



The New Male Nation: A Philosophical Collection of Articles About Culture, Sports, and the Quest for Power

Edited by Ingrad Smith

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Sneak Preview

The New Male Nation

A Philosophical Collection of Articles About
Culture, Sports, and the Quest for Power



Edited by Ingrad Smith
Jackson State University



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First published in the United States of America in 2010 by Cognella, a division of University Readers, Inc.

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14 13 12 11 10

1 2 3 4 5

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1609279-98-1



www.cognella.com 800.200.3908

Dedication



The New Male Nation: A Philosophical Collection of Articles About Culture, Sports and the Quest for Power is dedicated to my husband, Master Sergeant (ret.) Marvin Smith, my son, Jeffrey Smith, and my grandsons, Marcus Oliver, Jr., Jeffrey Smith, Jr. and Daniel Smith.

To Dr. Daniel Watkins, pastor of Zion Travelers Missionary Baptist Church and Dean of the College of Education and Human Development, Jackson State University, thank you for supporting workshops to educate people about domestic violence and encouraging young people to stay in school.

To our brave men and women serving in the United States Military, please accept this book as a token of my appreciation for all you are doing to protect our nation.

To my brothers of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and my sisters of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority thank you for working with our young people. You are making a difference.

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Introduction



By Ingrad Smith

In the Disney movie *Pinocchio*, Jimini Cricket sings a song entitled, “When You Wish Upon A Star.” The first line, “*When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are, anything your heart desires, will come to you.*” makes us long for the time when we believed in the magic that would make our wishes come true. If we could wish upon stars to make our dreams come true, we would all live the fairy tale lives we read about in Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty. We would find our Prince Charming and live happily ever after. Unfortunately, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that one in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, an estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year. Eighty-five percent of domestic violence victims are women. Historically, females have been most often victimized by someone they knew. Females who are 20–24 years of age are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence and most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police. Nearly 7.8 million women have been raped by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. This kind of intimate partner violence exceeds \$5.8 billion each year, \$4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health services. Alas, where is Prince Charming?

While some of us may have found our Prince Charming, regrettably many of us are still wondering if he will ever come. Even if he comes, will he be able to take care of his family? The Center for Labor Market Studies revealed in their May 2009 study entitled *Left Behind: The Nation’s Dropout Crisis* that males account for 60% of all young dropouts in the nation. In fact, the 2007 data showed 3,751,081 males between the ages of 16–24 dropped out of school. How can Prince Charming live happily ever after without a high school education today?

This book, however, is not a fairy tale. *The New Male Nation* is a philosophical collection of articles about culture, sports, and the quest for power. Certainly the answers to our problems in America cannot be solved by simply wishing upon a star. The problems are complex and interwoven into religion, culture, education, sports, society and politics. It is time we begin to formulate a strategy for discussing these problems. The collection of articles included in this book should be addressed in a scholarly manner, without placing blame on any one segment of our nation. Possible solutions

must be the focus of the discussions. If we begin to discuss the concerns that our young men face in America, maybe students in college classrooms can find strategic, systemic answers to the problems we face as a country. As in *The Female Factor: An Anthology of Critical Issues Facing Women* (University Press), this anthology challenges college and university students to explore innovative approaches and possible solutions to problems and expand our understanding of the ever increasing drain on the male population in America.

“When you wish upon a star . . . Anything your heart desires will come to you.” Generally speaking, it is time we put our intellectual energy into finding ways to encourage our young men to express love and respect for the women and girls in their lives. My heart’s desire is to find ways to end the domestic abuse against women and keep our young men . . . and women in school. Then maybe my granddaughter, little girls throughout America and around the world will have a better chance of finding their Prince Charming and living happily ever after.

About the Selections

Caveman Masculinity: Finding an Ethnicity in Evolutionary Science by Martha McCaughey is an excellent place to begin a discussion between the appearance of the caveman stereotype and the disappearance of Prince Charming. She challenges men to become “new kinds of men.” She points out the new popularity and fascination of the caveman stereotype in media and on the web. Her article begins with the image of prehistoric man and the way he bangs his woman on the head and drags her into the cave to mate and includes an account of a rape in Central Park caught on video. The attacker tells his victim “Welcome back to the caveman times.” Her discussion would not be complete without mention of the GEICO caveman. This article is not without scholarly discourse, research and academic merit. There should be an anticipation of a rather intense discussion as students delve into these first two articles.

Murry Milner’s article: *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: Teenagers, Status and Consumerism* explains the status system and how status is related to power. His insight into the cultural importance of status in society and in the lives of teenagers is important as we examine why our young men and women may be dropping out of school. He mentions that athletic ability is usually a highly respected quality for men. The new twist, however, is that of a student being both a strong student and an outstanding athlete. There is less encouragement for girls to become athletes.

Ellis Cashmore explores sports in *Making Sense of Sports: Why Competition Excites Us*. He provides us with three general observations of the reasons for the existence and longevity of sports. Among other things he suggests that sports somehow provide the excitement that our lives may lack. The discussion questions at the end of the selection form a point of departure for deeper inquiry for intellectually engaging discussions of the philosophical place sports have in the lives of men in America and their fascination

with the professional athlete. It may also be a good place to discuss the difference in the way men and women view sports.

No discussion of sports and men would be complete without an analysis of the race question. Kevin Hylton investigates this theory in *"Race" and Sport: Critical Race Theory*. He outlines five key tenets of Critical Race Theory as an important framework to critically consider issues related to 'race' racism and sport. Hylton also introduces ethnicity, nation and cultural racism. He defines cultural racism as the new racism. He includes a rather lengthy discussion of the Critical Race Theory. His first discussion question mentions Jack Nicklaus. This should bring about a lively discussion of Tiger Woods' career in golf and his private life that has become public.

Shira Tarrant's article: *Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex, and Power* brings us to a whole new level of discussion how men are and how they view women. Tarrant article is an "in your face" article with undeniable scenes from Daytona Beach of how men dominate women by exerting their power over them. Tarrant's story of Jacob Anderson-Minshall adds a new twist to the difference between men and women and society views masculinity and femininity. Give this article a few class sessions. Other sections of the article" B. Loewe: "How We Enter: Men, Gender, and Sexual Assault"; Derrais Carter: "this is What a Feminist Looks Like"; Michael S. Kimmel: "Abandoning the Barricades: Or How I Became a Feminist; What's Wrong with Fathers' Rights?"; Ben Atherton-Zeman: "Men's Manifesto; and others comprises a well woven story with multiple views on the male persona.

In *Power and Culture* by John R. Hall, Mary Jo Neitz, and Marshall Battani the questions of power are addressed by first looking at power aspects of the established order of culture and by investigating the political economy of cultural production. The writers mention Mark Monteiro's examination of the change in the male image. He cites male vanity in the fact that there are more pictures of male models, more articles dealing with male vanity, new cosmetics marketed to men, and treatments of male homosexuality. He states that it is still the image of the "real man" that persists as a yardstick against which to measure social change. There is also some insight into how technology shapes our culture.

Suggested Pedagogy

The Essential Question format is the recommended pedagogy for teaching a course using this text. If you are not familiar with the Essential Question, What is the Essential Question by Grant Wiggins is a good place to begin. The essential question should provoke deep thought, lively discussion, sustained inquiry, and new understanding as well as more questions. They should not be simple yes or no questions and the answers should not be found in the text. Rather, students should be challenged to develop complex questions with no one solution. In some instances, the question itself becomes the answer. Encouraging students to pose questions that get to the heart of

the matter should be the goal of the discussion. It should not be a debate over who has the right answer. The right questions could possibly stimulate a line of thinking and inspire answers that we never thought of because no one ever asked the right question.

“If your heart is in your dream ... no request is too extreme ... when you wish upon a star ... as dreamers do.”

Ingrad Smith, Ph.D.

Caveman Masculinity: Finding an Ethnicity in Evolutionary Science



By Martha McCaughey

The Caveman as Retrosexuality

Most of us can call up some image of prehistoric man and his treatment of women. He's a shaggy, well-muscled caveman, whose name is Thor, and we might picture him, club in hand, approaching a scrawny but curvaceous woman, whom he bangs over the head and drags by the hair into a cave to mate. I'm sure the majority of readers recognize this imagery. Indeed, today an image of modern men as guided by such prehistoric tendencies is even celebrated on T-shirts sold to American men on websites that allow people to post and sell their own designs. One such image for sale on the cafepress website features a version of Thor, wearing a fur pelt and holding a club, accompanied by the slogan "ME FIND WOMAN!" Another image available for T-shirts, boxer shorts, baseball caps, and coffee mugs features a man dressed in a one-shoulder fur pelt, with his club, smiling behind a cavewoman who is wearing a fur bikini outfit and cooking a skinned animal on a spit, with the saying "MENS PRIORITYS [sic]: 10,000 YEARS LATER AND STILL ON THE HUNT FOR FOOD AND SEX!" Another image features only the club, with the saying, "CAVEMAN: PRIMITIVE PIMPIN'."

Everywhere we look we can find applications of an increasingly fashionable academic exercise—the invocation of evolutionary theory to explain human male behaviors, particularly deplorable behaviors such as sexual harassment, rape, and aggression more generally. The familiar portrayals of sex differences based in evolution popularize and legitimize an academic version of evolutionary thought known increasingly as evolutionary psychology, a field referred to as the "science of the mind."² The combination of scholarly and popular attention to evolution and human male sexuality

Selected for The Social Issues Collection™ by Amy S. Wharton. Excerpted and adapted by Martha McCaughey from McCaughey, *The Caveman Mystique: Pop-Darwinism and the Debates over Sex, Violence, and Science* (Routledge, 2008). Copyright © 2008 by Routledge. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

has increasingly lodged American manhood in an evolutionary logic. The discourse of evolutionary science has become part of popular consciousness, a sort of cultural consensus about who men are.

The evolutionary theory is that our human male ancestors were in constant competition with one another for sexual access to fertile women, who were picky about their mate choices given the high level of parental investment required of the human female for reproduction—months of gestation, giving birth, and then years of lactation and care for a dependent child. The human male's low level of parental investment required for reproduction, we are told, resulted in the unique boorishness of the hairier sex: He is sexually promiscuous, he places an enormous emphasis on women's youth and beauty, which he ogles every chance he gets, he either cheats on his wife or wants to, and he can be sexually aggressive to the point of criminality.

We find references to man's evolutionary heritage not only on T-shirts but in new science textbooks, pop psychology books on relationships, men's magazine, and Broadway shows. There are caveman fitness plans and caveman diets. *Saturday Night Live's* hilarious "Unfrozen Caveman Lawyer" and the affronted caveman of the Geico car insurance ads joke about the ubiquity of caveman narratives. More disturbingly, the Darwinian discourse also crops up when men need an excuse for antisocial behavior. One man, who was caught on amateur video participating in the Central Park group sexual assaults in the summer of 2000, can be heard on video telling his sobbing victim, "Welcome back to the caveman times." How does a man come to think of himself as a caveman when he attacks a woman? What made so many American men decide that it's the DNA, rather than the devil, that makes them do it?

Using the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, or the account of how cultural ideas are taken up in the form of bodily habits and tastes that reinforce behavioral norms and social inequality, I suggest that scientific theories find their way into both popular culture and men's corporeal habits and attitudes. Evolution has become popular culture, where popular culture is more than just media representations but refers to the institutions of everyday life: family, marriage, school, work—all sites where gender and racial knowledges are performed according to images people have available to them in actionable repertoires, scripts, and narratives. As popular culture, evolutionary narratives offer men a way to embody male sexuality.

That an evolutionary account of heterosexual male desire has captured the popular imagination is obvious from *Muscle and Fitness* magazine's article on "Man the visual animal," which explains why men leer at women. Using a theory of the evolved difference between human male and female sexual psychologies developed by leading evolutionary psychologist Donald Symons, the article offers the following explanation under the subheading "Evolution Happens":

Not much has changed in human sexuality since the Pleistocene. In his landmark book *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (Oxford University Press,

1979), Symons hypothesizes that the male's sexual response to visual cues has been so rewarded by evolution that it's become innate.³

Such stories provide a means by which heterosexual male readers can experience their sexuality as acultural, primal: "The desire to ogle is your biological destiny."⁴

Evolution may happen (or may have happened), but these stories do not just happen. Their appeal seems to lie precisely in the sense of security provided by the imagined inevitability of heterosexual manhood. In a marketplace of masculine identities the caveman ethos is served up as Viagra for the masculine soul. Just as the 1950s women suffering what Betty Friedan famously called the feminine mystique were supposed to seek satisfaction in their Tupperware collections and their feminine figures, men today have been offered a way to think of their masculinity as powerful, productive, even aggressive—in a new economic and political climate where real opportunities to be rewarded for such traits have slipped away.⁵

It's hardly that most men today find themselves raising children at home while female partners bring home the bacon. But, like the fifties housewife, more men must now find satisfaction despite working below their potential (given that their job skills have lost their position to technology or other labor sources) in a postindustrial service economy that is less rewarding both materially and morally. As Susan Faludi puts it in her book *Stiffed*: "The fifties housewife, stripped of her connections to a wider world and invited to fill the void with shopping and the ornamental display of her ultra femininity, could be said to have morphed into the nineties man, stripped of his connections to a wider world and invited to fill the void with consumption and a gym-bred display of his ultra-masculinity."⁶

On top of the economic changes affecting men, during the 1990s a growing anti-rape movement also challenged men, taking them to task for the problem of violence against women. More state and federal dollars supported efforts to stop such violence, and men increasingly feared complaints and repercussions for those complaints. The rape trials of Mike Tyson and William Kennedy Smith, Jr., the increasingly common school shootings (executed overwhelmingly by boys), the sexual harassment of women by men at the Citadel, the media attention given to the notorious Spurr Posse (a gang of guys who sought sex for "points" at almost all costs), the local sexual assault trials of countless high school and college athletic stars, the sexual harassment allegations against Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas, and the White House sex scandals involving Bill Clinton meant more lost ground. Indeed, the 1990s saw relentless—though not necessarily ill-founded—criticism of men's sexual violence and other forms of aggression.

Right-wing leaders were as upset with men as feminists and other progressives. Those opposing abortion rights argued that sexual intercourse without procreation was undermining male responsibility, and those opposing women's equal-rights legislation argued that women's liberation would only allow men to relinquish their economic obligations to their families, sending women and children into divorce-induced poverty. Considering

that critics of men came from the political right and left, and from among men as well as women, it seems fair to say that in turn-of-the-century America moral disdain for men, whatever their age, race, or economic rank, had reached an all-time high.

For some men, the response was to cultivate a rude-dude attitude—popularized by Howard Stern, *The Man Show*, and MTV's endless shows about college spring break vacations. For some others, the response was to face, with a sense of responsibility and urgency, men's animal natures and either accept or reform their caveman ways. While some men were embracing the role of consumers and becoming creatures of ornamentation—the “metrosexuals”—other men revolted against metrosexuality, embracing a can-do virility that Sara Stewart in *The New York Post* referred to as “retrosexuality,” or that “cringe-inducing backlash of beers and leers.”⁷ Caveman masculinity, with its focus on men's irrepressible heterosexuality and natural vigor, is a scientifically authorized form of retrosexuality.

The Caveman as Popular Scientific Story

Popular culture is a political petri dish for Darwinian ideas about sex. Average American guys don't read academic evolutionary science, but many do read about science in popular magazines and in bestselling books about the significance of the latest scientific ideas. As such, it is worth examining—even when magazine writers and television producers intentionally “dumb down” relatively sophisticated academic claims. In this section, I look at the way some popular texts make sense of evolutionary claims about men. Later I suggest that the caveman ideology, much of which centers on men's aggressive heterosexuality, gets embodied and thereby reproduced.⁸

In September of 1999, *Men's Health* magazine featured a caveman fitness program. Readers are shown an exercise routine that corresponds to the physical movements their ancestors would have engaged in: throwing a spear, hauling an animal carcass, honing a stone. A nice looking clean-shaven young man is shown exercising, his physical posture mirrored by a scruffy animal skin-clad caveman behind him in the photo. Each day of the week-long routine is labeled according to the caveman mystique: building the cave home; the hunt; the chase; the kill; the long trek home; prepare for the feast; and rest. That an exercise plan is modeled after man-as-caveman reveals the common assumption that being a caveman is good for a man, a healthy existence.

Another issue of *Men's Health* magazine explains “the sex science facts” to male readers interested in “the biology of attraction.” We follow the steps of a mating dance, but don't quite understand that's what we're doing. Indeed, we must learn the evolutionary history of sex to see why men feel the way they do when they notice a beautiful woman walking down the street:

Of course, out there in the street, you have no thoughts about genetic compatibility or childbearing. Probably the farthest thing from your mind is having a child with that beautiful woman. But that doesn't matter. What you think counts for almost nothing. In the environment that crafted your brain and body, an environment in which you might be dead within minutes of spotting this beauty, the only thing that counted was that your clever neo-cortex—your seat of higher reason—be turned off so that you could quickly select a suitable mate, impregnate her, and succeed in passing on your genes to the next generation.⁹

The article proceeds to identify the signals of fertility that attract men: youth, beauty, big breasts, and a small waistline. Focusing on the desire for youth in women, the article tells men that “the reason men of any age continue to like young girls is that we were designed to get them pregnant and dominate their fertile years by keeping them that way. ... When your first wife has lost the overt signals of reproductive viability, you desire a younger woman who still has them all.”¹⁰ And, of course, male readers are reminded that “your genes don't care about your wife or girlfriend or what the neighbors will say.”¹¹

Amy Alkon's *Winston-Salem Journal* advice column, “The Advice Goddess,” uses an evolutionary theory of men's innate loutishness to comfort poor “Feeling Cheated On,” who sent a letter complaining that her boyfriend fantasizes about other women during their lovemaking. The Advice Goddess cited a study by Bruce J. Ellis and Donald Symons (whose work was also mentioned in *Muscle & Fitness*) to conclude that “male sexuality is all about variety. Men are hard-wired to want you, the entire girls' dorm next door, and the entire girls' dorm next to that.”¹²

Popular magazines tell men that they have a biological propensity to favor women with the faces of 11½ year-old girls (where the eyes and chin are close together) and a waist-to-hip ratio of .7 (where the waist measures 70% that of the hips). Men are told that their sexist double standard concerning appearance is evolutionary. Some of this research is very speculative—for instance, in some studies, men are simply shown photos of women with specific waist-to-hip ratios and then asked, “Would you like to spend the rest of your life with this woman?”—as though such staged answers reveal something about the individuals' real-life choices (or genes). But the results of this research make great copy.

Men's Health magazine in 1999 offers an article called “The Mysteries of Sex ... Explained!” and relies on evolutionary theory, quoting several professors in the field, to explain “why most women won't sleep with you.” The article elucidates:

Stop blaming your wife. The fault lies with Mother Nature, the pit boss of procreation. Neil M. Malamuth, Ph.D., professor of psychology at UCLA, explains. “You're in Las Vegas with 10 grand. Your gambling strategy will

depend on which form your money takes. With 10 chips worth \$1,000 each, you'd weigh each decision cautiously. With 10,000 \$1 chips, you'd throw them around." That's reproductive strategy in a nutshell.¹³

Popular magazine articles like this follow a standard formula. They quote the scientists, reporting on the evolutionary theorists' research, and offer funny anecdotes about male sexuality to illustrate the research findings. This *Men's Health* article continues to account for men's having fetishes: "Men are highly sexed creatures, less interested in relationship but highly hooked on visuals, says David Givens, Ph.D., an anthropologist. 'Because sex carries fewer consequences for men, it's easier for us to use objects as surrogate sexual partners.' Me? I've got my eye on a Zenith, model 39990."¹⁴

It's not just these popular and often humorous accounts of men that are based in some version of evolutionary theory. Even serious academic arguments rely on evolutionary theories of human behavior. For example, Steven Rhoads, a member of the University of Virginia faculty in public policy, has written *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* (2004), a book telling us why gender equity in the home and the workplace is a feminist pipedream. Rhoads argues that women are wrong to expect men to take better care of children, do more housework, and make a place for them as equals at work because, he states, "men and women still have different natures and, generally speaking, different preferences, talents and interests."¹⁵ He substantiates much of his argument about the divergent psychological predispositions in men and women with countless references to studies done by evolutionary scholars.

News magazines and television programs have also spent quite a bit of time popularizing evolutionary science and its implications for understanding human sex differences. The ABC news program *Day One* reported in 1995 on evolutionary psychologist David Buss's new book, *The Evolution of Desire*.¹⁶ Buss appeared on the show, which elaborated his theory by presenting us with super model Cindy Crawford and Barbie (the doll), presumably as representations of what men are wired to find desirable. As Buss explained in the interview, our evolutionary forebrothers who did not prefer women with high cheekbones, big eyes, lustrous hair, and full lips did not reproduce. As Buss puts it, those men who happened to like someone who was older, sicker, or infertile "are not our ancestors. We are all the descendants of those men who preferred young healthy women and so as offspring, as descendants of those men, we carry with us their desires."¹⁷ On that same television show, *Penthouse* magazine publisher Bob Guccione was interviewed and explained that men are simply biologically designed to enjoy looking at sexy women: "This may be very politically incorrect but that's the way it is. ... It's all part of our ancestral conditioning."¹⁸ Evolutionary narratives clearly work for publishers of pornography marketed to men.

Newsweek's 1996 cover story, "The Biology of Beauty: What Science has Discovered about Sex Appeal," argues that the beautylust humans exhibit "is often better suited to the Stone Age than to the Information Age; the qualities we find alluring may be powerful emblems of health, fertility and resistance to disease ..."¹⁹ Though "beauty isn't all that matters in life," the article asserts, "our weakness for 'biological quality' is the cause of endless pain and injustice."²⁰

Sometimes the magazines and TV shows covering the biological basis of sexual desire give a nod to the critics. The aforementioned *Newsweek* article, for instance, quotes feminist writer Katha Pollitt, who insists that "human beings cannot be reduced to DNA packets."²¹ And then, as if to affirm Pollitt's claim, homosexuality is invoked as an example of the countless non-adaptive delights we desire: "Homosexuality is hard to explain as a biological adaptation. So is stamp collecting. ... We pursue countless passions that have no direct bearing on survival."²² So when there is a nod to ways humans are not hardwired, homosexual desires are framed as oddities having no basis in nature, while heterosexual attraction along the lines of stereotypical heterosexual male fantasy is framed as biological. Heterosexual desire enjoys a *biologically correct* status.

Zoologist Desmond Morris explains how evolutionary theory applies to humans in his 1999 six-part television series, *Desmond Morris' The Human Animal: A Personal View of the Human Species*.²³ The first show in the series draws from his book, *The Naked Ape*, explaining that humans are relatively hairless with little to protect themselves besides their big brains.²⁴ This is stated as we watch two naked people, one male and one female, walk through a public place where everyone else is dressed in modern-day clothing. Both are white, both are probably 25 to 30 years old, both look like models (the man with well chiseled muscles, a suntan, and no chest hair; the woman thin, yet shapely with larger than average breasts, shaved legs, and a manicured pubic region). This presentation of man and woman in today's aesthetically ideal form as the image of what all of us were once like is *de rigueur* for any popular representation of evolutionary theory applied to human sexuality. No woman is flabby, flat chested, or has body hair; no man has pimples or back hair. These culturally mandated ideal body types are presented as the image of what our human ancestors naturally looked like. In this way and others, such shows posit modern aesthetic standards as states of nature.

Time magazine's 1994 cover story on "Our Cheating Hearts" reports that "the emerging field known as evolutionary psychology" gives us "fresh detail about the feelings and thoughts that draw us into marriage—or push us out."²⁵ After explaining the basics about men being less discriminating about their sexual partners than women, the article moves on to discuss why people divorce, anticipating resistance to the evolutionary explanation:

Objections to this sort of analysis are predictable: “But people leave marriages for emotional reasons. They don’t add up their offspring and pull out their calculators.” But emotions are just evolution’s executioners. Beneath the thoughts and feelings and temperamental differences marriage counselors spend their time sensitively assessing are the stratagems of the genes—cold, hard equations composed of simple variables: social status, age of spouse, number of children, their ages, outside romantic opportunities and so on. Is the wife really duller and more nagging than she was 20 years ago? Maybe, but maybe the husband’s tolerance for nagging has dropped now that she is 45 and has no reproductive future.²⁶

In case *Time* readers react to the new evolutionary psychology as part of a plot to destroy the cherished nuclear family, they are told that “progress will also depend on people using the explosive insight of evolutionary psychology in a morally responsible way. ... We are potentially moral animals—which is more than any other animal can say—but we are not naturally moral animals. The first step to being moral is to realize how thoroughly we aren’t.”²⁷

While many accounts of evolution’s significance for male sexuality seem simply to rationalize sexist double standards and wallow in men’s loutishness, a number of pop-Darwinist claims have the moral purpose of liberating men from being controlled by their caveman natures. Their message: men can become enlightened cavemen. These popular versions of man as caveman make an attempt to liberate men by getting them to see themselves differently. They tell men that they are cavemen with potential. They either make fun of men’s putatively natural shortcomings or encourage them to cage the caveman within through a kind of scientific consciousness-raising.

Rob Becker’s one-man show, *Defending the Caveman*, played Broadway and elsewhere from 1993 to 2005. This performance piece poking fun at sex differences is the longest running solo play in Broadway history. It relies on a longstanding man-the-hunter and woman-the-gatherer framework, from which modern sex differences follow. Cavemen hunted and focused on their prey until killing it. Cavewomen gathered things to use in the cave home. Men are thus strong silent types while women are into communication and togetherness. More significantly, *Defending the Caveman*’s creator and performer believes men have a bad rap. Becker points out that women say “men are all assholes” with a kind of feminist cultural authority men no longer enjoy when they make derogatory remarks about women. Rob Becker thus echoes the common sentiment among American men today that men are in the untenable position of being both hated and ignorant. They may want to try but they are unable to succeed. The show validates many people’s observations of the behavior patterns and sex battles in their daily lives, and seems to poke fun at men’s shortcomings—all the while affirming a vision of men as being as similar as peas in a primordial pea soup.

Evolution as Ideology

A critical examination of evolutionary science in its popular cultural manifestations over the past 15 to 20 years—the way most men come to know of the theory about their sexuality—allows us to ask how men come to know what they know about themselves. This type of analysis assumes that evolution is an ideology—which is not to suggest that humans got here via God’s creation or some means other than evolution by natural selection. Positioning evolutionary arguments about human nature as an ideology is to understand that people think and act in ways that take evolutionary theory, however they construe it, as a self-evident truth. Furthermore, positioning evolutionary theory applied to humans as an ideology allows us to examine the way evolutionary ideas about male sexuality circulate in our culture. It is on this basis that I challenge the convenient innocence with which men invoke science to explain their bodies and their actions.

The caveman is certainly not the only form of masculine identity in our times. But the emergence of a caveman masculinity tells us much about the authority of science, the flow of scientific ideas in our culture, and the embodiment of those ideas. In *Science, Culture and Society* Mark Erickson explains the connection between science and society in our times:

We live with science: science surrounds us, invades our lives, and alters our perspective on the world. We see things from a scientific perspective, in that we use science to help us make sense of the world—regardless of whether or not that is an appropriate thing to do—and to legitimize the picture of the world that results from such investigations.²⁸

In a culture so attached to scientific authority and explication, it is worth examining the popular appeal of evolutionary theory and its impact on masculine embodiment. The popularity of the scientific story of men’s evolved desires—however watered down or distorted the science becomes as enthusiasts popularize it—can tell us something about the appeal and influence of that story.

The Caveman as Embodied Ethos

If the evolutionary stories appeal to many men, and it seems they do indeed, it’s because they ring true. Many men feel like their bodies are aggressive. They feel urges, at a physical level, in line with evolutionary theoretical predictions. With a naïve understanding of experience, men can see affect as having an authenticity and empirical validity to it. In other words, the men who feel like cavemen do not see their identity as a fiction; it is their bodily reality and is backed by scientific study.

Certainly, evolutionary scholars would argue that the actual evolved psychologies make men feel like cavemen, or at least make those feelings emerge or affect behavior in particular environments. I argue that this explanation too simplistically separates men’s bodies from discourse.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu provides a tool for understanding how power is organized at the level of unconscious embodiment of cultural forces. I suggest that popular manifestations of scientific evolutionary narratives about men's sexuality have a real material effect on many men. Bourdieu's theory of practice develops the concepts of *habitus* and *field* to describe a reciprocally constitutive relationship between bodily dispositions and dominant power structures. Bourdieu concerned himself primarily with the ways in which socioeconomic class is incorporated at the level of the body, including class-based ways of speaking, postures, lifestyles, attitudes, and tastes.

Significant for Bourdieu is that people acquire tastes that mark them as members of particular social groups and particular social levels.²⁹ Membership in a particular social class produces and reproduces a class sensibility, what Bourdieu (1990) called "practical sense."³⁰ Habitus is "a somatized social relationship, a social law converted into an embodied law."³¹ The process of becoming competent in the everyday life of a society or group constitutes habitus. Bourdieu's notion of embodiment can be extended to suggest that habitus, as embodied field, amounts to "the pleasurable and ultimately erotic constitution of [the individual's] social imaginary."³²

Concerning the circulation of evolutionary narratives, we can see men taking erotic pleasure in the formation of male identity and the performance of accepted norms of heterosexual masculinity using precisely these tools of popular evolutionary science. Put differently, pop-Darwinism is a discourse that finds its way into men's bones and boners. The caveman story can become a man's practical sense of who he is and what he desires. This is so because masculinity is a dimension of embodied and performative practical sensibility—because men carry themselves with a bodily comportment suggestive of their position as the dominant gender, and they invest themselves in particular lifestyle practices, consumption patterns, attire, and bodily comportment. Evolutionary narratives thus enter the so-called habitus, and an aestheticized discourse and image of the caveman circulates through popular culture becoming part of natural perception, and consequently is reproduced by those embodying it.

In his study of the overwhelmingly white and male workspace of the Options Exchange floor, sociologist Richard Widick uses Bourdieu's theory to explain the traders' physical and psychical engagement with their work. Widick holds that "the traders' inhabitation and practical mastery of the trading floor achieves the bio-physical psycho-social state of a natural identity."³³ Hence the traders describe their manner as a "trading instinct." In a similar way, American men with what we might call a caveman instinct can be said to have acquired a "pre-reflexive practical sense" of themselves as heterosexually driven.³⁴

Bourdieu gives the name "symbolic violence" to that process by which we come to accept and embody power relations without ever accepting them in the conscious sense of knowing them and choosing them. We hold beliefs that don't need to be thought—the effects of which can be "durably and deeply embedded in the body in the

form of dispositions.”³⁵ From this perspective, the durable dispositions of evolutionary discourse are apparent in our rape culture, for example, when a member of the group sexual assault in New York tells the woman he’s attacking, “Welcome back to the caveman times.” Embodying the ideology of irrepressible heterosexual desire makes such aggression appear to be natural.

Bourdieu’s theory allows us to see that both cultural and material forces reveal themselves in the lived reality of social relations.³⁶ We can see on men’s bodies the effects of their struggle with slipping economic privilege and a sense of entitlement to superiority over women. If men live out power struggles in their everyday experiences, then caveman masculinity can be seen as an imagined compensation for men’s growing sense of powerlessness.³⁷ To be sure, some men have more social and economic capital than others. Those with less might invest even more in their bodies and appearances.³⁸

Sociologist R. W. Connell discusses the significance of naturalizing male power. He states:

The physical sense of maleness is not a simple thing. It involves size and shape, habits of posture and movement, particular physical skills and the lack of others, the image of one’s own body, the way it is presented to other people and the ways they respond to it, the way it operates at work and in sexual relations. In no sense is all this a consequence of XY chromosomes, or even of the possession on which discussions of masculinity have so lovingly dwelt, the penis. The physical sense of maleness grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history-in-society.³⁹

We see and believe that men’s power over women is the order of nature because “power is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body.”⁴⁰ Scientific discourse constitutes the field for some men in the constructed figure of the caveman, enabling those men to internalize such an identity. The caveman thus becomes an imaginative projection that is experienced and lived as real biological truth.

In his book, *Cultural Boundaries of Science*, Thomas Gieryn comments on the cultural authority of science, suggesting that “if ‘science’ says so, we are more often than not inclined to believe it or act on it—and to prefer it to claims lacking this epistemic seal of approval.”⁴¹ To his observation I would add that we are also more likely to *live* it. Ideas that count as scientific, regardless of their truth value, become lived ideologies. It’s how modern American men have become cavemen and how the caveman ethos enjoys reproductive success.

Cultural anthropologist Paul Rabinow gives the name “biosociality” to the formation of new group and individual identities and practices that emerge from the scientific study of human life.⁴² Rabinow offers the example of neurofibromatosis groups whose members have formed to discuss their experiences, educate their children, lobby for

their disease, and “understand” their fate. And in the future, he points out, “[i]t is not hard to imagine groups formed around the chromosome 17, locus 16,256, site 654,376 allele variant with a guanine substitution.”⁴³ Rabinow’s concept of biosociality is instructive here; for the discourse of the caveman offers this form of biosociality. The caveman constitutes an identity based on new scientific “facts” about one’s biology.

Of course, evolutionary psychologists would have us think that men’s desires are, in some final instance, biological properties of an internal psyche or sexual psychology. I am suggesting, in line with Bourdieu, that men’s desires are always performed in relation to the dominant discourses in circulation within their cultural lifeworlds, either for or against the representations that permeate those lifeworlds. We can see that a significant number of men are putting the pop-Darwinian rhetoric to good use in social interactions. The scientific discourse of the caveman (however un-scientific we might regard it by the time it gets to everyday guys reading magazines and watching TV) is corporealized, quite literally incorporated into living identities, deeply shaping these men’s experience of being a man.

The Caveman as Ethnicity

I recognize the lure of the caveman narrative. After all, it provides an explanation for patterns we do see and for how men do feel in contemporary society, tells men that they are beings who are the way they are for a specific reason, offers them an answer about what motivates them, and carries the authority of scientific investigation about their biological makeup. Evolutionary theory offers an origin story. Plus, it’s fun: thinking of the reasons you might feel a certain way because such feelings might have been necessary for your ancestors to survive a hostile environment back in the Pleistocene can be a satisfying intellectual exercise.

In telling men a story about who they are, naturally, pop-Darwinism has the normalizing, disciplinary effect of forging a common, biological identity among men. Embodying ideology allows men to feel morally exonerated while they reproduce that very ideology. The discourse of male biological unity suppresses many significant differences among men, and of course many ways in which men would otherwise identify with women’s tastes and behaviors. The evolutionary explanation of men’s sexual behavior is an all-encompassing narrative enabling men to frame their own thoughts and experiences through it. As such it’s a *grand narrative*, a totalizing theory explaining men’s experiences as though all men act and feel the same ways, and as though the ideas of Western science provide a universal truth about those actions and feelings.

I’m skeptical of this kind of totalizing narrative about male sexuality because evolution applied to human beings does not offer that sort of truth. The application of evolutionary theory to human behavior is not as straightforwardly scientific as it might seem, even for those of us who believe in the theory of evolution by natural selection. It is a partial, political discourse that authorizes certain prevalent

masculine behaviors and a problematic acceptance of those behaviors. I think there are better—less totalizing, and differently consequential—discourses out there that describe and explain those same behaviors. I’m also skeptical of men’s use of the evolutionary narrative because, at its best, it can only create “soft patriarchs”—kinder, gentler cavemen who resist the putative urges of which evolutionary science makes them aware.⁴⁴

Caveman masculinity has become an “ethnic option,” a way of identifying and living one’s manhood. Mary C. Waters explains that ethnic identity is “far from the automatic labeling of a primordial characteristic” but instead is a complex, socially created identity.⁴⁵ As an ethnicity, caveman masculinity is seen as not only impossible but undesirable to change.⁴⁶ The caveman as an ethnicity reveals an embrace of biology as a reaction to social constructionist understandings of masculinity, feminist demands on men, and the changing roles of men at work and in families.

To repeat: my quarrel is not limited to evolutionary theorists alone. Darwinian ideas are often spread by enthusiasts—secondary school teachers, science editors of various newspapers and magazines, and educational television show producers—who take up evolutionary theorists’ ideas and convey them to mass audiences. Evolutionary thinking has become popular in part because it speaks to a publicly recognized predicament of men. Changing economic patterns have propelled men’s flight from marriage and breadwinning, in conjunction with women’s increased (albeit significantly less prosperous) independence. If a man today wants multiple partners with as little commitment as possible, evolutionary rhetoric answers why this is so.

Evolutionary science doesn’t tell a flattering story about men. But more significantly, many people don’t understand that it’s *a story*. Evolution has become not only a grand narrative but a lived ideology. Maleness and femaleness, like heterosexuality and homosexuality, are not simply identities but *systems of knowledge*.⁴⁷ And those systems of knowledge inform thinking and acting. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus explains the ways in which culture and knowledge, including evolutionary knowledge, implant themselves at the level of the body, becoming a set of attitudes, tastes, perceptions, actions, and reactions. The status of science as objective, neutral knowledge helps make evolution a lived ideology because it feels truthful, natural, real.

Taking the historical and cultural changes affecting men seriously and embracing the diversity among men demand new understandings of masculinity, identity, and science. In gaining such a sociological perspective, men might resist making gender a new ethnicity and instead take a great leap forward to become new kinds of men.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would the story of the caveman be appealing to some men?
2. Discuss three reasons why we should examine the pop-Darwinist discourse of men’s sexuality.

3. What is the theory of habitus and how does that help us understand the possible impact of popular accounts of men's sexuality on men?
4. How are popular understandings of masculinity and men's sexuality linked to scientific understandings? How might discrepancies between the popular and the scientific views occur?
5. How is caveman masculinity a "new ethnicity"?
6. How would a sociological understanding of masculine identity help us see masculinity in ways that moves beyond caveman masculinity?

NOTES

1. This essay also appears in *Men's Lives*, 8th Edition, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner (New River, NJ: Allyn & Bacon, Pearson Education), 2009.
2. For defenses of the study of the popularization of scientific discourse, and exemplary studies of the popularization of Darwinian discourse in different eras, see Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) and Alvar Ellegård, *Darwin and the General Reader: The Reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in the British Press, 1859–1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
3. Mary Ellen Strote, "Man the Visual Animal," *Muscle and Fitness* (February 1994): 166.
4. *Ibid.*, 166.
5. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1963).
6. Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 40.
7. Sara Stewart, "Beasty Boys—'Retrosexuals' Call for Return of Manly Men; Retrosexuals Rising," *The New York Post*, July 18, 2006).
8. My argument here parallels a study of the pervasive iconography of the gene in popular culture. In *The DNA Mystique: The Gene As a Cultural Icon*, Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1995, 11) explain that popular culture provides "narratives of meaning." Those narratives filter complex ideas, provide guidance, and influence how people see themselves and evaluate other people, ideas, and policies. In this way, Nelkin and Lindee argue, DNA works as an ideology to justify boundaries of identity and legal rights, as well as to explain criminality, addiction, and personality. Of course addict genes and criminal genes are misnomers—the definitions of what counts as an addict and what counts as a crime have shifted throughout history. Understanding DNA stories as ideological clarifies why, for example, people made sense of Elvis's talents and shortcomings by referring to his genetic stock (*Ibid.*, 79–80). To call narratives of DNA ideological, then, is *not* to resist the scientific argument that deoxyribonucleic acid is a double-helix structure carrying information forming living cells and tissues, but to look at the way people make sense of DNA and use DNA to make sense of people and events in their daily lives.
9. Laurence Gonzales, "The Biology of Attraction," *Men's Health* 20.7 (2005): 186–93.
10. *Ibid.*, 192.

11. Ibid., 193.
12. Amy Alkon, "Many Men Fantasize During Sex, But It Isn't a Talking Point," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 29 September 2005, p. 34.
13. Greg Gutfeld, "The Mysteries of Sex ... Explained!," *Men's Health* April: 1999, 76.
14. Ibid., 76.
15. Steven E. Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004), 4.
16. David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994).
17. *Day One* reported in 1995. ABC News.
18. Ibid.
19. Geoffrey Cowley, "The Biology of Beauty," *Newsweek* 127 (1996): 62.
20. Ibid., 64.
21. Ibid., 66.
22. Ibid.
23. Desmond Morris' *The Human Animal: A Personal View of the Human Species* ["Beyond Survival"]. Clive Bromhall, dir. (Discovery Communication/TLC Video, 1999).
24. Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1967).
25. Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 45.
26. Ibid., 50.
27. Ibid., 52.
28. Mark Erickson, *Science, Culture and Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 224.
29. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
30. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* Stanford (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
32. Richard Widick, "Flesh and the Free Market: (On Taking Bourdieu to the Options Exchange)," *Theory and Society* 32 (2003): 679–723, 716.
33. Widick, 701.
34. Ibid.
35. Bourdieu, *Masculine*, 39.
36. Lois McNay, "Agency and Experience: Gender As a Lived Relation," in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, ed. Lisa Adkins and Bev Skeggs (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 177.
37. See McNay 175–90 for a discussion of emotional compensation and lived experience.
38. See Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) for a study pointing this out about working class women.
39. R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 84.
40. Ibid., 85.
41. Thomas F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

42. Paul Rabinow, *Making PCR, A Story of Biotechnology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 101–102.
43. Ibid., 102.
44. I am appropriating W. Bradford Wilcox's term, from his book *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Wilcox argues that the Christian men's movement known as the Promise Keepers encourages men to spend more time with their wives and children without ever challenging the fundamental patriarchal family structure that places men at the top.
45. Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 16.
46. See Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 127–137.
47. Steven Seidman, *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93.