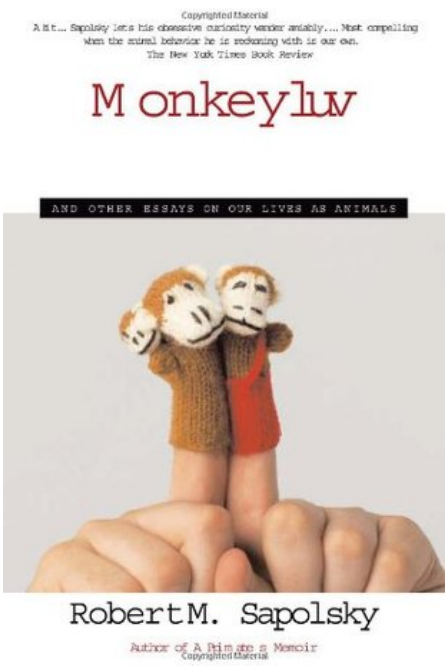

Monkeyluv: And Other Essays on Our Lives as Animals

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How do imperceptibly small differences in the environment change one's behavior? What is the anatomy of a bad mood? Does stress shrink our brains? What does *People* magazine's list of America's "50 Most Beautiful People" teach us about nature and nurture? What makes one organism sexy to another? What makes one orgasm different from another? Who will be the winner in the genetic war between the sexes?

Welcome to *Monkeyluv*, a curious and entertaining collection of essays about the human animal in all its fascinating variety, from Robert M. Sapolsky, America's most beloved neurobiologist/primatologist. Organized into three sections, each tackling a Big Question in natural science, *Monkeyluv* offers a lively exploration of the influence of genes and the environment on behavior; the social and political -- and, of course, sexual -- implications of behavioral biology; and society's shaping of the individual. From the mating rituals of prairie dogs to the practice of religion in the rain forest, the secretion of pheromones to bugs in the brain, Sapolsky brilliantly synthesizes cutting-edge scientific research with wry, erudite observations about the enormous complexity of simply being human. Thoughtful, engaging, and infused with pop-cultural insights, this collection will appeal to the inner monkey in all of us.

Monkeyluv: And Other Essays on Our Lives as Animals Details

Date	:	Published October 10th 2006 by Scribner (first published August 19th 2005)
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Author	:	Robert M. Sapolsky
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Genre	:	Science, Nonfiction, Psychology, Writing, Essays, Biology, Animals, Anthropology

From Reader Review Monkeyluv: And Other Essays on Our Lives as Animals for online ebook

Hina says

What was most enjoyable about this book was Sapolsky’s informal and friendly writing style. The essays in the book go into just the right amount of biology and technical information without making the topic seem dry or boring. The book covers a very wide range of topics covering human behaviours, traits, evolution, biology, psychology and many other fields of science to explain what makes humans so quirky. It was a surprisingly fun read and I chuckled out loud quite a few times.

Zimran Ahmed says

Performative

Danielle says

Way meh.

Viktor Malieichyk says

Not exactly a book, rather a compilation of articles on different topics. From low-level stuff like our genes and their interaction with the environment to some patterns that emerge in human societies. Everyone would find something interesting, and the best part is that every article has a list of literature for further exploration. And apart from that, the book is nicely written and easy to read.

John says

A wonderfully readable collection of essays on a wide range of topics, from genetics to physiology to society and civilization.

Shaghayegh says

"we are certainly not the most evolved species, nor the least vulnerable. Nor the cleverest."

Julia says

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Nadiya says

A great collection of essays about the influence on our behaviour caused by genes, body and environment. Masterfully written, well-researched with interesting scientific details.

Nikolus says

After reading the first couple of essays, I was disappointed; I thought it would be more information-heavy, educational, with fewer jokes about how "I'm a scientist, pop culture is weird to me".

I love RS's lectures online. He's obviously brilliant and entertaining, I just wish he had packed more about neurology, neurochemistry, etc. in this piece.

Javier Maldonado says

Tremendo, Sapolsky. Cuando grande quiero ser como tú.

Todd Martin says

Monkeyluv is a collection of essays (previously published elsewhere) grouped around 3 broad themes:

Genes and their influence on behavior.
This is the old nature/nurture debate. Are we the way we are because of our genes or the environment in which we are raised? Scientists figured out some time ago that it’s a combination of both, but identifying the source of specific behaviors is complicated.

Our body’s influence on behavior.
It should come as no surprise (except perhaps to extreme mind/body dualists) that brains are physical organs and are influenced by events that take place in the body and influence our bodies in return. Hormones released by the body effect the way we think and act (one of the reasons men are different from women) and fear (a mental phenomenon) causes gooseflesh (or a bottle-brush tail in the case of my cat) are two such examples.

The environment’s influence on behavior.
The most interesting essay involved the broad differences in cultures that evolved in desert vs. jungle environments and how desert cultures tend to be monotheistic, militaristic, repressive and paternalistic, while

jungle cultures are polytheistic and take a more free-wheeling approach to life (more like the tribes of Polynesia as opposed to the Yanomami I suppose). One could conclude that we are the unfortunate recipients of a desert culture that has spread globally (assuming you buy in to the precepts of this cultural anthropological explanation).

This is the first book I've read by Sapolsky, and I'm wondering how it took me so long to come around to him. He has a lively writing style and the ability to explain complex scientific subjects in an interesting manner to a layperson. He also has something that seems to be altogether lacking in most science writers … a wicked sense of humor.

Socraticgadfly says

This is another great book of what nature via nurture really means, driving many coffin nails through genetic determinism, including practitioners of Pop Evolutionary Psychology (with capital letters, as a philosophical mindset) who remain more genetic determinists than they let on while claiming to preach "nature via nurture."

Sapolsky is the real deal on "nature via nurture" - indeed, it should be noted that, with the exception of a totally genetically determined thing like Huntington's disease, he preaches "nature ONLY via nurture," or something along that general line.

Beyond that, he gets into the nuts and bolts of what we know today, and don't know, about non-coding areas of our DNA, which are NOT all simply "junk DNA." Rather, you have introns and exons for marking where a coding sequence of DNA starts and stops, and even more importantly, you have regulatory, or modulating, sections of DNA, which may tell a coding section only to switch on when there are more than 12 hours of daylight per day, which could be used to trigger mating behavior.

Here are some important page by page notes:

23 "More than 95 percent of DNA is non-coding. Sure, a lot of that is the junk-packing material DNA [a lot of which may be "quarantined" remnants of viral DNA, similar to what Norton Utilities does on your PC when necessary], but your average gene comes with a huge instruction manual about how to operate it, and the operator is often environmental."

23-24 "The startling second fact is that when you examine variability in DNA sequences among individuals, the non-coding regions of DNA are considerably more variable than are the regions that code for genes." Sapolsky admits much of this is due to junk DNA areas, but that much of the variability is attributable to regulatory area. Obviously, this has huge impacts on the nurture side of things.

42-44 Good discussion of imprinted genes, which differ from Mendelian biology in that only one is active, usually the one that comes from the parent of the same sex as a child. (Note: this does NOT mean these genes are limited in placement to our sex chromosomes.) The result? These imprinting genes battle for placental and fetal growth, as male and female genes have different "urges" for the placental and fetal rates of growth, due to male-vs-female differences in mammalian breeding strategy. Placental tumors can result if only the paternal gene is active, lack of placental implantation in the uterus when only the maternal gene is active.

61 Offspring of attractive males, in many species studies, survive less often than average.

63. In a study with ducks, with attractive males, it actually appears that the female invests more energy in the egg, laying a larger egg when impregnated by an attractive male. (The egg size is under female control.)

Both of these should put some question to old stereotypes about peacock tails being signs of fitness and so increasing mating, etc. At the least, they should caution us to look for more nuanced explanations.

83ff Limbic and autonomic nervous responses come on- and offline at different rates to one another. In relation to the frontal cortex, this may help explain why intermittent rewards can actually be more psychologically reinforcing than regular ones.

177. In many species, females in some way manipulate alpha-male type males into fighting over them, to go off and mate with more "nice guy" types.

184. Why our desire for revenge? It stems out of game theory, from games such as Prisoners' Dilemma, etc., which show the value of "tit for tat altruism" - if the game is played more than once, especially if one knows a "cheater" will be back in the mix again.

But, in a one-time game, especially where a competitor is informed he/she cannot inform players of future rounds about a cheater, including not being able to inform them through the action of punishing a cheater, then revenge as our self-appointed judge and executioner's pound of flesh seems a natural action, even if we the "cheated" have to expend yet more energy to make the cheater pay.

Hence our actions in today's civilized society, namely such as flipping people off for cutting us off in traffic, etc.

Mark says

One of the best science writers out there! I found myself chuckling out loud about things like parasitic bacteria. Dr. Sapolsky is great at bringing biology down to earth as well as warding us away from stereotypical ideas that can develop from popular coverage. With his cleverness and cynical humor, he doesn't have to resort to hype to make his topics interesting.

Bobby says

3.5 stars.

A collection of essays (18 total) which were published in magazines like Discover, Natural History, The Sciences, etc. by Robert Sapolsky, a biologist at Stanford. The book is divided into three parts: Genes and Who We Are, Our Bodies and Who We Are, and Society and Who We Are, with each having 6 essays. I found the first section just okay (a bit too basic I think) but enjoyed the second and third sections more. Given the broad range of topics—everything from genetic differences between men and women to the effect of stress on brain size to the mating habits of monkeys—there is something here for everyone. Which is also the major weakness of this book; that is, it has breadth at the expense of depth. Although Dr. Sapolsky gives

references at the end of each essay, his arguments still feel “light,” as is his writing, for better or worse. So I wouldn’t recommend it for those who are looking for academically rigorous writing but those who enjoy pop science will probably get a kick out of it. Plus, how can you resist this cover? (Not to mention the great backcover photo of the author with a…baboon(I think))

Adrian Sergiusz says

Sapolsky in his masterclass educational, entertaining and eye opening way steps back and observes all the weird peculiarities of human behaviour as a scientist and integrates that with his observation of our various cultural practices around the world. In a collection of various essays, he muses about interesting aspects of evolution and it's effect on us as animals. He very excellently observes the importance of understanding what genes are and are not and how they impact the nature of our behaviour together with our environment.
