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Beastly or Manly?

Having lived and studied among the Yānomamō Indians of South America, I feel most concerned about your article, which appeared under the disturbing title "Beastly or Manly?" [May 10].

The Yānomamō happen to have been studied at a time when their patterns of warfare and raiding were still intact. It also seems to be the case that outsiders came to know them during an unusually tumultuous period. As a result, disproportionate attention has been focused on the role of aggression and violence in Yānomamō society.

Now, in the light of pop ethology and sociobiology, the Yānomamō are seen not only as "wild Indians" but as one short step away from a baboon troop. The familiar tendency to look upon other groups of people as being less fully human than ourselves here masquerades as science.

I would like to make it clear that the Yānomamō are not the missing link.

*Judith Shapiro
Department of Anthropology
Bryn Mawr College, Pa.*

As a missionary at one time near the geographical center of the Yānomamō Indians, and knowing them as friends, I am aware of contradictions to Dr. Chagnon's conclusions. Here, simplified for brevity, are just a few: 1) hearing of female infanticide surprised the Yānomamō people; 2) wars seldom begin by wife stealing; 3) families of warlike men are not necessarily larger than those of less warlike men.

It is opportunistic of evolutionists to accept some facts and reject others because they might imply a specific creation.

*Paul Shadle
Bridgewater, N.J.*