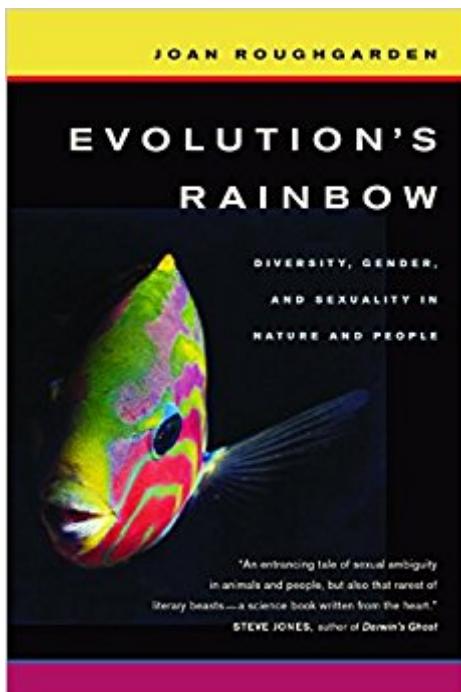


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Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, And Sexuality In Nature And People



Synopsis

In this innovative celebration of diversity and affirmation of individuality in animals and humans, Joan Roughgarden challenges accepted wisdom about gender identity and sexual orientation. A distinguished evolutionary biologist, Roughgarden takes on the medical establishment, the Bible, social science and even Darwin himself. She leads the reader through a fascinating discussion of diversity in gender and sexuality among fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals, including primates. Evolution's Rainbow explains how this diversity develops from the action of genes and hormones and how people come to differ from each other in all aspects of body and behavior. Roughgarden reconstructs primary science in light of feminist, gay, and transgender criticism and redefines our understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality. Witty, playful, and daring, this book will revolutionize our understanding of sexuality. Roughgarden argues that principal elements of Darwinian sexual selection theory are false and suggests a new theory that emphasizes social inclusion and control of access to resources and mating opportunity. She disputes a range of scientific and medical concepts, including Wilson's genetic determinism of behavior, evolutionary psychology, the existence of a gay gene, the role of parenting in determining gender identity, and Dawkins's "selfish gene" as the driver of natural selection. She dares social science to respect the agency and rationality of diverse people; shows that many cultures across the world and throughout history accommodate people we label today as lesbian, gay, and transgendered; and calls on the Christian religion to acknowledge the Bible's many passages endorsing diversity in gender and sexuality. Evolution's Rainbow concludes with bold recommendations for improving education in biology, psychology, and medicine; for democratizing genetic engineering and medical practice; and for building a public monument to affirm diversity as one of our nation's defining principles.

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Customer Reviews

This brilliant and accessible work of biological criticism has the potential to revolutionize the way readers conceive of gender and sexuality in the natural world. Roughgarden, a professor of biology at Stanford University and a member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, argues that the diversity of gender and sexuality one finds in many species suggests that evolutionary biologists of a strictly Darwinian bent are often misguided, since, according to Roughgarden, they erroneously assume a universally applicable gender binary in all species. The first half of the book brings that sexual diversity to light through innumerable examples among birds, reptiles, fish and mammals provided in highly readable anecdotes. The significance of this first section lies not only in this startlingly original portrait of nature, but also in how it suggests that contemporary Darwinian sexual selection theory is in part a result of cultural bias, since it "predicts that the baseline outcome of social evolution is horny, handsome, healthy warriors paired with discreetly discerning damsels." Roughgarden critiques this theory through an expansive study of biological scholarship, highlighting the frequent contradictions between such claims and the data used (and, she argues, manipulated) to prove them. The second and undoubtedly more controversial section discusses sexual diversity in humans. Taking as a given the presence in our own species of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and intersex persons, she reads current scientific writing-on a supposed "gay gene," on gender reassignment and other issues-through a perspective that sees diversity as an advantage, not a handicap. Readers more accustomed to traditional categories of gender and sexuality in humans will undoubtedly be surprised at how different a portrait emerges from Roughgarden's deeply personal and insistently ethical point of view. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"A fun read with laudable politics." -- Out Magazine

You would not find a tougher critic than my self, when it comes to the infiltration of cultural ideology that is also nonegotiably political. I am not yet finished reading this book, and I have come across one assumption that Joan seems to have carried throughout and not yet critiqued, which has to do with the unqualified projection of the economizatuon of Living processes (she has not critiqued the

assumption that social life among all species must be for gain of resources, while she critiques all assumptions having to do with procreative or gendered concerns). Yet the level to which Joan removes human bias is still a huge leap forward in bringing science toward the objectivity that will come of extensive self-examination of the kind that has been nearly absent within scientific praxes to date. Joan has been thorough in gathering, organizing, extracting and more boundlessly exploring meanings within Natures ecological communities, such that there are many questions posed that can well lead beyond the many patriarchal assumptions which prohibit our ability to see the potentials inherent in transitioning to a world characterized by "partnership" (Eisler) values and ways of being related within an ecological human or social world. She presents a myriad of New horizons for inquiry that is more Truly scientific, and potentially generative, if enhancing human and ecological Lives becomes the political imperative we need it to become.

Roughgarden's readable work on transgenderism touches upon two subjects simultaneously: the widespread existence of transgender, gay and transsexuality in virtually all species; and its usefulness in terms of species survival of gay and transsexual individuals in the species. Basic concepts and terminology in evolutionary biology are for the most part explained in terms that an average person can grasp. Well-documented examples of gay and transsexual behavior in species ranging from insects to fish to birds to mammals are presented. I particularly liked the example of the domestic and wild sheep. All of her discussions, though, serve another purpose, and that is to contrast how certain aspects of what Darwin believed have been supplanted. For example, there is little reason in Darwinian thought as to why there could possibly be any evolutionary advantage in having a small percentage of gay or transsexual individuals in a population, as they don't typically reproduce. However, Roughgarden shows how having adult members with no offspring actually can increase the odds that the young that are produced survive until they are able to breed. So it is not just about breeding, which is what much of Darwinian thought revolves around, but rather breeding AND ensuring that the young live to sexual maturity and mating themselves. All in all I found this an engaging, clearly-written, solidly documented work that doesn't require you to be a biologist, just a person with some understanding of science and a willingness to learn new ideas. highly recommended!

I use this as a textbook. It's accessible, interesting, and thorough (with the exception of a puzzling blind spot when it comes to the kathoey of Thailand). My only complaint is that it's ten years old now (the new edition included no text changes, only a new forward), and much of the research and

politics are out-of-date. Will we see an updated version from Joan Roughgarden soon? I hope so, because this is the only book of this scope on this topic available, to my knowledge.

This is a required textbook for my Anthropology class. It talks about diversity (or rainbow) among humans and animals in terms of their sexuality and gender expression. Do I like this book? Yes, it'll help me get through the class. Would I buy it if it's not for my class? Probably not.

Immensely informative and opened a wealth of information to absorb. This is a pivotal piece I wish every teacher, parent and college student would read. Gratifying; expands and enlarges opinion to take in and understand what may have never been considered or known.

// , I had long known that evolution did not work as a "survival of the fittest" model. Almost anyone who observes animal societies can tell that's bulls***.However, this book takes all the parts of evolution beyond mere survival of individuals and runs with them farther than I ever might have gone, otherwise.I forgive any refinement that this work might need, because of how far reaching and relatively unexplored many of these concepts are.Refinement will come with time.

Good book in general, but a little bit politically biased, not an excellent scientist's way.

Great book. Thank you!

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