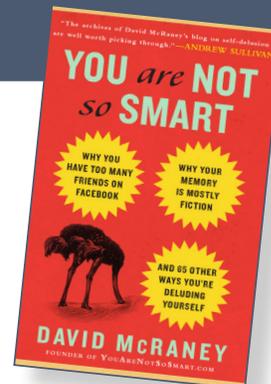


You are Not so Smart:

Why You Have Too Many Friends on Facebook, Why Your Memory is Mostly Fiction, and 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself

Book by David McRaney

Book review provided by Lt. Cmdr. John Barclay Reese, Technology, Operations & Plans (Code 67)



I am at an age where I cannot help but strike up conversations with perfect strangers while waiting in line. It is one of the many benefits of being an outgoing, middle-aged man. So, while waiting for a haircut (and eyebrow trim...seriously, when did this happen?!) recently at the Washington Navy Yard barber shop, I was pretending not to watch The Today Show with the other patrons when Matt Lauer made a statement that prompted me to engage the gentleman sitting next to me with the observation, "My mother has always said that if we only knew how uninterested other people are in us, we'd be a lot happier." To which the gentleman replied, "That's called the spotlight effect, and I'm reading a book about it that you might really enjoy." Eureka!

And so I was introduced to David McRaney's *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*, a delightful collection of enduring myths that McRaney, a self-described "psychology nerd," challenges with a great deal of wit, humor, and no small amount of research. Each concise chapter, which can be taken in any order, is introduced with a common misconception, followed by the truth, and an explanation of why we all are victims of our own cognitive biases, heuristics (mental shortcuts), and logical fallacies.

McRaney is not out to make us all feel inadequate and foolish; rather he debunks forty-eight of these misconceptions and offers all of us the opportunity to become more self-aware and, hopefully, avoid such psychological pitfalls in the future.

For instance, the Dunning-Kruger Effect: "The Misconception: You can predict how well you would perform in any situation. The Truth: You are generally pretty bad at estimating your competence and the difficulty of complex tasks."

Sound familiar? Are you a judge advocate who has ever had his hat handed to him in a "no brainer" situation? Just me, huh?

Well, fear not, because despite the book's title, McRaney is not out to make us all feel inadequate and foolish; rather he debunks forty-eight of these misconceptions and offers all of us the opportunity to become more self-aware and, hopefully, avoid such psychological pitfalls in the future. No small feat, however, given that we have developed these "fictions" over the course of the entirety of human existence in order to negotiate a scary world that requires such delusion in order to "stay sane." Also, as McRaney points out in Chapter 3, we are subject

to the "Confirmation Bias," which means that our opinions are "not the result of years of rational, objective analysis," but "the result of years of paying attention to information that confirmed what [we] believed, while ignoring information that challenged [our] preconceived notions."

And there it is, three years of law school right down the drain.

Don't worry, even if you aren't up for a little self-reflection and the shattering of your preconceived notions, you will enjoy, as McRaney explains, applying these lessons to others and reading the details of case study after case study in which human subjects never fail to disappoint. At the very least, you may find some comfort in better understanding why there's no need to get so upset while watching pundits say ridiculous things on twenty-four hour news channels and, perhaps most importantly, you will be possessed of a whole catalog of interesting anecdotes with which to start a conversation with strangers. 🐘

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