



Mean Genes: From Sex to Money to Food: Taming Our Primal Instincts

Terry Burnham, Jay Phelan

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Why do we want-and do-so many things that are bad for us? In *Mean Genes* Terry Burnham and Jay Phelan argue that we need to stop looking to Sigmund Freud for answers and start looking to Charles Darwin. *Mean Genes* reveals that our struggles for self-improvement are, in fact, battles against our own genes - genes that helped our distant ancestors flourish, but are selfish and out of place in the modern world. Using this evolutionary lens, *Mean Genes* brilliantly examines the issues that most affect our lives-body image, money, addiction, violence, and relationships, friendship, love, and fidelity-and offers steps to help us lead more satisfying lives.

Mean Genes: From Sex to Money to Food: Taming Our Primal Instincts Details

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From Reader Review Mean Genes: From Sex to Money to Food: Taming Our Primal Instincts for online ebook

Sandra says

This book is fantastic. You would be amazed at the things going on in our bodies courtesy of our genes. They really are "mean". :)

Sandra

Joakim says

Nobody will believe in evolutionary biology fully, and that genes have their own cutthroat agenda. Among us humans - the notion that biology dictates most our behaviour in the world is unthinkable. Author tries to convince the readers that we're just like the animals, and like then our genes are selfish, only we have the willpower and discipline to choose where our genes take us.

It's a fascinating read. Did you know that there are worms that will inject sperm into another worm and the sperm travel to its reproductive organ where it is then passed down to his female? Or did you know that babies release hormones that dilates blood vessels so more food would be carried to it..while the mother releases her own hormones to constrict them because she doesn't want to share nutrients? If not, and you find these facts fascinating - you might enjoy the book.

Jasmine Bhalla says

Not very fond of this one. It talked about how everything we do, our actions, our perspectives are related to how we have evolved and hence, our genes. It can be true but being a practical person, I could not accept/relate to many ideas ..

Colton says

Very interesting...

Filip Konrad says

Yet again book that should be at least 1/3 shorter :) Despite that fact it is a good read with facts from human evolution which explain puzzling situations of today. eg. why we tend to over-eat: because of genetic programming from past when the scarcity of food was quite common and our predecessors needed to have a buffer for future.

Margaretflynn says

A keeper.

Amit Goenka says

This is one of the few books which I have read more than once...thrice actually. Plan to read it once more so that write a review

Carol says

This is a competently-written, entertaining book for a lay audience. It asserts that humans are now living under radically different conditions than our ancestral environment for which most of our evolutionary history has adapted us. Our genes have wired us to eat large amounts of food whenever it is available, reproduce abundantly, attack and kill our fellow humans to take their territory, and carry out other behaviors that are not optimally suited to present-day conditions. This book is enjoyable to read, if we keep in mind that it was published in 2000. The information in such a topical book chases a quickly-moving target in a field such as human evolution in which important new discoveries are frequently made. We should view the information presented in this book with a questioning eye, as it may not be thoroughly up to date.

Morgan says

Overall, a really good book. Read for college course taught by one of the authors, Jay Phelan. Great at explaining key biological concepts and phenomenons in an easy to understand way. Gives advice on how to outsmart our genes & natural instincts; many applications to real life. Fun and also informative read.

Aerandir says

Albeit brief, it was a rather fascinating introduction to many examples of studies on animals of different species and humans, many examples of behaviour and species I never heard about before.

Jennifer Sykora jaenke says

I thought this book was "just okay." It had some insight into our human behavior but I thought it was poorly organized and contained just snippets of information that sometimes did/or did not flow well with each other.

Woodge says

Although this book's subject is based on evolutionary biology and is written by a couple of Ph. D.s, it's anything but dry and stuffy. This slim book is written with a chatty flair and is a quick and fascinating read. "Mean Genes reveals that our struggles for self-improvement are, in fact, battles against our own genes—genes that helped our distant ancestors flourish, but are selfish and out of place in the modern world." Using countless quirky examples, the authors illustrate their point that we are genetically programmed to do things that are bad for us... over-eating, infidelity, gambling, etc. ... they are all influenced by our genes. They also offer some tips on how to successfully outsmart our own programming. This book was a lot of fun and filled with interesting trivia.

Alex Zakharov says

Cute short book of heuristics to overcome human (mis)behaviors/drives that are somewhat surprising but expected outcomes of our evolutionary past. The authors main theme is that many of our sinful habits (e.g. overeating, gambling, over spending, cheating) are expected side-effects of survival strategies that worked very well in our ancestral past. In modern day many of these strategies are no longer necessary but we are still hard-wired for them from evolutionary perspective. Armed with this knowledge there are certain heuristics we can employ to avoid behaviors detrimental to us today.

As far as evolutionary psychology goes this is probably as good you are going to get – most (but not all) of book's examples/theories/explanations are pretty well-supported by research and are relatively uncontroversial which is certainly not true about evolutionary psychology as a field in general. The field itself is controversial for a number of reasons, for example the theories it generates elude verification and/or falsification and as such abuse is rampant - practicing bad science in evolutionary psychology is way too easy. Also, even systematic and careful guys like Burnham and Phelan avoid getting into subjects such as epigenetics and neuroplasticity which can undermine main tenets/assumptions of ev psych.

Either way, even if explanations are specious, biological predisposition for many bad habits is clearly present and the heuristics to combat these habits are insightful, entertaining and valuable. As usual what matters more is that something works, not necessarily why it works.

Eva says

I've got to stop reading the same book--albeit with different titles--over and over. This book was solid but I think I knew almost everything in it. A few new nuggets, though:

"Fertility is modulated by weight changes. Even minor weight loss caused by short-term dieting or exercise dramatically decreases fertility....If a woman wants to get pregnant, she should eat normally and avoid losing weight. This is true for all women, regardless of their weight." - p7

"In a study of 1300 alcoholics in Japan, guess how many were fast-flushers [i.e., had the "Asian flush"]? Not one. Although half the Japanese are fast-flushers, there was not a single one among these alcoholics." - p74

"[Gambling] bets come disproportionately from those who can least afford the losses: lottery players with household incomes of less than \$10,000 spend three times as much on tickets as those with incomes of more than \$50,000." - p83

"In one study, 94% of men ranked themselves in the top half of male athletic ability." - p91

"Even at this early age [two and three], before the influence of socialization is too overwhelming, 90% of boys can throw farther than the average girl." - p134

Brad says

This is a really cool book. It discusses some of the behavior traits that have been 'bred' into us. For example, if you had ancestors who risked crossing the seas for a chance at a better life you are genetically programmed to be a risk taker and may . The author applies this idea to eating habits, what we consider to be beauty, etc. I found it really interesting.
