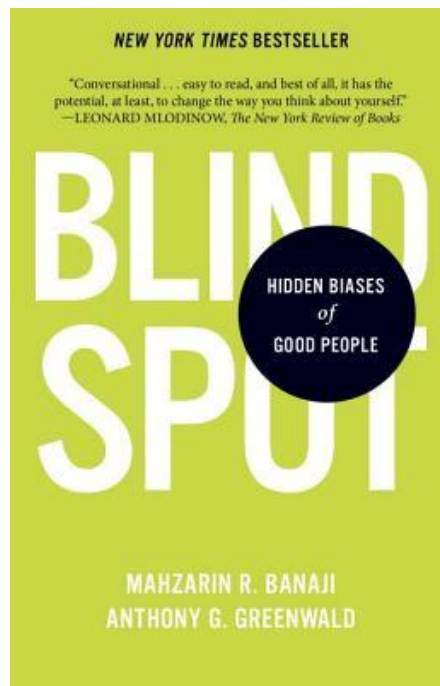




Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People

Mahzarin R. Banaji , Anthony G. Greenwald

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I know my own mind.

I am able to assess others in a fair and accurate way.

These self-perceptions are challenged by leading psychologists Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald as they explore the hidden biases we all carry from a lifetime of exposure to cultural attitudes about age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, and nationality.

“Blindspot” is the authors’ metaphor for the portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. Writing with simplicity and verve, Banaji and Greenwald question the extent to which our perceptions of social groups—without our awareness or conscious control—shape our likes and dislikes and our judgments about people’s character, abilities, and potential.

In *Blindspot*, the authors reveal hidden biases based on their experience with the Implicit Association Test, a method that has revolutionized the way scientists learn about the human mind and that gives us a glimpse into what lies within the metaphoric blindspot.

The title’s “good people” are those of us who strive to align our behavior with our intentions. The aim of *Blindspot* is to explain the science in plain enough language to help well-intentioned people achieve that alignment. By gaining awareness, we can adapt beliefs and behavior and “outsmart the machine” in our heads so we can be fairer to those around us. Venturing into this book is an invitation to understand our own minds.

Brilliant, authoritative, and utterly accessible, *Blindspot* is a book that will challenge and change readers for years to come.

Praise for *Blindspot*

“Conversational . . . easy to read, and best of all, it has the potential, at least, to change the way you think about yourself.”—**Leonard Mlodinow, *The New York Review of Books***

“Accessible and authoritative . . . While we may not have much power to eradicate our own prejudices, we can counteract them. The first step is to turn a hidden bias into a visible one. . . . What if we’re not the magnanimous people we think we are?”—***The Washington Post***

“Banaji and Greenwald deserve a major award for writing such a lively and engaging book that conveys an important message: Mental processes that we are not aware of can affect what we think and what we do. *Blindspot* is one of the most illuminating books ever written on this topic.”—**Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D., distinguished professor, University of California, Irvine; past president, Association for Psychological Science; author of *Eyewitness Testimony***

“A wonderfully cogent, socially relevant, and engaging book that helps us think smarter and more humanely. This is psychological science at its best, by two of its shining stars.”—**David G. Myers, professor, Hope College, and author of *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils***

“[The authors’] work has revolutionized social psychology, proving that—unconsciously—people are

affected by dangerous stereotypes.”—*Psychology Today*

“An accessible and persuasive account of the causes of stereotyping and discrimination . . . Banaji and Greenwald will keep even nonpsychology students engaged with plenty of self-examinations and compelling elucidations of case studies and experiments.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A stimulating treatment that should help readers deal with irrational biases that they would otherwise consciously reject.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

From the Hardcover edition.

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People Details

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From Reader Review Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People for online ebook

Yaaresse says

DNF.

I made it almost halfway through the book and then realized I am under no obligation to finish something I find this dull and obvious.

Your Cliff Notes for this book: Humans like categories and are very good at recognizing patterns. Humans live in cultures. Cultures tend to be homogeneous and distrust "otherness." Individuals pick up these biases from their cultures. As society has evolved (which, looking at daily headlines, is a questionable assumption), prejudice/bias is now considered "bad." We know consciously that it's "bad" to be prejudiced, but we don't usually realize how much bias/prejudice we subconsciously have absorbed and act on; however, if you become aware that you have a tendency toward unconscious prejudices, you can consciously work to overcome them.

There really isn't much new here. Maybe the authors created a new tool to measure just how biased we are, but I remember the same basic ideas presented in my 80s-era psych and sociology classes.

My real (biased) takeaway on this: Research psychologists need to get out in the real world more where the things they think they are "discovering" are fairly obvious to those of us who have ever been on the receiving end of bias...which is pretty much anyone who has ever interacted with someone not exactly like him/her.

Note: Usually I don't affix a star rating to books on my DNF/abandoned list. That said, I make exceptions if A) I've gotten more than 1/3 of the way through the book before giving up, and/or B) I thought the book especially inane, insufferable or just plain old awful.

Lolita says

A wonderful book, written respectfully, kindly but not hiding nor softening the truth.

“In the modern world, where friendships, collaborations, businesses, and entire economies span the globe in a highly networked web of interdependence, the ability to create alliances that bypass boundaries of race, nationality, and culture is critical to our well-being, our prosperity, our productivity—and perhaps even our survival.”

Excerpt From: Mahzarin R. Banaji. “Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People.” Delacorte Press

Jane says

A great and fairly quick read for 2017. This book focuses on our hidden biases, those that operate below our level of consciousness. It includes instruments to test your own hidden biases on a number of marginalized groups, race foremost among them. Most of us, including members of marginalized groups, will discover

that as much as we proclaim our commitment to equality for all, our unconscious brain is operating under the surface trying to reinforce systemic biases in our culture and institutions. These "mindbugs" are not easy to overcome, but understanding is the first step.

Koroviev says

This book, I believe must be read by almost anyone who is unaware of the idea of Implicit Association (as I was). The main text is only 167 pages, the rest is Appendices, Notes and Index. For the 167 pages of text, the information content is very good.

At the heart of it, the book explains the presence of *blindspots*, i.e. presence of implicit associations that our brain makes, without our conscious awareness, between groups and certain characteristics/properties. Such unconscious bias may (and usually does) lead to (invisible) discriminatory behaviour - as happens for example, while choosing a boss or employee of a particular gender, or choosing to help a particular type of individual/group thereby increasing its privileges, and so on.

The authors include Implicit Association Tests (IATs), designed to reveal such blindspots, within the book. They also support their claims by describing a lot of experiments/data, most of which were fun and interesting.

A simple IAT they begin with, reveals unsurprisingly, that people usually associate pleasant feelings with flowers, and unpleasant feelings with insects. A more complex one is the race IAT, which found that people (about 70% of test takers) associate pleasant feelings with White children as against Black ones, even when they claim to be perfectly egalitarian and indeed are consciously so.

The authors also suggest the origins of in-group bias (or out-group hostility). They end with possible ways to outsmart the biases, as they presently do not know the ways to eradicate them. But I believe, the knowledge of our own blindspots, makes them less sinister as we might attempt corrective measures, to render them less effective.

Alice says

Interesting insights, boring delivery. Half the book is about racial stereotyping, which seems to be a hot media issue these days. You might think that this book about how everyone harbors some level/version of prejudice, but it's actually about how YOU harbor some level/version of prejudice. Even if you don't know it.

Ariah says

For anyone who likes the genre of books like Freakonomics and The Tipping Point this is a great read. And for anyone else whose interested in the intersection of science and behavior with issues like structural racism and sexism (and plenty of other 'isms'), I'd highly recommend this book.

Implicit-Association Test (IAT) is a relatively new social psychology test designed to "detect the strength of a person's automatic association between mental representations of objects in memory." It makes a scientific case beyond our stereotypes and prejudices, while not at all excusing behavior, but rather taking a more

analytic approach to mitigating the negative impact of those biases.

I highly recommend this for anyone who does any work around dismantling structural racism or any other systemic inequity issues. It might help develop some more tools for the work.

Danielle says

This book is a result of the research of psychologists Banaji and Greenwald using the Implicit Association Test (more information about the test and the actual tests are available on their website <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>) They examine hidden biases people may have regarding things such as race, gender, and age as well as a number of other things. They look at what those hidden biases may mean in regards to our behavior and what if anything we can do to guard against them. It's definitely an interesting though slightly disheartening read. It's hard to think that either you're discriminating against people or they are discriminating against you via such an ingrained subliminal bias that there is almost no way it can be changed. I read an e-version of this book as an advanced reader's copy through NetGalley. If you plan to read it I would highly recommend reading the book in print rather than electronically. There were a lot of tests included in the book that were virtually impossible to do anything with in the format that I read it.

Kelly says

This was an all-faculty read at my school. To be honest, if you've got any passing familiarity with the general coverage of issues of race, racism and identity going around in the press for the last several years, you're likely going to have heard much of this before. Nonetheless, it does gather a lot of what you've likely read together and put together in a lucid, linear structure, walking the reader through neuropsychological structures that can lead to negative stereotypes forming, from our brain's tendency to sort things into categories to the book's extensive discussion with the results of the Implicit Association Tests (IATs) out of Project Implicit at Harvard, and what that reveals about the implicit biases of the millions of Americans who have taken the test.

If you're not familiar, first, you should definitely go take at least one of the tests to get the idea. And second, according to the scientists involved, the IAT tests prove that at over 75% of Americans who have taken the test show strong implicit biases, whether that be in the area of race, gender, age, or any other category tested. Even more strikingly, this was true whether or not they held views contrary to what the test showed their implicit bias to be. With regard to race, at least a sizable minority of white Americans who have strongly held egalitarian views nonetheless show strong implicit bias toward associating negative or violent images with African Americans. A majority, as of the writing of the book, of people who believe in gender equality nonetheless still had strong implicit associations of women with the home and as not being equally as good at math and science.

The conclusions reached are, then, not particularly surprising: there is a significant chance you probably have some level of implicit bias, and implicit bias has been proven to lead to discriminatory behavior, which is proven to impact the groups that you have some level of negative bias towards. And you may need to expand your definition of what both "bias" can mean and what "discriminatory behavior" is.

The book is structured for any person inclined to read this research and say something defensive like, "But I'm a good person who is nice to others around me!" or "I would never lie, ever!" or "I don't believe in and would never take any racist action!" to be able to have that reaction, be told that's a great start, but here's why

you're wrong or at least that there's a whole lot more to it than that. So if you know someone like this, this would be a good book to give to them so you don't have to explain. It's written largely for that person.

So what to do about it, to fix these awful hidden biases that you are horrified to discover you may have? Unfortunately this was the most needed and the shortest part of the book. The solution that one researcher comes up with- making sure she is continually exposed, day after day, to images and stories that contradict the implicit biases shown in her own test results, is the only one that they seem to have any evidence of working, as far as they know- and even then it only works when it is repeated constantly- otherwise the effects are still seen. (So basically, once again, representation matters.)

Maybe that's the next book? Or likely not, as a lot of researchers don't feel comfortable going beyond the results of their experiments (which is my frustration with reading a lot of education research for my job- it stops short of policy prescription, because "I'm just a scientist, ma'am!" but then those who pick up the policy transfer work often have much less of a clue what they're talking about.). So probably, again, another book, for someone else to write.

RA says

Would recommend

This book is about evidence-based studies about implicit association/unconscious bias/cognitive dissonance, and although it is not quite popular science, the tone is conversational and accessible. The authors fully concede their own biases, and that helps humanize the findings. Also, taking the Implicit Association Tests that the authors developed is VERY eye-opening. Unfortunately, the book is short on solutions (because are there really any?), but it's worth the read to get a better sense of how biases are at work in everyday behavior. Below I included the questions I used for my book club discussion at work, plus lines of note to me.

Discussion Questions

1. Before reading this book, how familiar were you with the concept of implicit association/unconscious bias? How did that affect how you approached the book? How have any of your ideas on the topic changed or evolved?
2. The authors define a category as “a collection of things having enough in common so that it is convenient to treat them as kin,” and they use social categories like race, ethnicity, and gender in a lot of examples. What other categories do we use to create shortcuts? How does that affect behavior and decisions?
3. The “Us and Them” chapter talks about in-groups and out-groups. When have you been a part of one or the other? What did that look like or feel like?
4. How can we help each other avoid blindspots?

Lines of Note

By “good people” we refer to those, ourselves included, who intend well and who strive to align their behavior with their intentions. Our highest aim for this book is to explain the science sufficiently so that these good people will be better able to achieve that alignment. (xv)

...the mind automatically undoes this darkening to correct for the shadow, lightening our conscious

experience of [the perceived darker square]. (8)

...mindbugs can be powerful enough to produce greater recollection of things that didn't occur than of things that did occur. (9)

...we fail to perceive individuals as individuals. They are often viewed as representatives of social groups. Tragedies that arise both from inappropriate trust and from inappropriate distrust bear the imprint of automatic decisions made on the basis of group membership. (17)

Social mindbugs are not restricted to decisions based on a person's race or ethnicity. They stem from psychologically and socially meaningful human groups of all sorts. Age, gender, religion, class, sexuality, disability, physical attractiveness, profession, and personality are only a few examples, and some are more magnetic than others in drawing us toward them as explanations of behavior. (17)

Formulated in the mid-1950s by Leon Festinger, a brilliant social psychologist, the theory of cognitive dissonance tells us that becoming aware of conflicts between our beliefs and our actions, or between two simultaneously coexisting beliefs, violates the natural human striving for mental harmony, or consonance. (59)

Most people, we've discovered to our happy surprise, would rather know about the cracks in their own minds. In the same way that they would want to know about a high level of blood cholesterol so that they can take action against it, they wish to confront potentially harmful mental content. They do so to be more certain that their automatic, unconscious thoughts do not result in actions that conflict with their reflective, rational side. (60)

When it comes to seeking change, the reflective, conscious side of the brain – the side that is unique to humankind – is more than capable of doing the necessary work. Its power derives from its ability to observe itself and to use those observations to guide conscious action. (70)

A category is a collection of things having enough in common so that it is convenient to treat them as kin. (78)

... those who belong to their society's "default" categories may see stereotyping as less of a problem than others do – they are much less likely to be its victims. (92)

Stereotypes do not take special effort to acquire. Quite the opposite – they are acquired effortlessly, and take special effort to discount. (109)

... an act of terrorism committed by a member of the in-group may be forgotten faster than a similarly reprehensible act perpetrated by a member of a foreign group. (135)

... group identity abhors a vacuum. Create an arbitrary connection between a person and a group and provide the mere suggestion that there are others who lack this connection to self, and the psychology of "us" and "them" rushes in to fill the void. Lines are drawn, whether or not the basis for the groups makes any sense, and discrimination follows. The first of these "minimal group" studies showed that not only did group members assign more resources to their own minimal groups, even when they would gain nothing personally from it, but, even more surprisingly, they were willing for their group to pay a cost in resources in order to maximize the difference between "us" and "them." That's even harder to explain, adding self-defeat to mere collective selfishness. (136-137)

... "us" and "them" identities can be forged on the basis of the flimsiest of criteria, and that the allocation of resources to members of one's own group at the expense of others can take a much subtler form than it did

under Hitler, yet still exact a high price on those who are discriminated against. (140)

If there is a radical suggestion here, it is that the intergroup discrimination is less and less likely to involve explicit acts of aggression toward the out-group and more likely to involve everyday acts of helping the in-group. (142)

Receiving the benefits of being in the in-group tends to remain invisible for the most part. And this is perhaps why members of the dominant or majority groups are often genuinely stunned when the benefits they receive are pointed out. Blindspots hide both discriminations and privileges, so neither the discriminators nor the targets of discrimination, neither those who do the privileging nor the privileged, are aware. No small wonder that any attempt to consciously level the playing field meets with such resistance. (144)

Uncomfortable egalitarians may be the prototypical “good people” who have hidden biases. They see themselves as helpful, but it turns out that their helpfulness is selective, caused in part by their discomfort in interracial interactions. Their discriminatory behavior consists of being selectively ready or able to help only those who are like them, those in their circle of friends and acquaintances – in other words, those in groups for which they have automatic preferences. (159-160)

In a society in which the ability to help falls more to Whites than to Blacks and in which in-group favoritism is the norm, ordinary acts of helping will necessarily contribute to White advantage. (162)

Justin Morgan says

Interesting but repetitive. It was repetitive and there were some good observations but it was very repetitive. Didn't finish the book.

Kaethe says

The short form:

Humans are really good at detecting patterns

All cultures include assumptions about groups

Humans absorb these assumptions as implicit associations regardless of their explicit beliefs

More privileged people grossly underestimate the harm from small acts of prejudice against less privileged people

Good people recognize these mindbugs and seek ways to work around them

Try and be excellent to each other

Library copy

Anna says

I love this book.

I've listened to it a few times, while doing other stuff, and with pretty fast pace.

So much insight. I'll listen to it again a few more times over time since I no longer need to worry about returning some forms of library books on time...

Kurt says

Your brain associates concepts, and it doesn't always tell you. Drs. Banaji and Greenwald give a great illustration to introduce the testing method that forms the basis for most of this book: imagine that you have a deck of shuffled cards, and you're told to separate them into two piles. Hearts and Diamonds go to your left, and Spades and Clubs go to your right. You can probably do that really quickly, without even having to think, since your brain can just associate the pairs into "Red goes left, Black goes right" - but if you have a different prompt, like Hearts and Spades go to the left, and Diamonds and Clubs go to the right, you will have to slow down a little. It's not that you can't make up an easy rule or that the question is hard, it's just that your brain has been trained to make an easy association among suits of the same color, so you have to put in just a little more thought when grouping ideas that seem to have less in common.

On this principle, the authors explore the Implicit Association Test to determine what other concepts people's brains have developed in associated groups. For example, you may see a list of words, and for every word that is either a Flower or a Pleasant word, you mark the circle on the left, and for every word that is a Bug or an Unpleasant word, you mark the circle on the right. More likely than not, you will be a little faster at this task than if the words were grouped differently. Where the test gets interesting and psychologically useful, of course, is where it touches on issues of race/gender/age/sexuality/etc. Most people, especially in the relatively sophisticated target audience of this book, honestly insist that they do not discriminate, so the benefit of this testing method is that it unearths biases about which the subject is unaware. If your brain takes a little longer to group, say, a traditionally feminine name with a career word, as opposed to a domestic word, you may have some gender bias affecting your actions and decisions in ways you don't realize.

I was familiar with this testing method before I started reading the book, since Dr. Sam Sommers uses it in *Situations Matter: Understanding How Context Transforms Your World*, but I was pleasantly surprised to see how thoroughly these authors explored the implications of what the test has shown over the last twenty years or so. There are real links between implicit preferences for one race over another and subtle discrimination (like a doctor's bedside manner), and the scientific community is just beginning to develop experiments to learn more. The book definitely made me ask myself hard questions and look for my own blind spots, and it is certainly a good read for anyone interested in issues of equality.

Where I think the book falters a bit, understandably, is that it is very descriptive without being prescriptive. The authors are candid about this aspect of the book, almost apologizing for conclusions that boil down to, "We can show scientifically that people discriminate even when they don't know they're doing it. We just don't know how to fix that." Certainly, there are a few solutions offered (when an orchestra began holding blind auditions, for example, the gender ratio among accepted musicians became much more even, and students who take math classes from female professors are able to significantly increase their implicit associations between women and math), but I get the sense that we are still a few significant studies away from a book with large-scale concrete solutions to the problems described in this volume. I have hope that such a book is on the way someday, so for now, I can recommend this book for a thorough and patient analysis of the problem while we wait for the book to suggest more solutions.

(I think I'm supposed to mention that I received a free copy of this book from the Amazon Vine program.)

Melissa says

I highly recommend this book. It explores in-depth the finding that unconscious attitudes can influence people's actions without their knowledge. Using data obtained using the Implicit Association Test (developed at Harvard), the authors make a convincing case to convince the reader that, yes, you probably are prejudiced in ways you don't know, and yes, those prejudices impact your actions in ways which would horrify you if you knew about it.

It's another way to understand what "white privilege" is all about. No judgement; just facts. And these facts are pretty hard to ignore.

Approximately 75% of Americans (of all races and ethnicities) demonstrate automatic White preference on tests of their unconscious attitudes. These attitudes are not chosen, and are often contrary to what the person believes in their conscious mind (eg: all races are equal). Still, the unconscious preference for and willingness to help people who are white continues to poison all areas of our society, hurting anyone who is not white.

The insight provided by this book is invaluable as we ponder the death of Trayvon Martin; the overpopulation of our prisons with people of color; stop-and-frisk policies in NYC; and our own wishful thinking about living in a "post-racial" society.

"...there now exists a substantial body of evidence that automatic White preference...predicts discriminatory behavior even among people who fervently espouse egalitarian views. This evidence is far too substantial to ignore..."

Peter Mcloughlin says

This is a book about the unconscious biases of good people. The book centers around the results from implicit association tests. Many of us in 21st century America are conscious egalitarians. We consciously believe it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of race, class, gender or sexual orientation. However unfortunately we carry unconscious biases which we largely have no control over. These biases show up on an implicit association test. The test usually involves rapidly responding and clicking on appropriate word that is either positive (good, great, beautiful...) and a negative word (bad, lowly, ugly...) and putting it quickly with as few errors as possible in the right category. At the same time one is sorting words on must sort races. You might be asked to sort good and bad words and pictures of people of different races into the good and bad categories. On the first try you may separate white faces with good and black faces with bad then you will be asked to separate black faces into good and white faces to the bad. By measure the lag time in the test takers sorting unconscious bias is measured.

I was curious how I would do on the test and found a website with the test online. I was relieved that I had almost no unconscious bias. Weirdly enough the tiny unconscious bias I did have was against white people and not for them. This was a strange result. I am relieved but it is not a badge of honor since I have no control over my unconscious mind the results could well have been different.

The disturbing thing is that a sizable number of egalitarian people (good people) show bias in favor of white people on the test. These biases have results in the real world. The book talks about the effects of these biases and remedies for these biases that we may consciously adopt. It was an informative book.

