



# **Why Sex Matters: A Darwinian Look at Human Behavior**

*Bobbi S. Low*

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Why are men, like other primate males, usually the aggressors and risk takers? Why do women typically have fewer sexual partners? Why is killing infants routine in some cultures, but forbidden in others? Why is incest everywhere taboo? Bobbi Low ranges from ancient Rome to modern America, from the Amazon to the Arctic, and from single-celled organisms to international politics to show that these and many other questions about human behavior largely come down to evolution and sex. More precisely, as she shows in this uniquely comprehensive and accessible survey of behavioral and evolutionary ecology, they come down to the basic principle that all organisms evolved to maximize their reproductive success and seek resources to do so.

Low begins by reviewing the fundamental arguments and assumptions of behavioral ecology: selfish genes, conflicts of interest, and the tendency for sexes to reproduce through different behaviors. She explains why in primate species--from chimpanzees and apes to humans--males seek to spread their genes by devoting extraordinary efforts to finding mates, while females find it profitable to expend more effort on parenting. Low illustrates these sexual differences among humans by showing that in places as diverse as the parishes of nineteenth-century Sweden, the villages of seventeenth-century China, and the forests of twentieth-century Brazil, men have tended to seek power and resources, from cattle to money, to attract mates, while women have sought a secure environment for raising children. She makes it clear, however, they have not done so simply through individual efforts or in a vacuum, but that men and women act in complex ways that involve cooperation and coalition building and that are shaped by culture, technology, tradition, and the availability of resources. Low also considers how the evolutionary drive to acquire resources leads to environmental degradation and warfare and asks whether our behavior could be channeled in more constructive ways.

## **Why Sex Matters: A Darwinian Look at Human Behavior Details**

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# From Reader Review Why Sex Matters: A Darwinian Look at Human Behavior for online ebook

## mark says

This is a must read - if you care about the future. It's a "behavioral ecological" approach, i.e. "what a biologist would predict if [they] knew only that here was a smart, upright-walking, highly social primate and \*nothing more\*." The author asks all the right questions, such as, "What is the impact of the 'global village' - the evolutionary novelty that our actions here and now affect others' lives far away?" She had NO idea! - having wrote the book pre 9/11, pre the social media of today, pre the US election of 2016, and pre the #metoo movement; but, my word! does sex matter - more than ever! Is that possible?

Just a sample - concerning war: "warfare is more common when people in a society perceive unpredictability in the environment ... A strong predictor is the threat of weather or pest disasters. in many societies, capturing women from other groups is a main purpose of war. societies with lots of young adult males are likely to see strife." (p. 220-221)

Concerning over population pressure [the main existential threat to humans] Low posits five current solutions and examines them: 1) The \*noble savage\* idea. 2) Reduce fertility. 3) Reduce consumption. 4) Ecofeminism. 5) Technology to the rescue.

She warns: "we have unconscious bias, and 'knowing' overt factual information doesn't help as much as we wish." and that "the only strategies likely to work consistently are those that manipulate individual, familial, and reciprocal costs and benefits." (pgs. 253 - 257)

This is a well written, thoughtful study of the present human condition. The text is a mere 258 pages, but with an additional 158 pages of notes, glossary, references, and indexes.

Low is hopeful that we'll "muddle through" the crisis's that we face, me too, but I think with the current movements, and lack of clear understanding of what we're up against [ourselves], and critical thinking - the cost will be far greater, for far more people than she ever imagined.

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## Janet says

One of my Anthropology books. Insightful.

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## Usfromdk says

This book isn't written by someone who read a few books and then decided to publish her own work on the subject - the book has 56 pages of references.

It's a very solid piece of work with a lot of interesting stuff. A lot of work went into writing this book, and you can tell. Recommended.

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## Allan Aksiim says

Popsience it is not, quite academic. I am still in the process of gathering my thoughts on the topic but generally I am quite impressed by massive amount of the references and linking of evolutionary theory, anthropology and history (in the case of Sweden and Germany in the 19th century).

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### **Satyabrata Mishra says**

This was a long book but was certainly worth the read. Sociologist Bobbi S. Low explores various aspect of the difference in behavior between the sexes all over the world and compiles the reason behind different taboos pertaining to different parts of the world

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### **R Arnaud says**

The book is nicely summarized by a sentence in chapter 9: "We started with very simple and general hypotheses about how resources affect reproductive success, and why men and women typically have quite different ressource strategies. But complexity has crept in."

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### **Amanda says**

Bobbi Low gives some interesting information about gender and human behavior from an evolutionary point of view. The book explains so many things that we just *know* about humans, such as: why rich men get pretty women, why males are more aggressive than females, etc. Low incorporates a lot of evidence from the animal kingdom and from studies of human societies. Very interesting. If I ever have kids, I'll explain to them about male/female relationships using info from this book (when they're old enough to understand all the sciencey stuff of course).

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### **Peter D. McLoughlin says**

Evolutionary psychology in a nutshell. Very enlightening.

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### **Muhannad says**

Too many parentheses.

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### **Kristine says**

I'm required to read this for my Animal Behavior class, but I don't mind. Seems like an interesting read.

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## **Daniella says**

I was a little bit disappointed by this book. Her explanations were chosen for the convenience in advancing her argument. It's also a little bit boring, I was skipping throughout a lot of it. I wanted to understand the evolutionary history of sex differences, but I think Joan Roughgarden has a better argument that clearly outlines the fact that there is a whole lot that we don't know about the diversity of sexes and the ways in which species express their gender. Roughgarden also has great critiques of the bias of scientists that doesn't let science advance the current perceptions of sexual selection and such. Bobbi is firmly entrenched in this bias. She has a great misunderstanding of ecofeminism btw. I did appreciate some of her explanations and her inclusion of cultural transmission which is oft ignored in evolution as, she notes, because of this arbitrary division between the biological and social. Some of her hypothesis (or facts) are interesting and I can believe it such as why there more men in politics.

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## **Emily says**

Man, this book has some heft to it. Like, a pound and a half worth, at least.

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