

George Gilder

THE BIOENGINEERING WOMB

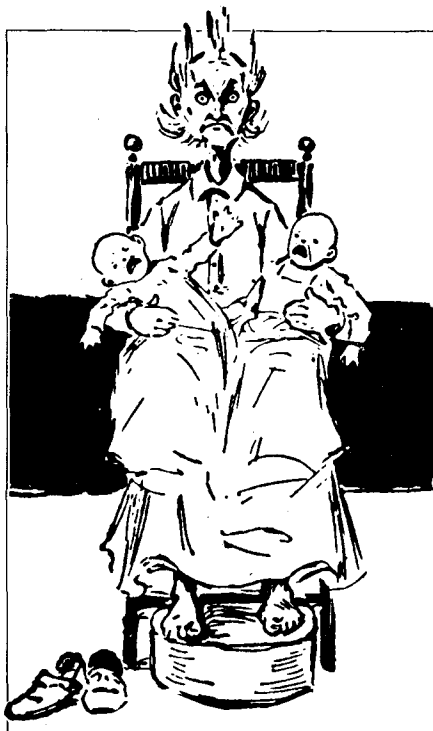
It could mean that men and women will never again have to get along.

A book about men and marriage written during the last half of the twentieth century labors under a cloud. Now no larger than a man's hand, it promises to shadow all debate about human sexuality in decades to come. Now mostly confined to laboratories, it is emerging year by year to become a major force in the definition and prospects of the two sexes, of masculinity and femininity.

The cloud is biogenetic engineering and it makes technically possible for the first time in human history a change in the very essence of sexuality. Often seen as offering a new liberation of women—and actually promising a series of impressive medical benefits—the new life sciences also pose grave dangers to both sexes.

The nature of the new technology

George Gilder is the author of Wealth and Poverty and The Spirit of Enterprise. This article is taken from Men and Marriage, a revised edition of his 1973 book, Sexual Suicide, to be published later this year by Pelican Books.



has been scrupulously weighed and explored in a recent book by Leon R. Kass, a doctor who thinks like the best of lawyers and writes like the best of writers.¹ In a more purely literary mode, Edward Grossman's essay "The Obsolescent Mother" (which appeared in the May 1971 *Atlantic*) has elegiacally captured the possible impact of the new techniques on the long, historic saga of childbirth in mystery and tumult. Other analysts range from the cogently premonitory to the wildly prophetic.

The progress in bioengineering enables the world to contemplate nothing less than a new stage of evolution, such as was intimated at the end of the movie *2001* and similar science fiction. But key developments may happen even before the turn of the century, for technological ventures into the space of woman, though less cinematically spectacular, are both more advanced and more portentous than any prospective adventures of astronauts.

The three approaches about which most is known are *in vitro* or test-tube fertilization; extracorporeal gestation (the artificial womb); and cloning, the exact reproduction or "xeroxing" of particular genotypes. Cloning poses the most obvious threat to human individuality, but the other two techniques also have far-reaching implications.

A clone is created by implanting the nucleus of a human cell, from any part of the body, into the enucleated cell of a female egg. This process, which can be repeated as often as eggs and wombs are available, creates genetic copies of the donor of the nucleus, identical twins in every way except age. It has the additional fillip of making possible the abolition of males, since the three

necessary elements—a cell nucleus, an enucleated egg, and a womb—can all be provided by a woman. Successful cloning has already been done with frogs, salamanders, and fruit flies, and by a related technique, scientists have engineered a mouse with genetic material from six parents.

Progress toward cloning feeds on a stream of recent successes related to *in vitro* fertilization, the conception of a child in a laboratory dish, and the transmittal of the blastocyte or fertilized egg to the uterine wall. In 1978 the first human baby so conceived—Louise Brown—was born in England, and hundreds more have been born in America, mostly after procedures managed by Drs. Howard and Georgeanna Jones at their clinic in Norfolk, Virginia.

The next step after test-tube conception—extracorporeal gestation and ectogenesis—is far more complicated. It entails in essence the creation of artificial wombs. The problems are being approached from both ends: the saving of increasingly premature babies and the extension of the life of blastocytes into the embryonic stages. The obstacles remain formidable, but impressive successes have been obtained with rats.

After reading the available literature, an apprehensive layman is left with the impression that it will be a very long time before artificial wombs for humans can be fabricated in number. But the creation of even a small number of elaborate and expensive devices would be ominous because it would relieve the scientists of the tiresome task of finding and managing available women. Clones, chimeras (human-animal hybrids), and other experimental "sports" might be generated and flushed at will.

Scientists can only guess at the likely chronology of new developments. Nobel Prize winner James D. Watson, the discoverer of DNA structure, told Congress in the early 1970s of his fear

that cloning will be perfected for humans "within the next twenty to fifty years." In other words, he doesn't know. But with *in vitro* fertilization a *fait accompli* and the artificial womb advancing steadily, the coming of clones seems perilously close.

Test-tube conception may seem a relatively limited step beyond the use of artificial insemination. That widely accepted practice has already given a few hundred medical students technical paternity over several hundred thousand children. Laboratory fertilization merely seems to extend relief to certain childless women that was previously available only if the sterility afflicted their husbands. The relief is decidedly better, moreover, since it allows the woman to retain full genetic maternity of her children.

Yet this seemingly innocent practice, which will ultimately help millions of childless couples to have babies, also poses many perplexing problems. Dr. Kass maintains that many of the women who can be helped by this technique also could be given a permanent cure by surgery on their oviducts (particularly if this operation were promoted as lavishly as the fertilization projects). Test-tube conception also will potentially reduce demand to adopt children. It advances the day when parents will be able to choose the gender of their child, either ordering a fetus of the preferred sex or aborting all undesired ones. By circumventing the act of love, *in vitro* conception takes another small step toward dislodging sexual intercourse from its pinnacle as both the paramount act of love and the only act of procreation. It thus promotes the trend toward regarding sex as just another means of pleasure, and weakens the male connection to the psychologically potent realm of procreation.

In addition, the process offers human uses far beyond the circumvention

¹See Leon R. Kass, *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs*. Free Press, \$23.50.

of sterility. It makes possible a further disconnection between motherhood and pregnancy. Since the fertilized ovum does not have to be placed in the body of the real "mother," it can be farmed out to any willing woman—for pay. This is not a farfetched idea. Using artificial insemination, a woman in Michigan has already rented her womb to a friend, borne a child fathered by the friend's husband, and delivered it to the wife. The family has received thousands of inquiries from others.

With *in vitro* techniques rather than artificial insemination, a much more attractive result—full genetic offspring—could be achieved by such means. New, more partial, and detached forms of motherhood become possible for busy or preoccupied women. The very role of mother and the profound biological tie with her child become optional. This development threatens to diminish further the perceived and felt authority of the basic connections of human life.

Individuality is far more deeply threatened, though, in cloning. The first clones will likely be done for a few rich experimenters or for the scientists themselves. But eventually the state would probably intervene to determine which persons were most suitable for copying. If artificial wombs were achieved, the state could assume increasing control over the genetic future of the race. With government at last controlling both production and reproduction, the dreams of the social planner could at last be fulfilled. But it would not likely turn out as Marx en-

But the long-run social implications remain dire for the human species as we know it.

In sexual terms, the nature of the change is easier to define. Although some analysts have predicted the liberation of women or the redundancy of males, the technology in fact most profoundly threatens women. Ultimately the womb could be made obsolete. Not only could the female body become a

twelve weeks of manhandling, often including violent physical abuse, gladly and voluntarily making large financial gifts to the instructors.

Under less intense control and training, homosexual impulses can arise in such a sequestered all-male group. In prisons, for example, the dominant men often want and extort sexual services. But their victims, surprisingly—even when exclusively heterosexual in

The alternative to the system of men and marriage is usually the system of men and misogyny.

strange combination of otiose spaces and appendages, not only could man become the exemplary, utilitarian physique, but the power of women over men could gradually pass away. First, with time, her sexual powers would decrease. For when we break the tie between sexual intercourse and procreation, destroy the childhood memory of the nurturing and omnipotent mother, banish the mystique of the breasts and the womb and of the female curves and softnesses, we could remove as well much of the special attraction of heterosexual love. We may liberate men to celebrate, like the ancient Spartans or the most extreme homosexuals today, a violent, misogynistic, and narcissistic eroticism.

Millions of American men know something about the spirit and feasibility of such a masculine, not even homosexual, society. The men who have been to war have told their story.

outside life—can sometimes feel a powerful psychological and even physiological change. Contrary to their every expectation, some may become willing partners in homosexuality.

The bonding process that occurs in the military, however, has no homoerotic content. It is a powerful example of the male ties that Lionel Tiger explored so fruitfully in his book *Men in Groups*. The system has its uses in protecting a society from enemies or in abetting the performance of crucial group activities. But it can be deadly to individuality and civilization. It is deadly to the sentiments that women evoke from men: love, creativity, nurturance, commitment to the future. Above all, it is perfectly barren. The male group, separated from women, is the male solidarity. There is no real love, little individuality, and no procreative instinct.

The male group treats women ex-

symbolic authority to the male command of other instruments of power. The technocracy, a dominantly male creation in the first place, would remain in the hands of a male minority.

The system of marriage that tames men and evokes their love is the chief obstacle to this technocratic future. If marriage endures, the realm of the state and the development and use of the technology can be limited, while the maintenance of human individuality can be assured. If the family should widely break down, then the world of artificial wombs, clones, and child-development centers can become an important reality rather than a laboratory curiosity. Norman Mailer was thus most profound when he defined the movement of women's liberation as the fifth column of the technocracy. He might have added that it is also the fifth column of true patriarchy: the sterile solidarity.

Human biology, however, may well obstruct the biologists and their schemes of technocratic sex. Although ideologues persist in their dreams of transcending gender, the evidence of profound differences between the sexes has now been widely accepted even by many sexual liberals. Under normal circumstances, biology is destiny. Men and women grow up in different ways, seek different goals, and transcend their biological separation chiefly through the mystery of love and marriage. But the new circumstances are not normal. We can no longer retreat to automatic affirmations of biological destiny. We are approaching a time when our destinies can be bioengineered. The question is whether we

AMONG THE INTELLECTUALOIDS



THE ABOUT MEN MEN

by Andrew Ferguson

Late last year, the Playboy organization announced that it had hired its first male bunnies. They'll work at a new Playboy club in New York City. Jeff Rector, one of the thirty-five novice bunnies chosen from nearly 1500 aspirants, said this transformation in his life process was "an awesome responsibility. We represent all of mankind, of manhood." The sad truth is that Mr. Rector is quite close to being correct. Consider these other developments:

- The League of Women Voters has announced that its new executive director is one Grant Thompson, a biological male.

- Senator Joseph Biden, whom my fellow Democrats often point to as the model of the new Democratic leader, rising up and striding boldly forth from the ashes of the Mondale-Ferraro campaign, speaks often of his heroes. Martin Luther King and the Kennedys are among them, he says, for the rather simple reason that "they made me feel good about myself."

- After ending a "relationship" with a former secretary, Dave Durenberger, a Republican senator from Minnesota, recently left his wife and moved into an all-male retreat—actually a large colonial mansion—in Arlington, Virginia. Senator Durenberger was giving enough of himself as a person to share the news in front-page stories in the *Washington Post* and the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*. He blamed what had heretofore been his personal troubles on the fact that "I didn't love myself well enough." Although "I'm a married person—I believe in the sanctity of marriage and the whole business," the Senator didn't know when he'd go back to his wife. "I'm not at that point yet," he shyly told his millions of readers. "The good news is that I'm not at the point so many people get to at the beginning of one of these things when they say it isn't even worth doing."

I could go on, but my point should be clear: no matter what they tell you,

these are tough times for the old-fashioned American male. Alan Alda may have gone into semi-retirement, but the flowers he planted in the 1970s continue to bloom. For all the dedicated trampling of Chuck Norris and Rocky, Rambo and Reagan, the brightly colored blossoms sprout thickly around our ankles, entangling ever more of our number, causing them to tumble softly into the comfy poppy field of the New Age man, where self-absorption equals sensitivity and compulsive confession is mistaken for candor. The signs are everywhere—even in America's newspaper of record, the *New York Times*.

More specifically, I'm referring to the *Times* Sunday magazine, and its "About Men" column. Tucked neatly between four-color, bled-to-the-edge ads for Waterford crystal and clothes designed by the rugged Ralph Lauren, "About Men" has for several years now

been a soapbox for the sort of man who is forever given to the minute, infinitely loving examination of his favorite subject: himself. I can scarcely believe that when the *Times* editors launched the column—presumably as a companion to the equally horrific "Hers" column that appears each Monday—they realized they were opening Pandora's trunk. Since then every freelancer in the country has lunged forward, eager to spill his guts. An avalanche of confession has poured in over the transom. But whatever their original intention, the editors apparently decided, as an "About Men" man might put it, to feel the flow and go with that.

The typical "About Men" contributor is not hard to define: he is between the ages of 25 and 45; he is successful in his work; he is vaguely

uneasy; he is divorced, with kids who teach him more about life than he ever dreamed possible; and he is extremely eager to talk—so long as the monologue doesn't stray too far from his favorite subject. Of course, there are exceptions to this profile of the self-possessed chatterbox. The occasional World War II vet, reflecting on the disappearance of civility, or the former Golden Gloves champ, remembering his blue-collar father's pride, can turn out columns that are witty and even affecting. But far more often "About Men" is about newspaper column as public therapy, where the patient rises from the couch and struts and preens.

The result is a series of amazing documents, a gushy diary produced by many different hands. Reading "About Men," you can imagine the manuscripts as they arrive at the *Times* office, adorned with loopy *l*'s and *i*'s dotted with enormous circles, a cute caricature of a snuggly bunny rabbit crouched in the corner of the page, a smiley face below the signature at the bottom. Gushy diaries are no longer the private preserve of insecure school girls; today they are written by wealthy men and published in magazines. David L. Dworkin, the president of Neiman-Marcus, recollects a littoral stroll with his daughter, whom he likes because she has given "tremendous validity to my life." The girl is only twelve and shouldn't be blamed for not knowing any better, but she makes the huge mistake of asking Dad whether he's happy. If you ask a guy like Mr. Dworkin a question like that, you'd better sit back and get ready for the long haul. It was, he writes, "a question I have never forgotten." Eight hundred words later, he's telling us that "there are nights—many nights—when I am awakened by disturbing thoughts that do not seem to retire with the rest of my mind/body functions. Nightmares of a sort. Images of a world not right. The future perhaps. . . . They make me ask, in the face of a life dedicated to achievement, 'Is this all there is?'" Like most "About Men" columns when they hit their confes-



Andrew Ferguson is assistant managing editor of *The American Spectator*.

sional stride, what Mr. Dworkin's lacks in originality it makes up in obviousness.

Then there is Wayne Kalyn, the managing editor of *World Tennis* magazine. Mr. Kalyn tells us how his wife left him (she needed "time and space"; he lumbered into the bedroom and cried); he then tells us how he went to his wife's apartment to surprise her with flowers and was himself surprised to discover her with another man. Instead of "being noble enough to have respected my wife's right to determine the direction of her life," Mr. Kalyn got steamed. He was a brute. He has gone to "About Men" to ask forgiveness from himself. It is granted.

You would think that confessions such as these would be better told to a bartender in the wee hours, when most of the other customers have stumbled home. Or maybe given man to man—say, to a best friend. Unfortunately, as Professor Michael McGill, author of the indispensable *McGill Report on Male Intimacy*, makes clear in his contribution to "About Men," this is no longer possible. He has discovered that men make crummy best friends because we "use interaction with one another to prove ourselves, following conventional rules of commerce and competition, ever aware that if we get too close, confide too much, it may be used against us." Quite a problem! He has hit on a solution. "Women," he writes, "use interaction as a way to improve relationships." Ergo, get yourself a woman for a best friend. Professor McGill himself has Sharon. "Sharon and I are intimate but sexually innocent; our interest in each other is relational, not romantic." That innocence comes as a great relief, he tells us, to his wife Janet, although from time to time she still suspects that Professor McGill plans, in fact, someday to jump Sharon's bones. "I have some more explaining to do," he says.

Professor McGill's situation, by the way, is an "About Men" anomaly, in that he has charged headlong into the New Age while his wife is the one who has lagged behind. More often the reverse is true; the writer is the dolt, and his wife/ex-wife/daughter/homosexual son has to drag him down the bumpy road to wisdom. These journeys are the stuff "About Men" is made of. John Dunne, for instance, says his daughter Nicole allowed him "to return to my childhood, to see things through her eyes, to giggle and be as silly as I wanted to be." And in a mild variation on this theme, the literary critic Benjamin DeMott records that he was taught how truly to enjoy an apple by a horse named Terence. (The details are numerous and, for our purposes here, insignificant.)

It is, then, a central contention of most "About Men" pieces that men aren't what they used to be—they are softer and gentler, more contemplative and refined. The column in that sense is self-evidential. Left a bit foggy is the question of whether this is a good thing; as an ethical matter, "About Men" writers strive to be nonjudgmental. But sooner or later they tip their hand. Many of the pieces have a tendentious, even exhortatory, flavor. Dr. Zick Rubin, a professor of social psychology at Brandeis University, worries that American men are too quantitative, and celebrates the fact that in his son's Little League games no score is kept ("The important thing... is the playing and the building of skills, not the winning"). Nevertheless, he scowls: "One can always find a father or two on the sidelines who is surreptitiously but scrupulously recording every run that scampers across the plate." Dr. Rubin shudders at the kind of example this must set for the kids.

"My sons may be better off in a country in which 'Manhood' will mean little more than, say, the name for an after-shave lotion," says Leonard Kriegel, who is moreover aware of "the price exacted" in our national life for the idea that a man should be "tough, resilient, independent, able to take it." Owen Edwards realizes that "medals are atavistic, mere archaic mementoes impressive to those who need to believe in a man's worth. Without the weight of tradition and the reflex of retrograde machismo, a chest full of medals is nothing more than a résumé in 3-D and Technicolor." After lamenting that fewer and fewer Italian men hold hands in public, Roger Youman sadly takes note of "the terrifying problems of a planet whose political leaders... seem to believe that their first priority is to prove their manhood. Nevertheless, at a time when the survival of the human race may depend on the willingness of men to walk hand in hand metaphorically, I see evidence that they are drawing apart physically. I take that as an ominous sign."

But this is just fretfulness on Mr. Youman's part. "About Men" writers are always seeing ominous signs, even when it is clear that the battle is won—even when, *pace* Eastwood and Stallone, most men have already defected to their side. Every Sunday my papergirl delivers fresh evidence, in the form of the *Times* magazine, that this is so.

Why then the fretfulness? Perhaps it's because of the insatiable nature, the remorselessness, of the Master the "About Men" men—and, in truth, all men—struggle to serve. This morning

I saw a religious talk show on television. The host, a mild, extremely solicitous man, was interviewing a woman theologian. After a couple of minutes she castigated him for using the masculine pronoun when he referred to God. In abject apology he twisted his mouth into a grotesque grin and began talking very fast. He had not long ago enrolled in a seminar on "the female component of the divine," he

recalled, and he was the only man there. "Talk about process and getting in touch with your own prejudices!" he said, but the woman theologian merely forced a thin smile and said nothing. In the silence that followed the host ran his fingers around his collar, squirmed a bit in his chair, and cleared his throat, ready to try again—ready to say whatever was necessary. □



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