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Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species

Sarah Hrdy

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Maternal instinct--the all-consuming, utterly selfless love that mothers lavish on their children--has long been assumed to be an innate, indeed defining element of a woman's nature. But is it? In this provocative, groundbreaking book, renowned anthropologist (and mother) Sarah Blaffer Hrdy shares a radical new vision of motherhood and its crucial role in human evolution.

Hrdy strips away stereotypes and gender-biased myths to demonstrate that traditional views of maternal behavior are essentially wishful thinking codified as objective observation. As Hrdy argues, far from being "selfless," successful primate mothers have always combined nurturing with ambition, mother love with sexual love, ambivalence with devotion. In fact all mothers, in the struggle to guarantee both their own survival and that of their offspring, deal nimbly with competing demands and conflicting strategies.

In her nuanced, stunningly original interpretation of the relationships between mothers and fathers, mothers and babies, and mothers and their social groups, Hrdy offers not only a revolutionary new meaning to motherhood but an important new understanding of human evolution. Written with grace and clarity, suffused with the wisdom of a long and distinguished career, Mother Nature is a profound contribution to our understanding of who we are as a species--and why we have become this way.

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