

Excerpts from Reviews and Advance Comments for *Mothers & Others*

“The consequences of viewing humans as having a history of cooperative breeding are potentially profound. . . . As Hrdy argues, pinpointing the sequence of evolutionary events in our hominin ancestry will be crucial to understanding the co-evolution of human traits. . . . Her thought-provoking book will interest students, specialists and general readers alike and should focus attention on the neglected roles of mothers and others within human evolutionary theory.”
—Gillian Brown, *Science* June 26, 2009 [[PDF](#)]

“In this compelling and wide-ranging book, Hrdy sets out to explain the mystery of how human evolved into cooperative apes.”

—Alison Motluk, *New Scientist* (April 4, 2009)

“Beginning with her opening conceit of apes on an airplane (you wouldn’t want to be on this flight) and continuing through her informed insights into the behavior of other species, Hrdy’s reasoning is fascinating to follow.”

—Michelle Press, *Scientific American* (May 2009)

“One of the boldest thinkers in her field, Hrdy believes that the ability to engage others in their care . . . is not an accident, but, rather, the result of evolutionary imperatives. Hrdy’s scope is huge. . . . To build her arguments, she expertly knits together research from a variety of fields. . . . Her book is at once entertaining, full of apt, often colourful anecdotes, sometimes culled from her own experiences, and rich with information and case studies. . . . Hrdy is not only synthesizing her own research on female reproductive strategies . . . but that of hundreds of other researchers to create what amounts to a sweeping new meta-paradigm.”

—Michele Pridmore-Brown, *Times Literary Supplement*, May 22, 2009

“If Sarah Blaffer Hrdy were a male scientist, I might be tempted to say that her new book... arrives like an intellectual time bomb, or that it throws a grenade into accepted notions of human evolution. But those are aggressive, competitive metaphors and one of the essential points of *Mothers and Others* is that aggression and competition have been given far too central a place in the standard accounts of how our species came into being. *Mothers and Others* . . . is not only revolutionary: it is also wise and humane.”

—Mark Abley, *The Gazette* (Montreal)

[Hrdy] “argues that our human ancestors became emotionally modern long before the human brain had reached its current average volume of 1,300 cubic centimeters, which is about three times the size of a chimpanzee brain — in other words, that we became the nicest apes before becoming the smartest. . . . To explain the rise of cooperative breeding among our forebears (she synthesizes an array of new research in anthropology, genetics, infant development, comparative biology.”

—Natalie Angier, *New York Times* March 3, 2009

“Hrdy’s lucid and comprehensively researched book takes us to the heart of what it means to be human.”

—Camilla Power, *Times Higher Education*, May 7, 2009, “Book of the Week.” Available [online](#).

“Hrdy’s much-awaited new book is another mind-expanding, paradigm-shifting, rigorously scientific yet eminently readable treatise. . . . [*Mothers and Others*] lays the foundation for a new hypothesis about human evolution.

—Claudia Casper, *Globe and Mail*, May 9, 2009. Available [online](#).

“Natural selection selects the fittest, but the fittest need not be selfish...the most refreshing aspect of (this book) is the challenge (offered) to what we thought we already knew.”

—John Odling-Smee, *Nature*, April 30, 2009

What [Hrdy] found is that our unique mothering instinct, quite different from gorillas and chimpanzees, meant that the children most likely to survive were those who could relate to and solicit help from others. We evolved to be wired for empathy for, consideration of, and intuition into how others are feeling.

—Jessa Crispin, *Smart Set*

For as long as she’s been a sociobiologist, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has been playfully dismantling traditional notions of motherhood and gender relations. . . . Hrdy is back with another book, *Mothers and Others*, and another big idea. She argues that human cooperation is rooted not in war making, as sociobiologists have believed, but in baby making and baby-sitting. Hrdy’s conception of early human society is far different from the classic sociobiological view of a primeval nuclear family, with dad off hunting big game and mom tending the cave and the kids. Instead, Hrdy paints a picture of a cooperative breeding culture in which parenting duties were spread out across a network of friends and relatives. The effect on our development was profound.

—Julia Wallace, *Salon*

Advance Comments

In the study of mothering, Sarah Hrdy has no peer. In *Mothers and Others*, we are treated to Hrdy’s infectious writing, taking the reader on a tour of our evolved history as a cooperatively parenting species. The ideas are big, bold, and brain-bending.

—Marc Hauser, author of *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*

Boldly conceived and beautifully written, *Mothers and Others* makes a strong case that we humans are (or should be) cooperative breeders. It is an indispensable contribution to the debate about how and why we came to be the most successful primate of them all.

—Melvin Konner, author of *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit*

As was the case for her earlier classic, *Mother Nature*, Sarah Hrdy’s *Mothers and Others* is a brilliant work on a profoundly important subject. The leading scientific authority on motherhood has come through again.

—E. O. Wilson