

MORTON KONDRACKE

Media hormone management?

Just at a time when the country is catching up to the damage done by easy divorce and sexual promiscuity, along comes Time magazine to tell us on its cover: "Infidelity: It may be in our genes."

The Aug. 15 cover story contains just the latest "scientific" argument—following claims that there's a "homosexual gene" and an "aggression gene"—that human beings aren't responsible for their own behavior.

The logical corollary is that we may as well learn to live with—and maybe even enjoy!—our 30 percent rate of unwed motherhood, 50-plus percent divorce rate and rising rates of teen-age sexual promiscuity.

America's mass media have been promoting sexual licentiousness for years because sex sells. Imagine a Time cover declaring: "Self Control: It may be society's only salvation." Bum-mer.

Actually, Time's cover article—by the distinguished science writer Robert Wright—could have been headlined: "Morality: It's definitely in our genes." Mr. Wright concludes his article by affirming that, whatever proclivities people (along with animals) have for sexual adventurism, humans also are the only species endowed with a capacity for self-con-

The evidence is strong that promiscuity and infidelity have disastrous "natural" consequences.

trol.

Mr. Wright quotes Charles Darwin as saying that "a moral being is one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving them."

To get to this point, however, one has to plow through pages of claims that fooling around just comes naturally. The claims are based on the theories of sociobiologists and "evolutionary psychologists" that, like other animals, people exist primarily to make sure their genes get distributed as widely as possible into the next generation.

The farthest-fetched of Mr. Wright's claims is the assertion that

women are natural cheaters because the testicles of human males are sized somewhere between those of chimpanzees (whose females are very promiscuous) and those of gorillas (very monogamous).

The case for male wanderlust is a lot stronger. Throughout the animal kingdom powerful males—those endowed with extra testosterone, the male hormone—get their pick of desirable females. Mr. Wright claims anthropologists have found that out of 1,154 past and present human societies, 1,000 rewarded their most powerful men with multiple wives.

It's true in America, too. Instead of having harems or practicing polygamy, though, we do "serial monogamy," whereby people dump spouses they're tired of and get new ones. The pattern is most evident among New York tycoons and movie stars, who constantly are in search of someone younger and better-looking.

The theory here is that males are biologically programmed to produce as many offspring as they possibly can. Males compete to impregnate

young, fecund females. Animals compete with brawn, men with money and power.

There's undoubtedly something to this theory, but it begs the question: Are human beings prisoners of their animal urges, or did Mother Nature (or God) hard-wire a capacity for self-control into them for a reason?

As strong as the evidence is for biologically based promiscuous urges, the evidence is just as strong that promiscuity and infidelity have disastrous "natural" consequences.

If offspring-production is the purpose of animal life, just look at the dire consequences to children of relaxed divorce laws and moral standards in the United States. Child poverty rates have skyrocketed because of increased out-of-wedlock birth to teen-aged mothers.

As Mr. Wright himself records, studies show that children living with adults other than their own parents are 100 times more likely to be abused than those living with parents and up

to 10 times more likely to be abused if they are living with one parent and one stepparent.

The epidemics of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are consequences of the promiscuity that's attended the post-1960s sexual revolution. The trend toward easy divorce has left millions of women (and the children they have custody of) economically worse off than they were while married, while the males who shuck them are better off.

Besides negative evidence, there's positive evidence that human beings are capable of more self-control than our current social arrangements encourage.

In the 1950s, for instance, only 27 percent of 18-year-old girls were sexually active. Now, it's 52 percent. As late as 1972, only 41 percent of 18-year-old boys had sexual experience. Now, it's 52 percent.

The evidence suggests that Mother Nature wants us to exercise the self-control she endowed us with. It's time for Time magazine and the rest of the media to help.

Morton Kondracke is a senior editor for Roll Call and is a nationally syndicated columnist.