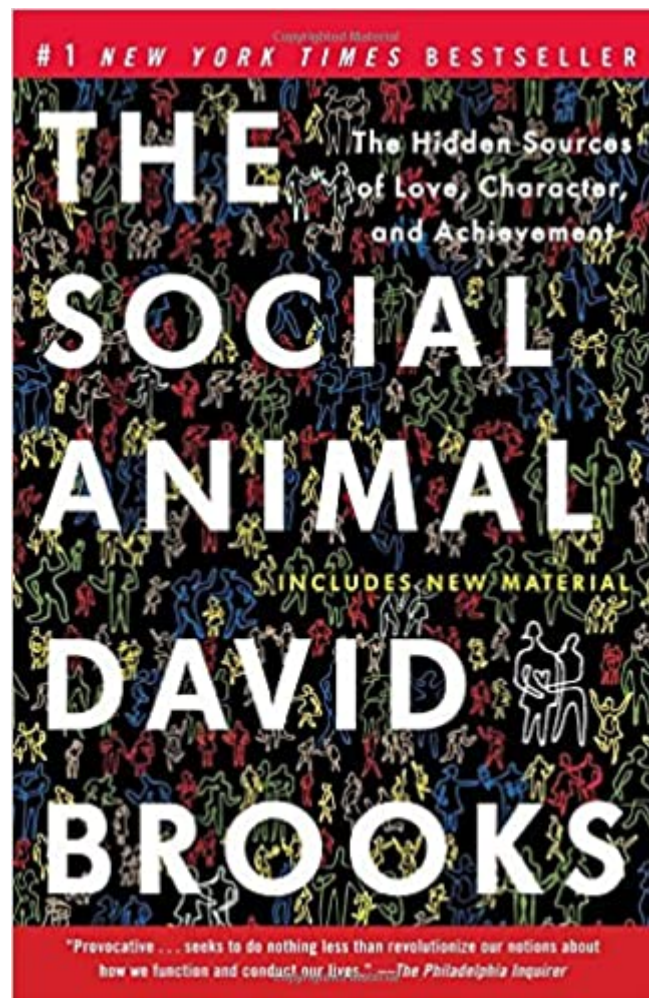




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# The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources Of Love, Character, And Achievement



## Synopsis

**#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER** With unequalled insight and brio, New York Times columnist David Brooks has long explored and explained the way we live. Now Brooks turns to the building blocks of human flourishing in a multilayered, profoundly illuminating work grounded in everyday life. This is the story of how success happens, told through the lives of one composite American couple, Harold and Erica. Drawing on a wealth of current research from numerous disciplines, Brooks takes Harold and Erica from infancy to old age, illustrating a fundamental new understanding of human nature along the way: The unconscious mind, it turns out, is not a dark, vestigial place, but a creative one, where most of the brain's work gets done. This is the realm where character is formed and where our most important life decisions are made—the natural habitat of The Social Animal. Brooks reveals the deeply social aspect of our minds and exposes the bias in modern culture that overemphasizes rationalism, individualism, and IQ. He demolishes conventional definitions of success and looks toward a culture based on trust and humility. The Social Animal is a moving intellectual adventure, a story of achievement and a defense of progress. It is an essential book for our time—one that will have broad social impact and will change the way we see ourselves and the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Guest Reviewer: Walter Isaacson on The Social Animal Walter Isaacson, the CEO of the Aspen Institute, has been chairman of CNN and the managing editor of Time magazine. He is the author of

Benjamin Franklin: An American Life and of Kissinger: A Biography, and the coauthor of The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made. He lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife and daughter. David Brooks has written an absolutely fascinating book about how we form our emotions and character. Standing at the intersection of brain science and sociology, and writing with the wry wit of a James Thurber, he explores the unconscious mind and how it shapes the way we eat, love, live, vacation, and relate to other people. In The Social Animal, he makes the recent revolution in neuroscience understandable, and he applies it to those things we have the most trouble knowing how to teach: What is the best way to build true relationships? How do we instill imaginative thinking? How do we develop our moral intuitions and wisdom and character? Brooks has always been a keen observer of the way we live. Now he takes us one layer down, to why we live that way.

--Walter Isaacson An Interview with David Brooks We talked with David Brooks about, among other things, Jonathan Franzen, Freud, and Brooks's own unfamiliar emotions, just before the publication of The Social Animal. You can read the full interview on Omnivoracious, the books blog, including this exchange: .com: Speaking of Tolstoy, I bet a lot of people are going to quoting the first line of Anna Karenina to you: "Happy families are all alike. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Is there a consistency between what makes a family happy, the way that this family turns out to be? Brooks: You know, I never bought Tolstoy's line. .com: I didn't either. Brooks: I didn't know many happy families that were alike. One of the things you learn is that we're all so much more complex. We all contain multitudes, so someone who might be a bully in one circumstance is incredibly compassionate in other circumstances. We have multiple selves, and the idea that we can have a very simple view of who we are, what our character is, that's actually not right. One of the things all this research shows you is how humble you have to be in the face of the complexity of human nature. We've got a 100 billion neurons in the brain, and it's just phenomenally complicated. You take a little child who says, "I'm a tiger," and pretends to be a tiger. Well that act of imagination--conflating this thing "I" with this thing "tiger"--is phenomenally complicated. No computer could ever do that, but it's happening below the level of awareness. It seems so easy to us. And so one of the things these people learn is they contain these hidden strengths, but at the same time they have to be consciously aware of how modest they can be in understanding themselves and proceed on that basis.

A Letter from Author David Brooks     ã Â© Josh Haner, The New York Times

Several years ago I did some reporting on why so many kids drop out of high school, despite all rational incentives. That took me quickly to studies of early childhood and research on brain formation. Once I started poking around that realm, I found that people who study the mind are giving us an entirely new perspective on who we are and what it takes to flourish.

We're used to a certain story of success, one that emphasizes getting good grades, getting the right job skills and making the right decisions. But these scientists were peering into the innermost mind and shedding light on the process one level down, in the realm of emotions, intuitions, perceptions, genetic dispositions and unconscious longings. I've spent several years with their work now, and it's changed my perspective on everything. In this book, I try to take their various findings and weave them together into one story. This is not a science book. I don't answer how the brain does things. I try to answer what it all means. I try to explain how these findings about the deepest recesses of our minds should change the way we see ourselves, raise our kids, conduct business, teach, manage our relationships and practice politics. This story is based on scientific research, but it is really about emotion, character, virtue and love. We're not rational animals, or laboring animals; we're social animals. We emerge out of relationships and live to bond with each other and connect to larger ideas. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

New York Times columnist Brooks (Bobos in Paradise) raids Malcolm Gladwell's pop psychology turf in a wobbly treatise on brain science, human nature, and public policy. Essentially a satirical novel interleaved with disquisitions on mirror neurons and behavioral economics, the narrative chronicles the life cycle of a fictional couple •Harold, a historian working at a think tank, and Erica, a Chinese-Chicana cable-TV executive •as a case study of the nonrational roots of social behaviors, from mating and shopping to voting. Their story lets Brooks mock the affluent and trendy while advancing soft neoconservative themes: that genetically ingrained emotions and biases trump reason; that social problems require cultural remedies (charter schools, not welfare payments); that the class divide is about intelligence, deportment, and taste, not money or power. Brooks is an engaging guide to the "cognitive revolution" in psychology, but what he shows us amounts mainly to restating platitudes. (Women like men with money, we learn, while men like women with breasts.) His attempt to inflate recent research on neural mechanisms into a grand worldview yields little except buzz concepts •"society is a layering of networks" •no more persuasive than the rationalist dogmas he derides. (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I love it. Brooks is a voice of reason in a maddening world, especially among conservatives in America. This text is a wonderful insight on how we tick and why we do what we do, presented in a story of individuals as they go through their lives and interact with a complicated world.

David Brooks never disappoints--his intelligence is a joy to try to follow in all his writings. This book takes a unique view of the development of human nature by telling the fictional life stories of a family; how the parents meet and the physiological and psychological instincts rule their reactions to each other; the birth and cognitive development of their child; how the human mind evolves and the different paths it can take, depending on the nature/nature it abides in. Overall, a fascinating way to approach the complexities of human development in our current society.

This book was suggested to me by a coworker . I found it very insightful in how we grow and develop and change as well as interact with the world around us. It was also quick a read not bogged down with jargon. Brooks did a phenomenal job consolidating study after study after study so that anyone could understand them.

I had to buy this book for class as it was required reading, but it is not just a boring textbook or nonfiction book. David Brooks writing makes the information about society's role in a person's life easy to read and digestible. He includes many facts and research about how people's outcomes can be determined in life and the chances of success, why some succeed and others plateau. Yet, it is written in a story way most of the time, following a few main characters on how they meet, get married, have a son, and how their decisions affect their overall outcome in life. I would recommend this book for anyone who is interested in psychology and nonfiction books that are relevant to our lives. It was a good read. The book is paperback and came in time for class.

David Brooks does a great job weaving numerous concepts from social sciences, particularly psychology and sociology. I found some of the strongest sections to be on:(1)Impact of parenting and environment on character formation(2)Conscious vs. Subconscious processes (System 1 & System 2 thinking)(3)What contributes to individual successI found the book somewhat easier to read than other books dealing with similar topics, particularly "Thinking Fast and Slow" by Daniel Kahneman. While some readers note that the fictional characters Harold and Erica are "a bit flat", I found the "story-telling" narrative useful in helping me absorb the otherwise somewhat dense material.Overall, I really enjoyed the book and got a few pearls of wisdom out of it. The only aspect that I found lacking is a clearer message of key takeaways. I think that the main principle that David Brooks is operating under is that life and human beings are complex and there aren't simple answers. However, I did feel myself asking "so what?" when I got to the end of the book and find it

difficult to succinctly summarize what central message the book was intending to convey.

Uniquely told, engaging. Mr. Brooks weaves snippets of research data together in the context of the lives of two fictional characters. So many, many things to ponder, I must read again!

As a non-specialist *The Social Animal* is probably one of the most revealing book I read about human behavior. With a mass of examples depicted through fictional characters Brooks brings a ton of research to light in one place. I have found myself and others represented in different situations that are described. Very knowledgeable and verbose, almost lyrical language is used. The reading involves the reader as a thriller. Highly recommended if you want to know more about psychology and human behavior without taking a degree in the matter. Ah and without the boring academic structure.

Time is racing, the world changing beyond recognition, and we find ourselves feeling lost, not knowing how to make sense of the events and seemingly familiar people around us. David Brooks successfully explains it all in *The Social Animal*--we recognize our friends or neighbors in his characters, find a name and a reason for what we see on the news, and moreover, finish the book with a sigh of relief, with a renewed feeling of hope that we as humans are still the same, humane and social, ever struggling and always capable of finding what we yearn for--love, character and achievement. Did the author just create a new genre? It is a life story of a modern couple with its very common personal and relational ups and downs, deftly interspersed with the theories and findings of research in the areas of human development--sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc., presented in a most palatable manner. Brooks' writing style, well polished in New York Times reporting, is superb and highly believable, so at times you wonder to what extent the book might be autobiographical.

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