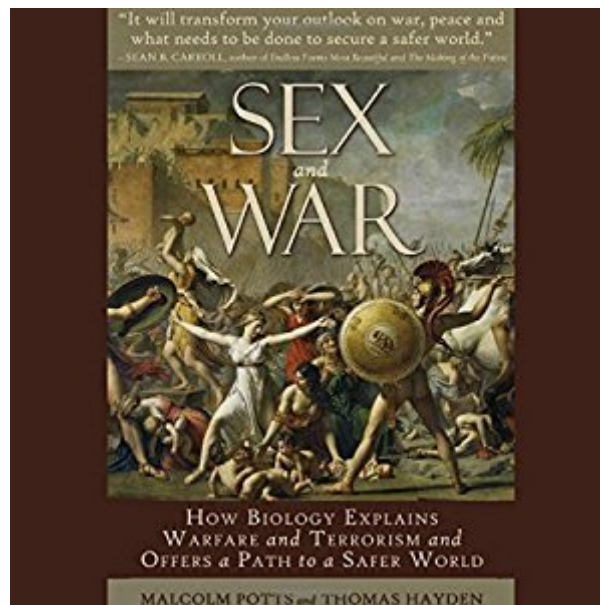




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Sex And War: How Biology Explains Warfare And Terrorism And Offers A Path To A Safer World



Synopsis

As news of war and terror dominates the headlines, scientist Malcolm Potts and veteran journalist Thomas Hayden take a step back to explain it all. In the spirit of *Guns, Germs and Steel*, *Sex and War* asks the basic questions: Why is war so fundamental to our species? And what can we do about it? Malcolm Potts explores these questions from the frontlines, as a witness to war-torn countries around the world. As a scientist and obstetrician, Potts has worked with governments and aid organizations globally, and in the trenches with women who have been raped and brutalized in the course of war. Combining their own experience with scientific findings in primatology, genetics, and anthropology, Potts and Hayden explain war's pivotal position in the human experience and how men in particular evolved under conditions that favored gang behavior, rape, and organized aggression. Drawing on these new insights, they propose a rational plan for making warfare less frequent and less brutal in the future. Anyone interested in understanding human nature, warfare, and terrorism at their most fundamental levels will find *Sex and War* to be an illuminating work, and one that might change the way they see the world. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Perhaps the better way of putting what "Sex and war" is about is quoting a question that the author poses at the last section of the book: "Why do we humans, remarkably social animals with extremely large brains, spend so much energy on one thing--deliberately and systematically killing other members of our species?" In fact, this question that guides the work along its fifteen chapters,

from "Sex and war" through "Civilization at its best." And to me at least, the question not only is answered but also re-elaborated in order to propose a solution to this authentic and ominous conundrum. Our biology emerges in several and disruptive manners. And it does all the time. We need to acknowledge that if we want to save the world, our world, we cannot let biology govern our decisions --biology is not destiny. So the authors give us a guide, a very appealing one, to find a way towards the future. I guess that the lessons of this book, being just a handful, contains the simplicity that normally is the best indicator of truth. So what the reader should know before deciding if buying or not this book it is that this is a very interesting and entertained essay. But not only that. The book has been written by two authors, both of them with a notorious pedigree on science and journalism. Dr. Potts is the main author and what impressed me more is that he has lived almost any single line he has written. I mean, he has been there, in the same places where the war and the violence it brings has taken place. But as everyone knows, this is not enough. You need, as the author, to have an acute mind and a proper insight to test what you think, once and again, for breaking the thick wall of the prejudices, our own as the others. Not an easy task, indeed. Thus, if you expect to find what the title of the book says, you'll find it, believe me. If you are interested in history, you'll feel accomplished. If you read detectives novels, this book will work for you too. If you are a passive citizen, it will shake you (perhaps a little bit). If you are a politician, I hope it will let you think deeper than usual (especially if you are a Chilean politician). If you do not know what to think about birth control, then this is a chance to make up your mind. And if you want to know why women are our last (or almost last) hope for not ruin the world, this book is the place to start. Five full stars.

The thesis of this book, co-authored by Malcolm Potts and Thomas Hayden, is summarized thus (Page 2): "This book is about war. It is about terror, and cruelty, and the biological origins and long, brutal, vicious, and destructive history of organized aggression. Perhaps most importantly, it is not just about the depths to which human beings can sink, but also how we came to be this way and what we can do about it." In short, the book addresses the human nature of violence, why it came about, and what tools might be available to us to reduce the carnage coming from our evolutionary background. Up front, I will simply note that there is not much in this book that is new. Arguments such as this have been around for some time. What is positive about this book is that it is well written and accessible to wider audiences than some of the more academic works. As one example of "dÃ©jÃ vu," Potts and Hayden argue that having more women in positions of power would likely reduce state created warfare and violence. The argument follows from the arguments presented, but Glendon Schubert made a similar argument a decade and a half ago (I did not see Schubert's

work mentioned, although I could have missed the relevant footnote--there are over 500, after all!). The book provides a perspective based on reproductive success being the key to evolutionary change and the understanding of what behaviors any species deploys. Among humans, team aggression (groups of males working together) and reproductive success are linked to make intergroup violence a default option for humans. The book notes the analogy with intergroup violence among Pan troglodytes (the chimpanzee), humankind's closest relatives in nature, further suggesting an evolutionary background to this behavior. The chapter titles summarize key points made: "We band of brothers" (human males "bond" with one another in warfare and cooperate to protect one another), "Terrorists," "Women and war," "Raids into battles," "War and the state," "War and technology," "War and the law," "Evil," "The Future of war," "Women and peace," and "Stoner age behaviors in the twenty-first century." The last chapter explores what might be done to reduce the extent of human violence and warfare. On page 368, some suggestions are summarized in a table. Among these: increase the number of women in parliaments and legislatures, empower women (including preventing unwanted pregnancies), ensure universal science education, encourage knowledge of history and evolution, maintain a free media, and don't supply potential enemies with weapons. Would some combination of these actually work? That's a good question. I am not so optimistic, but the listing (and the discussion of these in the final chapter) at least gets readers to reflecting on the subject. If that leads to broader discussion--whatever the reader thinks of the book's arguments--then it has made a contribution.

Interesting book, how war boils down to Women being suppressed over history. If Women would have equal rights, then likelihood of war is less. Countries with large young populations of men, are more likely of war. All people who don't support equal rights should read this, sadly, that's the people who don't read this kind of books, if they read at all.

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