

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement Study Guide

**The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love,
Character, and Achievement by David H. M. Brooks**

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Plot Summary

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement by David Brooks is mainly the story about Harold and Erica. Brooks borrows the methods of Rousseau by taking the principals and applying them through storytelling. Brooks has created two main characters - Erica and Harold.

Brooks begins by telling what he believes will be the happiest story the reader has ever read. It is a story about two seemingly ordinary people that have done extraordinary things. These people were never singled out as geniuses or spectacularly special in any way. Instead, their gifts seemed to be innate and less obvious than the gifts of some overachievers or star athletes. This couple possessed noncognitive skills - skills that are not obvious. The term is a catchall phrase for things that are not easily measured. Brooks states that this book is different from the zillions of others that have been published over the years. It focuses on the role of the inner mind and the birthplace of street smarts. Brooks asserts that the majority of thinking - thinking that leads to success - takes place in the unconscious mind. "If the study of the conscious mind highlights the importance of reason and analysis, study of the unconscious mind highlights the importance of passions and perception. If the outer mind highlights the power of the individual, the inner mind highlights the power of relationships and the invisible bonds between people." Introduction, p. 8.

Brooks goes on to talk about how the unconscious mind typically works separately and complementarily with the conscious mind. Brooks' main goal is to show the reader what the unconscious mind looks like when it is at its peak. He will attempt to explain the research and how the scientists understand human nature.

The stories of Harold and Erica begin when they are children. Harold and Erica were created to show the development and psychological nature of the individual and how it operated in and out of a relationship. Harold and Erica embody the principles and behaviors outlined by numerous scientists, educators and psychologists.

Brooks follows the lives of Harold and Erica throughout their formative years, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, their career choices, marriage, retirement and old age.

Harold and Erica have been created to show every aspect of the social animal including education, socialization, and morality. They have ups and downs and hard learning experiences. Throughout it all, however, both learn how to adapt and grow as individuals as well as a couple. Both achieve greatness in their chosen fields by emulating the principles set forth by the author.

introduction; Chapters 1-2

introduction; Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Introduction:

Author David Brooks begins by telling what he believes will be the happiest story the reader has ever read. It is a story about two seemingly ordinary people that have done extraordinary things. These people were never singled out as geniuses or spectacularly special in any way. Instead, their gifts seemed to be innate and less obvious than the gifts of some overachievers or star athletes. This couple possessed noncognitive skills - skills that are not obvious. The term is a catchall phrase for things that are not easily measured. Brooks states that this book is different from the zillions of others that have been published over the years. It focuses on the role of the inner mind and the birthplace of street smarts. Brooks asserts that the majority of thinking - thinking that leads to success - takes place in the unconscious mind.

Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia states that the unconscious mind can take in as much as eleven million pieces of information. The conscious mind can take in about forty pieces, although even that number seems generous. Wilson believes that it is the unconscious mind that does all the work.

The Empire of Emotion

"If the study of the conscious mind highlights the importance of reason and analysis, study of the unconscious mind highlights the importance of passions and perception. If the outer mind highlights the power of the individual, the inner mind highlights the power of relationships and the invisible bonds between people." Introduction, p. 8

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My Goals

Brooks' main goal is to show the reader what the unconscious mind looks like when it is at its peak. He will attempt to explain the research and how the scientists understand human nature.

My Other Purpose

Brooks' day job is writing about policy and politics. He speaks of the policies that have been implemented and failed. He believes that those policies have failed because of the oversimplification of human nature. Brooks states that the policies will continue to fail unless the concept of human nature is worked into those policies.

The Plan

Brooks borrows the methods of Rousseau by taking the principals and applying them through storytelling. Brooks has created two main characters - Erica and Harold.

Fellowship

The story of Erica and Harold is a story of progress. It is also a story of love and fellowship. The images we have of ourselves have been inherited. We see ourselves as superior to animals because of our abilities to rationalize. "In fact, we are separated from the other animals because we have phenomenal social skills that enable us to teach, learn, sympathize, emote and build cultures, institutions, and the complex mental scaffolding of civilizations." Introduction, p. 13. We are junctions and communication centrals, spiritual Grand Central Stations.

Brooks tells a short story about Douglas and Carol Hofstadter and their relationship as well as the aftermath of Carol's death.

Chapter 1: Decision Making

Brooks talks about the "Composure Class." The examples are humorous but still accurate regarding a specific culture and lifestyle. The Composure Class consists of people who have no special skills to account for a meteoric rise to fame. They went to the right schools and made the right decisions in the right jobs. They became wealthy over time. Mr. Casual Elegance, a movie-star handsome man, marries Ms. Sculpted Beauty. They have three children - Artistically Gifted, Global Compassion and Effortless Brilliance. The children excel in everything they do at private boarding schools and in their chosen obscure sports, e.g. lacrosse. The children go to prestigious schools and develop mirror image lifestyles to their parents. These people are typically nice but take some joy in making others feel inferior. They are the people that invite others to their weekend place and will meet them at a private airport where everyone will board a private plane. Their houses will be filled with furniture from Ikea and the food will be nearly non-existent. Their dogs will be one-third the height of the ceilings. People will applaud as they walk down the street and bathe in an aura of perfection.

The Meeting

Brooks tells the story of Rob and Julia and their first meeting. Rob and Julia would eventually marry and become the parents to Harold, one of the main characters in the story.

Rob and Julia were meant to be together. They shared similar backgrounds, opinions, and physical attributes. Brooks details the importance of these elements and how people tend to be surprised when others have common interests and lives as people, on the whole, tend to think they are more unique than they are.

The Stroll

At this point both Rob and Julia have the urge to rush right in yet experience trepidation and fear at saying the wrong thing, saying too much or appearing too vehement or desperate.

Love's Role

Elliot was a man with a superior intellect. Unfortunately, Elliot had suffered damage as the result of a brain tumor. He was easily distracted and had trouble managing his day to day life. A scientist tested Elliot. The tests showed Elliot's high level of intelligence. However, the scientist, Antonio Damasio, noted that Elliot never showed emotion. Elliot did not respond to photos that should have evoked great emotion such as earthquakes, accidents and floods. It was determined that while Elliot was prepared to make choices, even those based on moral imperatives, he could not actually make the choice. Damasio determined that people who do not feel emotion do not lead rational lives a la Mr. Spock. They tend to lead foolish lives. Damasio developed the theory that the unconscious requires us to be able to connect to emotion, to be able to measure the value of something. The brain possesses an EPS - an Emotional Positioning System - that can be compared to a Global Positioning System (GPS). The EPS creates judgments on past experiences and helps people to navigate through the day.

Another researcher, James LeDoux states: "The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake." Chap. 1, p. 33.

Implications

Understanding decision making leads to essential truths. "Reason and emotion are not separate and opposed." Chap. 1, p. 33.

Chapter 2: The Map Meld

Rob and Julia were happily married. After a few months they began to notice that their map meld for day-to-day living differed slightly. Julia liked the toilet paper to hang one way, Rob was the opposite. Rob bought meal-specific groceries while Julia bought ingredients. Julia refused to take off her socks for any activity, even sex; Rob was obsessed with buying toothpaste.

Procreation

The sex drives of men and women are discussed. Also discussed is the fact that the woman's orgasm is a mental process, not a physical reflex. Rob and Julia procreate and have a son.

Chapters 3-6

Chapters 3-6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3: Mindsight

Julia maintained her party girl persona into her late twenties. Meanwhile, Harold was forming rapidly in her womb. Brooks explains the growth process of the fetus as well as the immediate bonding that takes place after birth. Operation Motherhood was Harold's only goal and he had the tools to accomplish his task.

The Invasion

Julia became overwhelmed by Harold. She considered him to be half cupid, half storm trooper. He was sweet and lovely but was demanding and controlling. Julia's future seemed grim.

Intertwined

Julia and Harold would become intertwined through laughter, tears, funny faces, and calm moments.

Mirror Neurons

"Philosophers have long argued about the process people use to understand one another." Chap. 3, p. 49. People attempt to be theorists of other people's thought processes through observation and experience. However, there are rival processes that are also at work.

Mirror neurons are part of a theory that we have mental neurons that recreate the mental patterns of others. This is why people tend to imitate one another. Studies are examined. It turns out that Harold would become a promiscuous imitator.

Make 'Em Laugh

Studies show that people are thirty times more likely to laugh with others than when they are alone. Speakers tend to laugh more than listeners. Only fifteen percent of the conversations are even remotely funny. Laughter is used to bond and also to cover up awkwardness.

Chapter 4: Mapmaking

Harold grew. He became fascinated with material things like shapes and then his fascination changed to edges of objects. Eventually, Harold began to seek to have everything at his level. Plates were pulled off tables; books were rescued from their shelves. Harold only had two goals at this point - how to learn from his mother and how

to make stuff fall. Until a certain age, Harold had no inner voice, no self-analysis. All of his focus was on exterior objects and events.

The Task

At this point, Harold's only real job was to make maps of his surroundings. This portion of Harold's life was the time when he would learn the most and the fastest.

Only Connect

By the ages two to three, Harold's neurons could make as many as 15,000 connections, although the unused ones would fall by the wayside. Brooks discusses the growth of neurons and how the connections of those neurons would create the core of Harold.

Blending

Harold began to blend the connections. Books used the example of Harold leaping onto Julia's lap yelling "I'm a tiger!" People often think of calculating square roots as a difficult mental process and proclaiming "I'm a tiger" as child's play. The truth is just the opposite. Harold's declaration takes more blending than doing mathematical computations, which can also be done using a simple calculator. Calculators cannot make sentences using the correct words.

Storytelling

Harold began to use difficult words appropriately, recite old lyrics and show off his imagination. However, he also threw tantrums and became almost impossible to control in certain situations. Harold was an expert at telling stories in which a calm scene became a crisis. The crisis was solved - often through teamwork - and calm would be restored. Rob and Julia tried to associate but could not. Harold was lost in his own world of storytelling.

Chapter 5: Attachment

Chapter 5 begins with a tale about Harold's nightly routine with his homework. Again, Brooks approaches this with a good sense of humor. Julia, however, was not amused. Harold always had a litany of excuses and fibs when it came to his homework. When Julia could get him to sit down and do it, the paper was always returned with marks on it that resembled Sanskrit.

Even the simplest of projects were daunting tasks because of Harold's attitude. "Julia found his assignment sheet, and realized with a sinking heart that the next sixty-five minutes would be spent completing the ten minute assignment. The project's requirements were minimal - Harold would merely need a shoebox, six colored markers, construction paper, a three-foot display board, linseed oil, ebony, the toenail of a three-toed sloth, and some glitter glue." Chap. 5, p. 67.

There have been studies that show little correlation between a student's ability to complete homework and success on tests. Some believe that homework is not in proportion to a child's age or ability but to impress the parents that their child is receiving a proper education.

A modern theory suggests that Harold's freedom was being quashed by strict boundaries. However, the unsupervised Harold did not seem any happier. "Freedom without structure is its own slavery." Chap. 5, p. 68.

Eventually, Julia told Harold a story about an adventure she'd had just out of college. Suddenly, Harold became engaged and the homework was completed.

Firmly Attached

John Bowlby was a British psychologist who wrote the 1944 work *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves*. Bowlby's study showed that the majority of young boys that had been abandoned did not show emotion. They felt they were left because they weren't good enough. The boys were left to find other ways to cope. Bowlby stated that children need safety and exploration most of all in order to develop. The more secure person is apt to venture out into the world and explore new things. "All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures." Chap. 5, p. 71.

Bowlby's work was different in that it studied the relationship between mother and child rather than focusing on the sole development of the child. If a child is born with an irritable disposition and the mother learns how to respond in a positive manner to that disposition, the child will learn that he is accepted as he is. Children who are born into attuned atmospheres have better social skills. Children born into negative atmospheres may become aggressive, fearful or withdrawn.

The Complexity of Life

Harold would say that he had an attached life. He knew he was loved and therefore could expect to be loved. When things went wrong he did not completely remove himself or lash out more than an average person.

At age seven, Harold began to have tremendous issues with the fact that his parents went out almost every Saturday night. In Harold's mind, he thought he had done something wrong. Of course that was not the case. Harold was, for some reason, afraid. He thought his parents were leaving because he was bad or ate too fast. Julia finally explained that the episodes of crying and fits were getting out of hand. Harold, not understanding what that meant, thought that if he cried his hands would be cut off.

Chapter 6: Learning

Harold's high school years are discussed. Harold was a king of the high school. He was attractive, good at sports, and had a lot of friends. The behavior among the boys was juvenile and raunchy, as is common. However, when in certain situations, Harold could

be compassionate, polysyllabic and polite. Students understood that socialization was the most important thing in high school, far outweighing education.

The Mayor

In Harold's senior year in high school, he became the mayor - the ambassador to other groups outside Jockdom. He was Facebook friends with members of many other groups from the Normals to the Drama Girls, Faux Hippies, Honors Kids, and Pimpled Young Rockers. Harold was confident enough in himself that he was able to expand his social circle beyond his clique.

The Social Sense

Harold was able to scan a room and observe many different social dynamics. Harold, unlike many, had the ability to understand a group from the inside and know that each group had the same rules as his own, even if those rules weren't obvious to the casual onlooker. This skill would prove to be important to Harold as his intelligence was average at best. Even if he could get a B+, he was not marked as an intellectual superior.

Hot for Teacher

Harold became smitten with his English teacher, Ms. Taylor. She was not Harold's type. She was the artistically sensitive one that was thoroughly opposed to jocks, an opinion she adopted in high school. In her late twenties she was a poster child of the anti-establishment in many ways. She was the type of person to tack papers containing poetry and maxims around her desk such as: "One is apt to think of moral failure as due to weakness of character; more often it is due to an inadequate ideal." Richard Livingstone, Chap. 6, p. 87.

Ms. Taylor was overly influenced on a daily basis by literature. She became convinced that every student lived a life of quiet desperation and was determined to play matchmaker - book to student.

Her Method

Ms. Taylor understood that school curriculum was based on a false view of human beings. Teenagers are not empty crates waiting to be filled. This is another period in their lives in which they go through synaptic pruning. There are times when nine year olds are more savvy than a fourteen year old. Depending on the cycle of hormones and/or menstruation, boys and girls hear different things at different times even when the words do not change. Ms. Taylor developed a method in which she apprenticed the students rather than taught them. She taught them how to learn and take pleasure from it; how hard work could pay off.

The Hunt

At first Harold thought Ms. Taylor was absurd. One day she pounced on him in the hallway and thrust a copy of Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* into his hands. The book told of competition and glory. This was right up Harold's alley. The book also taught him about being connected to something ancient. Harold would eventually write his senior paper on the ancient Greeks. Ms. Taylor would be his advisor.

Step One

Harold would have to do research. He devoured five books on the topic and began to develop a familiarity and understanding of the material.

Step Two

Ms. Taylor praised Harold, which gave him a sense of worth and validated his industriousness. Automaticity was the goal. Ms. Taylor wanted the foreign matter to become familiar and comfortable. Harold was not thrilled when Ms. Taylor told him to read everything all over again. The reading helped Harold to develop new opinions and to recognize new aspects.

Step Three

After weeks of reading the books, Harold's knowledge was ready to come to the surface. Ms. Taylor asked Harold to keep a journal in which he would write about the Greeks as well as his high school experiences. Ms. Taylor believed that this would help Harold to digest what he had read, make new connections and develop a better understanding. In the end, there was not just one Harold represented in the journal. There were dozens of them.

Step Four

It was time to write the paper. Harold had digested all of the information, made connections and was now ready to put it all down on paper. Harold struggled with the exact direction. He kept pushing against invisible doors, waiting for one to open. Finally, Harold had an epiphany.

Greek Gifts

Ms. Taylor's method opened an entire new world for Harold. No longer would he simply sit in class and try to learn what was being taught. He would organize his thoughts, journal about them, and use the same process he had used when writing his paper. Harold had learned how to learn.

Chapters 7-12

Chapters 7-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7: Norms

Chapter 7 introduces the other main character, Erica. Erica was a lot different from Harold. When she was ten years old, she nearly got arrested. Erica and her mother, Amy, had moved into an apartment that belonged to one of Amy's friends. When it came time for Erica to go to school, she had her heart set on New Hope School. The problem was that because Amy and Erica lived with a friend, they were not legal residents of the neighborhood. Without legal residency, Erica was not eligible to go to the school. The social caseworker was rude and unmoving. Amy was silent. Erica threw a tantrum until the caseworker threatened to call the police.

Part of the problem was that Amy was manic depressive. She was also the most "downwardly mobile" person in her family. Her family had emigrated from China. Some of the time she could be the good minority poster child. At other times she was unable to commit to or complete anything. Despite all of her issues, Amy loved Erica. Erica's father, a Mexican American, was similar to Amy in that he was not stable. He would come and go and often not appear for months. Yet he doted on Erica when he was around. He never went to jail but could never seem to hold down a job or would refuse to take one that was beneath him. The family's social class status changed by the month.

Erica's family was much like that of her classmates. A study shows that ninety percent of people who live together and have a child plan to marry some day. About fifteen percent of those people actually marry before the child's first birthday.

Brooks discusses how the norms of social behavior vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, social class to social class. Educated class kids tend to have busier schedules while lower class kids tend to stay home more but are less stressed and happier overall. Unconscious skills and norms will shape the lives of the majority of people by age eighteen.

Emergence

When Erica was in public school in the eighth grade, a new charter school was formed. Simply known as the Academy, the school was structured similarly to New Hope and was meant as the next step for those students. The organizers wanted to tackle poverty. "The founders had started out with a theory about poverty: They didn't know what caused it. They figured it arose from some mixture of the loss of manufacturing jobs, racial discrimination, globalization, cultural transmission, bad luck, bad government policies, and a thousand other factors." Chap. 7, p. 114.

The founders had a hard time explaining the school to potential donors. The premise for the school was that poverty is an emergent system.

Brooks goes on to explain emergent systems in society.

As one might expect, Erica was determined to go to the Academy. Erica was as headstrong as ever. She was bright but caused trouble. She loved Amy and fought with her bitterly. Erica was ready for a fight. She approached the school's founders and was told that she, like many, would be entered into a lottery in the spring. Erica said it wasn't good enough. It was just another way to tell her no. The man who funded the majority of the programs at the Academy told the founders to rig the lottery. The founders told Erica that she would be allowed in but had to follow the rules to the letter. If she told anyone about their meeting, she would be thrown out. Erica won.

Chapter 8: Self-Control

The schedule at the Academy was grueling. The students put in long hours - longer if they were not living up to certain standards. They were taught how to live and to act in all types of situations, including social ones. Erica worked hard to excel. She made the honor roll. The most notable change in Erica was her new-found obsession with tennis. Erica began to live and breathe tennis, convinced that she would become a star athlete, play at Wimbledon and become rich and famous. Unfortunately, Erica's attitude mirrored that of famed tennis star John McEnroe. Erica did not understand self control. One day she went crazy on the court and was thrown out. Erica knew she was behaving badly but felt no remorse.

Temperance

Erica began to feel bad over her actions. Going to Amy didn't help Erica. At this point, Erica overshadowed Amy in many ways and Amy was no match for her daughter's behaviors. Amy often wondered if this was a phase or if these behaviors were indicative of Erica's future lifestyle and mentality. Some people, such as E.O. Wilson, believe that children are born with a certain personality. That personality may be tempered over time when matched with certain experiences, but those changes have limits. Erica most likely would have the same basic personality throughout her life.

Erica eventually confided in Amy that she didn't know why she behaved the way she did. "It feels like it wasn't even me," Erica told her mother during one of their conversations about the event. "It was like it was some strange angry person that had hijacked my body. I don't understand where this person came from or what she was thinking. I'm afraid she's going to come back again and do something terrible." Chap. 8, p. 126.

The Famous Marshmallow

In 1970 Walter Mischel performed the famous marshmallow test on a group of four year olds. Mischel put a marshmallow on a table. He told the children that they could eat the marshmallow right away but if they waited until he returned they could have two

marshmallows. Mischel later repeated the same experiment using an Oreo cookie. The results of the psychological test showed that children who could wait longer had a higher success rate in school and exhibited fewer behavioral problems. They also scored an average of 210 points higher on SAT scores. Those kids would go to better schools and make more money. The kids who could not wait more than thirty seconds had a higher rate of incarceration.

Character Reconsidered

Human decision making consists of three basic steps. The first step is the perception of a situation. The second step is to calculate the risk or benefit of involvement. The third step involves using the power of will to execute a decision. "Both will and reason are obviously important in making moral decisions and exercising self-control." Chap. 8, p. 129.

Brooks discusses the development of decision making and how the perception has changed.

Rematch

Months passed after Erica's incident and life at the Academy returned to normal. Erica embraced the thousand little rules that were strictly reinforced. She noticed changes in her diction and posture. Erica began to practice self-discipline. Erica's obsession with tennis lessened by her junior year. Before each match she went through a series of exercises to calm herself and find the right state of mind. Erica learned to put the task at the center of her focus and to tune out everything else including perceptions of her opponent and line calls.

Inspiration

Erica was transforming so much that she had become estranged to her family and friends. One day a Hispanic woman - a successful entrepreneur - came to the Academy. Erica immediately became transfixed and determined to make herself into a success. There would be no looking back.

Chapter 9: Culture

"Researchers have spent many years exploring the jungles of the human mind in search of the source of ambition." Chap. 9, p. 135. Brooks states that Erica had many of the traits commonly found in people who showed ambition. The author states that people who are highly driven seem to suffer from the fear of some existential danger. Many highly successful people have had a parent who abandoned them or died when the child was between the ages of nine and fifteen. While that wasn't entirely true in Erica's case, her mother was frequently mentally absent and her father was often physically absent. Ultra driven people have often met someone who has been successful and have taken advice from that person or have been influenced in some monumental way. Some ambitious people possess some level of talent. They also seek to belong to exclusive groups.



Work

Some people continue to believe that genius is derived from some divine spark. In modern times, scientists know what to expect from certain types of people including their aptitude and likelihood of success. Modern scientists believe that geniuses are not born, they are built.

Execution

As Erica made her way through the Academy, she found that she was the ultimate organizer. She spent hours putting everything in its proper place. "She had a desperate need to get things right." Chap. 9, p. 139.

Family and Tribe

Erica was thrilled when she was accepted into the University of Denver. It was a prestigious school and Erica had worked hard to be able to go there. However, Erica's family objected to her going so far away to school and began to pressure her to change her mind and her plans.

Authenticity

The difference in Erica's and Harold's worlds were that Erica's family wanted her to stay close to home while the people in Harold's world had expected him to go to school and, most likely, move away to do so.

The Club

Erica did go to Denver despite all of the protestations of her extended families. Erica was immediately immersed in a culture that was completely different from her own.

The Extended Mind

Brooks asserts that the main difference between smart animals and humans is that while both have the ability to solve problems, only humans pass that information down through generations through teaching those methods and solutions.

Cultures That Work

Erica began to take courses on sociology, psychology, history, and every other subject that could help her understand various cultures and how the human mind worked.

Memo to Herself

One day Erica wrote a memo to herself. It was a reminder that society is not formed through culture, education or anything else that sociologists might have asserted at one point. Society is no more than a layering of networks.

Chapter 10: Intelligence



Erica went to work for a consulting firm. She had no idea what the job was all about but it sounded cool and they hired her. Erica worked among men who were deemed to be geniuses before they could walk. While Erica believed herself to be intellectually inferior to these men, she was willing to listen and willing to learn.

Beyond IQ

Erica's boss, Harrison, was obsessed with IQ. He hired people based on IQ and socialized with people based on their IQ. Brooks discusses the IQ, how it is formed and how it may be shaped or changed.

Clocks and Clouds

Brooks talks about Jonah Lehrer and his fascination with Karl Popper's theories on clocks and clouds. Clocks are scientific and measurable; clouds are asymmetrical and changeable.

Time to Go

Erica found that she had outgrown her job and decided that it was time to go out on her own; to start her own consulting firm.

Chapter 11: Choice Architecture

Grocery stores and retail outlets place things in a certain way so that people will make certain choices.

The Struggle

Erica loved the hidden patterns used in choice architecture. Erica decided to build her business using the unconscious hidden patterns.

Behavioral Economics

Erica was faced the decision of what type of consulting firm to begin. She began to explore the field of behavioral economics.

Heuristics

Erica began to study heuristics to learn more about the connections people make between their behaviors and choices.

Rebirth

Erica discovered that while she was excellent with research, she needed someone that could take the information and turn it into usable advice. Upon the recommendation of a friend, Erica found Harold.

Chapter 12: Freedom and Commitment

"In college, Harold made another discovery. He could be interesting." Chap. 12, p. 183. Harold learned a great deal from his new roommate, Mark, who lived in "Intense World," a place that was filled with wild antics, experiences and soon-to-be fond memories. Through Mark Harold learned how to commit and be free at the same time.

The Odyssey Years

There used to be a theory that the Odyssey years consisted of four phases. Modern researchers have evolved the theory into six phases: childhood, adolescence, odyssey, adulthood, active retirement, old age.

The Group

The Group discusses the group of friends that would eventually become Harold's inner circle.

Fate

It was fate that eventually separated Harold and Mark. Mark was a dreamer that craved freedom and the open road. Harold was much more practical.

Erica

Harold received two job offers in one day. One happened to be from Erica. Harold wasn't sure he wanted the job but was attracted enough to Erica to arrange for a meeting.

chapters 13-16

chapters 13-16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: Limerence contains the following subheads: Status Sonar; Motivation; The Urge to Merge; Bliss; and Eros.

Erica and Harold met at Starbuck's for coffee. Erica told Harold her background and then laid out the job and its requirements. Harold accepted. After many months of working together, Harold and Erica began to spend time together outside work.

Harold began to take notice of his status sonar - the pluses and minuses that add up to indicate whether or not we are pleased with our lives and personal growth.

Harold began to crave Erica. He felt as if she had taken over his life. For the first time, Harold began to understand how some pagan religions could view love as a god.

The yearning for harmony can manifest itself in strange ways. This is one reason people are eager to conform and join groups as they have a need to belong. Brooks expands on the former theories and how one seeks bliss through merging with others and creating harmony.

Chapter 14: The Grand Narrative contains the following subheads: Overconfidence; The Rationalist Version; and The Disaster.

Things began to fall apart. While the business was wildly successful, Harold and Erica had little time to themselves or for each other. The house they bought began to fall apart because neither had time to replace light bulbs, clean the gutters or fix cracked windows. Then a recession hit and the business began to go downhill. People were fearful of taking the risks they had once embraced. Erica eventually had to take on another job. Erica promised "legendary excellence."

The mind is an overconfident machine. It makes us think we are better than we are. However, the mind does not relate any of this overconfidence to actual competence.

Rationalism gained prominence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was a scientific way of looking at things and removed the emotional issues and human foibles that had once plagued the business world.

Erica began to notice that there was something wrong in the company. There is a theory that once a company is sick inside, it will get sicker until it finally reaches its doom.

Chapter 15: Metis contains the following subheads: The Next Question; The Hidden Oracle; and Epistemological Modesty.

Erica grew increasingly frustrated. Harold tried to give advice but had removed himself from the corporate world when he became involved with the inner workings of the Historical Society. Brooks details some of Harold's activities.

Intellectual history oscillated from the rationalist point of view to the romantic point of view. Alfred North Whitehead referred to it as being "between eras that are simpleminded and those that are muddleheaded." Chap. 15, p. 231.

Brooks returns to the unconscious and its ability to perform complex tasks without alerting the conscious mind. Brooks also discusses the marriage between intuition and logic.

Chapter 16: The Insurgency contains the following subhead: The Meeting

Erica began to have lunch with Raymond. Eventually the lunch group grew. However, Erica and Raymond began to structure a plan that would save the company. Erica admired the fact that while Raymond was knowledgeable he was also aware of his shortcomings.

Erica, Raymond and the rest of the Brunch Club drafted a twenty-five page memo filled with suggestions and strategies to save the company. The problem would be finding a way to present it and to have Taggert take it seriously.

Finally, Erica and Raymond got their chance. They presented their work to Taggert and his boys. The plan began to work. Raymond eventually became CEO and Erica was at his side. Raymond retired and was replaced. After that CEO left, Erica took over. She was forty-seven. Erica never made drastic changes but the company became stronger and thrived.

chapters 17-22

chapters 17-22 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17: Getting Older contains the following subheads: Loneliness; Doldrums; Squandered; and Camp.

When a couple has been together for a long period of time, they invariably shift from passionate love to companionate love. Many couples do not make the transition. Divorce rates peak around the fourth year of marriage. Harold and Erica had been married for twelve years when she took over as CEO of Intercom. She and Harold had drifted apart. He was busy writing books and being immersed in history while Erica worked hard at running a major firm. The couple didn't fight, they simply drifted apart. They also began to notice and loathe certain behaviors in each other. Loneliness only magnified those issues.

Loneliness led to depression and Harold began to find himself wishing that they'd had children, but Erica was always too busy. Harold was not surprised when Erica mentioned getting a divorce. However, little more was said about it.

Harold became involved in Incarnation Camp, a camp that served kids from all socio-economic backgrounds. It seemed to be the only institution Harold had ever seen that was truly integrated.

Chapter 18: Morality contains the following subheads: Shame; Moral Sentiments; The Intuitionist View; Moral Concerns; The Moral Motivation; Moral Development; Moral Responsibility; and Redemption.

Erica continued to rise through the ranks. She met with one of her best clients, a man she called Mr. Make-Believe. Mr. Make-Believe was obscenely rich, famous and powerful. He consulted Erica routinely and claimed she was his most valued advisor. There was something about Mr. Make-Believe that entranced Erica. After a two hour lunch consultation, Erica had sex with her client. It was her one episode of adultery and it meant nothing to her. Later, shame would nearly devour Erica. She had cheated on Harold. Erica was unable to explain or rationalize her actions.

Brooks analyzes various levels of morality and how they are applied. Brooks discusses the Rationalist View versus the Intuitionist View.

Some researchers believe that there are people born with a greater sense of moral responsibility than others.

"Some researchers believe we have a generalized empathetic sense, which in some flexible way inclines us to cooperate with others. But there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that people are actually born with more structured moral foundations, a collection of moral senses that are activated by different situations." Chap. 18, p. 280

In investigating her motives, Erica realized that she had become a different person. She renewed her love for Harold and questioned her previous thinking, goals, and ideals.

Chapter 19: The Leader contains the following subheads: The Private Campaign Speech; Political Psychology; The Underdebate; and Teamism.

Brooks tells the story of Richard Grace, the man who would be president. Grace was a dynamo and easily gained attention wherever he went. He was desperate to have Erica on his team. Grace knew how to do everything exactly right. He knew who to talk to and for how long, he smiled and accepted compliments, made promises and appeared to be perfectly prepared at all times. Grace was a true politician. And Erica and Harold supported him. As expected, Grace offered Erica a job. Erica and Harold met with Grace in a van where he laid out his expectations and responsibilities of the job. Erica was going to be under a microscope. Grace also issued some warnings:

"All of these things threaten your ability to be honest with yourself, to see the world clearly, to have some basic integrity as a person. And yet we endure this theater of the absurd because there is no other life so filled with consequence." Chap. 19, p. 292

Chapter 20: The Soft Side contains the following subheads: The Hard Side; The Shallow View; The Soft Side; Socialism; Experiments in Thinking; Social Mobility; and A Nation of Grinders.

Erica took on the position as deputy chief of staff for Grace. While Erica was slaving away in the White House, Harold took a job as the Robert J. Kolman Research Fellow for Policy Studies. Harold quickly learned the ins and outs of being a "political johnny." Brooks discusses Harold's experiences with liberals and conservatives. Brooks also discusses Harold's struggles with redefining socialism. Harold began to write articles and eventually undertook a research project on social mobility.

Chapter 21: The Other Education contains the following subheads: Mindfulness; The Second Education; The Dancing Scouts; Creativity; and You are There.

Erica is thrown into the world of global politics. Erica had reached the pinnacle of success yet realized that it did not make her as happy as she once thought. Also, Erica was getting old. It was noticeable in many ways which seemed strange to a woman that still saw herself as a pushy young girl. Erica decided to retire. She wanted to reconnect with friends and write a memoir. She also dove head first into the world of art and creativity.

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Chapter 22: Meaning contains the following subheads: The Contemplative Life; Search for Meaning; and The Final Day.

Brooks jokes about the people who spend their entire lives being successful and busy. When they retire, they hire personal trainers, take up skiing and long to accomplish great feats while their energy holds out.

Harold and Erica bought a second home in Aspen. The operated a tour company for eight years until Harold's knees gave out. Harold's health worsened and he began to reminisce and seek meaning for his life. One day, while Erica was in her office at her computer, Harold fell into a state of unconsciousness. Not long after, Harold died.

Characters

Harold

Harold is one of the main characters in David Brooks' *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. Harold was created to show one half of the development and psychological nature of a couple that embodied the principles and behaviors outlined by numerous scientists, educators and psychologists.

Harold was the only child of Rob and Julia. Rob and Julia were members of what Brooks calls the Composure Class. Rob and Julia were admired for their wealth, education and overall demeanor as well as their good looks. Everyone wanted to be either Rob or Julia. Harold would have a difficult time living up to that status at first.

Harold was an unusual child. He was a daydreamer. His logic made no sense to Rob and Julia. He could develop intricate stories with happy endings but could not stay on task for the simplest project. He sulked, fought, argued and cried whenever things did not work out the way he wanted them to, yet Harold did not know how to change his behavior or the outcome.

Harold's life truly began to change in high school when his English teacher Ms. Taylor taught him to learn through in depth study and being able to relate the information to Harold's own life. Harold's social skills were well honed by this time, but it was clear that if Harold was going to succeed, he would need more tools and information.

Erica

Erica is one of the main characters in David Brooks' *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. Erica was created to show one half of the development and psychological nature of a couple that embodied the principles and behaviors outlined by numerous scientists, educators and psychologists.

Erica was the product of Amy, a manic depressive single mother, and a father that was rarely around. Erica's social status changed often but she was always not far from the poverty line. Erica would sometimes get into fights or trouble in school because of her temper or undisciplined manner. Erica was well loved by her mother and father but neither could control her.

Erica's life truly began to change in high school when she was enrolled in the Academy, a charter school. Erica had fought hard - and failed - at becoming a part of New Hope School and she was determined not to miss out again. Erica managed to get in to the school through sheer will power and fortitude. She approached the enrollment committee with such passion and force that the private school's main benefactor approved Erica's enrollment even though it was against policy to do so.

Erica adapted quickly to the Academy's thousand little rules. Soon Erica began to change. Her posture and diction improved; she learned how to be disciplined and controlled. The day Erica stormed into the office at the Academy was the day she effectively changed her life.

Rob

Rob is Harold's father. He is the man all other men admire - handsome, well spoken, well dressed and well educated. Rob is a member of the Composure Class and someone that other people desire to be around and to emulate.

Julia

Julia is Harold's mother. Like Rob, Julia is a member of the Composure Class. She was a bit of a wild girl that had to learn to be a mother.

Amy

Amy is Erica's mother. She is a first generation Asian-American. She suffers from manic depression and has extreme difficulties operating as a single mother. Amy, however, supports her daughter's ambitions.

Walter Mischel

In 1970, Walter Mischel performed the famous marshmallow test on a group of four year olds. Mischel put a marshmallow on a table. He told the children that they could eat the marshmallow right away but if they waited until he returned they could have two marshmallows. Mischel later repeated the same experiment using an Oreo cookie. The results of the psychological test showed that children who could wait longer had a higher success rate in school and exhibited fewer behavioral problems.

John Bowlby

John Bowlby was a British psychologist that wrote the 1944 work *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves*.

Ms. Taylor

Ms. Taylor was Harold's high school English teacher. She presented him with a book that would change his entire way of learning and, therefore, of living.

Antonio Damasio

Antonio Damasio developed the theory that the unconscious requires us to be able to connect to emotion, to be able to measure the value of something.

Raymond

Raymond worked at Intercom alongside Erica. The pair developed a strategy to save the failing company. Raymond would eventually become the company's CEO.

Mr. Make-Believe

Mr. Make-Believe was one of Erica's top clients. The man was a wealthy and successful businessman that had started from nothing.

Objects/Places

Social Animal

David Brooks' *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* shows how human beings are indeed social animals. Educational facilities and social programs often miss the mark in addressing one or more aspects of the person without addressing all in conjunction with one another. This is most clearly seen in the educational careers of Harold and Erica. However, Harold and Erica were fortunate enough to be involved with one or more people in their formative years that would address all of the aspects of the social animal and therefore, create successful human beings.

One of the most interesting studies presented by Brooks is that of John Bowlby, a British psychologist, who wrote the 1944 work *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves*. Bowlby's study showed that the majority of young boys that had been abandoned did not show emotion. They felt they were left because they weren't good enough. The boys were left to find other ways to cope. Bowlby stated that children need safety and exploration most of all in order to develop. The more secure person is apt to venture out into the world and explore new things. "All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures." Chap. 5, p. 71

Bowlby's work was different in that it studied the relationship between mother and child rather than focusing on the sole development of the child. If a child is born with an irritable disposition and the mother learns how to respond in a positive manner to that disposition, the child will learn that he is accepted as he is. Children who are born into attuned atmospheres have better social skills. Children born into negative atmospheres may become aggressive, fearful or withdrawn.

This study shows the importance of the formative years and how the social animal is formed from this point forward.

Education

Education is a vital aspect in the formation of the Social Animal. The studies show what type a person will be with and without the benefit of education as well as the socialization that goes along with the experience. Harold and Erica are very different in the way they approached their education, yet both benefitted greatly from it and became successful, well-adjusted people.

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Erica's life truly began to change in high school when she was enrolled in the Academy, a charter school. Erica had fought hard - and failed - at becoming a part of New Hope School, and she was determined not to miss out again. Erica managed to get in to the school through sheer will power and fortitude. She approached the enrollment committee with such passion and force that the private school's main benefactor approved Erica's enrollment even though it was against policy to do so.

Erica adapted quickly to the Academy's thousand little rules. Soon Erica began to change. Her posture and diction improved; she learned how to be disciplined and controlled. The day Erica stormed into the office at the Academy was the day she effectively changed her life.

Famous Marshmallow Test

In 1970, Walter Mischel performed the Famous Marshmallow test on a group of four year olds. Mischel put a marshmallow on a table. He told the children that they could eat the marshmallow right away but if they waited until he returned they could have two marshmallows. The test measured the amount of time the children were able to wait before eating the marshmallow. Mischel made a correlation between the time one could wait and his/her aptitude and future success rate in both social and academic settings.

New Hope School

New Hope School is the school that Erica fought hard to get into when she was ten years old. Erica was not successful.

The Academy

Erica was enrolled at the Academy, a charter school founded by teachers that wanted to address the whole person, not just the academic side. Erica adapted quickly to the Academy's thousand little rules. Soon Erica began to change. Her posture and diction

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Structure

Structure proved to be one of the main keys to success for both Harold and Erica during their formative and school years as it taught them discipline and to learn to appreciate the results of hard work.

The Odyssey Years

There used to be a theory that the Odyssey years consisted of four phases. Modern researchers have evolved the theory into six phases: Childhood, adolescence, odyssey, adulthood, active retirement, old age.

Consulting Firm

Erica and Harold started a consulting firm shortly after they married.

Intercom

Intercom is the name of the company Erica joined after abandoning the consulting firm. Erica would eventually become the company's CEO.

Incarnation Camp

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Themes

Social Animal

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Change

David Brooks' *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* shows how drastic change can sometimes occur in a person despite that person's upbringing. Erica is a prime example of this concept. Erica's life was turbulent from the time she was a child. Although Erica was well loved, her mother was frequently mentally absent due to bouts with severe depression, and her father was often physically absent. The attempts to make up for these absences with Erica, while well intended, were not sufficient. Unless something was done to change the path, Erica was headed for big trouble. In Erica's case, the change came in two waves. The enrollment at the Academy was the biggest turning point in Erica's life. The second was meeting

the Hispanic businesswoman that would have such a profound impact on Erica that she would change her personality as much as possible to become an entrepreneur in the making.

Studies do show, however, that a person can only change so much from his or her formative years. While there are exceptions to every rule, people may mature and adopt new behaviors, but by and large people are the way they were as children.

Education

Education is a vital aspect in the formation of the Social Animal. The studies show what type a person will be with and without the benefit of education as well as the socialization that goes along with the experience. Harold and Erica are very different in the way they approached their education, yet both benefitted greatly from it and became successful, well adjusted people.

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Style

Perspective

David Brooks (1961-) is a Canadian-born author and op-ed columnist for the New York Times. Before joining the New York Times, Brooks worked as a contributing editor for the Washington Times, a senior editor for The Weekly Standard, an op-ed editor for The Wall Street Journal, and a contributing editor for The Atlantic Monthly and Newsweek. Brooks currently works as a regular commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and on PBS' "News-Hour." Brooks is also a regular contributor to "Meet the Press."

Brook's books consist of *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (And Always Have) in the Future Tense*, and *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character and Achievement*. Brooks received high praise and commercial success with *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character and Achievement*. It reached number three on the non-fiction best sellers list at Publishers Weekly in April 2011.

In addition to Brooks' writing work, he has also served as a visiting professor of public policy at the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at North Carolina's Duke University.

Brooks work has appeared in many periodicals including *Forbes*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *Commentary*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The Public Interest*.

Tone

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement by David Brooks is a work of non-fiction. The tone of the book is typically non-partisan. This is a particularly difficult tone to achieve considering the personal experiences and controversial material in the text.

Brooks tends to stay true to a scientific way of presenting information while managing to inject humor in various places. For example, when discussing the Famous Marshmallow test, Brooks tells the reader the basic information of the study. In 1970, Walter Mischel performed the Famous Marshmallow test on a group of four year olds. Mischel put a marshmallow on a table. He told the children that they could eat the marshmallow right away but if they waited until he returned they could have two marshmallows. Mischel later repeated the same experiment using an Oreo cookie. "A kid picked up the cookie, slyly ate the creamy filling and carefully put it back in its place. (That kid is probably now a U.S. Senator.)" Chap. 8, p. 127.

Brooks also reveals personal insights and opinions about various practices, discoveries and events.

By mixing the scientific with the personal and humorous, Brooks manages to tell a story rather than focus solely on scientific data and clinical studies to delve into the psyche of the "social animal" known as the human being.

Brooks' *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* is engaging and the methods used within are designed to entertain as well as inform.

Structure

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement by David Brooks is a work of non-fiction. It is 407 pages in length. It contains an introduction, twenty-two chapters, notes, acknowledgments, and author information.

Without the notes, acknowledgments, and author information the total length of the work is 362 pages. The shortest chapter is twelve pages in length; the longest chapter is twenty-two pages in length. The average length of the chapters is sixteen pages.

Each chapter is separated into sections with subheadings. The work is generally chronological in nature.

Chapter 1: Decision Making; Chapter 2: The Map Meld; Chapter 3: Mindsight; Chapter 4: Mapmaking; Chapter 5: Attachment; Chapter 6: Learning; Chapter 7: Norms; Chapter 8: Self-Control; Chapter 9: Culture; Chapter 10: Intelligence; Chapter 11: Choice Architecture; Chapter 12: Freedom and Commitment; Chapter 13: Limerence; Chapter 14: The Grand Narrative; Chapter 15: Metis; Chapter 16: The Insurgency; Chapter 17: Getting Older; Chapter 18: Morality; Chapter 19: The Leader; Chapter 20: The Soft Side; Chapter 21: The Other Education; Chapter 22: Meaning

The author's section includes basic information about David Brooks. David Brooks (1961-) is a Canadian-born author and op-ed columnist for the *New York Times*. Before joining the *New York Times*, Brooks worked as a contributing editor for the *Washington Times*, a senior editor for *The Weekly Standard*, an op-ed editor for *The Wall Street Journal*, and a contributing editor for *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Newsweek*. Brooks currently works as a regular commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and on PBS' "News-Hour." Brooks is also a regular contributor to "Meet the Press."

Quotes

"If the study of the conscious mind highlights the importance of reason and analysis, study of the unconscious mind highlights the importance of passions and perception. If the outer mind highlights the power of the individual, the inner mind highlights the power of relationships and the invisible bonds between people."

Introduction, p. 8

"In fact, we are separated from the other animals because we have phenomenal social skills that enable us to teach, learn, sympathize, emote and build cultures, institutions, and the complex mental scaffolding of civilizations."

Introduction, p. 13

"Another researcher, James LeDoux states: 'The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake.'"

Chap. 1, p. 33

"Reason and emotion are not separate and opposed."

Chap. 1, p. 33

"Philosophers have long argued about the process people use to understand one another."

Chap. 3, p. 49

"Freedom without structure is its own slavery."

Chap. 5, p. 68

"All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures."

Chap. 5, p. 71

"One is apt to think of moral failure as due to weakness of character; more often it is due to an inadequate ideal."

Chap. 6, p. 87

"The founders had started out with a theory about poverty: They didn't know what caused it. They figured it arose from some mixture of the loss of manufacturing jobs, racial discrimination, globalization, cultural transmission, bad luck, bad government policies, and a thousand other factors."

Chap. 7, p. 114

"Researchers have spent many years exploring the jungles of the human mind in search of the source of ambition."

Chap. 9, p. 135

"She had a desperate need to get things right."
Chap. 9, p. 139

"In college, Harold made another discovery. He could be interesting."
Chap. 12, p. 183

Topics for Discussion

Do you agree or disagree with the idea that children will grow up to be very similar in temperament as they were when they were children? Do children have the capacity to change themselves? Who is most responsible for a child's intellectual and moral upbringing? Does the child make any of the decisions?

What do you think might have happened to Erica if she had not been enrolled in the Academy? Do you think Erica would have been as successful if she had not modeled the Hispanic business woman? What models do you have? Explain.

What do you think prompted Harold to change from consulting work to history? Was working as a historian a fulfilling career for Harold? What other activities did Harold embrace?

Examine Erica's link to Grace. Do you think Erica was the right person for the job? Do you think you would have made the same decisions? How did Harold fit into the picture? What happened after Erica's term ended?

Erica had an affair with Mr. Make-Believe. Examine Erica's moral crisis after the event. Did she ever tell Harold? Why was Erica so drawn to Mr. Make-Believe? What would you have done in Erica's place?

Erica fell back in love with Harold after a period of years of being relatively disconnected from her. Did Harold feel the same way? What caused the shift? How did Erica and Harold save their marriage?

Examine Harold and Erica's retirement years and old age. How had they changed? Did either have any regrets? What lessons can be learned from Harold and Erica?