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WHO NEEDS MEN?

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WHO NEEDS MEN?

Addressing the prospect of a
matrilinear millennium

Women now make up 56 percent of students in America's colleges and universities and, by the year 2007, having achieved parity or majority in such traditionally "male" fields as business and biology, will earn 200,000 more bachelor's degrees annually than will men. What does such a disparity portend, given that there are already six women in the workplace for every seven men and that the percentage of women who never marry or have a child has risen steadily for a generation? Has a fundamental shift between men and women occurred in industrial society? What narrative accounts for Iceland's astonishing out-of-wedlock birthrate of 65 percent, the dramatic rise in the average age of Taiwanese brides, and the 23 percent functional-illiteracy rate among England's young men? Could it be that males are in decline?

Knowing that such an idea will be greeted with skepticism, *Harper's Magazine* invited two practiced observers of the human condition—a man and a woman—to open the debate.

The following discussion was held over lunch at the Savoy restaurant in Manhattan.

COLIN HARRISON

is the deputy editor of Harper's Magazine. He served as moderator.

BARBARA EHRENREICH

is a political essayist, columnist, and social critic, as well as a contributing editor of Harper's Magazine.

She is the author or co-author of twelve books, including *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, and, most recently, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*. Her last article for Harper's was "Nickel-and-Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America," which appeared in the January issue.

LIONEL TIGER

is the Charles Darwin professor of anthropology at Rutgers University, was for twelve years research director of the Harry F. Guggenheim Foundation, and serves as a consultant to various governmental and private organizations. Among his books are *Men in Groups*, which introduced the term "male bonding" into the cultural vocabulary; *The Imperial Animal* (with Robin Fox); *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*; *The Pursuit of Pleasure*; and *The Decline of Males*, published in May.

THE INSULT OF MASCULINITY

COLIN HARRISON: Lionel, you're worried about men, that they are under pressure—societally, occupationally, sexually—even as women are enjoying a long overdue ascension. Men are now a minority of college students, hold fewer and fewer jobs in relation to women, and are not present in the daily lives of one quarter of American children. What's happening?

LIONEL TIGER: Since the 1960s I've listened to the whole discussion of sex and gender, and have retained a somewhat stubborn sense that there's a lot going on that is not at the level of politics, or even at the level of consciousness. I think the fulcrum of the subject is the birth control pill. We have made a major shift in our reproductive relationships, causing some rather glaring phenomena, such as the rise in single motherhood and the emergence of legal and illegal abortion in communities that hitherto had been very resistant to it. The shift is being misdiagnosed, on the one hand, by politicians who yammer on about family values as a way to recapture a family structure no longer available to many people; and, on the other hand, by academics and theorists who want to amend the interpersonal relations between males and females. What has changed are our underlying biological patterns. Just as Marx describes the problems of our century at its beginning, I think that Darwin may describe many of the problems at its end. And these are gay rights, single motherhood, abortion—all things that essentially come out of the biology of *Homo sapiens*.

BARBARA EHRENREICH: We have many millennia to cover here, and I take issue with you even on our starting point in this discussion. As for the role of the pill in creating a crisis in the relation be-

tween the two sexes, I find that very unconvincing for the reason that there's always been fairly safe and effective contraception before the pill—for example, the diaphragm.

TIGER: And the condom.

EHRENREICH: Right, but going back to traditional societies, you also find contraception. A human male has never known for sure whether he's planting a seed in fertile ground, so to speak.

TIGER: But the pill is categorically different, I think, because it has allowed for a measure of privacy. Only the woman knows whether she's using it or not. Which, historically, is new.

EHRENREICH: Well, she also knows whether she stuffed a pessary made out of grass and mud into her vagina.

TIGER: Which the man might be able to detect, as she would a condom. My point is that the introduction of the pill a generation ago yielded two counterintuitive results—more single mothers and more abortions. Paternity uncertainty has had a far more volatile impact than anyone would have predicted.

EHRENREICH: But you cannot establish that the increase in single motherhood has anything to do with pill usage. In fact—

TIGER: Except in time.

EHRENREICH: I know, but just because something happens at the same time—well, there's a fancy Latin phrase for that kind of logical error. But in fact one of the groups in our society that has consistently rejected the pill as a form of birth control is poor, inner-city women, who have a lot of suspicion about the pill. And, remember, the pill that was initially released was very high in estrogen, with lots of side effects and hazards. I was one of the women who took it in the mid-Sixties, and I got off it when strange things began to happen.

So it produced, perhaps, a generation of women who had high expectations about contraception and control over their own bodies, but were really let down. And it's not until about the last ten years that there's been a low-estrogen pill with fewer side effects. So that's another problem with your assertion. But there are lots of *other* reasons why men have walked away from the family that have nothing to do with knowing whether their children are biologically theirs or not. By the way, one more little biological point is concealed ovulation—an odd thing about humans. Human males never know whether they're impregnating a fertile woman. God knows why we have this. A little feminist touch from the Goddess, I guess. Anyway, I find the connection between the pill and these social changes unconvincing.

TIGER: What would be convincing?

EHRENREICH: I would agree that there has been an exodus of men from the family. The single-mother family is much more common. I'd give three reasons. One is that men *wanted* to leave. Men had been coerced into the male breadwinner role, in which they had to agree to support a non-working woman and her children forever. As I argued in *The Hearts of Men*, there was a revolt against that beginning in the Fifties. A lot of men looked around and said, "Why are we supporting these parasites, these women who don't earn their keep?" A second cause is that some of the ideological props pushing men into that role—such as the whole quasi-Freudian psychology, in which real manhood was defined as holding a job, being married, and supporting your wife—were beginning to crumble in the Fifties and Sixties. The human-potential movement came along and said: Life is not just a matter of fitting into a sex role; it's an open-ended trajectory, a path that could go here or there. You don't have to fit the one model. That had a big impact, certainly on middle-class men and women. And then, third, the thing undercutting the older male role in the family is the decline of male wages. Working-class men are not in a position to support a family anymore.

TIGER: We agree on the third point. But on the issue of the therapeutic model, you have to add the entire feminist movement, which dynamically energized women to believe that being in the traditional role was a sign of emotional or psychological poverty, and that they should move out into the labor force. This movement led to a series of profound tensions, which I see at the university all the time, in which the whole essence of what used to be defined as normal maleness is

now seen as a risible kind of fatuous and reactionary behavior. One example is what happens to boys in school. Being males, they like to make large-muscle movements, and then they're told by their teachers that they've got attention deficit disorder and they're given Ritalin and tranquilized, and they drop out of school. What happens to those boys? There's a community out there punishing them. We have a social system, based on sentimental psycho-prejudice, in which the norm is the female norm and what boys do is seen as socially disruptive. Another example is the notion that a man should take care of a spouse and children. I have boys in my classes who are stunned into silence when the discussion turns to what

happens after they graduate. They don't dare talk, because they're going to get leapt on by the women of the class, who'll say, "What do you mean you want to take care of a wife and child?" The women are personally insulted.

EHRENREICH: I've had the opposite experience with college audiences. I'd say, "How many women here would like to just stay home and raise children?" And you'd get a few hands. They'd be a little embarrassed, but they'd put their hands up. Then you'd ask, "How many men here are prepared to devote their lives to supporting these women who are not going to work?" No hands.

TIGER: Of course. In the old days there used to be some rather severe forms of control over this, one of which we used to call God, and if you got married in the Church, then that was the end of it. If you were a Catholic you could not possibly divorce. It just couldn't happen. And up until



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the Fifties or Sixties getting a divorce, even in the secular sense, was quite difficult. Once you got married you understood that it was for keeps. It was a real contract. And what subsequently happened, because of this psycho-therapeutic sauce that you could apply as a kind of a flavoring, is that people began to see their lives not as forms of commitment to obligation but as forms of commitment to self-expression. That's a real change, historically. Now men no longer see themselves as having a set of commitments that they have to fulfill. Many of them are insufficiently imaginative or confident about the alternative to know quite what to do.

EHRENREICH: I'm not talking about marriage, I'm talking about the idea that within marriage a man has to be the sole breadwinner. I'm saying *men* rejected that. It has nothing to do with whether they want to get married or not. They often *want* to get married. But if you ask them what kind of woman they want to get married to, they say one who can pull her own weight.

TIGER: This has now gotten to a surrealistic level; young men won't marry very talented young women who are on a law-partner track or making lots of money on Wall Street, because they think the moment they marry them, they'll quit working. The men don't want to have to support an organism costing \$150,000 a year.

EHRENREICH: That only confirms my point.

TIGER: But they view it as a question of equity, you see. The notion of equity between a man, a wife, and their children has changed, so that a man no longer feels that it's enough to bring home his paycheck, except in the working-class communities, where if he can do that it's pretty good, because jobs are hard to get. Those men really do want to supply goods and services to their families and try their very damn best to do so. But there's been a recalibration in the national sphere, publicly and emotionally and conceptually, away from male responsibility, due in part to the whole force of the feminist movement, which has been phenomenally powerful.

EHRENREICH: Let's get to feminism. Please don't generalize from academic women about American feminism. That's unfair. If you speak for grass-roots, mainstream feminism in this country, the position has not been that we want to destroy the family. It's been that we think the family is so important that men ought to get involved in it. That's been the stance. That you guys can get used to the idea of changing a diaper without issuing a press release every time you do it. The message is that what we're doing at home is important. And you men damn well better do some of it, too.

TIGER: I agree with you that it's hard to characterize feminism, because it doesn't exist as a unitary thing. But if you ask women in the public, not Gloria Steinem or any of the whole array of profes-

sional feminists, whether they think of themselves as feminists, they say no, because they feel that it's anti-family, it's anti-female. There's a strong undercurrent of resentment to this notion that the only sensible female role is one in which she is self-supportive.

EHRENREICH: But that hasn't been the feminist point of view. The feminist point of view has been that we have to respect that traditional role. Hence the feminist campaign to improve social security for homemakers, for example. This is why some of us fought our losing battle to keep welfare, because raising children is work. There's an old feminist slogan that says there are no non-working mothers. But right now, being a full-time mother is only an option for women married to wealthy men.

TIGER: Let's consider the Jesus and Mary story in the Bible. I think it's a metaphor for welfare. Joseph was not the father, had no personal responsibility for that child. The community has to take care of the mother and child. In the old days, when it was legally required that you take care of your child or children if you were married, there was no option, no necessary community to step in to help out when the mother didn't know who the father was—before DNA testing, which is going to change all this; before you could make any kind of assertion about who a child's father was, the church and the state conspired and said to the guy, I'm very sorry, this is your job, you must do this. Now, many men didn't do it, but many, many did. One of the greatest transfer payments of all time must have been in the 140 or 150 years of the Industrial Revolution, when every steelworker in Cleveland, Kiel, and Sheffield would take his sixty or seventy dollars and bring it home to his wife. Since nobody had bank accounts, she'd give him three or four dollars for whatever he might want to do with it, and she handled the rest. That went on throughout the industrial world for a long time. That was seen as both morally appropriate and essential. Somewhere we lost that belief.

EHRENREICH: That was not always a very voluntary transfer payment. My own grandmother had to go to the shift boss at the mines and complain that my grandfather was not bringing home his paycheck. He was drinking it away. I always felt ambivalent about that story, going to the boss to complain about your husband. But it was a struggle to get that paycheck past the bars of Butte, Montana. I am saying this to undercut any notion that men have some genetically inherited program that says they are not whole men unless they can bring home money to a wife. It was a struggle to get men to be responsible to their families.

TIGER: Your point drives to the basic point I'm making, which is that as a society we're moving to a biologically fail-safe mechanism, which is to look at the mother-child relationship as the core of the community. And once again the male is scuf-

fling around the outside trying to figure out what the hell to do. That's what we see in some communities, especially certain minority communities. The species has always faced the question of what to do with the young males. That problem still remains. We're moving to a new kind of matrilineality that is happening very quickly. Increases in the number of single mothers have been astonishing over the past thirty years. Margaret Mead said years ago that fatherhood is a social invention, and there you and I agree. We've lost, however, the notion that we should even maintain the fiction that it's desirable. In fact, there are lots of people trying to undermine it, so you have fatuities such as Gloria Steinem's "a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle"—a kind of tonal rendition of this entire story. The result has been an unprecedented speed of change in the heartland of human life, which is male-female relationships and the raising of children. I don't think one can avoid the responsibility to look at all possible explanations.

EHRENREICH: You keep picking on Gloria Steinem.

TIGER: Because she's a suitably sentimental figure here, and obviously quite prominent—

EHRENREICH: She didn't make up that slogan. And I don't see what's so threatening about that slogan anyway.

TIGER: Imagine if she said that about blacks.

EHRENREICH: What would be the problem? All it means is that you don't have to land a man to be a full human being as a woman. Don't be threatened by it.

TIGER: I'm not. I am trying to ask why all this started to happen so remarkably rapidly, and what effect it has on people. We need to find the best possible explanation. I happen to think that if we're talking about a biological category, gender or sex, biology isn't a bad tool to use.

EHRENREICH: Sex is a biological category, gender isn't. You should have picked up that from the feminist academics.

TIGER: But gender/sex is in fact a boring dichotomy, because we all know what we're talking about. I think that sex is real; gender is fashioned, *fashionable*. I don't much care about gender; I do care about sex. Let's restrict our discussion to that, because at least it's clearer than talking about gender.

EHRENREICH: When you talk about whether men wanted to be breadwinners, you're talking about gender, and then you're trying to trace this all down to what seems to me a rather adventitious matter, the introduction of the birth control pill. This is just really hard to follow.

TIGER: It may be hard to follow, but it may not therefore be incorrect. When I said that time was the factor, all I said was that whereas there's no causal relationship that you can identify, there is a temporal relationship in which you introduce a

technology here and you get a series of events there, which are plausibly related. Plausibly. And all I'm trying to do is sketch—

EHRENREICH: *Male* scientists came up with the pill.

And I'll tell you something else men introduced: *Playboy* magazine, which initially was an ideological, polemical journal that rallied men to dump their wives or not get married in the first place. I think that I could make an argument every bit as convincing that *Playboy* was much more important than the birth control pill in saying to men, You don't have to be the breadwinner for a family the size of which you don't even control.

DE-GENDERED MAN?

HARRISON: Lionel, you mentioned that your male college students seem quite confused about what is expected of them. Is it that they don't want to fulfill traditional expectations or that they feel that they *can't* fulfill those expectations? In other words, does the idea of supporting a family terrify them?

TIGER: Young people are absolutely terrified about their futures. They're very, very concerned about earning a living. They're very aware of the profound competition in the job market, that companies are not keeping people forever. Personal economic stability is the first order of business. And now women are the majority in the universities, so the men are competing not only with one another, which they've always had to do, but now with women, and women generally do better.

EHRENREICH: So you cite that as another example of male decline, what we could call the feminizing of the university?

TIGER: I wouldn't use that word, "feminizing."

EHRENREICH: One of the reasons why fewer men are going to college may be because they suspect that they can make a living just as well without a college education; in other words, they still have such an advantage over women in the non-professional workforce that they don't require an education. I would explore that possibility before advertising the point that the relative decline of men in the student body represents male decline. It may represent male *advantage*.

TIGER: I can't treat that idea seriously, because, for example, we know from the black community that women go into the university far more than men. And it's not because black men are getting jobs as orthodontists; it's because they're not getting any jobs at all. They're not going into any higher education because they just feel doomed. So yours is a capricious analysis. Furthermore, let's assume that men are now staying out of the university and earning fortunes doing I don't know

what, but let's assume that they are. When push comes to shove, ten years from now, it's the women who are going to get the good jobs because they've got the credentials. Those are the emergent outlines of our community. When I talk about the decline of males, I'm merely trying to point out something that's quite astonishing; if any of us had been told thirty years ago that men would now be the minority at universities and that universities would now be having affirmative action for men, we'd have been shocked. Even fifteen years ago, we wouldn't have believed it. Events have happened so rapidly that we've lost an analytical lever to try to understand them. That's all I'm trying to say. Paternity certainty is not the only thing that's involved. Nonetheless, in most cases, most men still do what they are supposed to do about their children, and they work their asses off for them. Some of them leave, as you yourself characterize, but it's now much more permissible to leave, not, please, just because of *Playboy* but because of some sense of equity; the idea that I do not have to provide money to another organism. Marriage is no longer a sacred ritual, legislated and denoted by God, but yet another contract. The

rise of the prenuptial contract is merely a leading indicator of the prenuptial agreements emotionally, which are that we go into this relationship until severe irritation do us part.

EHRENREICH: You are romanticizing marriage in the past. Marriage, if anything, has become much more about romantic love than it was in past centuries, when it was a contract between two families, an economic relationship. You'll concede that—

TIGER: I don't want to concede that point. What I want to concede is that marriage has always been seen as a difficult phenomenon involving male and female sexuality that was likely to yield children. Therefore it required a composed preparation called the wedding, in which you bring the two families together, in some cultures actually exchanging money through the wedding feast and

the wedding gifts. I agree totally that it has never been a romantic matter. The more romantic it's become, the less it's had to do with kinship and the more it's had to do with psychology.

EHRENREICH: I want to get at another level here. I want to explore your feelings about these things. You say the "decline" of males—there's a sad tone to that. I would feel sad, as a mother of a son, if males suddenly started "declining" in some serious way. Do you feel loss and regret and nostalgia? Why call it a decline? Why not say, Let's go boldly forth in this more egalitarian and somewhat de-gendered world?

TIGER: A more attractive picture to be sure, but not, however, I think, quite as accurate a rendition of the emotional consequences of what's happening. I'm not interested in characterizing my own personal psyche in this matter, solely because I think it's of zero interest to anyone. What is of interest is the fact that, as you suggested, young men and women are very concerned about these matters, one reason being that they no longer have a set of rules that they think are emotionally and morally worthwhile. Now, why should people have rules? If you study anthropology, you realize that human beings generally try to have rules, notions of how to behave. What we saw in the

Clinton-Lewinsky business was some astonishing confusion between personal and public life.

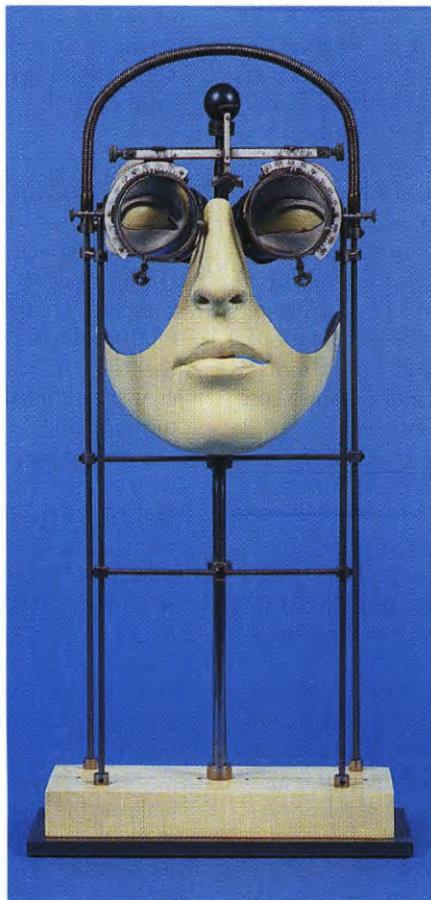
EHRENREICH: You certainly got away from the issue of how *you* feel about it. See, I'm willing to say how I feel.

TIGER: I'm wholly uninterested in your feelings.

EHRENREICH: But I think it lends energy to what I say here, because I *do* feel strongly about this. A good deal of my adult life has been given to the struggle for gender equity. I don't want males to decline, I want females to rise up. I think you have some powerful nostalgia here, perhaps not only for patriarchy but for more hierarchical and feudalistic ways of life in general.

TIGER: I could not object more strongly to your characterization of me as moving toward patriarchy and—what was the other calumny? Feudalism?

EHRENREICH: That's left open unless you—



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TIGER: You don't leave it open. I don't think the intellectual is the personal. I think the personal is the personal and the intellectual is the intellectual. We shouldn't confuse psychodrama with analysis. And I happen to think, as a matter of formal principle, that one's personal position is not necessarily connected to one's intellectual position.

EHRENREICH: You come to this discussion of men and women, and you have no particular stake in the kind of world we're heading toward?

TIGER: I have a stake in getting the argument right. I have a stake in trying to ensure that when people live their lives they do so with a measure of information that is as uncorrupted as possible by sentiment, cant, and ideology. I have a personal stake that is anti-ideological, I will concede that. Ideology is a form of brain damage, and too much of the world makes easy judgments based on ideology rather than the harder work of going through each case on its merits. So to that extent, yes, I do have a personal position, but it's a functional position, not, I have to assure you, out of some nostalgia for the Montreal of the 1940s in which I grew up working in my father's economic colossus, Martin's Herring Store. This was presumably where I learned the elegant privilege of patriarchy. You must be joking. Be a little kinder to the messenger.

EHRENREICH: But there's a nostalgia to the phrase "the decline of males." I'm willing to be generous on this point and take you as just a neutral, non-ideological, disembodied presence commenting on things very distant from you. But these things are not distant from me, or from a lot of people trying to figure out their lives. When is the decline of males going to get to the point when, say, the Senate is mostly women?

TIGER: Oh, I don't think it's going to, because women understand perfectly well that the best thing to do is to vote for the appropriate senators. Which is what they've figured out now to do in the last two elections, and they've done all through Europe too.

EHRENREICH: If men are declining so fast, why aren't there more women in the Senate?

TIGER: They should be if they want. I don't think it's necessarily a sign of progress to be in the Senate, given most of the people there.

EHRENREICH: How about CEOs? Women have made very little progress at the top of the corporate hierarchy.

TIGER: Again, that's a complicated question about who wants those jobs.

EHRENREICH: A lot of women do.

TIGER: Then they should try to get them. They're going to have as much trouble getting them as men do. Most men, virtually *all* men, don't get those jobs. Yes, there's a disproportionate number of men who have those jobs, because a disproportionate number of men have been in the system

over the years. It will change. But not totally. A lot of women will simply not be prepared to do what men are prepared to do, which is essentially to deny themselves any inner private life in order to achieve this status.

EHRENREICH: Wait, wait. I hope you're not saying that the reason women aren't in those positions of power is that they just haven't tried. You're going to have trouble convincing a lot of women that men are on the decline when we haven't seen much of a change in the positions of power in the world. And so I would say, yeah, they may be declining, but not fast enough.

TIGER: Regarding the dramatic spots, the CEO positions, I agree. I don't think that's going to change very quickly. That will depend on people being willing to be unmarried, on women being unmarried.

EHRENREICH: Wait, why doesn't it depend on men being willing to be unmarried? We don't have celibate male CEOs.

TIGER: No, because they have wives.

EHRENREICH: So it would seem to me that men are still holding their own pretty well, that there's still quite a bit of advantage in being a man.

TIGER: I never said there was a disadvantage.

EHRENREICH: Well, I'm just pointing out that the decline hasn't been very dramatic.

TIGER: It hasn't been yet. But when I use the general term "males," I'm not so interested in the elite CEOs. I'm much more interested in the broad mass of the population and how people in general are living, much more interested in the one third of babies born to single mothers who, I think, get a raw deal at the outset—because there's no father. And that fact seems to me to be vital in any effort to look at the future.

HARRISON: Barbara, you mentioned your son. How do you think these changes affect him?

EHRENREICH: He's twenty-six and in a long-term relationship. He's not married. And the deal between him and his girlfriend is that when she's making more money she supports the two of them and when he's making more he supports the two of them. There doesn't seem to be any fuss about it. I think it'll be the same way if they have children, that they'll divide the child raising that way. I don't think he's unique to his generation in being pretty laid-back about the traditional male sex role. He's just not interested.

TIGER: I was once asked by a major magazine principally devoted to women to do a story about women married to men whom the women felt were not working hard enough. One man had gone off to Seattle to express himself, and another had decided to take up bookbinding. The men were doing just what they felt like doing. The women were *deeply* irritated. And I think one consequence of this kind of quest for non-traditional male identity is that a lot of women will say,

I'm not going to even bother getting married.

HARRISON: But Lionel, how could women possibly complain about men simply expressing themselves, when, in fact, that freedom is what women have worked for so hard for thirty years?

TIGER: I remember that one woman came to our place for dinner—and she's got a very important job—and the first thing she said was, "I can't work this hard anymore." Now, she had a job of such envious status that most people would be thrilled with it. What she was saying was that she wanted her spouse to actually do more than what he was doing. And he was doing the best he could. But that was her response. When you look at what's going on in Japan, in Germany, in France, in England, at the marriage patterns, you see real changes. In Japan, for example, the women have decided they simply cannot bear these men who go off to work and come back drunk at night and expect them to have dinner ready and all of that. The women are simply not getting married. And if they are getting married they're not having any children, so the Japanese government has been trying to stimulate the birth rate, and in Singapore they actually pay people with high IQs to have babies. It's a kind of high comedy. But the women are realizing that they have to be able to do it themselves. So one reason that there are more women in college than men is that they're working for two, because they're going to have to support children.

HARRISON: Barbara, if your son has a child with this woman, in or out of wedlock, do you expect that he'll support that child?

EHRENREICH: Well, he'll do his best, yes.

HARRISON: Do you expect him to support that child?

EHRENREICH: Well, with his girlfriend, yes. I would expect them both to support that child. Who else? You want me to do it?

HARRISON: What if he didn't?

EHRENREICH: And he just goofed off? Well, I guess I'd have to take that baby in.

TIGER: You know what? You're now part of the emerging kinship system.

EHRENREICH: I'm part of a family. It's a family responsibility.

TIGER: That's right, which is what marriage always has been. Kinship responsibility.

EHRENREICH: Why, what are you getting at? Are you saying my son is a no-good, a deadbeat?

HARRISON: I am trying to find the point of conflict. Earlier you referred to men being freed from their roles. If your son decided to move to Seattle and put earrings in his ears and do something crazy—

EHRENREICH: He already has earrings.

HARRISON: Okay, what I mean is, what if he did not want to support the child? At what point do you say, Your freedom ends—

EHRENREICH: Of course I believe in responsibility to children when they come along, but I was trying

to talk very sympathetically toward men who reject this kind of role. I'm not, however, sympathetic to deadbeat dads. Kids are an absolute, lifelong responsibility. Spouses, girlfriends come and go. A kid, that's who the contract should be with. And I would say all this to my son if he were to be so rotten. But he's actually one of the most responsible people on earth.

TIGER: Obviously he's had a decent mother in this matter, but the fact is, for a lot of young men, their mothers don't know what to tell them.

EHRENREICH: What about the women, though? Women have spent far more of their time raising children, having children, and if any sex has been radically displaced from its traditional work, it's women. My great-grandmothers had four, five, six pregnancies. A tremendous investment of a woman's life. *This* is what has changed. Now, in my generation, it might be two or three pregnancies. In my daughter's, it'll be one or two. So if any sex has been quickly tossed out of what apparently was its prehistorically ordained job, it's females. So please don't now toss us out of the colleges and better jobs.

TIGER: You obviously are not getting the tone of the argument, because women can still do what they've always done.

EHRENREICH: Which is?

TIGER: Which is if they want, they can have a child or two. They're not exempt from or kept out of the reproductive system, and that's what's happening with a third of the babies in the industrial world.

EHRENREICH: Men aren't either. I'm saying both sexes have been pushed out of older roles.

TIGER: Oh, no question about it.

EHRENREICH: Women certainly more so, and all the more radically so without welfare. Now you can't even say, Oh, I think I'm going to have a baby and let the government support it.

TIGER: But women still have the opportunity to experience a good part of the life cycle. I see the life cycle as something you really want to protect, in that you want to give every organism the opportunity to do as full a range of its endowed genetic capabilities as possible. In this sense I have a zookeeper's mentality. You want to create a societal zoo in which the conditions are as close to the evolutionary nature of the animals' conditions as you possibly can. Therefore I think that forcing people not to have children is wrong. I think it's morally wrong. It's biologically wrong also. And we evaluate zoos by how well the animals reproduce in them.

EHRENREICH: But there's no need for us to keep reproducing at a rapid clip. From the vantage point of economic elites, there's even a surplus of humans on earth.

TIGER: No, there's not a surplus.

EHRENREICH: But the population is high. You can't

so easily convince the elite in some particular country that their businesses will come to a halt if they don't campaign to provide charity for starving babies. We have a trend away from social welfare, toward dismantling it, because there's no reason on the part of the elite to keep those little children alive. This is what's new, I would say, about the human situation. We have overfilled the earth, or at least filled it up pretty well. And some of the visions of family that you have, which I sense that you are nostalgic for, belong to a more sparsely populated earth, and are implicitly pro-natalist.

TIGER: The earth that we're talking about, the industrial earth, is becoming, in fact, more and more sparsely populated. The birth rates all through Europe and Russia are declining, and Italy will have about half its population in sixty years if the current birth rate stays as it is.

EHRENREICH: But the overall global population is expected to go up for several more decades.

TIGER: That's a conjectural issue, because then the basic political question becomes immigration.

EHRENREICH: Huh? My point is that biologically this is a new situation. Maybe there was a time when women had to stay at home or at the hearth, and produce baby after baby, and just fill up the earth. God said, Go forth and multiply, and we took that commandment very seriously, this species. That's been done. You could still argue against feminists in the nineteenth century and say, Well, if you want to have these jobs and do this and that, what's going to happen to the species? Now we can say, as women, Wait a minute, we did our work, we overstocked the earth with human beings. We can take a rest now. We can be gay if we want. We can be asexual. The change may be terrifying in some ways, but it's also wonderful.

TIGER: As I mentioned, in many of the European countries and eventually in the United States, absent Hispanic immigration, populations will begin to decline. It doesn't feel as if it ever will, but there is a declining birth rate in many of the European countries, and it's serious enough for governments to pay attention.

EHRENREICH: My point is that for the first time on earth, that's something to applaud.

TIGER: Yes, except that in terms of the life cycles of the men and women involved, it is a form of sentimentally enforced infertility. Look at fertility clinics now, which are among the most prosperous part of the medical industry because people have delayed having children. A community enjoys itself better if it engages in reproduction, simply because reproduction is so rich, such an important part of life.

EHRENREICH: Right, but it's no longer a necessity.

TIGER: I never said it was.

EHRENREICH: I know. I'm making a huge, sweeping biological point.

TIGER: I wouldn't dream of doing that.

EHRENREICH: (Laughing) Come on. I feel comfortable making huge sweeping biological points with you because you have done so much of it in your life—and very intriguingly. But the fact is that now women can live different ways. That is the biological turning point. The burden is not on every woman to keep her womb stuffed with the next baby.

TIGER: Then the question remains—and you're rephrasing the question that's implicit in our discussion—what the hell do the males do?

LEVITTOWN IN THE PALEOLITHIC ERA

EHRENREICH: You know, Lionel, it's funny to me that you haven't mentioned the crisis for males that took place about 12,000 years ago—just on the eve of the transition to agriculture, as hunting was ceasing to be a viable way of life, and largely, I would conjecture, because of depleted game stocks in the world. What men did at that point was pretty scary. They invented war. They found something for themselves to do. It was glorious, it flattered their egos, those of them that lived through it. Then there were those poor guys who had to make the much less glamorous adaptation to pushing a plow, to agriculture. I'm just saying you haven't mentioned the first big decline of males 12,000 years ago.

TIGER: It was a decline, but it involved a change. That crisis of movement from hunting and gathering to agriculture and pastoralism generated all our moral systems. The Lord is my Shepherd, the Buddhist ethic—all these are the ethics of small farmers and shepherds, part of an effort to deal with precisely the problem of what the hell do we do with the males. So we make up a religion, we tell them that they're going to have to do this on pain of hell. And if they happen to get involved sexually with someone and a baby is born, then they're married de facto, full stop, end of story. All the organized religions come out of that crisis of transition. Warfare, yes. Warfare happened, however, before, and it happens in the chimps.

EHRENREICH: The first evidence of war, as opposed to individual homicides, is from around 12,000 years ago, which is long after our evolutionary divergence from chimps.

TIGER: That's when the population started to get large enough.

EHRENREICH: Maybe. But I want to take this opportunity to take issue with the whole view of gender and evolution you have been associated with for decades: the "man the hunter" theory, in which the males are the hunters and the females just wait around for them to bring the meat home. I think my real anger at you, Lionel, is that—I

have to say it—is that by creating this mythical view of our past—and I don't think you did it all that convincingly—you made it impossible for anybody to talk interestingly about prehistory for a long, long time.

TIGER: I did this?

EHRENREICH: Yep. I'm blaming you and a few other sociobiologists who said, here's how it was millions and hundreds of thousands and tens of thousands of years ago, this is what it was like in the gender sense, here is what the two sexes did. It turned a lot of women off from looking back at our evolutionary history. And it's not well founded, not at all. That whole "man the hunter" idea is a strange vision of human evolution. For one thing, it would make us the only predatory species in which only one sex hunted. Very odd.

TIGER: What about the chimps?

EHRENREICH: Female chimps hunt, too.

TIGER: But hardly at all. Occasionally and opportunistically, but they don't go out and—

EHRENREICH: But the male chimps don't either. They are not exactly a predatory species.

TIGER: But they do conduct warfare.

EHRENREICH: Not anywhere near as intelligently—or as often—as ants do. My point is that we are beginning to understand that hunting, until about 15,000 years ago, was probably a communal activity. It was not done by small bands of guys going off and leaving the gals back at the campsite. It was done by a whole community driving herd animals over a cliff, into a cul-de-sac, into a net (a net often made by women, we assume, but we don't really know). So, you, Lionel, gave us a very funny picture. You gave us a picture of evolution in which only one sex was really being acted on by natural selection, and that was the male sex. Because males were hunting, the male sex was naturally selected for intelligence, for the ability to cooperate with others, for everything.

TIGER: My central argument in *Men in Groups* was that hunting was cooperative among humans, who do cooperate to acquire food, unlike the other primates, who do not. In *Imperial Animal*, Fox and I asserted that it was biologically better to give than to receive. But the hunters were and largely are male. It was women who were selecting the hunters. That's how prestige in sexual selection goes. You're accusing me of having made an argument based on a relatively small database, which I concede, but I wasn't there, and neither were you; you don't know who was making nets, you don't know who was killing the animals. The genetic evidence we have shows that this hunting business went on for nearly the entire history of our species. At the time of Christ half the people were still hunting and gathering. Was there a difference between men and women and their hunting patterns? If a bunch of guys are going out hunting and you, the

woman, are carrying a bowling ball in the hot tropical sun, namely a baby, are you going to go with them? No.

EHRENREICH: You're not following my distinction between the communal strategy of hunting and the stalking strategy of hunting. This is important, because the stalking of individual animals probably becomes more important only as the supply of animals begins to shrink—more recently than 15,000, 12,000 years ago—on the verge of the Neolithic revolution. All I'm saying is that "man the hunter" is basically an exciting macho fantasy of human evolution.

TIGER: It's a macho fantasy to hunt a pig? Those are your words.

EHRENREICH: Yeah, they're my words! Because *your* words really shut off any useful discussion of gender and human evolution. Because I share your respect for biology. I *do* believe there is a human nature. I do believe there are some things about us that we share that come from that long prehistory. I further believe that some of them are ill-served by, or contradicted by, the arrangements in which we now live. Not just men or women—I'm talking about all humans. For example, I think we're a sociable species. Sociality is central to us. You created the term "male bonding." You threw us way off the track with that. It's not male bonding that's at issue, it's human sociality. It's a desire to bond with other people in generous, exciting, adventurous, convivial ways. We may not be set up to live in a socially isolated capitalist society. It would be important to talk about that. I personally resent the fact that I can't even open up the subject of human evolution with my feminist friends without wasting half an hour refuting you.

TIGER: Look, I'm either flattered or deeply depressed by the power I retroactively had in these matters. It comes as a great surprise to me. But let's assume that you're correct and that I had this negative impact, along with a few other chums. I'm certainly not alone in this malefaction. We were dealing with the comparative primate data such as they were, which show remarkable sex differences. When we do a genotype of humans and chimps, we're just like them, except for possibly as few as fifty genes—fifty genes out of a hundred thousand. So you cannot then tell me that this Paleolithic history is in the realm of nostalgia alone.

EHRENREICH: Of course, I'm not. I'm agreeing with you on that.

TIGER: Maybe some of us were a little intrepid in trying to specify these ideas rather early on, but then what was the alternative? To go on yammering about sex roles and gender and all of these contemporary sorts of things?

EHRENREICH: But you essentially made up a story. And what made it so suspect, even to those of us who didn't have a grip on the data, is that the picture you created of prehistory looks so much like

Levittown in 1957. The guys went out in the morning and worked, the women stayed at home with the babies. That made it suspect to some of us right from the start.

TIGER: You may have been unduly constrained by Levittown, because if you also look at the hill towns of Italy 3,000 or 5,000 or 7,000 years ago, you'd find that the men would go out into the fields and the women would remain at the hearth.

EHRENREICH: What made it suspect is that it looked all too much like you were finding Paleolithic justifications for the hierarchy that existed in 1957.

TIGER: I'm sorry, Barbara, I don't think that's a strong argument. I can appreciate—

EHRENREICH: No, it's not a strong argument. It's just a reason for suspicion. I'm saying it would have been odd if people 25,000 years ago had sex role relationships very much like people in Levittown in 1957.

HARRISON: If that's true, Barbara, how would you redescribe 25,000 years ago? What were the differences between men and women then?

EHRENREICH: Well, we don't know how much difference there was. You'd have to be pretty foolish to extrapolate back to 25,000 years ago.

TIGER: Why?

EHRENREICH: Or you could be Lionel and do it. But I would not. I would say that there's reason to believe, as I already said, that the economy was based on communal hunting, which requires everybody in the group. You need the pack.

TIGER: Barbara, that's not what happens with contemporary hunter-gatherers.

EHRENREICH: Of course not. Contemporary hunter-gatherers live in a world that's been depleted of game. Today, you have to stalk individual animals.

TIGER: I understand—

EHRENREICH: It's my turn to explain all of prehistory, Lionel, you've had your turn. I'll give you a guess, a speculation. That era of communal hunting comes to an end when the game supply is diminishing globally—for whatever reasons, per-

haps because of human hunting. Then humans change sometime, much closer to now than 25,000 years ago, maybe 15,000 years ago, 12,000 years ago, to the other hunting strategy, which is hunting by

stalking. That requires quiet, and, no, you can't be carrying a baby. That's when hunting gets more specialized, with bands of men. That and the Neolithic revolution really transform the relationship between the sexes. For one thing, pro-natalism enters in with the Neolithic. You need those babies to be field hands. So I would say the downfall for both sexes may have come with that transition. We got locked into a mode of production that only became worse and more constraining with industrialization.

TIGER: Again, none of us was there. I'm not so displeased as you appear to be with retrodiction; that is, by looking at what happens now and describing what might have happened in the past. Or looking at a contemporary chimp

and asking, What is the chimp likely to have been 50,000 years ago? I think there's some genuine continuity between those two figures—chimp then, chimp now. I think the same is true with humans. And if one looks at what men now do recreationally, they hunt and fish. Generally women do not. Some women do, but the overwhelming numbers of hunters and fisherpeople are men. They do sports. They pay attention to sports. They do the proto-aggression sort of thing that one would expect a captive chimp to do.

EHRENREICH: But whenever women have gotten a chance to hunt and fish, and when those things have been appealing, socially prestigious things to do, they have done it. And women are hunting and participating in sports more and more now. You're neglecting the increasing participation of women not only in sports but as sports fans. The number of women who watch the NFL is amazing. As restrictions have been lifted off women, we become boxers, we become—

HARRISON: Let me interrupt you right there. Boxing seems to be a useful compression of everything



LIONEL BELLETTIERI

we're talking about, since it's combat. A woman friend recently said to me, "Women are boxers now. We should pay attention to this." And my response was that when the first woman kills another woman boxing, then I'll believe that women are boxers. Perhaps that is a prototypically male point of view.

EHRENREICH: Perhaps, but Lionel just said we can extrapolate back from what people do as hobbies to what they did in the Paleolithic. I'm saying that once you give women a chance, they do some amazing things. I would not have predicted, twenty years ago, that women would be so eager to get into combat in the military. Another little touchy subject we—

TIGER: They're still not, as a matter of fact, if you ask the ones who are actually in the military. It's fine if you ask all the theorists.

EHRENREICH: But women have been beating on the door, they want the military promotions.

TIGER: Who? Who? Who? Who? Who?

EHRENREICH: Female officers, for example. And remember that women are already allowed in combat in two branches of the service—the Navy and the Air Force. Anyway, my point is that as barriers have been removed from women's lives, things happen that even I, as a very feminist, liberated woman, would not have imagined. So if you're going to say, Well, in 1973 men liked sports and women liked needlepoint, and we can extrapolate back to 25,000 years ago from that, I'd say, no, no way.

TIGER: I'm not suggesting that these differences are so absolute you will never find a man doing anything a woman does and vice versa. That's simply not an acceptable argument. But just because you will find some women playing sports is not then necessarily to say that all of those differences that may have existed in the past are therefore theoretical.

EHRENREICH: Well, I'm just questioning your little methodology of going back from what people like to do now to what they were doing 25,000 years ago.

TIGER: What you call my "little methodology" has to do with an effort to understand the nature of the species from what it actually chooses to do. It seems to me that there is a kind of listening that one does, as you did in your report on working in restaurants ["Nickel-and-Dimed," January], that you can do only if you're not making judgments. What I'm talking about here is a species-wide ethnography based on a commitment to the notion that human beings are more or less all the same, that there are some differences between men and women that tend to recur. You will get a lot of women at bullfights, but you will get more men interested in *being* bullfighters. So to try to invalidate a broad argument about the nature of a reproductive species and its sex roles on the

basis of who goes to NFL games doesn't seem to be an appropriate position.

EHRENREICH: Right, but to make any arguments on the basis of what people have been doing, according to their sex, for the last twenty, thirty, forty years, is also ridiculous. A woman couldn't be a woman bullfighter in 1940. In many parts of the country a woman couldn't walk down the street smoking a cigarette. Women have been so constrained in so many societies, and still are in many societies, that I would not want to extrapolate from their behavior in these sexist societies to whatever might be "natural" to us.

THE MATRILINEAR MILLENNIUM?

HARRISON: Given that things are changing, are we now arriving, Barbara, at some more natural state of opportunity for women to be who they happen to be? And if so, what is that? Are they really almost the same as men, except for a few different sex-organ doohickeys?

EHRENREICH: I'm arguing that the big biological change at the moment is that we have populated the earth, we have done our job on that. As women, we can say that each of us individually does not have to bear children. That opens up all kinds of freedoms.

HARRISON: So if your son says to you, "My girlfriend is just like me. We're the same, except for the doohickeys," then you would agree.

EHRENREICH: Sure.

TIGER: If he comes to you and says, "Mom, she wants to have a child and I don't," is that fine?

EHRENREICH: Sure.

TIGER: Or if he says, "Look, I would really love to have a child and she doesn't want to have one. Shall we split?"

EHRENREICH: I don't really see the relevance of the question.

TIGER: I'm interested in how your theory pertains to your interest in life.

EHRENREICH: You mean, as a potential grandma?

TIGER: Yes.

EHRENREICH: Oh, as a potential grandma. I see, I've got to get my genes reproduced?

TIGER: No, no.

EHRENREICH: Tell him to go out and find another vessel, huh?

TIGER: Well, you're putting it in a rather unkindly manner. You might actually enjoy babies.

EHRENREICH: Oh, I love babies. With all that genetic programming, practically anybody who drools attracts me.

TIGER: Okay, so now we're not talking about the selfish intrusion of the Barbara Ehrenreich gene into the third millennium but rather just your own enjoyment of life as a member of the species. You'd obviously tell me you'd like to have a grand-

child just because it's entertaining. Again, forgive me for personalizing it. But you did start it. If the barrier in your son's choice was this particular female, you might have a special attitude toward her, only because she was interfering with what you saw as a natural grace point of your life cycle, which is to have a grandchild.

EHRENREICH: What a wicked, evil mother-in-law I would be! What an awful woman! "Dump that bitch because she's not producing my grandchildren"? No, I couldn't possibly say that. It's none of my business. Obviously. Plus, the bright side of our biological time is that there are plenty of other sources of satisfaction to me in my life, and I will not be a lonely old lady if I don't have grandchildren. Now, it would be a wonderful thing to have grandchildren, but I also have an awful lot to do, and I won't be able to baby-sit them every day, those grandchildren. That's what I'm saying: the gene pool's been stocked, well stocked. The terrifying thing is the lack of a collective social commitment to the children who already exist on this earth.

HARRISON: I want to ask each of you to offer your picture of the future. Where are we going?

TIGER: We'll see great attention paid to boys' academic success and career opportunities, because it's quite clear that in many labor forces the females are superior.

More and more children will be born out of wedlock, as currently exists in the black community, and more and more women in the rest of society won't assume that they're going to marry. They will just assume that they will live their lives themselves, or with their children or with other women or alone. The question still remains, What about the males? And here, I think, we will continue to see what we're currently seeing, which is a decline in male contribution to the labor force; that is, the number of hours men are working keeps going down, and they retire earlier and earlier. Men will occupy their time with sports and pornography. Society will be very different when many people grow up without fathers around. The conviviality of kinship is likely to be much less salient in people's lives, and they will continue to have to create vigorous, vivid emotional experiences out of public experiences such as television and movies and the Internet. Celebrities then become the surrogate family members. People will live more of their emotional lives in symbolic terms. And as for private sexuality, one gets the impression that young people realize that sexuality is very, very demanding and can lead to a whole series of commitments that people are not ready to accept or understand very well. They find it difficult to contemplate a whole lifetime of doing something like raising children. So we may find, in that sense, a decline in

long-term intimacy. Maybe we'll see an increase in virtuoso intimacy for short periods of time, but not that kind of long-term commitment. In this sense, I guess, as a citizen, I have a real question about what happens in such communities with few children. We end up a very wealthy society with a lot of people spending a lot of money flying to Key West.

EHRENREICH: Someone—Karl Marx?—once said that the possibilities for the future are always socialism and barbarism. There's a nightmare future and there's a better possibility, but the nightmare future is that the poor children of single mothers don't get cared for. They become like the street children in Rio de Janeiro whom cops shoot for sport. They become throw-away children, there's no collective public commitment to them from fathers or governments, and the whole situation gets uglier and uglier. Who knows? Maybe they'll be raised to provide organs for transplant to people in the Northern Hemisphere. And then, as for your young men, they can be soaked up by paramilitary groups, or, in the more industrialized places, they can become soccer hooligans. So that would be the nightmare world: nobody taking responsibility, and militarism as our major collective endeavor. Not only for men, I should say, because I think one very dramatic change that I would emphasize in recent years is that the woman warrior has appeared on the scene. Women arm themselves. Women are action heroes in films. They too may have a militaristic response to a crumbling world, a world without the old economic or biological certainties.

But then, of course, we have the option of a better world, and my hope would be that we do develop a collective responsibility to those people who are on the earth now. In my utopia I would expect that marriage would change a lot. Couples would make a contract, not with each other, because I think these relationships don't last forever, but make a contract to be co-parents forever. I think we might formalize that and maybe make some beautiful ceremonies around the co-parenting contract. I would also want to see people get less of their need for sociality derived just through kin and the immediate family, which reflects the sad fact that we often have no other form of community in our lives. In general, I would like to see us getting much more satisfaction from other people in all kinds of ways—forms of conviviality that are not really permitted, or not available to us in this very fragmented, highly competitive culture we live in. And it would be great for women too. We can have babies or not, we can climb mountains, we can snuggle by the fireplace. Do all those things. And men can climb the mountains with us, and snuggle with us too. ■