

“In this highly informative and thought provoking book, the author has tackled one of the most challenging subjects in medical, behavioral and social science - the nature and role of human instincts. His approach to the topic is refreshing, as it does not dwell on complex neurobiology or ethereal psychoanalytic style speculation. Instead, Halvorson applies his characteristic plain language design to each chapter. Following a very useful overview of the role of instincts in our lives, he addresses a broad range of characteristics of human instincts including, among others, the propensity for instinct-driven division of our world into ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ groups. While such categorization might appear obvious to some, the author’s dissection of the subject and reliance on clear and compelling examples is persuasive - it makes clear beyond a reasonable doubt that misdirection of human instinctual behavior can have devastating consequences. Halvorson presents each face of the topic with equal balance and objectivity - the positive, constructive aspect of human instincts and the negative, destructive aspect. This ‘non-partisan’ treatment is perhaps the most powerful quality of the book as it inspires a broader and more honest consideration of the implications, merits and flaws of human instincts rather than simply favoring one or another group of traits.

One of the most interesting chapters (Chapter 9) addresses our instincts to decorate and create art forms and how such instincts impact intergroup relations. The message that the author conveys is simple but powerful - that the expression of aesthetic instincts can enhance peace instead of having the alternative effect of divisively demarcating properties and possessions between and among multiple groups.

Chapter 12 provides a fascinating discussion of human instincts and the creation of modern America. The author explains how instinctive behavior affected the landscape of America and specifically describes the powerful impact of instinct-influenced tribalism. He notes that, ‘As we look at our history, we can see the clear and constant footprints of our full package of instincts extending back in every direction. Instincts have very clearly shaped major aspects of our history and our nation.’ This correlation of instincts and prominent historical footprints offers an intriguing and unique look at American history. *Primal Pathways* has much to offer any reader wishing to understand the nature of human instincts and their dramatic effects on our history and contemporary daily life,” —

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