622] Hirschfeld offered a more nuanced take for those who were interested: "A slightly more subtle version might hold that in virtue of the contingencies of power and authority, adults draw children's attention to race. Then children would open their eyes and discover it." See: L. Hirschfeld, 'Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children?', *American Anthropologist*, 104/2 (2002), pp. 611-627.

about being Republican or French is because blacks and tall and blond people are more visually prominent than Republicans or French folk."[623]

Despite the popularity of Frances Aboud's research on the nature of prejudice in children, most anthropologists refused to touch the subject, according to Hirschfeld, who grew increasingly impatient with his field's timidity in the coming years. The usual explanations for the social science's lack of interest in studying childhood prejudice—most of which were traceable to anthropology's earlier "embarrassing" juxtapositions of Western children with their "primitive" counterparts across the world—were no longer credible, Hirschfeld believed. A more convincing explanation was that "anthropology's faint image of children reflects a more general tendency in American social science to view childhood as a way-station on the path to [full adulthood]." This was a "curious state of affairs given that virtually all contemporary anthropology is based on the premise that culture is learned, not inherited."[624]

An even more convincing explanation for the timidity behind this "curious state of affairs," however, was that the Left simply refused to entertain any explanation of prejudice that was rooted in biology—not because they distrusted the science, but because they distrusted what the public would do with such science. Only when the Left came to view the naturalization of prejudice as having the potential to further the progressive cause was it briefly and cautiously embraced.

The mixed and oftentimes unpredictable reception of evolutionary explanations of hate and prejudice on display in this chapter complements several historiographical themes mentioned in the literature review. In *Science Under Fire*, Andrew Jewett traces how Americans came to treat certain scientific claims as threats to democratic and moral ideals, yet the history of EP's treatment of prejudice exposes the highly fragmented nature of this resistance. Ideological recombination is once again at play, as many Americans who would have likely rejected determinist explanations of bigotry under different circumstances instead pushed for racial bias to be pathologized by the state—in the hope that this would make it easier to "treat" and potentially "cure" prejudice with federal funds.

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[623] L. Hirschfeld, 'Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children?', *American Anthropologist*, 104/2 (2002), pp. 611-627.
[624] Ibid.

Gary Gerstle's *American Crucible* helps explain why so many left-leaning Americans were eager for scientists to step in to help end the scourge of prejudice in the United States. Decades of tension between those who endorsed civic nationalism versus those who viewed America in ethno-racial terms—as a country "held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government,"[625] as Gerstle puts it—had left liberals open to experimentation when it came to solving this seemingly intractable problem. At the same time, psychological research that pointed to the universality of coalitional prejudice as opposed to individual bias was received with far less enthusiasm, which suggests that even those who were receptive to the science of hate drew the line at any science that could further justify large-scale wars and tribal alliances.

The scattered and seemingly disjointed nature of the Left's reaction to the science of prejudice also complicates Richard Hofstadter's account of cyclical anti-intellectualism, as well as the critique of the deficit model of public engagement with science put forth by Jane Gregory and Steve Miller in *Science in Public*—neither of which fully addresses the nuance present in these debates during EP's heyday. The public's perception of these scientific revelations was not simply predicated on preexisting narratives that they already held dear; they were also heavily dependent on the potential of these studies to either heal or further wreak havoc on a fragile society, in which interethnic tensions dominated the news.

Somewhat paradoxically, many on the Left who were eager to learn about and admit to their own racial biases still clung to the idea that these biases were culturally constructed. Here, the "science" of bias was acceptable if it could be used to expose a problem that had been forged by society rather than natural selection. This was not what the science indicated, however, and in rejecting the possibility that prejudice and xenophobia were species-wide phenomena, the Left implicitly dismissed scientific accounts of coalitional cooperation as well—thereby making it more difficult to address the very problems liberals sought to solve.

[625] G. Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton University Press (2001), pp. 4-5.

PREJUDICE

The Science of Ethnocentrism: "Highly Flammable Material"

As he reflected on the increasingly violent crisis unfolding in the Balkans during the 1990s, the moral philosopher Peter Singer recognized an age-old problem dressed up in new clothing. For Singer, the existence of what would have been considered "white on white" violence in the United States was proof that these issues ran more than skin-deep. Racism and out-group aggression may not be inevitable elements of the human experience, Singer concluded, but these emotions were certainly natural enough that they could be easily summoned by the slightest perversions of culture. "The tragedy of the Balkans has shown only too vividly how ethnic hatred can be revived among people who have lived peacefully with each other for decades," Singer wrote in 2000, as he urged his fellow leftists to accept this uncomfortable reality. "Racism can be learned and unlearned, but racist demagogues hold their torches over highly flammable material."[626]

Richard Lewontin was another prominent left-leaning academic who encouraged his readers to speak more openly about the reality of racial categorization and its repercussions. Pattern recognition was an unavoidable element of the human experience, he insisted, and the colorblind utopia that well-meaning liberals were chasing was essentially a nonsensical pipe dream. The era's most common defense against accusations of racism—"I don't see color"—may have been politically correct, but it was glaringly and scientifically inaccurate. In 1982, Lewontin attempted to highlight the complex relationship between the illusions and realities of racial categorization:

> In ordinary parlance we still speak of Africans as one race, Europeans as another, Asians as another. And this distinction corresponds to our everyday sensory impressions. No one would mistake a Masai for a Japanese or either for a Finn. Despite variation from individual to individual within these groups, the differences between groups in skin color, hair form, and some facial features makes them clearly different. Racism takes these evident differences and claims that they demonstrate major genetic separation between 'races.'…We have no difficulty at all in telling apart individuals in our own group, but 'they' all look alike. Once, in upper Egypt, my wife was approached by an Egyptian who began a lively conversation with her under the impression that he knew her. After she repeatedly

[626] Singer, *A Darwinian Left*, p. 36.

> protested that he was mistaken, he apologized, saying, in effect, "I'm sorry but all you European women look alike.[627]

Over the course of the next three decades, evolutionary psychologists set out to understand why people like the confused Egyptian stranger in Lewontin's story acted the way they did—why superficial physical categorization was such a tempting trap into which humans of all cultures routinely fell. The answer, they believed, had less to do with hate and more to do with cooperation: The coalitional adaptations that had allowed humans to work together in order to solve large-scale challenges in the ancestral environment had necessitated the creation and exclusion of out-groups.[628] "Xenophobic behavior was supposed to result from the process of kin recognition, and obviously people with different physical features couldn't be your close kin," wrote Nancy Dess and Richard Bloom.[629] (Researchers at the University of Amsterdam several years later found that oxytocin helped drive these exclusionary emotions, by encouraging an affinity toward in-group members and an aversion to those in out-groups.)[630]

This did not mean that humans were fated to live their lives as xenophobic bigots, however. "It is not in the genes that African Americans and European Americans will be mutually prejudiced and discriminatory," Nancy Dess and Harold Fishbein reassured their readers, nor was it written in our genetic code that "white Americans will demonize Americans of Japanese descent." Instead, it was how humans defined the out-group that determined the direction and severity of their prejudices. Dess and Fishbein also made sure to note that our genetic tendency to discriminate needed to be triggered by an exacerbating environment. The Hutus and the Tutsis, they pointed out, "share a language and religion, have intermarried extensively, and have engaged in complex sociopolitical relations for hundreds of years. Tribal identities did not make the massacres of the mid-1990s inevitable."[631]

In 2003, Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, and Robert Kurzban found that although humans automatically "encode the race of each individual they encounter," these "computational mechanisms" were merely "byproducts of mechanisms that evolved for some alternative function." This meant that "manipulating coalitional variables can dramatically decrease the

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[627] R. Lewontin, *Science for the People*, 14/2 (March/April, 1982), p. 11.
[628] D. Buss, W. von Hippel, 'Psychological barriers to evolutionary psychology: Ideological bias and coalitional adaptations', *Archives of Scientific Psychology, 6*/1 (2018), pp. 148-158.
[629] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence,* p. viii.
[630] R. Bregman, *Human Kind: A Hopeful History*, New York: Back Bay Books (2019), p. 74.
[631] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence,* p. 158.

extent to which race is noticed and remembered." Humans, in other words, were preprogrammed to identify and distrust members of an out-group, but what constituted an out-group was highly malleable.[632] Unlike visual patterns associated with age and sex, a person's designated "race" was a "very implausible candidate for a conceptual primitive to have been built into our evolved cognitive machinery," evolutionary psychologists argued, since our Pleistocene ancestors had traveled primarily by foot—meaning that their contact with other humans would have been "geographically local," and a "typical individual would almost never have encountered people drawn from populations genetically distant enough to qualify as belonging to a different 'race.'" Instead, racial encoding had evolved for the purpose of "detecting coalitions and alliances."[633]

Unfortunately, the instinct to form and monitor coalitions and alliances was also central to what constituted "racism" in the modern world. "There are specific adaptations that are designed to cause individuals to desire to belong to groups, and, under certain conditions, to systematically exclude and exploit members of other social groups," wrote Robert Kurzban and Mark Leary, which meant that "certain instances of stigmatization can be understood as cases of out-group discrimination and exploitation."[634] Ironically, it was an evolved desire for cooperation, belonging, and acceptance that had facilitated our fear and hatred of the "other":

> The mechanisms underlying coalitional psychology are likely to be deployed when people perceive themselves as members of a meaningful and potentially cooperative group…When coalitional psychology is engaged, we expect phenomena such as in-group favoritism and competitiveness. The cues that someone is a member of a different coalition are likely to be extremely variable. Members of cooperative groups tend to differ in their language, speech patterns, clothing, cultural rituals, and so forth. Any of these features, subject to the vagaries of cultural and historical processes, might lead to the activation of coalitional psychology and the concurrent systems that are designed to exploit and prevent exploitation by members of other groups...In modern environments, one cue that is often used is racial variation between groups…Racial cues do not differ substantively from other cues, such as language or dress—they are simply one way that people distinguish coalitions, often for the purpose of exploitation.[635]

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[632] L. Cosmides. J. Tooby, R. Kurzban, 'Perceptions of Race', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7/4 (April, 2003), pp. 173-9.
[633] Ibid.
[634] R. Kurzban, M. Leary, 'Evolutionary Origins of Stigmatization: The Functions of Social Exclusion', *Psychological Bulletin*, 127/2 (March, 2001), pp. 187-208.
[635] Ibid.

The cooperation required in order to build and sustain meaningful coalitions could be costly to the individual, however, and ethnocentrism was the glue that kept cooperative alliances intact when its members grew tempted to pursue a more solitary and risk-averse life. Ethnocentrism's bonding effect had been powerful, and it was therefore difficult to dissolve with education and cultural manipulation alone. While fear of members of one's own group could be deprogrammed rather easily through learning and increased interaction, fear and loathing directed at an out-group died hard.[636] This was especially true in the modern world, where rapid and mass migration made physical characteristics such as skin tone exceptionally tempting patterns to recognize and exploit. With the right approach, however, evolutionary psychologists believed that the ethnocentric glue could be weakened: When "cues of coalitional affiliation no longer track or correspond to race, subjects markedly reduce the extent to which they categorize others by race, and indeed may cease doing so entirely," Kurzban, Cosmides, and Tooby found. "Despite a lifetime's experience of race as a predictor of social alliance, less than 4 min [*sic*] of exposure to an alternate social world was enough to deflate the tendency to categorize by race," which was "simply one historically contingent subtype of coalition."[637,638]

Decision or Disease: Attempts to Pathologize Bias

By the mid-1990s, discussions surrounding implicit bias—and how to combat it—had become mainstream, as psychologists reckoned with the possibility that every human of every race—not just the stereotypical bigot—could harbor racist thoughts and prejudices. In 1998, the University of Washington psychologist Anthony Greenwald and the Harvard psychologist Mahzarin Banaji teamed up to develop a novel test for biases, which relied on rapid word and imagine association techniques.[639] Americans were eager to put their progressive credentials to the test by subjecting themselves to a trial by fire, and the press was there to encourage them. In 1988, *Psychology Today* ran a cover story that revealed that even Banaji—a woman and a

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[636] R. Hammond, R. Axelrod, 'The Evolution of Ethnocentrism', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50/6 (December, 2006), pp. 926-936.
[637] L. Cosmides. J. Tooby, R. Kurzban, 'Can race be erased? Coalitional computation and social categorization', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 98/26 (18 December, 2001), pp. 15387-15392.
[638] Evolutionary psychologists would later claim that racial categorization was a byproduct of an evolved "alliance detection system." See: D. Pietraszewski et al., 'Constituents of political cognition: Race, party politics, and the alliance detection system', *Cognition*, 140 (July, 2015), pp. 24-39.
[639] Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness'.

minority—was not immune to prejudicial thoughts. "I showed very strong prejudices," she confessed. "It was truly a disconcerting experience." Banaji was far from alone: The majority of people who took the test—including self-described "progressives"—were more inclined to associate positive adjectives with traditionally "white" names and negative adjectives with traditionally "Black" names.[640]

As word of these tests spread, their popularity grew. They were discussed on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2006,[641] and around 2008, the University of Chicago began offering their own tests to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection. During the online assessment, users encountered a total of one hundred men, some of whom were Black and some of whom were white—all holding either guns or cellphones. Users were instructed to shoot the gunmen and holster their gun when they encountered a man holding a cell phone. When the *New York Times* columnist and lifelong progressive liberal Nicholas Kristof took the test,[642] he shot the virtual armed Black men after an average of 0.679 seconds, and the virtual armed white men after an average of 0.694 seconds. Kristof also holstered his gun more quickly when he encountered unarmed white men as opposed to unarmed Black men—indicating a small yet significant racial bias. Like Banaji, Kristof could take comfort in the fact that his biases fit a larger pattern: "Most whites and many blacks are more quick to shoot blacks, no matter how egalitarian they profess to be," Kristof reported. These types of tests "very cleverly show that a stunningly large proportion of people who honestly believe themselves to be egalitarian unconsciously associate good with white and bad with black."[643]

In 2002, Susan Fiske from the Department of Psychology at Princeton University argued that most biases were like those exhibited by Mr. Kristof: culturally constructed, relatively tame, and alterable with sufficient amounts of inter-group contact. "Most people reveal unconscious, subtle biases, which are relatively automatic, cool, indirect, ambiguous, and ambivalent," Fiske wrote. "Such biases result from internal conflict between cultural ideals and cultural biases," and while a "small minority of people, extremists, do harbor blatant biases that are more conscious, hot, direct, and unambiguous," these biases resulted from "perceived intergroup conflict over

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[640] A. Paul, 'Where Bias Begins: The Truth About Stereotypes', *Psychology Today* [New York], (1 May, 1998).
[641] 'Overcoming Prejudice', Oprah Brand Website, (1 January, 2006), consulted online (6 August, 2020), https://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/overcoming-prejudice/13.
[642] N. Kristof, 'A Confession of Liberal Intolerance', *The New York Times* [New York], (8 May, 2016), p. SR1.
[643] N. Kristof, 'Our Racist, Sexist Selves', *The New York Times* [New York], (6 April, 2008).

economics and values, in a world perceived to be hierarchical and dangerous." Bias reduction would therefore come from "education, economic opportunity, and constructive intergroup contact," much like Allport had predicted in *The Nature of Prejudice* nearly half a century earlier. Allport's calculus began to break down, however, when it confronted the "extreme biases" that "underlie aggression," in which case "personal economic deprivation is not in fact the culprit."[644]

The extremists to whom Dr. Fiske alluded were more common than she let on, however, and their gnawing presence had fueled a political campaign to categorize extreme bias as a disease of the mind. The clinical psychologist Edward Dunbar was one of many mental health professionals who, over the course of his career, had been inundated with requests for help from people who exhibited biases that were, without question, "conscious, hot, direct, and unambiguous," as Fiske put it. There was the woman who felt the need to ritually cleanse herself throughout the day because she feared she would be "infected" by Jews, the waiter whose disdain for Black people was so pronounced that he would regularly fling their plates on the table with such vigor that he could not hold down a job, and the Vietnam War veteran who avoided Asians at all costs.[645]

These clients suffered from extreme forms of prejudice, and Dunbar was one of a growing number of mental health professionals who were petitioning the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to include "pathological bias" as a diagnosable disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)—a move that would have theoretically allowed courts to treat violent perpetrators of vicious hate crimes more leniently. "When I see someone who won't see a physician because they're Jewish, or who can't sit in a restaurant because there are Asians, or feels threatened by homosexuals in the workplace, the party line in mental health says, 'This is not our problem,'" Dunbar said during an interview with *The Washington Post*. "If it's not our problem, whose problem is it?" While most people were "inculcated with stereotypes and biases with cultural issues," he added, "some individuals not only hold beliefs that are very rigid, but they are part of a psychological problem."[646]

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[644] S. Fiske, 'What We Know Now About Bias and Intergroup Conflict, the Problem of the Century', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11/4 (August, 2002), pp. 123-8.
[645] Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness'.
[646] Ibid.

Alvin Poussaint, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, had been pushing for the DSM to include extreme bias since 1969.[647] The pathologically prejudiced clients that Dunbar had encountered were clearly "delusional," Poussaint said. They "imagine people are going to do all kinds of bad things and hurt them, and feel they have to do something to protect themselves" to the point that they are unable to "work and function."[648] A year earlier, Poussaint had argued that it was "time for the American Psychiatric Association to designate extreme racism as a mental health problem. Clinicians need guidelines for recognizing delusional racism in all its stages so that they can provide treatment. Otherwise, racists will continue to fall through the cracks of the mental health system, and we can expect more of them to act out their deadly delusions."[649] "If you have a mental process that leads some people to commit genocide," Dr. Poussaint asked, "how can you not think that's a mental disorder?"[650]

The genocides and pogroms of the 20th century had indeed facilitated the push to classify extreme bigotry as a brain disorder. During a meeting of the National Urban League in 1958, the psychologist Alfred J. Marrow had argued that widespread prejudice—the evidence of which was glaringly obvious to anyone who opened a newspaper—was "primarily psychological in nature," and that "we must turn for guidance and help to the behavioral scientists." This approach gained momentum in the 1960s, when Black activists began to argue that racism required professional medical interventions, according to W. Carson Byrd and James Thomas. In 1963, the American Hospital Association and the APA released a joint statement that cited mental illness as the primary health problem in America. That same year, President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Centers Act, which stated that "mental illness was both cause and effect of racism."[651]

Not everyone believed that pathologizing bigotry was the right move. "I don't think racism is a mental illness, and that's because one hundred percent of people are racist," argued Paul Fink, who had been president of the APA from 1988 to 1989. "If you have a diagnostic

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[647] W. Byrd, J. Thomas, 'How racism came to be called a mental illness—and why that's a problem', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (7 June, 2016).
[648] Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness'.
[649] A. Poussaint, 'They Hate. They Kill. Are They Insane?', *The New York Times* [New York], (26 August, 1999), p. A17.
[650] E. Eakin, 'Bigotry as Mental Illness Or Just Another Norm', *The New York Times* [New York], (15 January, 2000), p. B9.
[651] W. Byrd, J. Thomas, 'How racism came to be called a mental illness—and why that's a problem'.

category that fits one hundred percent of people, it's not a diagnostic category."[652] Darrel Regier, a research director at the APA, remained open-minded but urged caution. "If you are going to put racism into the next edition of DSM, you would have enormous criticism," Regier said during an interview with *The Washington Post*, before suggesting that the APA would likely be accused of "pathologizing all of life." The psychiatrist Sally Satel was less diplomatic: "I think it's absurd," said Satel, who believed that such an addition to the DSM would allow violent racists to "use it as a defense" in court.[653] The New York State Psychiatric Institute psychiatrist Dr. Robert Spitzer voiced a similar concern in 2000. "If psychiatry were to define racism as a mental disorder, you'd have to include the Nazis, and the Serbs who hate Muslims," Spitzer argued. "There would be no end…Almost everyone would be ill."[654] James Jones, a professor of social psychology at the University of Delaware, felt that such a move would dilute and distract from the larger issue. "Racism is so deeply ingrained in our culture that to try to identify individuals who are racist is in some ways to trivialize the depth and breadth of the problem," Jones said when asked about whether or not racism should be added to the D.S.M-IV in 2000.[655]

Gary Belkin, the deputy chief of psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital in New York, felt that such concerns were overblown. The APA's decision to add pedophilia to the DSM had not led to blanket exonerations of child predators, he noted, nor would the addition of extreme prejudice lead to blanket exonerations of violent racists, antisemites, or homophobes. "Psychiatrists who are uneasy with including something like this in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual need to get used to the fact that the whole manual reflects social context," Belkin argued. "That is true of depression on down. Pathological bias is no more or less scientific than major depression."[656]

The leadership of the American Psychiatric Association remained unconvinced, however, and continued to reject repeated requests (most of which came from Black psychiatrists) to include racism in the DSM—a consensus Poussaint chalked up to fear. "Calling racism a mental illness might appear to absolve racists of their moral responsibility," he speculated, "thus decreasing their motivation for self-examination and change."[657] Dr. Poussaint believed a deeper

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[652] Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness'.
[653] Ibid.
[654] E. Eakin, 'Bigotry as Mental Illness Or Just Another Norm', *The New York Times* [New York], (15 January, 2000), p. B9.
[655] Ibid.
[656] Vedantam, 'Psychiatry Ponders Whether Extreme Bias Can Be an Illness'.
[657] Poussaint, 'They Hate. They Kill. Are They Insane?'.

cowardice was also at play; that the APA's embrace of extreme bigotry as a disorder would have led to embarrassing and uncomfortable bouts of introspection within an organization whose members were overwhelmingly white. In 2000, just over two percent of the APA was not white and male, and if they had agreed to incorporate a disease model of racism, they would have had to look at their "friends, their relatives, and themselves" under the harsh glare of an awkward and unsympathetic spotlight.[658]

The APA's reluctance to pathologize bias was indicative of a larger and more fearful academic culture that refused to biologize anything having to do with race—even the conception of it. Behavioral scientists like Lawrence Hirschfeld regularly called out what they believed to be social science's myopic perception of race and racism, which was not only flawed but potentially harmful. "Doing science by ruling out possibilities because we are uncomfortable with them is not a good strategy," Hirschfeld claimed. Although our "idea of race" may not be biologically determined, the "abstract principles that give rise to the idea probably are both biologically determined and products of an evolved adaptation. In short, race is something for which we have a prepared susceptibility."[659] Well-meaning educators in the social sciences were attempting to "convince people that something they know perfectly well is not the case," which was an ineffective way to change people's minds. "We don't get people to diet by telling them that they are not hungry," Hirschfeld wrote, and "we won't get people to stop deeply cognizing race by telling them that they do not…The susceptibility to think in racial terms is genuinely within us, clearly in virtue of our cognitive endowment."[660]

"Burn This Message": The Napoleon Chagnon Fiasco

If, as Hirschfeld argued, it was true that racialist thinking was part of our "cognitive endowment," it followed that the inter-ethnic violence that continued to play out on the world stage had less to do with economic hardship and more to do with an organic hatred and fear of the "other." The anthropological establishment, however, was unwilling to part with the increasingly nonsensical claim that violence was linked almost exclusively to resource

[658] Eakin, 'Bigotry as Mental Illness Or Just Another Norm'.
[659] L. Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture, and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds*, Cambridge: MIT Press (1998), p. xii.
[660] Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making*, p. xiii.

competition, and in 2000 these competing narratives came to a head in a scandal that upended the field and did lasting damage to the reputation of one of its most popular members.

The controversy can be traced to 1988, when the University of California anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon (whom John Tooby once referred to as "the world's most famous living social anthropologist")[661] issued a direct threat to the anthropological status quo by publishing "Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population" in *Science,* which detailed the lives of the Yanomamö tribe in the Amazon rainforest bordering Venezuela and Brazil. Over the course of twenty-three years, Chagnon had spent a total of fifty months living among the Yanomamö, and had concluded that the tribe's fear of and hatred toward other tribes had virtually nothing to do with resource scarcity and everything to do with an innate desire to ensure genetic continuity.[662] Ever since he had first been introduced to a group of Yanomamö warriors who had "just concluded a bloody club fight with a neighboring village over the abduction of seven women," according to *The New York Times*, Chagnon had begun to question the ethos of his anthropological colleagues; that tribal violence was induced by squabbles over land and food (of which the tribe had plenty). "I began realizing that my training in [the University of] Michigan was not all that it was supposed to be," Chagnon admitted, after he had watched the Yanomami raid the same nearby village twenty-five times over the course of seventeen months.[663]

Chagnon knew he was challenging years of anthropological consensus. "Many anthropologists tend to treat warfare as a phenomenon that occurs independently of other forms of violence in the same group," he wrote in *Science*. This had led his peers to "restrict the search for the causes of the war to issues over which whole groups might contest—such as access to rich land, productive hunting regions, and scarce resources—and, hence, view primitive warfare as being reducible solely to contests over scarce or dwindling material resources." Chagnon invoked the theory of inclusive fitness when he argued that "it is to be expected that individuals

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[661] J. Tooby, 'Jungle Fever', *Slate*, (25 October, 2000), consulted online (10 September, 2018), https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2000/10/jungle-fever.html.
[662] N. Chagnon, 'Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population', *Science*, 239/4843 (26 February, 1988), pp. 985-992.
[663] E. Eakin, 'How Napoleon Chagnon Became Our Most Controversial Anthropologist', *The New York Times Magazine* [New York], (17 February, 2013), p. 32.

(or groups of closely related individuals) will attempt to appropriate both material and reproductive resources from neighbors whenever the probable costs are less than the benefits."[664]

The Yanomamö, Chagnon discovered, were adept at redefining the out-group as needed, and homicide—along with the hatred that fueled it—could occur "both within and between villages." When "killing occurs within the village, the village fissions and the principals of the two new groups then begin raiding each other," Chagnon observed. The "most common explanation given for raids (warfare) is revenge for a previous killing," and the "most common explanation for the initial cause of the fighting is 'women.'" Chagnon argued that overt displays of out-group aggression was a way for Yanomamö men to advertise their courage and win mates without harming members of their own group, and those who demonstrated a "willingness to act violently and to exact revenge for the deaths of kin may have higher marital and reproductive success."[665] Timid men who exhibited cowardice suffered societal repercussions: "In all but the most determined raiding parties, a few men drop out for reasons such as being 'sick' or 'stepping on a thorn.' Some of these dropouts privately admitted to me that they were simply frightened," Chagnon recalled. "Chronic dropouts acquire a reputation for cowardice and often become the subject of frequent insult and ridicule, and their wives become targets of increased sexual attention from other men."[666]

As the evolutionists had hypothesized, the impassioned out-group aggression exhibited by the Yanomamö stemmed from in-group affinity, and with it a desire to form coalitions. "In order to understand why blood revenge is such a powerful motive among the Yanomamö and other tribal groups organized by kinship," Chagnon wrote, "one must first understand how complex and pervasive kinship relationships are in such communities." Tribal members would routinely "pool resources and reallocate them to needy members," and would "cooperate for mutual protection." If "someone in the village is killed, the probability is very high that he or she will have many bereaved close kin, including the village leader or leaders who have more kin than others; the leaders are the very individuals who decide whether killings are revenged."[667] The magnitude of the "will for revenge" was directly proportional to "kinship density," according to Chagnon. Men who were willing to risk their lives during a raid took these risks "in

[664] Chagnon, 'Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population', pp. 985-992.
[665] Ibid.
[666] Ibid.
[667] Ibid.

proportion to the amount of mutual support they receive from comrades…Lone raiders do not exist."[668]

Although Chagnon was aware that he was bucking tradition when he submitted his observations to *Science* (he had always espoused a "more Hobbesian view of human nature than is popular in most anthropological circles," according to John Tooby),[669] nothing could have prepared him for the life-altering controversy his work sparked a decade later. In 2000, the leadership of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) received an ominous letter from the anthropologists Terence Turner and Leslie Sponsel—of Cornell University and the University of Hawaii, respectively—informing them that a soon-to-be-published book by Patrick Tierney, *Darkness in El Dorado* (2000), was about to expose a scandal whose "scale, ramifications, and sheer criminality" was "unparalleled in the history of Anthropology." Among the accusations leveled against Chagnon by Tierney and summarized by Turner and Sponsel was that Chagnon and his research partner James Neel had "greatly exacerbated, and probably started, the epidemic of measles that killed hundreds, perhaps thousands" of indigenous people during his research trips to the Brazilian rainforest. Even worse, they had likely "done so as part of an experiment in sociobiology," according to a report by Thomas Gregor and Daniel Gross.[670]

The letter had been picked up by the press in the summer of 2000 (The *Guardian*'s headline: "Scientist 'killed Amazon Indians to test race theory'"),[671] and as the AAA was beginning its investigation, other academic institutions were already concluding their own inquiries, all of which cleared Chagnon of all but the most benign charges. "Well before the AAA produced its report," Gregor and Gross found during their review of the investigations, the National Academy of Sciences, the International Genetic Epidemiology Society, the American Society of Human Genetics, and the Society for Visual Anthropology had all "found the charges they examined to be without merit." Even the Yanomamö issued a statement in defense of Chagnon:

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[668] Chagnon, 'Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population'.
[669] Tooby, 'Jungle Fever'.
[670] T. Gregor and D. Gross, 'Guilt by Association: The Culture of Accusation and the American Anthropological Association's Investigation of "Darkness in El Dorado"', *American Anthropologist*, 106/4 (December, 2004), pp. 687-698.
[671] P. Brown, 'Scientist "killed Amazon Indians to test race theory"', *The Guardian* [London], (23 September, 2000).

> We have read the grave statements made by the journalist Patrick Tierney...concerning Dr. Napoleon Chagnon. We strongly reject these statements because they are lies. The fact was that a severe epidemic of measles struck communities on the Padamo, Ocamo, Mavaca and Alto Orinoco rivers during 1967. Dr. Chagnon—known among us as Shaki—came to our communities with some physicians and he vaccinated us against the epidemic disease, which was killing us. Thanks to this, hundreds of us survived and we are very thankful to Dr. Chagnon and his collaborators for their help. We demand that our national government investigate the false statements of Tierney, which taint the humanitarian mission carried out by Shaki [Chagnon] with much tenderness and respect for our communities.[672]

It was clear that far from harming the Yanomamö, Chagnon had helped them avoid a disease-ridden disaster. Yet despite a lack of evidence that Chagnon had acted inappropriately, and in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary, the AAA went ahead with their investigation and delivered a 325-page report, which was filled with "opinion papers, ethical pronouncements," and "vast but unbalanced background materials," according to Gregor and Gross. "When those materials are stripped away, what remains is a verdict of not guilty on the truly serious charge—genocide—and guilty on some comparatively minor issues related to publications and fieldwork." As an unnamed anthropologist put it in an interview with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Chagnon had been "accused of capital murder, and it appears that he's now been convicted of a parking violation."[673]

Chagnon may have gotten away with a slap on the wrist, but by the time the last of the allegations were discredited in the fall of 2000, the damage to both his reputation and his field had been done.[674] As Gregor and Gross highlighted, the AAA Task Force never alleged that Chagnon had lied. "On the contrary, they acknowledge its members' lack of expertise on the [Yanomamö] and abstained from evaluating whether his data were correct." The AAA was also clear about its motives in deciding to pursue the investigation. In the words of the Task Force: "First, [the *Science* article's] publication coincided with a disastrous moment in the long history of the struggle for Yanomami land rights in Brazil…Second, the article received extensive coverage in the popular press," which had "created stereotypes that harmed the Yanomami."[675]

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[672] Gregor, Gross, 'Guilt by Association', pp. 687-698.
[673] T. Gregor, D. Gross, 'Anthropology and the Search for the Enemy Within', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (26 July, 2002).
[674] Ibid.
[675] Gregor, Gross, 'Guilt by Association', pp. 687-98.

The AAA viewed Chagnon as collateral damage in a campaign to fight stereotypes and save face.

John Tooby did not usually concern himself with press-fueled controversies in the behavioral sciences, but some misrepresentations of his field were worth correcting. He was, after all, an anthropologist by training, and there were real-world consequences not to what Chagnon had done, but to what had been done to Chagnon:

> Much damage has already been done—and not just to the reputations of Neel and Chagnon. Tierney's claim that an immunization program can start an epidemic has been carried around the world in media reports. This myth could compromise the ability of health workers to administer such programs, especially in poor countries, and people could die as a result. Moreover, indigenous cultures will not benefit from the public's impression that they are endangered only by the occasional anthropologist, when in fact they are victims of far more powerful forces, ranging from well-meaning missionaries to untrammeled modernization. The slow-motion tragedy of the world's indigenous peoples continues, and Tierney's thoroughly dishonest book is just one more exploitation of them.[676]

In her own reporting on the controversy, Alice Dreger—in the spirit of delivering a "cautionary tale to scholarly associations, which have the challenging duty of protecting scholarship and scholars from baseless and sensationalistic charges in the era of the Internet and twenty-four-hour news cycles"—argued that Turner and Sponsel had been waiting for an opportunity to bury Chagnon ever since their "various pre-*Darkness* charges" against him had failed to "garner much attention." Tierney's damning manuscript, which had been delivered to Turner and Sponsel before its publication, had presumably offered them the raw material they had long sought in order to destroy the work and reputation of a controversial anthropologist.[677]

Journalists had also failed Chagnon by considering Tierney's story "too good to check," according to Dreger. "In the current media market," she wrote, "reporters are rewarded for primacy and speed, not for accuracy," which meant that people like Tierney could "get far with a lot of untruths if their story is especially juicy."[678] Dreger also reported that as the AAA was working through their inquiry of Chagnon, Sarah Hrdy had written to Jane Hill—a former

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[676] Tooby, 'Jungle Fever'.
[677] A. Dreger, 'Darkness's Descent on the American Anthropological Association', *Human Nature*, 22 (February, 2011), pp. 225-246.
[678] Ibid.

president of the AAA who had chaired the Task Force—to voice her concerns over what was becoming an increasingly authoritarian investigation. Hill's response revealed that it was all a show:

> Burn this message. [Tierney's] book is just a piece of sleaze, that's all there is to it (some cosmetic language will be used in the report, but we *all* agree on that) [emphasis original]. But I think the AAA had to do something because I really think that the future of work by anthropologists with indigenous peoples in Latin America—with a high potential to do good—was put seriously at risk by its accusations, and silence on the part of the AAA would have been interpreted as either assent or cowardice. Whether we're doing the right thing will have to be judged by posterity.[679]

With the help of an attorney, Chagnon was eventually able to convince the AAA to remove the Task Force report from its website in 2009, although by that time Chagnon's reputation was already in tatters.[680]

Guilty by Association: The Bell Curve and Kevin MacDonald Make Trouble

The stubborn aversion to the type of behavioral research that scientists like Chagnon were conducting—expressed by the timid anthropologists at the AAA and, to a certain extent, the skittish psychiatrists at the APA—reflected a larger sense of existential dread that had begun to corrode the behavioral sciences the moment *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* was released in 1994. Written by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (a psychologist and political scientist, respectively), *The Bell Curve* and the media frenzy that followed was precisely what behavioral and social scientists had been fearing since the discreditation of John Philippe Rushton. Herrnstein and Murray broke every taboo in modern science when they claimed that the IQ gaps between the races were partly heritable, and they had written these forbidden words for the general public's consumption. Making matters worse was the fact that *The Bell Curve*'s publisher—The Free Press—chose to court controversy rather than squelch it, with an ad campaign that highlighted the polemical nature of the book. (*The Bell*

[679] Obtained via email [to Dreger during her investigation] from Hrdy, November 6, 2009; used with Hill's permission. See: Dreger, 'Darkness's Descent on the American Anthropological Association', pp. 225-246.
[680] Dreger, 'Darkness's Descent on the American Anthropological Association', pp. 225-246.

Curve's first dust cover made sure to mention that it was "certain to ignite an explosive controversy.")[681]

News outlets were more than happy to fulfill The Free Press's prophecy by lavishing attention on Herrnstein and Murray, who, as the Harvard law professor Randall Kennedy pointed out, knew how to "make the most of controversiality." The authors had "succeeded in transforming their latest work into a profitable news item," Kennedy continued, and they did so by "proclaiming that they have revealed something hidden and new."[682] The public, argued Kennedy, "ought to distinguish between work that is usefully controversial because it opens up new avenues of thought," and "work that is controversial merely because it provides an occasion for shouting about pre-formed views…Contrary to the impression they sometimes give, Murray and Herrnstein are not intellectual pioneers; they are popularizers who have a keen sense of how to make a big splash among people who read opinion magazines and op-eds."[683]

Even notoriously liberal publications like *The New Republic* could not resist the urge to capitalize on the drama Murray and Herrnstein chased. In 1994, with Andrew Sullivan at the helm, the *New Republic* ran a cover piece entitled "Race and I.Q.", which began with an excerpt from *The Bell Curve*. It was immediately attacked by friends and foes alike, many of whom publicly accused Sullivan of giving cover to the kind of racist "junk science" that had plagued the United States for over a century. "White Americans have rarely been constrained by reason, or morality, when it comes to asserting their superiority," the influential journalist Alexander Star pointed out. "Prejudice may no longer be the primary cause of our racial ills, but it works its way in more stealthy guises."[684] The prominent sociologist Nathan Glazer voiced a similar concern: "Should we be talking about this at all?" he asked. "Of course we will be talking about it: Charles Murray was on the most recent cover of The *New York Times Magazine*, and there is a full-page ad in the *Times Book Review* for *The Bell Curve*…What good will come of it?"[685] Alan Wolfe (author of *The Human Difference: Animals, Computers and the Necessity of Social Science*) suggested that Herrnstein and Murray, in their pursuit of fame, were acting irresponsibly, even if their findings were technically accurate. "Murray and Herrnstein sound like

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[681] 'In Response to "Race, Genes and I.Q."', *The New Republic* [Washington], (31 October, 1994).
[682] Ibid.
[683] Ibid.
[684] Ibid.
[685] Ibid.

two people who have found a way for racists to rationalize their racism without losing sleep over it," he wrote. "One could call what they are facilitating *Racist Chic*."[686]

Sullivan saw things differently. Reflecting on the controversy years later, he wrote that it had been his job as a journalist to report on important ideas and the people behind them, so that "controversial" arguments could be exposed to "scrutiny and criticism." For Sullivan, "ducking this issue was not an option and even seemed cowardly…I simply refuse to feel ashamed for publishing this debate, for showing that liberals need not be afraid of any set of ideas or empirical claims, and for believing that the best response is to air all of it, confident that the truth will ultimately win."[687]

Herrnstein, who died the same month *The Bell Curve* was released, was spared any potential humiliation, and if Charles Murray was bothered by these critiques, he hid it well. A decade before *The Bell Curve* made him famous, Murray had been an unemployed drifter battling a midlife crisis. Now, he was sipping Champagne on first-class flights to Aspen and musing to reporters about his courageous foray into what he himself described as "social science pornography."[688]

The Bell Curve sent shivers down the spines of those whose fields fell under the wide umbrella of social science, but evolutionary psychology was technically not a social science (most considered it to be a hybrid of social and natural science). Its practitioners were also adept at either ignoring or refuting unfounded connections to race science in the press, and despite the fact that people like Massimo Pigliucci—an influential biologist and philosopher—had suggested that *The Bell Curve* was actually a work of evolutionary psychology,[689] the field escaped the controversy relatively unscathed. *The Bell Curve* debacle had, however, sharpened the media's focus on the field's implications and connections, and although it was relatively easy for evolutionary psychologists to distance themselves from Herrnstein and Murray, it was far more

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[686] Ibid.
[687] A. Sullivan, 'Excuse Me, Mr. Coates', *The Dish Blog* (22 December, 2014), consulted online (6 May, 2022), https://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/12/22/excuse-me-mr-coates.
[688] J. Deparle, 'Daring Research or "Social Science Pornography"?', *The New York Times* [New York], (9 October, 1994), p. F48.
[689] M. Menie, M. Sarraf, 'Controversies in Evolutionary Psychology', *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*, T. Shackelford, V. Weekes-Shackelford (eds.), Springer (2021), pp. 1399-1420.

difficult for them to separate themselves from rogue actors like Kevin MacDonald, who flew the flag of evolutionary psychology without permission.

MacDonald published several journal articles that at first glance seemed to fall neatly in line with EP's take on tribalism. In *Politics and the Life Sciences*, for instance, he wrote:

> Social identity mechanisms were adaptive in the [ancestral environment] because an important set of outgroups were groups living in nearby areas that did not show detectable physical differences in appearance while nevertheless being on average less genetically similar than ingroups…As a result, mechanisms that result in discrimination in favor of ingroup and against outgroups would also tend to benefit people genetically. Obviously, in multi-racial, multi-ethnic states, social identity mechanisms may often result in maladaptive behavior, because ingroups and outgroups can be manipulated by the media, ethnic leaders, and other elites.[690]

Passages like this only indicated that MacDonald was guilty of stale prose, not bad science. The problem was that he was also a white supremacist, and was therefore regularly profiled in the press for his noxious views, which he attempted to justify using the parlance of evolutionary science. In 2000, MacDonald was the subject of a *Slate* piece titled "Evolutionary Psychology's Anti-Semite," and in a letter to Judith Shulevitz—the piece's author and *Slate*'s "Culturebox" column editor—John Tooby attempted to distance his field from MacDonald (who was "not remotely an evolutionary psychologist," Tooby charged, "any more than B.F. Skinner was a Freudian psychoanalyst"), and chastised Shulevitz for placing a spotlight on a dangerous fraud. "How are we to fight bad ideas?" Tooby began. "Choices include denouncing them (as immoral), showing them to be untrue, or ignoring them…In choosing moral denunciation, what have you done? Many things that MacDonald has not been able to do for himself. Through *Slate*, one of the Web's premier news gateways, you have made the obscure and fringe famous and well-indexed. You have constructed him as the key figure in a scandal or affair—the kind of thing people enjoy reading about."[691] MacDonald may have referred to himself as an evolutionary psychologist, but this kind of falsehood was what "journalism—investigative or not—is for: not to take people's claims about themselves at face value."[692]

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[690] K. MacDonald, 'An Integrative Evolutionary Perspective on Ethnicity', *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 20/1 (March, 2001), pp. 67-80.
[691] 'How To Deal With Fringe Academics', *Slate*, (7 February, 2000), consulted online (12 October, 2022), https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2000/02/how-to-deal-with-fringe-academics-6.html.
[692] Ibid.

Much like Andrew Sullivan had defended his decision to publish the *Bell Curve* excerpt, Shulevitz defended her editorial decision by arguing that her job was to report on important people and their ideas. For Shulevitz, *Slate* had reported on a controversy, not enabled it. "Should I have drawn attention to MacDonald and his theories? The answer to that one is easy: Yes. Vigorous discussion is always preferable to scornful silence. I'll concede that if this guy were just some nut posting on the Internet from his cabin in Montana, it might be silly to waste time on him. But Kevin MacDonald is a full professor at an accredited university. He holds three executive positions in a professional organization you and Leda helped found."

Tooby countered that publications like *Slate*—which thrived on political and cultural turmoil—were playing a dangerous game. "You are on to a far scarier story than you know," Tooby wrote back. "The world is overflowing with people who see one ethnic group or another as a threat, and these aggrieved are now, after 70 years' hiatus, being presented with respectable theoretical underpinnings. These are coming not from wicked sociobiologists or demented evolutionary psychologists but over their objections—from well-meaning, communitarian-oriented biologists. The floodgates are opening, and soon we will all be nostalgic for what will seem to us, in comparison, to be MacDonald's enchantingly tame early efforts."[693]

Shulevitz shrugged off the warnings. "You feel that your job here is to defend your profession against cavalier treatment by journalists like me," she shot back. "But that's not our mandate, as I understand it, nor will it result in anything useful to our readers." Shulevitz then accused Tooby of failing to adequately denounce imposters like MacDonald: "For the purposes of argument, let's grant your premise that Kevin MacDonald isn't an evolutionary psychologist," she wrote. "If he's not but calls himself one…does that relieve you of the obligation to comment? As I understand it, it is the job of intellectuals to speak out about things that matter to them…Once you knew what he was working on, your and your peers' total silence could all too easily be interpreted by the rest of the world as tacit agreement."[694]

[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Dangerous Implications

Evolutionary psychology had managed to survive twenty years without a Kevin MacDonald problem, but it was bound to arrive at some point. MacDonald embodied the type of pseudoscientific, value-driven, and rigidly determinist science that evolutionary psychologists had been wrestling to distance themselves from ever since Tooby and Cosmides laid the groundwork for their new discipline in Cambridge, MA. Evolutionary psychology (and adaptation-based behavioral science in general) was only interested in human universals. It held that in-group bias was natural but racism was not, and that although xenophobia was to a certain extent socially constructed, its underlying machinery had evolved under the strains of natural selection. Given the ubiquity of tribalism throughout world history, evolutionists knew that humans had evolved to be wary of out-groups. The question was how that out-group came to be defined. It seemed unlikely that humans were hard-wired for the type of racial prejudice that pervaded American society, since our hunter-gatherer ancestors would "rarely, if ever, have encountered a person of a different race," according to Cosmides, who found that only a few minutes of exposure to a simulated world in which modern conceptions of race were irrelevant led to a dramatic decrease in racial categorization.[695]

Mismatch was therefore almost entirely to blame for most modern-day manifestations of prejudice and xenophobia, according to the evolutionists. Because humans evolved as members of small subsistence groups, they were primed to form strong tribal affiliations with one another. Within the ancestral environment, strangers who were not part of the tribe posed a very real threat, especially when resources were scarce. The autonomy and protection of the in-group was paramount, wrote Fishbein and Dess, and over the course of over a million years, fear of the "other" became engrained in our genome, which could not keep up with the "rapid emergence of new social structures" such as states and rapid migration—forcing the human mind to make do with other artificial forms of categorization *within* cultures. Modern humans were therefore "predisposed to treat out-group members of their own cultures as if they were members of different tribes." Viewed through the lens of Hamilton's theory of inclusive fitness, the prejudice

[695] 'Racism—A Complex Phenomenon', *Oakland Post* [Oakland], (26 December, 2001), p. 1B.

Mr. Kristof exhibited when he took the implicit attitude test represented little more than an ethnocentric hold-over from his ancestral past.[696]

The discovery that modern bigotry had merely hijacked our evolved proclivity for categorization—and could therefore be mitigated through social conditioning—should have come as good news. This was not how it landed, however, in a country where prejudice was still so prevalent and transparent. The ethnic hatred on display during the 19th century, although more pronounced and brazenly violent than in more modern times, was still very much alive in the United States between 1980 and 2010. It permeated the American fabric as the nation wrestled with existential questions of national identity,[697] oftentimes with White Anglo-Saxon Protestants acting as the racial and cultural standard to which other groups were held. (Asian Americans were considered to be the "model" minority, with one 1971 *Newsweek* article going so far as to praise them for "out-whiting the whites".)[698] New theories of an evolved propensity for hatred only threatened to amplify this turmoil, especially as rumors of a race-science revival were already swirling around best-selling books like *The Bell Curve*.

Tooby and Cosmides also believed that it had been the "moral appeal" of the Standard Social Science Model that had played an outsized role in its triumph over the adaptationists on this front, due to its "strong stand against explaining differences between races, classes, sexes, or individuals by hypothesizing underlying biological differences." To "support the SSSM was to oppose racism and sexism and to challenge the SSSM was, intentionally or not, to lend support to racism, sexism, and, more generally…'biological determinism.'"[699] Fears of a race science revival were not altogether irrational. As late as 2007, scientists no less famed and respected than James Watson were arguing that Black people were less intelligent than white people,[700] and seven years earlier Watson had mused about the supposed connection between one's race and sex drive.[701]

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[696] *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence,* pp. 168-70.
[697] A sampling of *Time* cover story headlines between 1985 and 2010: "Immigrants: The Changing Face of America" (1985), "America's Changing Colors" (1990), "Welcome to Amexica" (2001), "Who Gets to be an American?" (2006).
[698] B. Lim, 'I Am Not a Model Minority', *The Harvard Crimson* [Cambridge], (13 February, 2014).
[699] *The Adapted Mind,* pp. 34-5.
[700] C. Milmo, 'Fury at DNA pioneer's theory: Africans are less intelligent than Westerners', *The Independent* [London] (17 October, 2007).
[701] M. Gerson, 'The Eugenics Temptation', *The Washington Post* [Washington], (24 October, 2007).

It was also not unreasonable for anthropologists to worry about the implications of Chagnon's *Science* article. Immediately after it was published, it was picked up by the press in Brazil, whose government had been struggling to rein in a scourge of illegal gold mining on Yanomamö lands. The Brazilian Anthropological Association issued a statement that faulted Chagnon with disseminating dangerous and "dubious scientific conclusions," which the illegal miners were using as an excuse to reach deeper into tribal lands.[702] The AAA, however, appeared less concerned with the safety of the tribe and more with protecting its image. Chagnon's case had exposed the wider Orwellian chill within anthropology, and in his memoir Chagnon spoke of how his colleagues had tried to silence him even before the scandal. "We shouldn't say that native people have warfare and kill each other," Chagnon reported being told by the University of Michigan anthropologist Norma Diamond. "People will get the wrong impression."[703] "The last bastions of resistance to evolutionary theory," Chagnon later told a *New York Times* reporter, "are organized religion and cultural anthropology."[704]

During the controversy that stemmed from Chagnon's *Scienc*e article, Alcida Ramos, a Yanomami expert at the University of Brasilia, explained to *Science* that in Brazil, anthropological science was interwoven with politics. "To do anthropology in Brazil is in itself a political act. We don't separate our interests as anthropologists from our responsibility as citizens."[705] In the United States, a direct—albeit more subtle—parallel mentality had already taken hold, as anthropologists implicitly put their politics and careers before their science, by ignoring direct evidence from other organizations (and the Yanomami themselves) that the object of their investigation was innocent. Anthropologists were bent on vilifying and slandering Chagnon not because they believed his actions were dangerous, but because his data were dangerous—that his research would alert people to the fact that violence was not caused by rare disputes over land and resources, but rather by innate xenophobic tendencies that allowed men to gain an adaptive advantage.

Much like with the debate over the origins of homosexuality, multiple teams were angling to tell their own story of xenophobia's genesis for their own gain. The American

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[702] Eakin, 'How Napoleon Chagnon Became Our Most Controversial Anthropologist'.
[703] L. Cronk, 'Review: Noble Savages: My Life Among Two Dangerous Tribes—The Yanomamö and the Anthropologists', *Human Ecology*, 41/3 (June, 2013), pp. 487-9.
[704] Eakin, 'How Napoleon Chagnon Became Our Most Controversial Anthropologist', p. 32.
[705] Ibid.

Psychiatric Association wanted it to be socially constructed because they did not want to absolve bigots of their responsibility; Edward Dunbar and Alvin Poussaint wanted it to be a disease so they could treat it more effectively; and the American Anthropological Association wanted it to be predicated entirely on resource competition so they could paint the Yanomamö more favorably and subsequently save their land from exploitation. Only Chagnon and the evolutionists seemed to be concerned with xenophobia's origins as opposed to the implications of its origins.

CONCLUSION

Fear of Data-Driven Misogyny

John Tooby's spat with Judith Shulevitz in *Slate* illustrates the extent to which evolutionary psychologists believed that their image problem could be traced to poor communication and little more. Publications like *Slate*, Tooby charged, were leaving readers with the false impression that an adaptationist approach to human behavior was inherently flawed, dangerous, and laced with prejudice.

This was especially true within feminist circles, where evolutionary psychologists believed that the stubborn vilification of their field could be traced more to bad press than bad science. "There are a number of fundamental observations about which feminists and evolutionary psychologists more or less seem to agree," wrote David Buss in 1996, including the "worldwide tendency of men to control resources, men's use of these resources to control and manipulate women, men's focus on women's sexuality as a locus of control, some men's use of sexual aggression as a means of circumventing women's choices, men's view of women in proprietary terms, and the role that women sometimes play in perpetuating oppression." Scientific theories that pointed to an evolved difference in temperament between the sexes therefore had "much to contribute to feminist psychology by providing a deeper understanding of why these phenomena occur."[706]

In 2005, Margo Wilson similarly argued that feminists should embrace, rather than shun, a more comprehensive explanation for the existence of patriarchal systems. "The worry here is that to suggest that the male psyche evolved to control women by direct action or by creating patriarchal institutions is to suggest that nothing can change," Wilson wrote. "I protest. An evolutionary perspective on male psychology can result in a better understanding of the developmental conditions and environmental contingencies that regulate masculine psychological processes."[707] Nancy Dess agreed, arguing in 2003 that "contemporary evolutionary thinking about human behavior encompasses many ideas dear to the Left," such as "reciprocity, social responsibility, coalition politics," and "nonviolent conflict resolution."[708]

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[706] Buss, 'Sexual Conflict', pp. 300-6.
[707] M. Wilson in G. Vandermassen, *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?,* Preface.
[708] N. Dess, *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence,* p. 247.

The problem, according to Dess, was that "many left-leaning people are scared away from this treasure trove by inaccurate, clumsy or naive depictions of it, not to mention the racial-superiority campaigns by the likes of J. Philippe Rushton." The "usefulness of an evolutionary approach to the Left's agenda," she believed, "will only be appreciated when their righteous concern about it is addressed."[709] Robert Kurzban made a similar point in 2010, when he argued in *Frontiers in Psychology* that the greatest challenge to the field "lies less in coaxing nature to give up her secrets, and more in communicating the insights from evolutionary psychology to those outside the field."[710]

Indeed, evolutionary psychologists believed that much of the feminist downplay of evolved psychology could be attributed to confusion and bad optics. If the evolutionists could only hone their message and deliver their dispassionate conclusions more effectively, they reasoned, their work would be embraced by most feminists. The evolutionists were up against a far greater barrier to inclusion, however; one that had been built on a deep (and not altogether irrational) fear that their work—regardless of its validity—would usher in a new era of data-driven misogynistic oppression. These concerned feminists were not waiting for clarification, nor were they waiting for the evolutionists to present data sets that could be used to their advantage; they felt as though the entire scientific enterprise that produced these dangerous ideas needed to be discredited and destroyed. "Nature is the sexists' trump card," wrote Debbie Cameron, who authored *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (2007). "We need not get bogged down in 'nature versus nurture' arguments about whether there really is a gene for female intuition, or ironing, or whatever the scientists have come up with this week," she said. "That is fighting on the enemy's terms."[711]

Many Darwinian feminists did, however, choose to fight "on the enemy's terms," and these women were honest about their political motivations. It was men who had picked this fight by politicizing and distorting science at the expense of women's biology, they claimed, and it was their job to end it through a negotiated peace. ("The subject of women's biology is profoundly political," Ruth Hubbard wrote in 1990. "The predominantly male scientists who have described our biology have done so at least in part to explain why it is 'natural' for us to

[709] Ibid.
[710] Kurzban, 'Grand Challenges of Evolutionary Psychology'.
[711] Cameron, 'Back to Nature', pp. 6-15.

function as we do in society.")[712] These disrupters were unafraid to admit that they viewed the world through a subjective, feminine lens, and they brought this worldview into the lab as a form of methodological affirmative action. "Becoming conscious of the sexist assumptions that males dominate or that male behavior represents the norm has made both female and male animal behaviorists into better scientists," wrote Anne Fausto-Sterling, Patricia Adair Gowaty, and Marlene Zuk in 1997. "Rather than rendering humans as flat, uniform creatures, they account for human variation and adaptability."[713]

This much-needed correction inevitably slid into an overcorrection, however, and scientists like Hubbard soon began to question not only the overreaches of a male-driven science, but its entire Darwinian premise as well—going so far as to imply that natural selection was simply a tall tale that had been told by an impressionable Victorian man in the 19th century. "Darwin's evolutionary theory is based on the idea that the history of organisms has unfolded in a world of scare resources where individuals have to compete," Hubbard wrote. "In this world the individual is the most important unit, far more important than the group. Both assumptions reflect basic beliefs of Darwin's class and society."[714,715]

It was not just card-carrying feminists who feared the social implications of an evolved psychology. "It is precisely because biological determinism is exculpatory that it has such wide appeal," Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin wrote in 1984. "If men dominate women, it is because they must…Such a theory can become a powerful weapon in the hands of ideologues."[716] Beckwith and Durkin worried about the weaponization of adaptationism as well. "The publicity these studies [on sex difference in the brain] have received indicates the current receptivity to these ideas in influential circles," the duo observed. "They are bound to affect parents, teachers and students who read about them."[717]

In an effort to placate concerned feminists and their allies, evolutionary psychologists regularly flashed their interactionist credentials, by stressing the pivotal role of culture and environment at every turn. "It is a complete misconception to think that an adaptationist

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[712] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, pp. 1-3.
[713] Fausto-Sterling, Gowaty, Zuk, 'Review: Evolutionary Psychology and Darwinian Feminism', pp. 402-417.
[714] Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, p. 4.
[715] Debbie Cameron also alluded to the impact of Darwin's identity when she dismissed him as a yet another "bearded Victorian Patriarch" in 1997. See: Cameron, 'Back to Nature', pp. 6-15.
[716] S. Rose, R. Lewontin, L. Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*, New York: Penguin (1984), p. 237.
[717] J. Beckwith and J. Durkin, *Science for the People*, 13/5 (September/October, 1981), p. 34.

perspective denies or in the least minimizes the role of the environment in human development, psychology, behavior, or social life," wrote Tooby and Cosmides in *The Adapted Mind*.[718] A year later, David Buss stressed that "contrary to common misconceptions about evolutionary psychology, documenting that sex differences originated through a causal process of sexual selection does not imply that the differences are unchangeable or intractable."[719] Even the president of the American Psychological Association, Diane Halpern, made it known in 2005 that even the most biologically hardwired differences between the sexes were not immutable, since the "continuous interplay of biological and environmental influences can change the size and direction of the effects sometime in the future."[720] These apologias were ignored, however, by those who wished to read "genetics" as "eugenics," "evolved" as "determined," and "innate" as "inevitable."

Fear of Data-Driven Violence and Hate

This willful ignorance of evolved psychology—predicated on fears of its misuse—followed the evolutionists when they shifted their focus to the origins of violence and hate. The politically-doomed University of Maryland conference—whose funding was revoked by the NIH because it was "politically incorrect," as Arthur Caplan put it—was regarded as little more than a racist dog whistle by the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP, and Napoleon Chagnon's observation that the frequent Yanomamö attacks on neighboring tribes were fueled by xenophobia as opposed to resource scarcity inspired the American Anthropological Association to downplay the conclusions of one of its most esteemed members, since the "indigenous peoples in Latin America" were "put seriously at risk," as the investigative Task Force's chair, Jane Hill, wrote sheepishly in a private email. These types of fears were not new. Noam Chomsky admitted during an interview in 1982 that he was reluctant to discuss any connections between genes, behavior, and race, since the "sheer discussion of group differences—arguing for them *or denying them* [emphasis added]—would indirectly only serve to promote racism within the public," according to Ullica Segerstråle.[721]

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[718] Tooby and Cosmides, *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 87-91.
[719] Buss, 'Sexual Conflict', pp. 305-6.
[720] 'Men and Women: No Big Difference', American Psychological Association, (20 October, 2005), consulted online (22 May, 2024), https://www.apa.org/research/action/difference.
[721] U. Segerstråle, *Defenders of the Truth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000), p. 183.

It was therefore a deeply entrenched fear of *public* misunderstanding and misappropriation that led most academics to downplay evolved psychology—not simply a sincerely held and Marxist-driven belief that its premise was irreparably flawed. When Dr. John Diggs, the deputy director for outside research at the NIH, defended his organization's decision to halt the Maryland conference, he cited the fact that the conference brochure had "inflamed public opinion,"[722] and this was precisely the type of fear that fueled the pushback against Thornhill and Palmer during the rape debates. The Stanford University biologist Joan Roughgarden called *A Natural History of Rape* the "latest 'evolution made me do it' excuse for criminal behavior from evolutionary psychologists," and concerned sex-crime prosecutors were some of the book's loudest critics.[723] Regardless of the validity of the science behind the claim that rape was an adaptation, it was simply too dangerous to speak of such things in a country where men possessed neither the scientific vocabulary nor the proper temperament to parse reasons from excuses. There were larger and more dangerous implications to this work as well: "If one can give a believable evolutionary explanation for the difficult problem of rape," Jerry Coyne opined during the Thornhill and Palmer controversy, "then no human behavior is immune to such analysis."[724]

Analyzing every aspect of human behavior through the lens of natural selection was, in fact, the stated goal of evolutionary psychology. But touting the benefits of evaluating rape, hate and violence through an evolutionary lens was nearly impossible within an academic ecosystem that championed behaviorism to a fault. The horrors of the Second World War had cast a pall over adaptive behavioral science to the extent that any discussion of the evolved origins of violence or prejudice was off limits, and the official behaviorist line—epitomized by UNESCO's "Statement on the Nature of Race and Racial Differences" (1950), which argued that "biological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood"[725]—was that the xenophobic hatred that had plagued humanity since the dawn of civilization could be eradicated through sufficient levels of cultural conditioning. This well-meaning yet scientifically dubious proclamation was quickly absorbed by elite American universities and prominent scientific organizations, where it

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[722] P. Hilts, 'U.S. Puts a Halt To Talks Tying Genes to Crime', *The New York Times* [New York], (5 September, 1992), p. A1.
[723] Begley, 'Can We Blame Our Bad Behavior on Stone-Age Genes?'.
[724] Coyne, 'Of Vice and Men'.
[725] UNESCO, Four Statements on the Race Question, Paris: UNESCO (1969), p. 5.

remained entrenched for over half a century. The myth of the Noble Savage was such an appealing escape from reality that the AAA's membership doubled between 1960 and 1968, when Margaret Mead—the myth's most famed defender—was its president.[726]

These benevolent deceptions were meant to counter the doubtlessly dangerous claim that violence and the out-group aggression that fueled it was to any extent hard-wired. Evolutionary psychologists, however, employed none of the pessimistic and genetically deterministic rhetoric they were accused of harboring. Quite the opposite, in fact: By studying prejudice through the lens of natural selection, evolutionists had discovered that out-group aggression was actually highly malleable and therefore amenable to change. Skin tone and other physical characteristics tended to be the easiest ways in which people formed groups, but virtually any characteristic was fair game for division, including one's history, ideas, and dress.

The manifestation of hate was therefore the ultimate interaction of nature and nurture, and nurture could have theoretically won the day if social scientists had only accepted its evolved counterpart. "At evolution's behest," wrote the University of Washington psychology professor David Barash in *The Hare and the Tortoise: Culture, Biology, and Human Nature*, humans "tend to defend and protect our offspring, favor our relatives, identify with groups, respond to mob psychology with a propensity for violence, and distrust outsiders and anyone who is different. The interaction of our biological and cultural heritage leaves us enmeshed in a complex mosaic of the bestial and the beautiful, of problems and possibilities."[727] Americans were so focused on the bestial problems that they were blind to the beautiful possibilities. "It is Barash the tortoise who needs to be stirred from his biological rut," read one Kirkus review of Barash's work.[728]

In fact, any scientific conclusion that had pointed to innate differences between racial groups would have run against the entire premise of evolutionary psychology, which had staked its reputation on the existence of cross-cultural behavior. With the exception of sex differentials (which, given the social climate of the 1990s, predictably received the lion's share of the public's attention), the adaptationists were highlighting and advocating for human *universals*—the

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[726] Eakin, 'How Napoleon Chagnon Became Our Most Controversial Anthropologist'.
[727] D. Barash, *The Hare and the Tortoise: Culture, Biology, and Human Nature*, New York: Viking (1986), pp. 143-4.
[728] 'Review: The Hare and the Tortoise: Biology, Culture, and Human Nature', *Kirkus Reviews*, (15 May, 1986), consulted online (5 January, 2024), https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/a/david-barash/the-hare-and-the-tortoise-biology-culture-and-h.

evolved components of everyday emotions and behaviors that could be found across every culture in every corner of the world, such as a fear of snakes, mother-infant bonding, jealousy, love, and the pleasure that comes from eating sweet foods. Explaining how natural selection had forged our affinity for violence and prejudice, however, was far more difficult than highlighting the adaptive benefits of enjoying a ripe piece of fruit.

Real Dangers and Guilty Associations

Despite their interactionist bent, evolutionary psychologists often employed terminology that had been utilized by hardened genetic determinists in the recent past (and in some cases the present), which led to conflations that fueled the downplay. It was no coincidence that the criticisms leveled at *The Bell Curve* sounded strikingly similar to those that had been directed at evolutionary psychology, despite the former's focus on differences between groups and the latter's emphasis on their similarities.

It is difficult to overstate the extent to which evolutionary psychology and its adherents were disconnected—both scientifically and philosophically—from what had been considered "race science" in the United States throughout the 20th century. The distance between evolutionary psychology and the work of people like Herrnstein and Murray (and especially Jensen and Shockley), was analogous to the distance between ethology and geography. In fact, evolutionary psychologists were devoted to understanding why race science had been such an appealing enterprise in the first place—with the implication that a problem must be fully understood if it is to be solved. To those who opposed any connection between prejudice and evolution, however, this research—to say nothing of its popularization—risked normalizing and therefore legitimizing harmful racial stereotypes.

There were, of course, real dangers that came with highlighting the biological components of human behavior, especially when it involved hate and violence. Chagnon's research *had* apparently emboldened gold miners to reach deeper into Yanomamö territory. And there were genuine risks involved in searching for the elusive "gay gene," since scientists no less esteemed than James Watson had gone on record as late as 1997 to argue that parents should be allowed to abort a fetus that carried such a genetic marker. "If you could find the gene which determines sexuality and a woman decides she doesn't want a homosexual child, well, let her," Watson said in an interview with *The Washington Post*. "We already accept that most couples

don't want a Down child. You would have to be crazy to say you wanted one, because that child has no future."[729]

But Watson was a hardcore reductionist—a no-limits genetic determinist—and evolutionary psychologists were nothing of the sort. The real dangers, the evolutionists believed, lay in *not* speaking about evolved psychology openly and honestly, since the intellectual void this silence produced tended to be filled by people and organizations with far more social pull than the increasingly irrelevant Dr. Watson. Groups like the Promise Keepers—an "all-male Christian organization devoted to reinvigorating American patriarchy," as Nancy Dess put it—took it upon themselves to deliver wildly inaccurate and misleading "truths" about the divergent biologies of men and women in the absence of mature, centrist dialogue,[730] just as the Pioneer Fund had peddled junk science that had boldly "uncovered" nonexistent hereditary differences in intelligence between racial groups during behaviorism's zenith.[731]

The irony was that some of the most hardened and unapologetic biological determinists could be found not within the ranks of evolutionary psychologists or even among the far Right, but among the far Left. During a panel discussion on "Lesbianism as a Personal Politics" during Lesbian Pride Week in New York City in 1977, presenters regularly spoke of men and women as belonging to different "species or races," according to Andrea Dworkin, who was in attendance. "Amidst the generally accurate descriptions of male crimes against women," Dworkin reported, was a kind of "ideological rot, articulated of late with increasing frequency in feminist circles," which held that "men are biologically inferior to women," and that "male violence is a biological inevitability." In order to eliminate the violence, the speakers insisted, "one must eliminate the species/race itself." This "doctrine seemed to be music to their ears." Dworkin, who was Jewish, spoke out against the type of rigid deterministic rhetoric that had underwritten the Holocaust. "I spoke, afraid. I said that I would not be associated with a movement that advocated the most pernicious ideology on the face of the earth. It was this very ideology of biological determinism that had licensed the slaughter and/or enslavement of virtually any group one could name, including women by men."[732]

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[729] Gerson, 'The Eugenics Temptation'.
[730] N. Dess, *Evolutionary Psychology and Violence*, p. 243.
[731] See: 'Fund Backs Controversial Study of "Racial Betterment"', *The New York Times* [New York] (11 December, 1977), p. 76.
[732] Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone*, pp. 111-12.

The Media Distorts and the Left Turns Right

A more dispassionate and reasonable center would have likely reduced the need for the type of extreme misandry displayed at Lesbian Pride Week, just as it would have likely kept groups like the Promise Keepers from delivering their own distorted narrative of the innate differences between the sexes. Yet it seems as though no amount of distancing or disavowal on the part of responsible scientists would have ever been enough to keep truly malevolent actors from hijacking their conclusions, since even the purest scientific truths were routinely distorted by the media. And although evolutionary psychologists may have been too focused on the "inaccurate, clumsy or naive depictions" of their field in the press, as Nancy Dess put it, the media's love affair with scandalous science was a true problem.

Americans craved simplification, and this was especially true when it came to "sexy" Darwinian science. But compressing these ideas into two-page newspaper and magazine articles inevitably generated confusing oversimplifications and outright falsehoods—which often led well-meaning evolutionists to press for the elimination of terms like "Darwinism, Darwinist and Darwinian" when discussing the evolved origins of human behavior in front of a lay audience. Writing in a popular opinion blog in 2008, the evolutionary biologist and science writer Olivia Judson noted how the misuse and politicization of these terms had suggested a "false narrowness to the field of modern evolutionary biology, as though it was the brainchild of a single person 150 years ago, rather than a vast, complex and evolving subject to which many other great figures have contributed."[733] A similar essay by the ecologist Carl Safina in 2009, titled "Darwinism Must Die So That Evolution May Live," noted that "equating evolution with Charles Darwin ignores 150 years of discoveries, including most of what scientists understand about evolution…Almost everything we understand about evolution came after Darwin, not from him. He knew nothing of heredity or genetics, both crucial to evolution."[734]

Evolutionary psychologists were not blameless when it came to the media's distortion of their work. Impaired by the fawning attention many of their studies received in the popular press, evolutionary psychologists and their supporters often resorted to public-facing generalizations and loose metaphors regarding the roots of human behavior—a price they were willing to pay in

[733] C. Safina, 'Darwinism Must Die So That Evolution May Live', *The New York Times* [New York], (9 February, 2009).
[734] Ibid.

order to win the public's favor. Trusting the public with complex ideas was risky, however, and the looseness with which evolutionary psychologists discussed these phenomena in the press came back to haunt them. "There is a price to benefitting from the kind of distorted and simplified image produced by the media," Dan Sperber lamented in 2009. "Part of the price has been exacted when evolutionary psychologists had to play the game and, in order to benefit from it, went along with the media image, with its superficiality, distortions, and ideological overtones. This might have seemed cheap but now another part of the price is exacted when similar ideologically loaded simplifications and distortions are used not in favor but against evolutionary psychology."[735]

The Left's willingness to resort to "ideologically loaded simplifications" in their efforts to downplay evolutionary psychology—and with it Darwinian natural selection—over fears that such an analysis would wreak havoc on the moral infrastructure of society, marked a stark political role reversal. Throughout most of the 20th century, the downplay of evolutionary science in America had been the sole purview of the conservative Right, whose base had routinely dismissed Darwinian evolution as dangerous nonsense and had rallied against its teaching in schools. Although liberal progressivism had assumed many roles since the country's founding, at its core, it had consistently stood for the promotion of Darwinian natural selection, evidence-based evolutionary science, and dispassionate scientific inquiry.

The Left's downplay of evolutionary psychology was also laced with a tone of sexist and racist condescension that had historically been a hallmark of the American Right: The editors at *The Harvard Crimson* seemed unable to fathom that a woman could side with Lawrence Summers (and science) over the feminist's platform; Nancy Thornhill's scientific contributions to the rape-as-adaptation hypothesis were dismissed as little more than political cover for her husband; and the overwhelmingly white members of the American Anthropological Association appeared to believe that they knew what was best for the Yanomamö, despite the tribe's insistence that Chagnon had been a blessing rather than a curse.[736]

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[735] D. Sperber, 'Evolutionary Psychology Under Attack', International Cognition & Culture Institute, blog post (23 June, 2009), consulted online (2 May, 2023), https://cognitionandculture.net/blogs/dan-sperber/evolutionary-psychology-under-attack.

[736] Between 1984 and 1996, over eighty-five percent of anthropology PhDs were awarded to white people. See: D. Freeman, 'Minority Recruitment in the Historical Profession and Other Disciplines', *The Organization of American*

The knee-jerk condemnations of evolutionary psychology and the adjacent fields with which it became associated by liberals were therefore not liberal at all. These were illiberal and inherently *conservative* moves, which sought to inhibit the spread of legitimate scientific knowledge for the same reason the Right had fought to keep evolution out of American schools: a fear of what this knowledge would bring. These actions and tactics did not reflect the principled stands of people with an authentic, competing ideology (as Steven Pinker, Paul Gross, Norman Levitt, and others have suggested). Instead, they were the efforts of those who feared the implications of a science they knew to be correct. Because when reason and data are no longer seen as effective tools against the dissemination of potentially dangerous scientific ideas, all that remains is politics.

Histories

There are four recurring themes in this dissertation that inform historiographical debates surrounding the history of science in the United States: overcorrection, ideological tension, confusion, and emotional anger. The readiness to sideline and admonish researchers whose findings conflicted with more optimistic narratives of human nature (in the tradition of Margaret Mead, for example) illustrates the inherent polarization of American life and politics, as well as Americans' discomfort with moderate, centrist narratives. These types of overcorrections should serve as fodder for historians who view the history of the United States as a series of drastic oscillations from one moral extreme to the other, and reinforce claims made by historians like Jewett and Gerstle; that political and moral anxiety tends to fuel irrational antagonism toward any science that fails to neatly align with whatever ethical framework is currently *en vogue*.

These overcorrections expose an underlying ideological tension, however, which is often insufficiently addressed in social histories of this era. Gary Gerstle's focus on the competing strains of civic and ethnic nationalism does not fully account for the fact that the Left and Right were engaged in a series of undeclared, ideological "civil wars," in which liberals and conservatives were more than willing to break from their official party lines when alternative and even conflicting rhetoric served their immediate purposes. And while Alan Brinkley and Richard Hofstadter offer powerful accounts and explanations of political polarization, these narratives

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Historians, (17 March, 1999), consulted online (12 June, 2024), https://www.oah.org/1999/03/17/minority-recruitment-in-the-historical-profession-and-other-disciplines-an-oah-report.

chafe against the reality of a post-Cold War world, in which the rise of popular science literature allowed anyone with a subscription to *Newsweek* or *Playboy* to form opinions on human nature without necessarily being tempered by political tribalism, religion, or a formal education in the sciences.

The democratization of scientific knowledge through the proliferation of popular science media came with significant challenges, however, and the types of editorial simplifications required to make behavioral science more accessible to the lay reader created a vicious cycle of confusion, from which scientists struggled to separate themselves. This was especially true regarding the public's persistent failure to separate what is natural from what is "good"—a frustrating reality for scientists who felt the need to correct the record by offering more simplifications and ill-fitting metaphors. This dynamic corroborates claims made by historians such as Jane Gregory and Steven Miller, who argue that the deficit model of public understanding fails to account for the fact that the public was clearly hungry for the type of scientific knowledge evolutionary psychologists were delivering, which was almost certainly due to the fact that readers were eager to know whether their most shameful impulses were in fact "natural."

Confusion and anger are closely related, however, and the history of evolutionary psychology is riddled with instances in which confusion regarding the purpose and aims of this new behavioral science quickly transforms into anger, and occasionally outright rage. Populist revolts against "dangerous" science have been widely documented by historians such as Jewett and Hofstadter, who show how certain ideas can trigger indignation among those who fear that elite science is a threat to their values and way of life. As the history of evolutionary psychology shows, however, these outrages could be finely graded and scaled, with anger intensifying in tandem with the perceived risk posed by the scientific claim being made. Scientific explanations of coyness or mate preference, for instance, elicited only mild annoyance relative to the fury leveled at those who suggested that rape may have resulted from a genetic adaptation.

Future Work

There are several directions in which this research could be extended, the most obvious of which would involve a comparative study of evolutionary psychology's reception within other liberal democracies that thrive on a free press, such as the United Kingdom. This dissertation remained grounded in the United States because of this country's particularly tumultuous history regarding racial hierarchies, xenophobic tensions, political polarization, and the advancement of women's rights, although these tensions have of course shaped the histories of other nations as well. A follow-up project could therefore examine the extent to which the social patterns identified in this dissertation were analogous to those of other English-speaking nations during the same period of time. How did the British press treat evolutionary accounts of rape and xenophobia in a country where the media is subjected to more restrictive libel laws, and where sensationalist tabloids are relatively easy to discern from serious journalism? A direct comparison between the United States and the United Kingdom—or Australia or Canada, for that matter—would help clarify how American scientists and their followers in the press received and reacted to the controversial ideas advanced by evolutionary psychologists.

Another way to build on this research would be to extend the timeline beyond 2010, into an era of decentralized social media communication that rendered the newspaper and magazine distortions of the 1990s and early 2010s quaint by comparison. The events detailed in this dissertation end just as platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were beginning to transform the media landscape, by allowing anyone with an opinion and an Internet connection to weigh in on topics whose public discussion had previously required at least a semblance of editorial mediation or expertise. Looking at how the tone and character of these debates shifted alongside this heavily democratized media landscape—especially within the narrower context of short-form video and "meme" content—could deliver powerful insights regarding the roles and effects of algorithmic amplification at a time of stark political polarization and science-denialism.

This research would also benefit from a more quantitative approach, through increased scrutiny of a wider variety of media platforms. The close readings of academic texts, newspapers, books, and magazines that informed this dissertation leave room for more research into other modes of popular communication, and a patient historian armed with the right analytical tools would doubtlessly uncover interesting narrative patterns by looking at television and YouTube transcripts, along with less formal online "blogs." A thorough analysis of additional

media platforms throughout this period would also yield more opportunities to compare media output across the entire political spectrum—as opposed to simply looking at the Left and Right binaries. A broadened media lens would also make it possible to expand the scope of this research beyond evolutionary psychology to adjacent fields that have attracted similar anxieties, such as behavioral genetics, population genetics, or biosocial criminology.

Although beyond the scope of this project, a full history of evolutionary psychology will remain incomplete without a closer examination of the personalities and actions of its key figures—through interviews and oral histories that reveal their motives, goals, and fears. Many of the characters who appear in this dissertation are still alive, and conducting interviews with the evolutionary psychologists, science writers, and editors who were either directly involved in these debates or standing at the periphery would highlight the more emotional components of decision-making that are rarely discussed in print. What journalistic tensions and trade-offs were required to capture the public's attention while adhering to opaque editorial guidelines? How did feminist critics of EP reconcile their skepticism of the field's motives with their broader commitment to scientific inquiry behind closed doors? Interviews geared toward obtaining answers to more personal questions such as these would almost certainly reveal a degree of ambivalence and tension that defies the more binary categories to which a dissertation of this scope is necessarily limited.

Perhaps the most interesting and important route this research could take, however, would be in service of a generalized, book-length study that investigates how democratic societies throughout the 20th century have reacted to morally and politically sensitive scientific research. This dissertation shows that formal, top-down rejections of even the most controversial claims made by evolutionary psychologists were relatively rare, and that informal media dynamics played an outsized role in the public's perception of EP's dangers and validity. A large-scale, "big history" research project could therefore explore the various ways in which different types of societies across the globe have dealt with the menace of potentially dangerous science, by utilizing formal and informal practices ranging from uninhibited laissez-faire journalism to outright state prohibition. It may be the case that more liberal democracies with stronger protections for free speech have developed clearer and more stringent guidelines for communicating research on topics such as rape and xenophobia, for instance, while more illiberal societies have historically—if ironically—encouraged such communications, due to a

false belief that heavy-handed and pseudo-Darwinian governance can be legitimized through evolutionary explanations of human behavior.

A more holistic, comparative approach that considers a wider range of societies and cultures would also help reveal wider patterns of overcorrection, moral panic, and media distortion—dynamics that have been central not only to the history of science, but to the course of history itself. By examining the evolved foundations of human psychology, evolutionary psychologists drew attention to the genetic dispositions that shape these dynamics; dispositions that pit men against men, women against women, and insiders against outsiders. Their scientific findings suggest that these behaviors are not merely the products of particular times or places, but rather expressions of deep-seated adaptations that will likely continue to shape human history well into the future. Historians interested in using the past to explain the present and brace for the future would do well to take note of these insights.

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