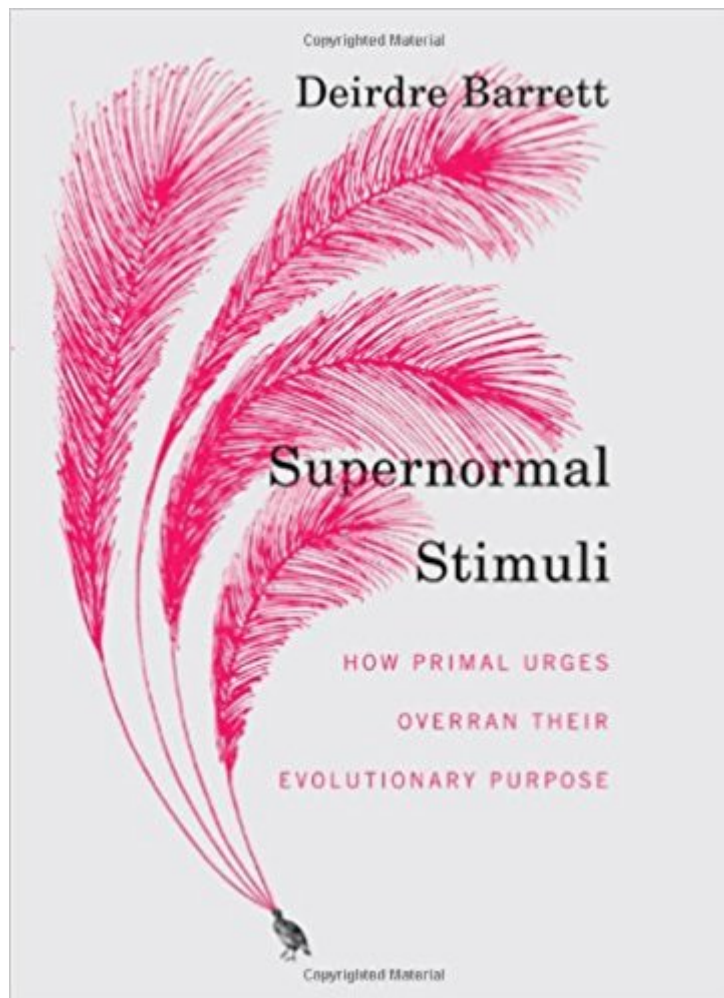




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Supernormal Stimuli: How Primal Urges Overran Their Evolutionary Purpose



Synopsis

A Harvard psychologist explains how our once-helpful instincts get hijacked in our garish modern world. Our instincts— for food, sex, or territorial protection— evolved for life on the savannahs 10,000 years ago, not in today’s world of densely populated cities, technological innovations, and pollution. We now have access to a glut of larger-than-life objects, from candy to pornography to atomic weapons— that gratify these gut instincts with often-dangerous results. Animal biologists coined the term “supernormal stimuli” to describe imitations that appeal to primitive instincts and exert a stronger pull than real things, such as soccer balls that geese prefer over eggs. Evolutionary psychologist Deirdre Barrett applies this concept to the alarming disconnect between human instinct and our created environment, demonstrating how supernormal stimuli are a major cause of today’s most pressing problems, including obesity and war. However, Barrett does more than show how unfettered instincts fuel dangerous excesses. She also reminds us that by exercising self-control we can rein them in, potentially saving ourselves and civilization. 55 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Deirdre Barrett is an evolutionary psychologist at Harvard Medical School’s Behavioral Medicine Program. She is the author of several books, including *Waistland*, *Trauma and Dream*, and *Supernormal Stimuli*. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When I picked up the book I did not have high hopes. I was very pleasantly surprised to read the first chapter about the Niko Tinbergen and Konrad Lorenz. I had read about them individually but not as in this telling of their long and happy relationship which bore intellectual fruits for both. A heart warming story. That was just the first chapter. The second chapter deals with our ideas on beauty, sex and attractiveness as derived from the concepts of sociobiology. The author's style is light yet the content comes across wonderfully. She is a capable write and I venture that she is a capable scientist as well because to describe something so well you have to fist understand it well. I am thoroughly enjoying reading this book and will sure to check out her other books. King Solomon's Ring (Routledge Classics) Curious Naturalist

Fascinating book, I read this in college for my evolutionary psychology course several years ago. To this day, I still site some of their ideas in conversations involving "why we instinctively do things that don't make sense". I consider it a must read for someone with a curious and open mind!

But I wish it could have been longer and more detailed about our evolved psychology. That being said, it is written in coherent and clear style. You don't need much background information to understand the book's argument. Anyone who is interesting in evolutionary psychology would really like this book.

Not a single mark. It doesn't even feel like a used item.

Better than advertised condition. Thank you.

I'm an avid popular science pleasure reader, so I ordered this book right after hearing the author on the radio. I'm so glad I did! It is a fascinating book, very well-written. The concepts are explained in a way that makes them easy to grasp. The animal to human metaphors are truly illuminating. The main point of the book is supernormal stimuli, which are exaggerated versions of natural stimuli to which there are existing instinctual responses. Barrett discusses how our evolved instincts are overwhelmed by technological advances, population density, and other facets of modern society. She explores how pornography, unhealthy diets, and even the quest for nuclear energy as opposed to wind or solar energy can be explained by supernormal stimuli. One reader said he liked the early chapters which are closer to standard evolutionary psychology better than the later more speculative ones. I disagree: I think the ideas in the later chapters are novel and exciting and offer

ideas about how to deal with problems of our modern world that I haven't heard anywhere else.
Excellent book; I recommend it highly!

Great book. I highly recommend.

Written from an evolutionary psychologist's point of view she elaborates upon various topics of human activity in regards to why and how they stimulate us. A captivating read, I must have put 25+ dog ears in the entire book just so I could keep reading.

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