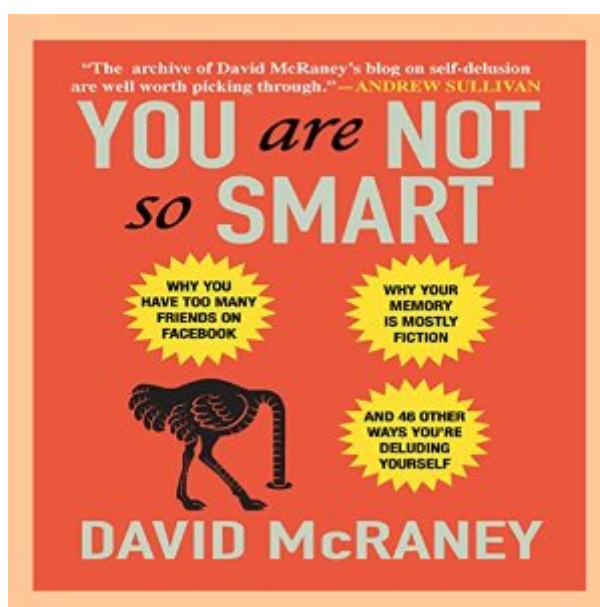


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# You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends On Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, And 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself



## Synopsis

An entertaining illumination of the stupid beliefs that make us feel wise. 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. Based on the popular blog of the same name, *You Are Not So Smart* collects more than 46 of the lies we tell ourselves everyday, including: Dunbar's Number - Humans evolved to live in bands of roughly 150 individuals, the brain cannot handle more than that number. If you have more than 150 Facebook friends, they are surely not all real friends. 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. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm a clinical psychologist interested in neuroscience, so much of this material was already familiar to me. Most of the ideas can be found scattered through other books like *The Winner's Curse*, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, *Predictably Irrational*, and others. I've read and admired all of those. I would gladly throw them all away if I could keep *You are Not So Smart*. The author understands the science and the facts, and conveys them quite clearly. I didn't find a single error. He writes

wonderfully. Crisp, clear, funny, casual, but not too casual. When I read it, I feel I'm chatting with a brilliant buddy. As I understand it, the author is not a professor or scientist. He's certainly smart enough to be one. In the 1970s and early 1980s, research psychologists generally believed that humans are more or less rational, most of the time. They believed that irrational thinking was caused primarily by disruptive emotions like anger or fear. We now know this is just plain wrong. During the last twenty years or so, research evidence against this view accumulated. Daniel Kahneman became the first psychologist to earn a Nobel Prize for describing the new understanding. Meanwhile, evolutionary psychology provided a new template for understanding the human mind. It evolved. We often see faces in clouds, but never see clouds in faces. We sometimes mistake a coiled garden hose or rope for a snake, but rarely mistake a snake for a garden hose. These tendencies, and many others like it, reflect our evolutionary history. The reproductive cost of jumping away from a coiled garden hose is very small. The reproductive cost of failing to recognize a dangerous snake is very high. You do not think rationally, nor does anyone else.

Not a five-star book, no. But so close! The chapters detailing scientific studies from neurologists and behavioral psychologists are, for this humanities guy, the meat of the book, and they make the book one I would recommend to anyone. A weakness: long about the middle of the book, we get several chapters rehearsing the logical fallacies of rhetoric (things like the ad hominem argument, or the bias for false authorities), and these are much less interesting, less compelling, and certainly less fresh than what comes before or after. Perhaps without them, the book would have seemed too short, but they nearly derailed the book for me. Another minor beef I had was that you can, at times, sense the author bending or massaging his data or his analysis to make subtle insinuations about whose politics are smart and whose politics are not. It becomes more overt near the end, and while I am certainly not outraged or offended that someone wants to suggest that smart politics tend to fall with one party and not the other, it wasn't the kind of move I tend to appreciate. (On the other hand, his interpretation of politics may flatter some readers, and they may like the book even better for that very reason... though wouldn't that itself be a cognitive bias?) Also, I think too often, to make his point, the author makes it seem as if a bias in one direction equals a kind of knee-jerk determinism to act a certain way under certain conditions. That is to say, if people tend to do something under certain test conditions, the author extrapolates that they will pretty much always act that way in the real world. I was often reminded of the notion in Quantum Theory that observation affects reality.

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