

Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life: A Psychologist Investigates How Evolution, Cognition, and Complexity are Revolutionizing Our View of Human Nature

By Douglas T. Kenrick

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“Kenrick writes like a dream.”—Robert Sapolsky, Professor of Biology and Neurology, Stanford University; author of *A Primate’s Memoir* and *Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers*


What do sex and murder have to do with the meaning of life? Everything.

In *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life*, social psychologist Douglas Kenrick exposes the selfish animalistic underside of human nature, and shows how it is intimately connected to our greatest and most selfless achievements. Masterfully integrating cognitive science, evolutionary psychology, and complexity theory, this intriguing book paints a comprehensive picture of the principles that govern our lives. As Kenrick divulges, beneath our civilized veneer, human beings are a lot like howling hyenas and barking baboons, with heads full of homicidal tendencies and sexual fantasies. But, in his view, many ingrained, apparently irrational behaviors—such as inclinations to one-night stands, racial prejudices, and conspicuous consumption—ultimately manifest what he calls “Deep Rationality.”

Although our heads are full of simple selfish biases that evolved to help our ancestors survive, modern human beings are anything but simple and selfish cavemen. Kenrick argues that simple and selfish mental mechanisms we inherited from our ancestors ultimately give rise to the multifaceted social lives that we humans lead today, and to the most positive features of humanity, including generosity, artistic creativity, love, and familial bonds. And out of those simple mechanisms emerge all the complexities of society, including international conflicts and global economic markets. By exploring the nuance of social psychology and the surprising results of his own research, Kenrick offers a detailed picture of what makes us caring, creative, and complex—that is, fully human.

Illuminated with stories from Kenrick's own colorful experiences -- from his criminally inclined shantytown Irish relatives, his own multiple high school expulsions, broken marriages, and homicidal fantasies, to his eventual success as an evolutionary psychologist and loving father of two boys separated by 26 years -- this book is an exploration of our mental biases and failures, and our mind's great successes. Idiosyncratic, controversial, and fascinating, *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life* uncovers the pitfalls and promise of our biological inheritance.

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Editorial Review

Review

Sonja Lyubomirsky, Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside; Author of *The How of Happiness*

“Douglas Kenrick is a brilliant thinker, gripping speaker, and a writer whose style is so engaging, probing, and full of irreverence and wit that is unmatched by anyone I know in academia. On top of his profound mastery of the study of evolution and behavior, he has a fascinating and quirky life story that adds color and richness to his academic expertise. He is also that rare individual with whom you'd be equally likely to want to have a drink and/or seek out to obtain keen insights into human motivation and behavior (and ideally both at the same time).”

Noah Goldstein, UCLA Anderson School of Management; Author of *New York Times* best-selling *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive*

“One of the Founding Fathers of modern evolutionary psychology, Doug Kenrick is also regarded as one of the most brilliant, creative, and accessible scholars in all of the social sciences. But a conventional scholar he is not: One part academic, one part comedian, and one part street fighter from Queens, Kenrick has ruffled a few feathers in his time. His crisp and witty writing, and his willingness to put scientific correctness before political correctness, will make readers think, laugh, and blush all at the same time.”

Kirkus

“Kenrick's gift for speaking directly to the reader and making the abstract concrete through humor and homely examples make [*Sex, Murder, and The Meaning of Life*] an accessible and engaging exploration of how human behavior is connected to the behavior of our primitive ancestors.”

Richard Wrangham, Ruth B. Moore Professor of Biological Anthropology at Harvard University; author of *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*

“Kenrick's irreverent potpourri of personal anecdote, background science and catchy experiments makes evolutionary social psychology both entertaining and profound. *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life* is a disturbing and fascinating read. It will make you wonder who you are.”

Steven Pinker, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University; Author of *How the Mind Works*, *The Language Instinct*, and *The Stuff of Thought*

“Douglas Kenrick is one of the most important scientists studying the evolutionary shaping of human drives and emotions. By highlighting the author's own research, this lively book introduces readers to new evidence on how the mind works, presented in a cohesive framework.”

Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University; Author of *Stumbling on Happiness*

“Several decades ago, Doug Kenrick married evolutionary biology to social psychology and he has been a leader in this important field ever since. Unlike many scientists, he sees the big picture and writes with humor, wisdom, and verve. I'm eager to read his book!”

Dan Ariely, James B. Duke Professor of Behavioral Economics, Duke University; Author

of Predictably Irrational

"*Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life* helps us understand our complex, odd and quirky nature. It is a fascinating journey that brought us here and Douglas Kenrick is a master in helping us understand our real nature."

About the Author

Douglas T. Kenrick is Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University. He serves as a member of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society executive council, and has published over 150 scientific articles, books (including the best-selling "Social Psychology," now in its fifth edition), and book chapters (in the "Handbook of Social Psychology" and the "Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology"), the majority applying evolutionary ideas to human behavior and thought processes. Much of his work has been funded by NIMH and NSF and has been reported in highly prestigious journals, including "Behavioral and Brain Sciences," "Psychological Review," "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology," and "Evolution and Human Behavior," in addition to being covered in national media, including "Newsweek," the "New York Times," and "Psychology Today." Kenrick lives in Tempe, Arizona.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frances Williamson:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or all their friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? May be reading a book is usually option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the guide untitled *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life: A Psychologist Investigates How Evolution, Cognition, and Complexity are Revolutionizing Our View of Human Nature* can be excellent book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Jocelyn Welch:

Reading can called mind hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book particularly book entitled *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life: A Psychologist Investigates How Evolution, Cognition, and Complexity are Revolutionizing Our View of Human Nature* your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely might be your mind friends. Imaging each word written in a e-book then become one type conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get previous to. The *Sex, Murder, and the Meaning of Life: A Psychologist Investigates How Evolution, Cognition, and Complexity are Revolutionizing Our View of Human Nature* giving you yet another experience more than blown away your brain but also giving you useful info for your better life within this era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind are going to be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

Judi Orta:

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