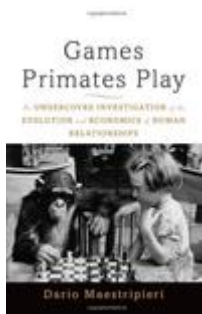


## Of Naked Apes and Hairy Markets

A review of



**Games Primates Play: An Undercover Investigation of the Evolution and Economics of Human Relationships**

by Dario Maestriperi

New York, NY: Basic Books, 2012. 302 pp. ISBN 978-0-465-02078-2.

\$27.99



---

Reviewed by

[Robert D. Mather](#)

[Tephillah Jeyaraj](#)

In 1967, zoologist Desmond Morris wrote a provocative book titled *The Naked Ape*, in which he examined *Homo sapiens* as an animal. Treading in the realm of ethologists and anthropologists, Morris developed a unique style of observing and describing humans as a scientist would examine the behaviors of any other animal. Given the fact that humans are, in fact, animals, this was not a surprising perspective for a zoologist to take to describe human behavior.

However, social scientists were not as receptive to the perspective. Morris warned, “There are others who will resent any zoological invasion of their specialist area” (Morris, 1967, p. 12). Morris stuck to basic behaviors, describing his observations of human behaviors in the realms of sex, fighting, and caregiving. Indeed, Wilson (1980) later paid the price for such resentment when he introduced his controversial idea of sociobiology. In one

violent incident, Wilson was doused with water by protesters who invaded the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Wilson, 2006). Ethologists such as Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1989) and Konrad Lorenz (1966) and primatologists such as de Waal (1989, 2005) have also promoted such a perspective of observing human behavior.

In *Games Primates Play: An Undercover Investigation of the Evolution and Economics of Human Relationships*, Dario Maestripieri observes human behavior through the lens of a primatologist in a manner reminiscent of the work of Morris. An engaging writer and thorough scientist, Maestripieri succeeds in presenting a good balance of controversial debates regarding his assertions. He develops arguments to support his ideas on primate behavior based on the most current social cognition, social neuroscience, and judgment and decision-making research.

Maestripieri offers examples from personal observations as well as empirical research to illustrate the similarities between humans and other primates. He successfully explains why certain relationships work whether they are between a supervisor and an employee, a professor and a student, or romantic partners. He discusses the roles of dominance and nepotism as influential factors in predicting human behavior with examples from macaque monkeys, who interact in strikingly similar ways to humans. Status, rank, and who one knows award survival benefits in the monkey world, the Italian army, and academia.

Competition and cooperation are well-researched topics in animal behavior studies where, traditionally, evolutionary explanations take precedence. Economists have also developed models to explain and predict human decision-making behavior using game theory. Maestripieri applies both of these approaches to explain workplace behavior such as how employees interact with coworkers and their supervisor and climb the corporate ladder. Using several interesting vignettes, he demonstrates the similarities between human behavior and the monkey world, where the appropriate use of social knowledge can advance an individual's interests.

Whether an individual appears to be generous or is willing to cooperate depends on the context—is the person in the public eye or not? Given research on social facilitation (Bond & Titus, 1983; Zajonc, Heingartner, & Herman, 1969) and the Hawthorne effect (Landy, 1989), it is well known that humans behave differently depending on their audience, but so do monkeys. Maestripieri even cites examples from the fish world, where opportunistic cheating is widely prevalent. On the other hand, building a good reputation seems to yield significant benefits across the board.

In primate markets, grooming is the “currency” of choice, where monkeys may trade grooming for food, protection, or sexual access. Although humans do not groom each other, physical attractiveness and money seem to be the commodities involved in finding a mate (Buss & Angleitner, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Maestripieri explains that the demand and supply for certain high-value characteristics in a group determine the type of partner that one is able to find, even in business relationships such as that of an author and a publisher. Such social forces govern many

markets, both naked and hairy. Recent research calls into question the social function of grooming (allogrooming) (Grueter, Bissonette, Isler, & van Schaik, 2013), but Maestripieri's supply-and-demand discussion of high-value characteristics seems to be unaffected by the resolution of the issue of the social function of grooming.

Contrary to the rational choice theory proposed by economists that holds that a decision is made after all possible options have been explored and weighed, humans are notoriously irrational in their choices (Ariely, 2008). We often make decisions on the basis of our emotional state. Maestripieri argues that emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, lust, or love actually modulate our behavioral predispositions to act a certain way and that our choices and behavior follow algorithms or preprogrammed neural circuits that are part of the evolutionary package that we share with other primates.

Many of Maestripieri's good examples of what might be called the "social psychology of science" come from his observations of his colleagues in academia, in particular, and how their behaviors illustrate basic behaviors of primates. In the epilogue, Maestripieri addresses the general perception of and attitude toward evolutionary theory, especially in the context of the current political and religious climate. He emphasizes the distinction between the role of science in providing knowledge and objective explanations, and the tendency of people to subjectively judge and use this knowledge.

Over the last decade, research in behavioral neuroeconomics has been gaining popularity as an interdisciplinary area, with contributions from psychologists, economists, neuroscientists, and primatologists who have the common goal of understanding and explaining human and animal decision-making processes (Glimcher, Fehr, Camerer, & Poldrack, 2008). For the interested reader seeking further information, *Games Primates Play* provides a good sampling of the theories and observations from the fields of primatology, behavioral economics, evolutionary biology, and psychology. For those uninitiated, it is an engaging introduction into the interdisciplinary intersection of these areas.

In conclusion, *Games Primates Play* is appropriate for a wide audience, including teachers and students of psychology, as well as scholars who are interested in the behavior of their cohorts. The experience of reading this thought-provoking, useful book is similar to walking through the forest with an expert bird-watcher. The reader is afforded the opportunity to walk through the human social experience with an astute primatologist. This is a thoroughly well-researched theoretical work in the tradition of Desmond Morris.

---

## References

- Ariely, D. (2008). *Predictably irrational: The hidden forces that shape our decisions*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. [PsycINFO](#)
- Bond, C. F., Jr., & Titus, L. J. (1983). Social facilitation: A meta-analysis of 241 studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, *94*, 265–292. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.94.2.265 [PsycINFO](#)  
[Article](#)
- Buss, D. M., & Angleitner, A. (1989). Mate selection preferences in Germany and the United States. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *10*, 1269–1280. doi:10.1016/0191-8869(89)90239-0 [PsycINFO](#) [Article](#)
- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, *100*, 204–232. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.100.2.204 [PsycINFO](#) [Article](#)
- de Waal, F. (1989). *Peacemaking among primates*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [PsycINFO](#)
- de Waal, F. (2005). *Our inner ape: A primatologist explains why we are who we are*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1989). *Human ethology*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter. [PsycINFO](#)
- Glimcher, P., Fehr, E., Camerer, C., & Poldrack, R. A. (2008). *Neuroeconomics: Decision making and the brain*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Grueter, C. C., Bissonnette, A., Isler, K., & van Schaik, C. P. (2013). Grooming and group cohesion in primates: Implications for the evolution of language. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *34*, 61–68. doi:10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2012.09.004 [PsycINFO](#)  
[Article](#)
- Landy, F. J. (1989). *Psychology of work behavior* (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. [PsycINFO](#)
- Lorenz, K. (1966). *On aggression*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Morris, D. (1967). *The naked ape*. New York, NY: Dell.
- Wilson, E. O. (1980). *Sociobiology*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Wilson, E. O. (2006). *Naturalist*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Zajonc, R. B., Heingartner, A., & Herman, E. M. (1969). Social enhancement and impairment of performance in the cockroach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *13*, 83–92. doi:10.1037/h0028063 [PsycINFO](#) [Article](#)
-

PsycCRITIQUES  
1554-0138

May 15, 2013, Vol. 58, Release 20, Article 5  
[© 2013, American Psychological Association](#)