

# **You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself**

*David McRaney*

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**An entertaining illumination of the stupid beliefs that make us feel wise, based on the popular blog, [youarenotsosmart.com](http://youarenotsosmart.com).**

You believe you are a rational, logical being who sees the world as it really is, but journalist David McRaney is here to tell you that you're as deluded as the rest of us. But that's OK—delusions keep us sane. *You Are Not So Smart* is a celebration of self-delusion. It's like a psychology class, with all the boring parts taken out, and with no homework. Collecting more than sixty of the lies we tell ourselves every day, McRaney has produced a fascinating synthesis of cutting-edge psychology research to turn our minds inside out.

*You Are Not So Smart* covers a wide range of topics drawn from all aspects of life, such as coffee (it doesn't stimulate you; it's just a cure for caffeine withdrawal), placebo buttons (those fake thermostats and crosswalk knobs that give us the illusion of control), hindsight bias (when we learn something new, we reassure ourselves that we knew it all along), confirmation bias (our brains resist new ideas, instead paying attention only to findings that reinforce our preconceived notions), and brand loyalty (we reach for the same brand not because we trust its quality but because we want to reassure ourselves that we made a smart choice the last time we bought it). Packed with interesting sidebars and quick guides on cognition and common fallacies, *You Are Not So Smart* is infused with humor and wit.

## You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself Details

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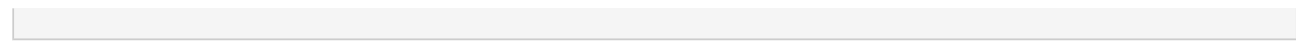
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# From Reader Review You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself for online ebook

## David says

This is a fun, pop-psychology book that kept me interested from beginning to end. It is arranged into 48 chapters, each devoted to a different misconception that we are all subject to. Some of these misconceptions have technical names that will be unfamiliar to most people. For example, I never heard of "apophenia", which is the idea that coincidences are so miraculous, they must have meaning. The "truth" is that "Coincidences are a routine part of life, even the seemingly miraculous ones. Any meaning applied to them comes from your mind."

Another misconception is "Brand Loyalty". This is the idea that you prefer the things you own over those you don't, because of rational choices you made. The truth is that you prefer things that you own, because "you rationalize your past choices to protect your sense of self". Retailers understand this misconception, and try to prevent you from suffering from "buyer's remorse."

The "expectation" misconception is a classic. Wine experts can be fooled by altering their expectations. Experiments have shown that putting wines into bottles with cheap or expensive labels can alter the expectations of wine drinkers and experts alike, thus changing their opinions of wine quality. Some manufacturers put high prices on their products in order to persuade consumers of their high quality. I think of this, when I see high-priced headphones of certain brands.

Many of the misconceptions are described in terms of classic psychology experiments. They are all fun to read, and made me laugh (at myself). The only problem is that I've read about most of these experiments in other books. That is the problem with pop psychology books--after a while, they repeat the very same material over and over.

I do wish the book had an index. Here I am trying to remember where I read various anecdotes and experiments, and I am at a loss as to where to find them. Many of the chapters reiterate, "You are not so smart". So, the tone of the book might rub some readers the wrong way. But I felt like it was just written that way to add a bit of humor, not to be condescending.

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## Khadidja says

We have endless internal dialogues that assist with interpretation of information and decision-making based on what we know , feel , and think it's right but the truth is we are all delusional ... somehow ! All of us think we're smarter than everyone else , just like we believe that we're better looking, funnier, more attractive and more likeable and more generally competent than everyone else. Of course we're not , we are naturally hindered into thinking in certain ways and not others, and the world around us is the product of dealing with these biases, not overcoming them.

The three main subjects in this book are **cognitive biases, heuristics, and logical fallacies**. These are components of your mind

## **Cognitive biases:**

cognitive biases are predictable patterns of thought and behavior that lead you to draw incorrect conclusions. You and everyone else come into the world preloaded with these pesky and completely wrong ways of seeing things, and you rarely notice them. Many of them serve to keep you confident in your own perceptions or to inhibit you from seeing yourself as a buffoon. The maintenance of a positive self-image seems to be so important to the human mind you have evolved mental mechanisms designed to make you feel awesome about yourself. We tend to like people who think like us. If we agree with someone's beliefs, we're more likely to be friends with them. While this makes sense, it means that we subconsciously begin to ignore or dismiss anything that threatens our world views, since we surround ourselves with people and information that confirm what we already think.

*For example : Hindsight Bias*

*THE MISCONCEPTION: After you learn something new, you remember how you were once ignorant or wrong.*

*THE TRUTH: You often look back on the things you've just learned and assume you knew them or believed them all along*

"I KNEW IT" !!!

You tend to edit your memories so you don't seem like such a dimwit when things happen you couldn't have predicted. When you learn things you wish you had known all along, you go ahead and assume you did know them. This tendency is just part of being a person, and it is called the Hindsight Bias.

*another example : Introspection*

*THE MISCONCEPTION: You know why you like the things you like and feel the way you feel.*

*THE TRUTH: The origin of certain emotional states is unavailable to you, and when pressed to explain them, you will just make something up.*

You think you know why you like what you like but if someone asks you : Why you like that book or painting or music? according to research, your explanation is probably going to be total bullshit , when you are faced with a decision in which you are forced to think about your rationale, you start to turn the volume in your emotional brain down and the volume in your logical brain up. You start creating a mental list of pros and cons that would never have been conjured up if you had gone with your gut. As Wilson noted in his research, "Forming preferences is akin to riding a bicycle; we can do it easily but cannot easily explain how."

## **heuristics :**

Heuristics are mental shortcuts you use to solve common problems. They speed up processing in the brain, but sometimes make you think so fast you miss what is important. Instead of taking the long way around and deeply contemplating the best course of action or the most logical train of thought, you use heuristics to arrive at a conclusion in record time. Some heuristics are learned, and others come free with every copy of the human brain. When they work, they help your mind stay frugal. When they don't, you see the world as a much simpler place than it really is

## **logical fallacies:**

Logical fallacies are like math problems involving language, in which you skip a step or get turned around without realizing it. They are arguments in your mind where you reach a conclusion without all the facts because you don't care to hear them or have no idea how limited your information is. You become a bumbling detective. Logical fallacies can also be the result of wishful thinking. Sometimes you apply good logic to false premises; at other times you apply bad logic to the truth. For instance, if you hear Albert Einstein refused to eat scrambled eggs, you might assume scrambled eggs are probably bad for you. This is called the argument from authority. You assume if someone is super-smart, then all of that person's decisions must be good ones, but maybe Einstein just had peculiar taste.

With each new subject in this book you will start to see yourself in a new way. The more you try to analyze it the more you hurt your brain :(

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## **Will says**

I like this book because it's told me that my memory is infallible, that I've made the right decision at every turn, and I'm a completely rational actor who can calmly ignore mental biases -- not like those poor deluded fools he keeps mentioning in his studies. Must be terrible being one of THOSE people.

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## **Vonia says**

This awesome read evidences basic theories to a lot more complicated, the obvious to those you never would believe until you read the data.... but the difference being that the writer backs that up with really good data and/or studies. Some of the "theories"/"ways" you already know like the Texas sharpshooter fallacy, normalcy bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect, brand loyalty, the ad hominem fallacy, groupthink, hindsight bias, The anchoring affect, the illusion of transparency, Cognitive Bias, The Fundamental Attribution Error....

There are 48 reasons you are not so smart.... A lot of it also is stuff you knew but didn't know how to label. Which also assists in making you understand it more "insightfully", with less denial. Reviews say this had the right amount of uncomfortable truth (something along those lines), but I disagree. It was more. More than was comfortable. But none of us want to admit to ourselves that we lie to ourselves, do we? So, yes, pretend this was a scholarly read with a "right" amount of truth, when the truth is, for all of us, it was too much. And we will, the best of us anyways, accept that; understand that as individuals this is the inevitable way for our surviving, and after hating the author for bringing us out of our denial momentarily, lie to ourselves that, no, of course we welcome the truth, thus having to not hate Sir McRaney. Then we will subsequently resshelf this. And go back to our lives of unavoidable lying to ourselves. But, with all our new information, data, evidence, insight filed away, although we will never be one hundred percent honest with ourselves, we can be a little more aware so as to reduce it a little to better the daily interactions, relationships, etcetera in our lives.

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## Crystal Starr Light says

We think we're really smart, that we are much better than the stupid people around us, but in reality, our brains take shortcuts to make situations easier for us to handle. This book divulges 48 ways that show we aren't really all that smart.

This isn't so much a full review as just my brief impressions. Which are, in one word: WOW! This book was incredible to read! I spent an entire 2+ hour flight reading this, unable to put it down and read my fiction books!

Some of these examples I had heard of before (such as the Invisible Gorilla experiment and how we rewrite our memories). Others just astounded me, such as how our brains can't really hold more than about 150 people or the many ways we are bad at statistics (Affect Heuristic, Illusion of Control, etc.). I thought it was particularly clever how McRaney made sure in each section to say "you are not so smart" at least once; it never came off repetitive or condescending.

About the only complaint I have is how some of these 48 examples overlap, such as with Aprophenia and Consistency Bias. It was sometimes difficult to differentiate the differences or, I should say, understand why the author split the two items apart instead of tie them together. It did kinda irk me that the Just-World Fallacy was the explanation for blaming a woman's rape on her dress or going out at night. Sure, some of it may contribute, but I doubt that victim blaming can be 100% attributed to our brains misfiring like this. Also, the book hints that men and women think differently; I still think that society has something to do with that.

But really, don't take these complaints too much to heart (they are VERY mild and barely mentioned). It's a fascinating look at our brains, how we think, and how we can try to overcome some of these fallacies to be more rounded individuals. Highly recommended!

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## Terri Timonen says

Readers Beware!!! NEVER believe a book that presents "all-or-nothing" concepts as absolute truth!! And that's exactly what David McRaney's book attempts to do. Each chapter identifies a "Misconception" and a "Truth" attempting to persuade the reader to believe "The Truth" as the author sees it...biased and supported with biased, shallow research. What the author fails to do is provide evidence to the contrary. He presents a very subjective, one-sided argument in favor of his beliefs on a variety of so-called "myths" and "facts".

For example, one chapter titled "The Bystander Effect" states this misconception **When someone is hurt, people rush to their aid** and the truth as **The more people who witness a person in distress, the less likely it is that any one person will help**. The author defines this "truth" even more simply: **"I could help them, but I'm sure someone else will come along."** Followed by **"Everyone thinks that. And no one stops.**

Is David McRaney for real?! True, this phenomenon has been researched and proven to be credible among social psychologists, BUT it is NOT an all-inclusive/exclusive "doctrinal truth" for the entire human population. David McRaney chooses not include the "rest of the story". He lists only specific, well-known events that prove his point. But what about the population of people that have stepped in to help someone who was hurt? Where are those studies? Non-existent? Maybe. Why? Because they are incidental. You might hear about some altruistic stranger who came to someone's rescue on the evening news every now and

then, but that's about it.

I have personally experienced a few "emergency" situations among a crowd and the Bystander Effect was never the case. Sweeping conclusions that present outcomes as either black or white are very dangerous. This author is irresponsible at best and deceptive at worst. I will concede that some of the chapters do provide "food for thought", especially The Straw Man Fallacy which addresses how we attempt to win an argument by re-framing our opponent's position (i.e. making it personal, etc.). The only conclusion one can glean from this book is that the "misconceptions" and "truths" David McRaney identifies are unprovable. Circumstantial. Biased. To lump the behavior of the majority of the human population into these "boxed" fallacies is insulting.

If you're a free-thinker, creative problem-solver, or desire to see the whole picture beyond "the elephant's trunk", then this book will most likely be a waste of time...unless of course anger spurs you to action. In that case, I would make it a case study.

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## Jim says

A quick, informal view of cognitive biases, behaviors, & other glitches that keep us from being the rational beings we believe we are. Each chapter is brief explanation of what brain glitch is being covered. I knew most of them, but found even those chapters interesting as he gives very good examples. It's interesting how & why many of these evolved plus how they're playing out in modern society. Many are used to trick us by advertising, political candidates, & others. Many of these are necessary to even function, but have disastrous consequences when out of hand. Others are just a pain that we have to watch for.

The introduction describes the reason for these. We evolved in a completely different environment that we have created for ourselves now. Snap judgments & prejudices that once saved our lives are now causing issues. The primitive, emotional parts of our brains often come to conclusions that we can't articulate. Sometimes we're influenced by them, other times we can override them, but it can lead to dissonances. Of course, hormones & unconscious senses can factor in. It's amazing we're as rational as we are, which isn't very.

Many of these were drawn directly from his website/blog which is here:

<https://youarenotsmart.com/>

I'll list the table of contents with a brief explanation. Many are actual psychological terms, but some aren't.

**Priming** - environmental factors causing decisions. The smell of freshly baked bread or cookies can make a house more attractive for sale.

**Confabulation** - we make up reasons if we don't know one. Our emotional brain decides, we act. Why? Ask us & we'll tell you even though we don't know.

**Confirmation bias** - If it agrees with our beliefs, it is given more weight than if it disagrees.

**Hindsight bias** - I knew that! Rewriting ourselves to bolster our self esteem.

**The Texas sharpshooter fallacy** - painting the bulls eye after the shots for the best effect.

**Procrastination** - we really should vs. we want.

**Normalcy bias** - this can't be happening!

**Introspection** - thinking about thinking, judging our own knowledge. Again, self esteem makes us think better of ourselves.

**The availability heuristic** - easily recalled given more weight than less well known. News tells us of more



disasters, we believe more are happening, even if they're not.

**The bystander effect** - someone else will do it/no one else is so why should I? Being part of the herd is important.

**The Dunning-Kruger effect** - I am smarter/better/prettier than I really am, another aspect of bolstering the self esteem.

**Apophenia** - seeing connections & meaning where none exists. Bad statistical & probability analysis. Part of our egocentric point of view.

**Brand loyalty** - investment bias. I invested therefore rationalization of better qualities, minimize problems. Similar to or elements of confirmation bias.

**The argument from authority** - famous or well educated in one area carrying weight in another where they are no better informed than anyone else.

**The argument from ignorance** - very similar to the Dunning-Kruger effect, the more you the less certain you are.

**The straw Man Fallacy** - shifting the point to a limited fantasy figure & changing it to more easily refute.

**The ad hominem fallacy** - shifting the point from the issue to the speaker's status.

**The just-world fallacy** - belief in Karma

**The public goods game** - self interest run rampant? Sort of.

**The ultimatum game** - status/fairness trumps rationality, similar to previous.

**Subjective validation** - if it pertains to me, it is more likely correct. Astrology couldn't exist without it. We tend to notice what fits us & disregard that which doesn't.

**Cult indoctrination** - belief in a person or ideology as a whole, tendency to discount the bad.

**Groupthink** - fitting in, not making waves, even when really dumb. Bay of Pigs. Every group needs a Devil's Advocate or, as he puts it, a disagreeing asshole.

**Supernormal releasers** - existing response tendency magnified. Junk food, Barbie dolls (7:10 waist hips ratio healthy, 5:10 super sexy, even if not healthy), beetles loving beer bottles.

**The affect heuristic** - snap judgement of good-bad based on initial, often subconscious impressions. An emotional response that is tough to overcome. (Instant dislike/love.)

**Dunbar's number** - 150 is about the max for social connections.

**Selling out** - everyone does. It's what keeps the economy growing.

**Self-serving bias** - maintain & enhance self-esteem by favoring self in self narrative.

**The spotlight effect** - belief we are noticed more than we are.

**The third person effect** - mass media affects you more than me, so I must limit the incorrect info you receive.

**Catharsis** - full of anger? Punch a bag & let it out! Except it turns out that doesn't work so well.

**The misinformation effect** it's far too easy to misremember something when told something else happened. Watch a robbery, look at a line up. If told that the suspect is there, too many people will find him even if he isn't.

**Conformity** - fitting into the tribe is super important.

**Extinction burst** - why so many diets fail. *Any time you quit something cold turkey, your brain will make a last-ditch effort to return you to your old ways.*

**Social loafing** in a group, everyone slacks off some.

**The illusion of transparency** belief that others can see what you are thinking & feeling.

**Learned helplessness** after too many failures, animals just quit trying in the same situation.

**Embodied cognition**- the brain, while important, is not the only resource we have available to us to generate behavior.

**The anchoring effect** relying too heavily on the first piece of info no matter its actual veracity or relevance. If the sale price is 1/2 the normal price, it must be a good deal. Used by Harbor Freight & Northern Tool constantly!

**Attention** - We don't pay attention to everything evenly & that varies by culture. Tunnel vision is amazing,

can even miss the gorilla in the room, literally.

**Self-handicapping** - expecting less of ourselves so that failure doesn't hurt as bad.

**Self-fulfilling prophecies** - Meet someone, categorize them as an ass & they behave like one. Many times the reason is the way you react to them, so they fulfill what you expect.

**The moment** - something I'd been waiting for & had expected to hear about in other contexts. We are not one person, but multiple people, especially the "Now" person (a few seconds to about 3 minutes when memories are either dropped or put into long term memory) & the "Remembered" self (which has little time sense, although he doesn't mention that) which is the narrative self. Happiness is based on satisfying both of these selves. I believe this is also part of the Peak-end rule where we tend to remember averages & endings.

**Consistency bias** not remembering how we really were/thought/acted, but framing it in how we would today.

**The representativeness heuristic** again, we're bad at probability. We instinctively believe tails will come up if 6 heads have already appeared, but the probability is still 1 in 2.

**Expectation** belief that experts can't be fooled. They can as many wine tasters & art critics have found out.

**The illusion of control** we have very little even over our bodies much less outside them.

**The fundamental attribution error** believing that other people's behavior, especially bad, is due to personality flaws not environmental factors.

Wikipedia also has a good list of memory biases here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of...)

Well worth the time to listen to & a lot of fun.

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## Alexander says

If only books like these could be liquefied and piped into the water supply.

Fox News and MSNBC would self-destruct, and democracy might become something more than the "least-worst" option.

YOU ARE NOT SO SMART is antifreeze for your thinkbox.

Granted, there's nothing new here, but having forty-eight of the most fundamental brain-hacking principles of heuristics theory in one populist, user-friendly package, gives one hope that sanity, rationality, and most of all, *humility*, will occasionally prevail against the banshee hordes of American unreason. We want this sh\*t to go mainstream in a serious way.

In terms of presentation, McRaney's breviary of mental hygiene often reads like a compilation of practical jokes concocted by research psychologists to bring our colossal inborn stupidity to light. And employing science to help us laugh at ourselves is the most humanizing of paths to a chastened self-awareness.

Grade: E for Edifying

A nice little omni-tool for dismantling the straitjackets of solipsism.

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## **Lara says**

like to think that I know just how advertisers are trying to sway my thoughts and opinions and gain my buying power. I also like to think that I am in complete control of such things as my thoughts, opinions, and buying power. But, evidently, I am not so smart.

I like the color red. I also like to think that I know exactly why I like the color red. But, David McRaney says that I am not so smart.

I like to think that I am a good person who would rush to the help of others in an emergency. I also like to think that I can think quickly on my feet and would know exactly what to do in such an emergency. But the book I just read tells me that I am not so smart. (Sometimes I like to think that I would have no idea what to do in an emergency. Just so we're clear that at least sometimes I'm smart. Maybe.)

I like having friends. I also like having Facebook friends. I like having more than 150 Facebook friends. But apparently, I am not smart enough to have more than that. You know--because I AM NOT SO SMART.

I could go on, but I will spare you, and let you read about it for yourself in David McRaney's new book *You Are Not So Smart* (though I bet you were smart enough to figure out that that was the title already) which is based on his popular blog by the same name (that I wasn't smart enough to hear about before now, but have now read daily since).

McRaney has taken his blog and moved it to book format with small, blog-sized chapters which announce a misconception (when you are around others, you feel as if everyone is noticing every aspect of your appearance and behavior) and a reality (people devote little attention to you unless prompted to). McRaney then uses psychological studies and examples to explain the misconception du jour and help us all understand exactly how not smart we are.

Fascinating stuff, people. I really enjoyed reading it. It's the kind of stuff that I can really eat up because it is just so interesting.

That said, I found myself being just the teensyist bit angry at the lack of control I have in my life. Everything around me is apparently manipulating my thoughts and views and I am so unaware of it that I make up lies and reasons to explain my actions. I also don't like how psychology and the brain are the everything. Some of the studies and misconceptions/truths don't match up with my religious views. Especially my beliefs that God answers prayers and that the Holy Ghost can lead and guide us through personal revelation. I'm sure that my brain does play a part in that, but I don't think it's ALL my brain.

But then, I am not so smart.

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## **Brendon Schrodinger says**

This great work boils down to: "Despite millions of years of evolution your brain is a jumbled mess of neurons that covers up it's downfalls by lying to you constantly. Here are just 46 ways your brain is being an asshole."

Just like Dawkins argues against a creator in showing that evolutionary adaptations can be flawed and seemingly badly designed, David McRaney shows in this work that despite those claims that the human mind is one of the most complex structures in the known universe, it's shoddily put together, with bits that don't work together and bits that were added on at the last minute and that the only way it 'works' is that it constantly lies to itself about the reality it exists in. You have in your head a used car salesman.

David demonstrates the limitations of our brains by picking out these 46 different ways our brain lies to us and writing a small chapter on each. Each lie is well researched and refers to different published studies for evidence. For example the chapter on why you have too many Facebook friends talks about studies about the limitations of how many people you can hold in a social circle in the physical world and compares these figures to the data on Facebook. He also talks about the reason why you 'befriend' all those people using the internet.

Most interesting are the chapters that highlight the limitations in vision and the comprehension of sensory input. You are not a little person in a box watching a ultra high definition surround sound movie of your existence. More like your homonculus watches a scratchy silent movie from 1908 with no sound and missing film cells, a friend tells them about the soundtrack over the phone.

There are also great chapters on how you think you are better than everyone else out there. He actually gives statistics on how many people think they are better than average drivers and how many people think they have a better than average IQ. The figures will astound you.

I highly recommend this fun and enlightening read. It certainly will make you question everything you think and perceive, which is a practice that all science endorses strongly. This book is so much more than your average pop-psychology book that litters the popular science section of bookshops and libraries. It holds no punches and approaches the subject from a critical standpoint. Weeks after reading this book I'm still laughing at my brain when I know it's lying to me.

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**Ali Sattari says**

Far better than The Art of Thinking Clearly!

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**Stephanie \*Very Stable Genius\* says**

Turns out everyone thinks they are somehow smarter than the people around them, everyone. We all are guilty of it. We walk into a Wal-mart, take a look around us and think “what a bunch of freaks, and always in Wal-mart” .....But we are also in Wal-mart as we make this judgment. I don't go into that store unless they are the only option, but every time I look around and I think to myself “do I also look like a freak by just entering this store, then magically go back to normal when I leave?”

I once thought that I had free will and nothing that Sam Harris wrote proved otherwise, but David McRaney may have done just that. Nothing we do as humans have anything to do with individual choice. We are all manipulated by the media and a bunch of biases and fallacies.

Here are a couple of examples of this.....

#### *“Confirmation Bias*

*The Misconception: Your opinions are the result of years of rational, objective analysis.*

*The Truth: Your opinions are the result of years of paying attention to information which confirmed what you believed while ignoring information which challenged your preconceived notions.”*

So, this wasn't news to me. I am not ever going to watch Faux News for any reason, unless I had a job that forced me to do it. Skeeter, down the street would rather eat an arugula salad before watching Rachel Maddow for ten seconds. We are only going to pay attention to the things that confirm our beliefs.....this explains the existents of Rush Limbaugh. That being said, I'm right and Skeeter is not.

#### *“Extinction Burst*

*The Misconception: If you stop engaging in a bad habit, the habit will gradually diminish until it disappears from your life.*

*The Truth: Any time you quit something cold turkey, your brain will make a last-ditch effort to return you to your habit.”*

Yeah, anyone who has dieted (most probably everyone, unless you are one of those skinny people who “just can't seem to gain weight”.....everyone hates you) has experienced this. You are going along well, you are hitting your goals....you hit a plateau or life gets in the way and you break from the diet a little. Before you know it you are back to eating the stuff you really shouldn't. This is due to the ‘extinction burst’. Food tastes good, some food tastes better than others and since we evolved to survive we are hard wired to crave high calorie food because that is what determined life or death. Ironically, that's what's killing us today. When a reward is taken away from us, we throw a fit.....but if we still don't get the reward we give up. That's why you never give in to a two year old during an extinction burst.

#### *“The Just-World Fallacy*

*The Misconception: People who are losing at the game of life must have done something to deserve it.*

*The Truth: The beneficiaries of good fortune often do nothing to earn it, and bad people often get away with their actions without consequences”*

This is a big one. All those people who believe that poor people are poor because they want to be and/or are not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps because they just want to live easy off the system and have no idea how to work hard, these people are fooled by this fallacy. Never, do they take into account their own fortunate beginnings as the reason they themselves are not amongst the poor. The reason they are not poor is not only because they worked really hard (I'm not saying they didn't work hard, and that is a big part of success), but they are not poor because they didn't come from poor most likely. Many people have risen above their poor beginnings (Ben Franklin) but it's a very hard cycle to overcome.

Those who have a hard time overcoming this may have this fallacy to blame.....

## *“Learned Helplessness*

*The Misconception: If you are in a bad situation, you will do whatever you can do to escape it.*

*The Truth: If you feel like you aren't in control of your destiny, you will give up and accept whatever situation you are in.”*

This is all about having some control in your life. If all choice is taken away from a person they tend to give up. Residents in nursing homes do better if they get to choose how to arrange their furniture than those who have everything done for them. If you are living in a bad situation and you don't have any control over what happens to you, you don't have access to higher education because it is financially out of reach. No one will give you a job no matter how hard you try because you aren't dressed nice enough, and you don't have enough education.....these people will accept their situation most likely than not.

This book was very interesting. But I'm feeling a little down because I learned that I am not so smart and I am not that special.

Thanks David for the depression.....\*sigh\*

All kidding aside, I really enjoyed this book. Here's a website if you would like to read more.

You are not so smart.

As seen on Shelfinflicted

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## **Amber Koppenhofer says**

Sometimes first impressions are the right ones. Below in italics is my original impression of the book after reading the intro:

*I've just picked this book up from the library and have only read the introduction, written by the author, who briefly explained why we, as a society, are generally stupid, and how each of us has an internal dialogue that convinces we are much smarter than we are. So, I can't help but wonder what makes this guy think he's one of the rare truly intelligent humans beings who seemingly has enough authority to write a book telling the rest of us how stupid we are. Is he going to explore the fact that it's possible he just thinks he's smart enough to write this book, and that it's perhaps just his internal dialogue telling him that the majority of society is stupid in order to make himself think he is much smarter than he really is? Hmmm... it will be interesting to see where this book goes. As with most informational books, I will probably piddle through this as I feel motivated to read it.*

Now that I'm done with it, after spending months piddling through this book (as I thought I would), reading a chapter here, two chapters there, putting down for a week or a month, and picking it back up again, I have decided that while I do like this book, and do think it is informative, I have also found that my original thoughts on my book remain nearly the same....

No matter what way you spin it, according to this book, we are all a bunch of dumb asses. The author, McRaney, reviews 48 different heuristics (mental short cuts) and cites psychological studies to inform us that

none of us really think for ourselves, that it is our environment that influences our thoughts and behaviors, that we don't know when we are lying to ourselves, that we only pay attention to the information we believe in and ignore the rest, that we don't understand why we like what we like, that are memories our mostly fiction, and that we have an internal dialogue that convinces us that all this stuff that happens in our head is real, even when it's not. You can try to convince yourself you don't fit most of these descriptions, but then McRaney serves up the self-serving bias to refute that idea. Basically we are all egotistical, whimsical dim wits walking blindly through this world, making more of coincidences than we should and constantly living in an unconscious state of our own fictionalized worlds. No one is self aware, except of course for those conducting the studies and the author of this book. However, I cannot deny that I see a lot of truth what McRaney reveals, I just think that he and the psychologists cited in these studies forget that some of the conclusions they are drawing can come from their own heuristics. Interesting stuff, nonetheless.

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## **Kent says**

I love Radiolab. It is the best thing. Here are the episodes that you should listen to instead of reading this book:

Deception - <http://www.radiolab.org/2008/mar/10/>

Memory and Forgetting - <http://www.radiolab.org/2007/jun/07/>

Placebo - <http://www.radiolab.org/2007/may/17/>

Morality - <http://www.radiolab.org/2007/aug/13/>

Stress - <http://www.radiolab.org/2007/apr/09/>

Choice - <http://www.radiolab.org/2008/nov/17/>

Also the other ones. Mmmmm Radiolab.

The good thing about YANSS:WYHTMFOFWYMISFA46OWYDY, as I like to abbreviate it, is the sheer accretion of self-delusions. There are a lot of them, and McRaney presents a compelling case that we are profoundly self-delusional creatures.

The bad thing about YANSS:WYHTMFOFWYMISFA46OWYDY is the storytelling. This book is little more than a long list of studies. Plus, if you've ever studied Psychology at all (or listened to Radiolab. Did I mention that you should listen to Radiolab?), most of this will already be familiar to you.

One trap that McRaney didn't mention is the one that he consistently falls into: confusing correlation with causality. Very few of the studies that this book describes establish causality. As such, many, if not most of the conclusions that the book derives are simply not rigorous.

This foray into pop-science has proven unsatisfying. I'm not sure yet if I dislike the genre or if this was just a bad example.

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## **Megan says**

[Confabulation is a memory disturbance, defined as the production of fabricated, distorted or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive (hide spoiler)]

