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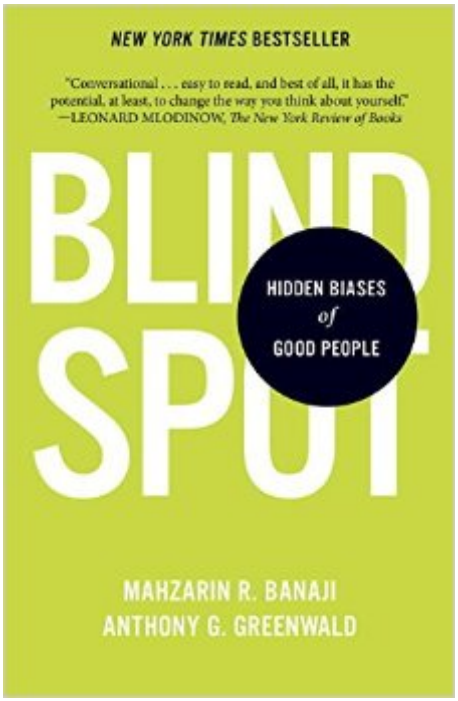
Blindspot: Hidden Biases Of Good People



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Synopsis

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.â œBlindspotâ • is the authorsâ ™ 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 groupsâ ”without our awareness or conscious controlâ ”shape our likes and dislikes and our judgments about peopleâ ™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 titleâ ™s â œgood peopleâ • 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 â œoutsmart the machineâ • 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 Â â œConversational . . . easy to read, and best of all, it has the potential, at least, to change the way you think about yourself.â •â ”Leonard Mlodinow, The New York Review of Books Â â œAccessible 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 weâ ™re not the magnanimous people we think we are?â •â ”The Washington Post Â â œBanaji 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.â •â ”Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D., distinguished professor, University of California, Irvine; past president, Association for Psychological Science; author of Eyewitness Testimony Â â œA 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.â •â ”David G. Myers, professor, Hope College, and author of Intuition: Its Powers and Perils Â â œ[The authorsâ ™] work has revolutionized social psychology, proving thatâ ”unconsciouslyâ ”people are affected by dangerous stereotypes.â •â ”Psychology Todayâ œAn 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.â •â ”Publishers Weekly Â â œA stimulating treatment that should help readers deal with irrational biases that they would otherwise consciously reject.â •â ”Kirkus ReviewsFrom the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Blindspot promises to uncover hidden biases of "Good People." Unfortunately, it just unfolds what has been published ad nauseam in recent decades...the same stuff anyone who would be interested in reading this book has most likely already learned through several means. Studies and reports have indicated through surveys, association tests, etc etc that people have biases. There is nothing new here besides the data of several testing procedures that show biases.I had hoped that Blindspot might show some creativity and risk taking in showing blindspots that have not been previously discussed or revealed; however, what is discussed are basically the following biases: white v. black, male v. female, heterosexual v. homosexual, and young v. old. (If you are not aware these biases might exist, then you should read this book.) There is nothing outside the box here. Sure the data and findings are supported and relevant, but it is not news. What about something surprising like biases that are not everyday fodder in the media and culture. The authors fail to delve into biases outside those generally labeled as "politically correct."Are biases ever correct and useful, even life-saving? Do we sometimes ignore our intuition to ill-effect to avoid seeming biased? What is the danger of overcompensating for biases in our culture? The authors avoid these and similar more

difficult and innovative questions.It would have been interesting, for example, for the authors to examine how biases and blindspots are constantly being manipulated, developed, and taken advantage of in our everyday lives in the media, by politicians, educators, advertisers, etc. More discussion about how to identify and correct biases of various types would have been welcome too.

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 command, 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.

Its easy to accept the idea that the majority of brain activity linked to our physical body occurs outside of conscious awareness (getting out of bed in the middle of the night to urinate, driving home from work with no memory of the trip); its difficult to accept the idea that our attitudes and values have a profound influence on how we treat other people but most of this occurs outside of conscious awareness. The scientific evidence on the latter, and the implications of this work, is at the core of this book. If you are interested in the rapid, relatively automatic social judgments that underlie stereotypes, first impressions, prejudice, benevolence, racism, sexism, and ageism, then you need to read this book.The authors are the world leading experts on the rapid, non-conscious

judgments that people make about other people and themselves. Measures of these automatic/implicit/non-conscious mental processes increased exponentially as a result of their groundbreaking work. Readers unfamiliar with their research are offered a number of different tests where they can assess their own hidden biases. I suspect many readers will be surprised, intrigued, and entertained by these assessment devices. They add a new dimension to understanding the subtleties of how one can be vehement about liberal egalitarian values but still hold non-conscious preferences for young white heterosexual men.The chapters are brief and the prose is fluid. There are virtually no redundancies in this small volume. Unlike most psychologists and behavioral economists, Banaji and Greenwald do not go into painstaking detail about the methodology of specific studies.

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