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50 Must-Read Psychology Books

Reading is the supreme “lifehack” — distilled knowledge that often took years to assemble can be consumed in just a few hours.

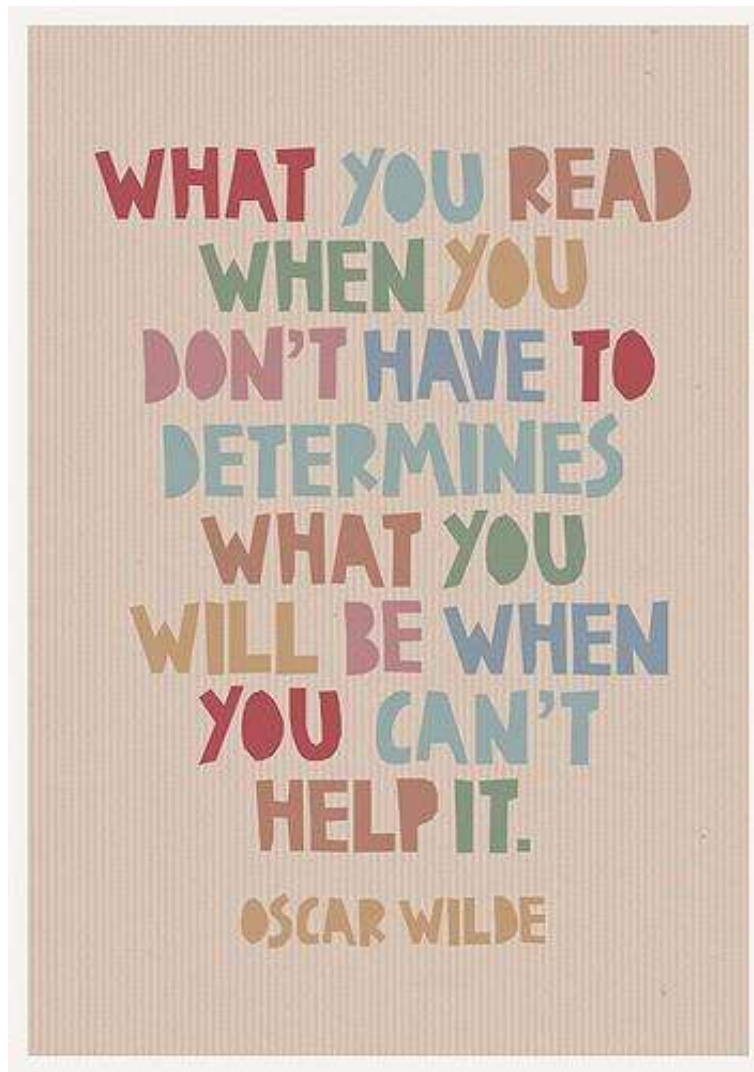
And the more you know about social psychology and human behavior, the better.

At [Help Scout](#) we have learning stipend ([here's why](#)) for our teammates so you can buy as many books as you need. You're probably not surprised to hear that I've built myself quite the collection of psychology books.

Lucky me. Because reading books lets you “jumpstart” your education by absorbing what researchers, professors, and authors spent years assembling.

I can't think of a single better way to empower yourself than that.





Note: *While all of the books below will deal with the human mind, not all of them are purely scientific. Some books deal on persuasion or look closely at social interaction. With that caveat, let's begin.*

1.) The Social Animal

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Social-Animal-Elliot-Aronson/dp/1429233419/>

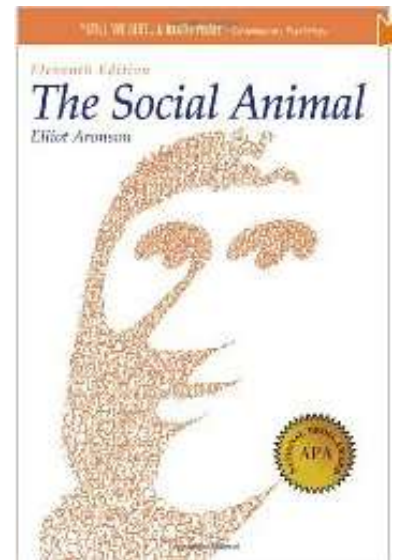
In my humble opinion, the greatest general overview of social psychology ever written.

This book seems to be in such high demand that the Amazon prices are

often outrageous.

The demand is warranted however, few books will give you as in-depth, interesting and just a generally well written overview of social psychology quite like Elliot Aronson's classic.

A must-read if you can obtain it, consider it the best presentation of "social psychology 101" ever.



2.) Influence: Science and Practice

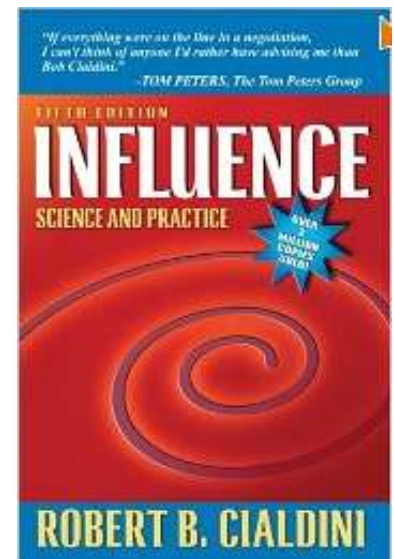
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Influence-Practice-Robert-B-Cialdini/dp/0205609996/>

This is considered *the* gospel on the psychology of persuasion.

Cialdini's now infamous work deserves the amount of praise it gets.

Not only is the book easy to follow with tons of excellent examples (explained in laymen terms), Cialdini also spends the time to go into *why* these studies played out as they did.

Lastly, he addresses how to defend yourself from persuasion techniques that wish to harm you rather than ethically convince you (scammers, people selling faulty products knowingly, disingenuous attempt to persuade, etc.)



A true classic.

3.) Yes! (50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive)

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Yes-Scientifically-Proven-Ways-Persuasive/dp/1416576142/>

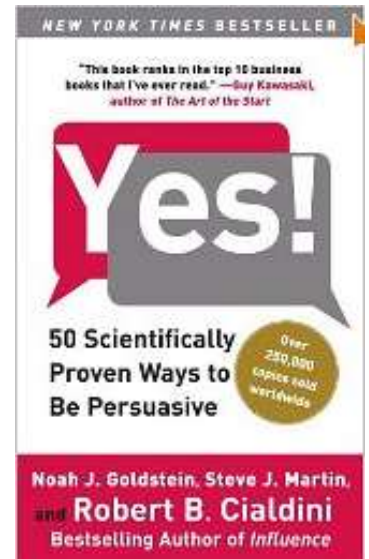
Don't get me wrong, I really enjoyed this book, but just be forewarned that this should be used as a *compliment* to the other “meatier” entries on this list.

While the book is informative, the studies are grazed over pretty quickly, not much depth is given to any individual study.

It does make for a great “rabbit hole” read.

This is where you find out about a study, look up more about it, find more related studies, and “go down the rabbit hole” searching for new material.

A great starting point to getting your feet wet in a variety of persuasion related studies.



4.) Thinking, Fast and Slow

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Thinking-Fast-Slow-Daniel-Kahneman/dp/0374275637>

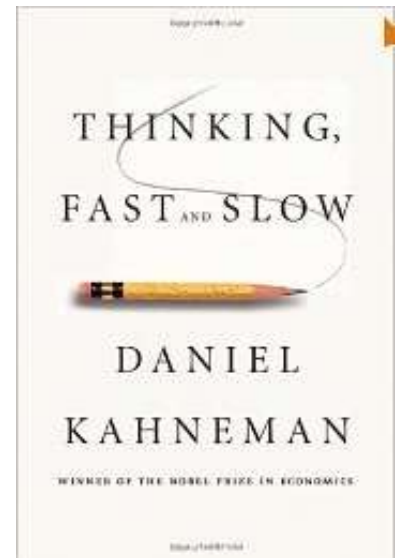
Without a shadow of a doubt, one of my all time favorites.

Trying to go over what this book digs into would take me a whole post in itself, so allow me to just gush...

This book is damn awesome, read it!

Seriously though, for behavioral research, there are few books that touch the scope and breadth that Dan Kahneman dives into with this masterpiece

Mr. Kahneman holds a Nobel Prize in economics as well, and this aspect shines through in the book's many examples.

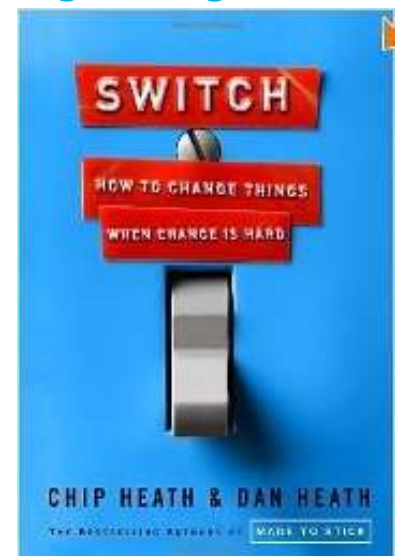


5.) Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Switch-Change-Things-When-Hard/dp/0385528752/>

The Heath brothers (Dan Heath and Chip Heath) put out some of my favorite material on the subject of persuasion (more on that later).

Their book *Switch* aims to answer the question: “Why is it so hard to make lasting changes in our companies, in our communities, and in our own lives?”



Specifically, why is it so hard to change things that have become commonplace?

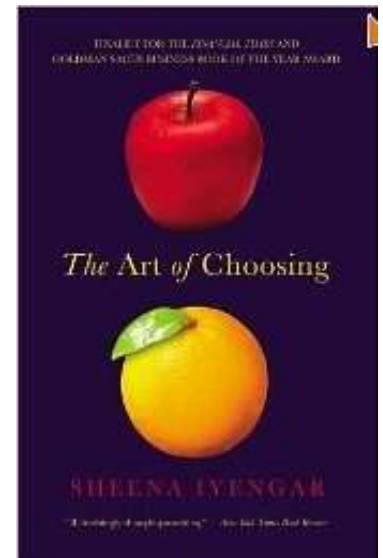
The book is structured very well (as is their other entry on this list) and incredibly readable; you can tell that a lot of effort was put into breaking the book down into appropriate sections and making it easy to pick up by anyone.

6.) The Art of Choosing

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Choosing-Sheena-Iyengar/dp/Boo85RZDMK/>

If you are a believer in the expression “less is more”, I have to ask... *why have you not read this book yet!*

This is the quintessential read on how human beings make choices and what external influences affect those choices.



I first came across Sheena Iyengar’s work through finding out about her infamous “jam study” through an online publication.

Needless to say, I was in love (call me! ;)) and had to pick up her book.

It’s a fantastic read and very enjoyable all the way through, I happen to consider Sheena a great writer as well as a great researcher.

7.) Priceless

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Priceless-Myth-Fair-Value-Advantage/dp/0809078813>

Human beings have zero understanding of intrinsic value.

We are heavily influenced by contextual clues when we examine things like “price” and “cost.”

This has been shown via a **number of studies**, and this book offers a superb analysis of the literature.

You’ll be very surprised to see just how easily marketing departments can influence our perception of things with subtle tweaks to pricing (making this an important read for every consumer... aka everyone!)



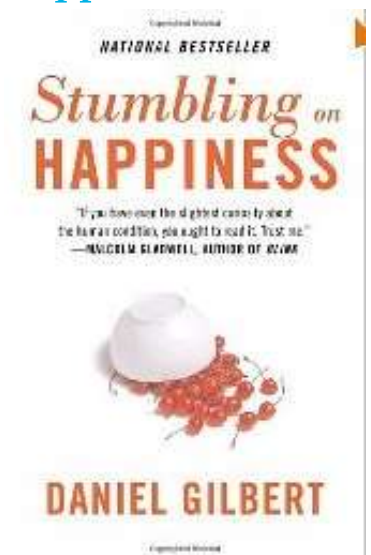
8.) Stumbling on Happiness

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Stumbling-Happiness-Daniel-Gilbert/dp/1400077427/>

Despite the title of this book, this isn’t a “self-help” book by any means.

It is more concerned with the process in the mind than on ways you can “be your best self!”

One commentator pointed out a quote that fits the book well: “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself – and you are the easiest person to fool.”



It's a fitting quote because the entire book reveals how your brain is essentially hard-wired into doing the exact opposite!

Fortunately, Gilbert's incorporation of research and insightful anecdotes make this one of the most enjoyable (and least "hoo-rah") positive psychology books out there.

9.) Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Drive-Surprising-Truth-About-Motivates/dp/1594484805/>

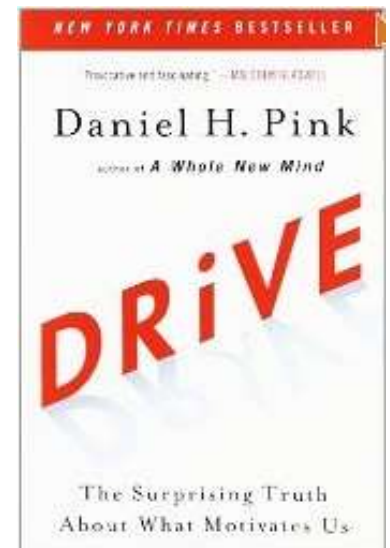
Again, a book that may seem like self-help, but really isn't.

Drive spends a majority of it's time focusing on what gets us motivated in the workplace.

It examines the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that allow us to keep pushing, and questions which methods of utilizing both (with intrinsic being far more important) are the most effective for both employees and employers.

The book is a really important read, and I love how Pink tackles the subject, but I couldn't help but agree with the highest critical review: the book has some padding.

If you don't mind a few sections going on a bit longer than they should though, this book is a must read.

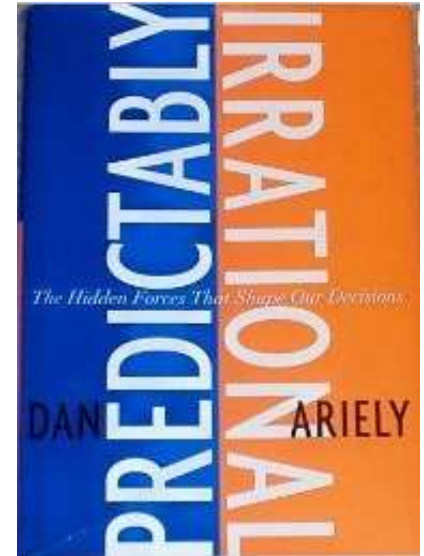


10.) Predictably Irrational

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Predictably-Irrational-Hidden-Forces-Decisions/dp/006135323X>

I highly enjoy Dan Ariely's work, but boy is this book disheartening!

Few books will make you question your own decisions quite like this one; Ariely shows how seemingly mundane or meaningless changes can greatly impact our behavior when we don't realize what's going on (which is a majority of the time, heh).



As a sample, check out his famous [pricing study](#) on the Economist, you'll see how small changes can really play with our perception of things.

I would put this book squarely on the “understanding your brain” spectrum of our post title, but this book also has some fantastic insights on persuading *others* if you closely examine the given examples.

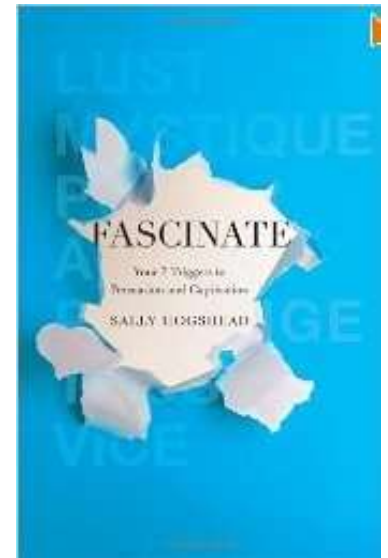
11.) Fascinate: Your 7 Triggers to Persuasion and Captivation

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Fascinate-Your-Triggers-Persuasion-Captivation/dp/0061714704>

I'll avoid the entirely too awful pun of calling this book “fascinating”, but I will say that it is an *enchanting* read.

I have two main comments on Sally's writing: the first is a slight critique, in that the book often tries to take more established ideas and make them sound entirely new.

The second is full of praise: it's hard to title a book with the word "Fascinate" if it's not a page-turner, and Sally's writing will definitely hook you until the end.



She also leaves readers with an *actual gameplan* when ideas are brought up, which I loved.

I enjoyed Sally's speaking and picked this book up when someone recommended to me, and now I'm recommending it to you because it's an insightful look at persuasion.

12.) Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Made-Stick-Ideas-Survive-Others/dp/1400064287/>

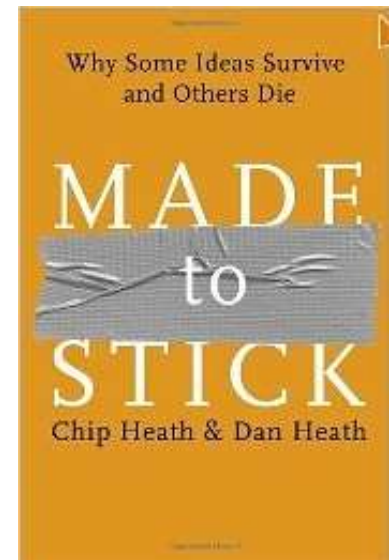
Definitely one of my favorite marketing books ever written (Heath Brothers again, no surprise here!), but it's not something that can only be enjoyed by marketers (as I noted in the intro).

A quote from Mark Twain is included in the book's description: "A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on", and the authors offer an explanation as to *why* these ideas can stay with

us for so long.

I feel like we all find ourselves asking a similar question at times, as to why something caught on so quickly while something else (that may have been superior) faded away.

Diving a little deeper than the answer of “better marketing”, this book aims to address (and largely succeeds) the 6 ways certain ideas just stay with us while others slip away.

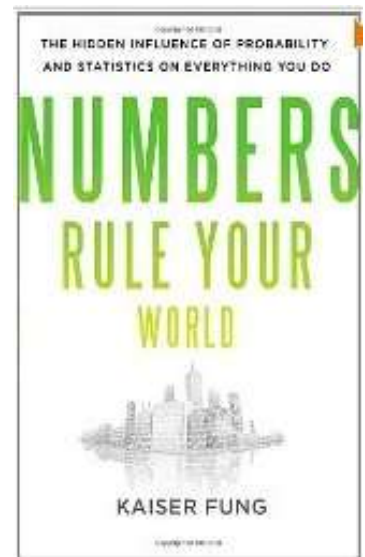


13.) Numbers Rule Your World: The Hidden Influence of Probabilities and Statistics on Everything You Do

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Numbers-Rule-Your-World-Probabilities/dp/0071626530>

This book is probably the most unique of all of the books on this list.

I certainly wouldn't call it a book about persuading others, but it does address what *could have* been an incredibly boring topic for some readers (the application of statistics and how they affect you) and turned it into a really easy read.



I approached this book expecting to slowly crawl through it, but there are a ton of great examples and Fung does a truly fantastic job of using

stories to get his points across.

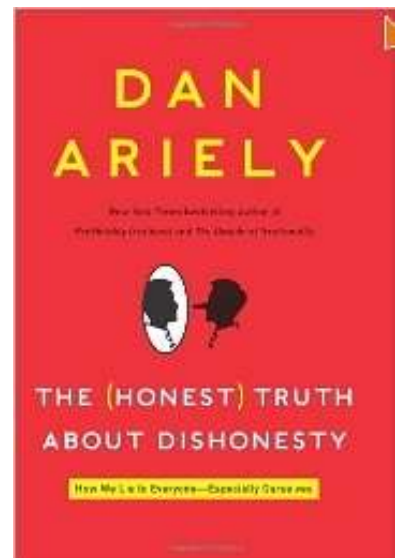
Whether you're a "numbers guy" (or gal) or just want to take a laymen's look at statistics and their involvement in the current affairs of the world around you, you'll enjoy this book thoroughly.

14.) The Honest Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone (Especially Ourselves)

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Honest-Truth-About-Dishonesty-Everyone—Especially/dp/0062183591/>

In case it hasn't been made apparent so far (look 4 books up), I'm a big fan of Dan Ariely's work!

There are some bold claims in this book (that, perhaps, honesty is but a choice between benefit from cheating and our psychological motivation), but Ariely makes some compelling arguments to back up each point addressed.



As with *Predictably Irrational*, you'll come away with a lot of questions, but in a good way: you'll begin to re-think things that were formerly "obvious" in the context of what you just learned from Ariely.

Many people (myself included) have commented on how powerful the last two chapters are in particular: is there ever a context where cheating becomes socially acceptable?

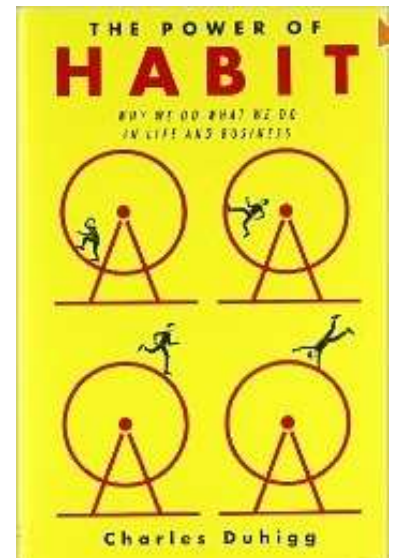
Ariely forces you to ask these and other meaningful questions, and the result is a very powerful message with some great research & examples to comb through.

15.) The Power of Habit (Why We Do What We Do)

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Power-Habit-What-Life-Business/dp/1400069289>

This book came highly recommended, and I enjoyed it, but I have some thoughts...

While the author does a **great** job of splitting up habits into appropriate sub-groups (habits of individuals, habits of successful organizations, habits of societies) and in showing how habits actually operate in the brain there is one shortcoming...



The book doesn't show you how to break any habits!

Maybe my expectations were set for a different kind of book, but I found the lack of this aspect being addressed as a bit un-fulfilling.

All that said, the book is still a very easy read and a great look on how habits manifest in the brain.

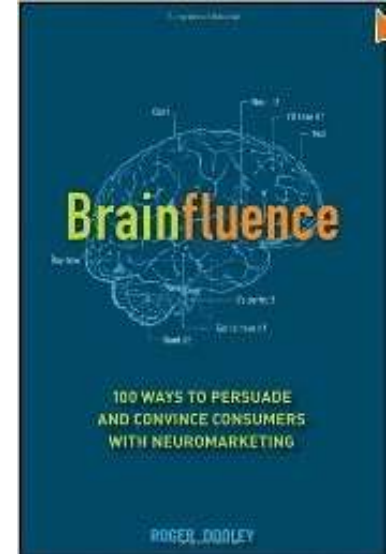
16.) Brainfluence: 100 Ways to

Persuade and Convince

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Brainfluence-Persuade-Convince-Consumers-Neuromarketing/dp/1118113365>

This is another book that focuses more on serving up “bite-sized” analysis of multiple studies rather than diving deeply into a few.

As such, it serves as a *fantastic* jumping-off point and one of those “rabbit hole” books that I mentioned above: you’ll find yourself following up on multiple experiments in order to learn more.



One fantastic thing that Roger Dooley (see his very enjoyable blog [on Forbes](#)) has done is to break these studies up into separate categories (something that was failed at in the Yes! book above).

With sections like ‘Brainfluence Copywriting’ and ‘Brainfluence Branding’, you can tell what sort of studies you are about to get into.

In some instances, I found the sources to be somewhat lacking: links to other books instead of the actual studies, for instance (but don’t let that stop you from picking up what is an otherwise great read).

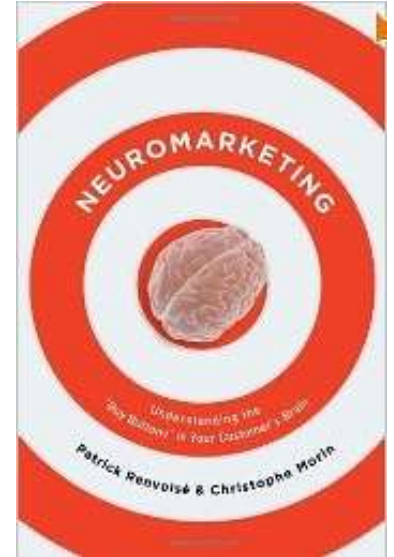
17.) Neuromarketing: Understanding the Buy Buttons in Your Customer’s Brain

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Neuromarketing-Understanding-Buttons-Customers-Brain/dp/078522680X>

This is, frankly, one of the best beginner books for those interesting in neuromarketing or “brainy marketing” as it is so affectionately referred to.

This means two things:

1. The book is a very easy read; studies are not cited in-depth and the content can be easily consumed
2. If you're **not** new to this space, this book can seem a little simplistic



For instance, you could read my post on [how to create viral content](#) and cover a whole section of this book on “arousing emotions from buyers” in a single blog post, but if you’ve never encountered this stuff before, this book (along with *Influence*, #2 on the list) are must-haves for beginners.

Those who have read a few of these books already can probably give this a pass.

18.) The Branded Mind

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Branded-Mind-Neuroscience-Really/dp/074946125X/>

This book is *not* an easy read. That being said, it is a rewarding read if you can make it through.

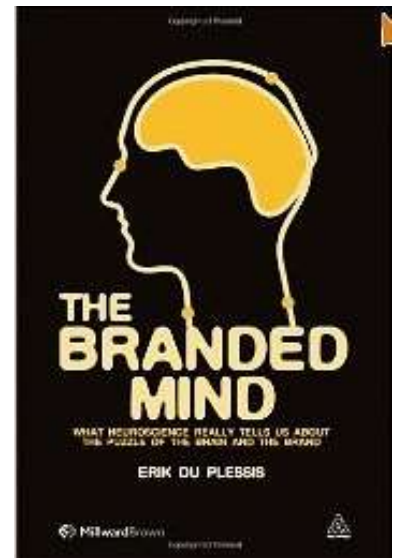
In essence, Du Plessis makes the argument that emotions are not in

conflict with rational behavior, and that they in fact can cause rational behavior.

As mentioned though, this books requires some patience: if you love pop-psy only, be prepared for a challenge, this book reads more like a college textbook than a “I’ll kill 5 minutes by reading this”.

I struggles with the book a bit more than usual until I came across [this fantastic review](#) which recommends a revised reading order.

Bottom line: if you’re willing to put in the effort, you’ll get a lot out of this book, this is definitely one of the most compelling & challenging books on the list.

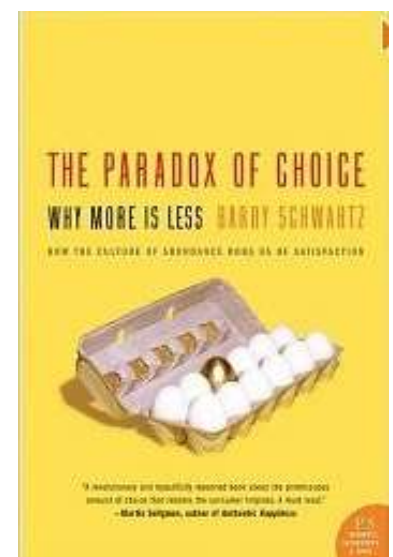


19.) The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Paradox-Choice-More-Less/dp/0060005696/>

I really enjoyed this book, it makes you think a lot about, well... the paradox of choice: is having a ton of options at your disposal good for the brain?

Schwartz argues that decision-making was a lot simpler years ago, and while the majority of the book focuses on a “buying angle” (see things like buyer’s remorse and others which are closely



related to choice), the lessons here can be carried to many of life's aspects.

An abundance of choices has a tendency to trick our brain into thinking a lot of choice is a good thing, when that is not necessarily the case.

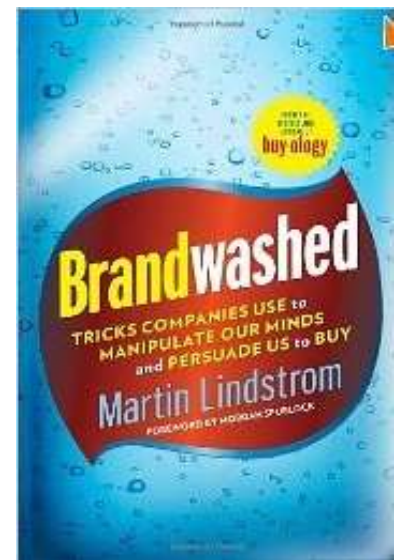
While Schwartz is very much an academic, the book reads quite fluidly and won't trip you up with an abundance of scientific terms, although each point made is backed up quite eloquently.

20.) Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Brandwashed-Tricks-Companies-Manipulate-Persuade/dp/0385531737/>

This is one of those amazing crosses between understanding marketing to utilize it for your entrepreneurial endeavors **or** to simply understand how brands try to persuade you.

Some of the examples aren't so mind-blowing (groceries using crates to make fruit seem "farm-fresh") but others are really interesting.



I wish Lindstrom would have done a bit more analysis on each study, as he seems to just take each at face value.

That being said, the studies cited are really interesting and very revealing in how easy it is for marketers to trick us.

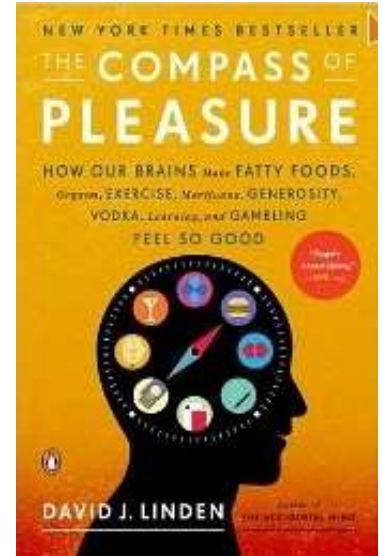
21.) The Compass of Pleasure

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Compass-Pleasure-Exercise-Marijuana-Generosity/dp/0143120751/>

The subtitle of this book is just too damn good...

How Our Brains Make Fatty Foods, Orgasm, Exercise, Marijuana, Generosity, Vodka, Learning, and Gambling Feel So Good

Ha!



If you've ever wanted to know why cigarettes are one of the most addictive substances of all time or how dopamine can turn your brain into a **slave** for pleasure, this is the book for you.

I would forwarn that this isn't really a book to help addiction, but for understanding the nature of addiction and the processes in the brain.

22.) The Buying Brain

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Buying-Brain-Secrets-Subconscious/dp/0470601779/>

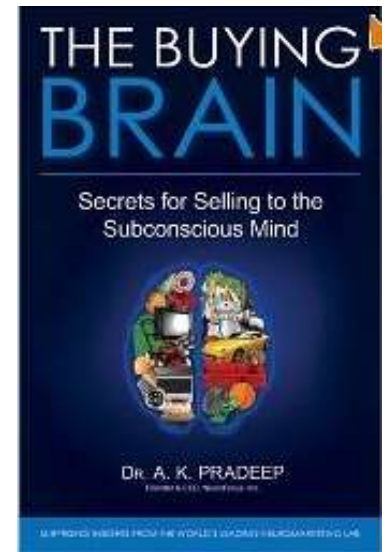
There is another book by Lindstrom (2 above) called *Buyology* that often comes highly recommended when discussing books of this ilk... but I would say that you should skip that book and get this one instead.

Pradeep creates a great overview of the emerging neuromarketing space

and does so with a lot of good concrete examples.

I enjoyed that specifically because many books have a problem of simply citing the research at hand: as a guy who regularly reads research papers, I appreciate the exposure to new research, but I could have just read it myself.

This book avoids this problem by giving “actionable” (even though I hate that word) steps for implementing.



23.) The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us

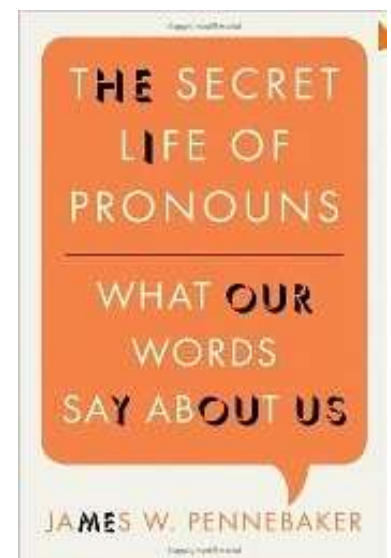
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Secret-Life-Pronouns-Words/dp/1608194809>

You all know that I’m very interested in the psychology of language and in particular, how [psychology plays a role in storytelling](#).

This books digs into how language can reveal a lot about a person.

Some archetypes that are focused on include gender, affluence, liars, sadness, introverts vs. extroverts, and a variety of others.

While the research in this book was excellent (and often collaborative), I



wanted more!

I felt like more examples could have been used in particular, but as for what's there, it's great.

24.) Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Mistakes-Were-Made-But-Not/dp/0151010986>

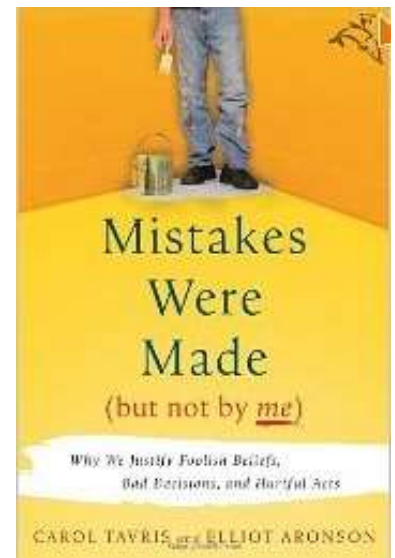
If you head waaaaay back up to #1 on this list, you'll see that I'm an Elliot Aronson groupie.

If I could define this book in one word though, it would be: **frightening**.

Even more so than Ariely's contributions, this book exposes how *everyone* is at risk of refusing to admit to their mistakes, even when the evidence is conclusive.

The research is accurate and cited appropriately, the book is still an easy, enjoyable read, and it's from the guy who wrote my favorite social psych book of all time (with a talented co-author)...

What's not to love! 😊

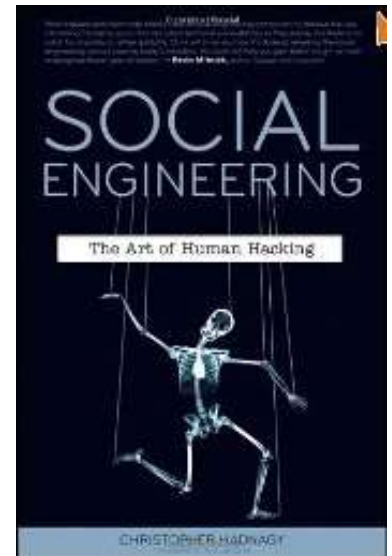


25.) Social Engineer: The Art of Human Hacking

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Social-Engineering-The-Human-Hacking/dp/0470639539>

While this book specifically addresses [social engineering](#) (surprise), there are many psychological aspects that turn this into a very intriguing read on influence.

The book definitely has a very... antagonistic approach, but that's because of the subject matter (people are referred to as “victims” and the activities are defined as “exploits” and “attacks”... because that's what they are).



It's kind of like watching those shows where a former thief shows the homeowners how easy it was to break into their house.

Except with this book, manipulation is the subject at hand.

26.) The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Lucifer-Effect-Understanding-Good-People/dp/0812974441/>

This book focuses on the findings from the legendary [Stanford prison experiment](#).

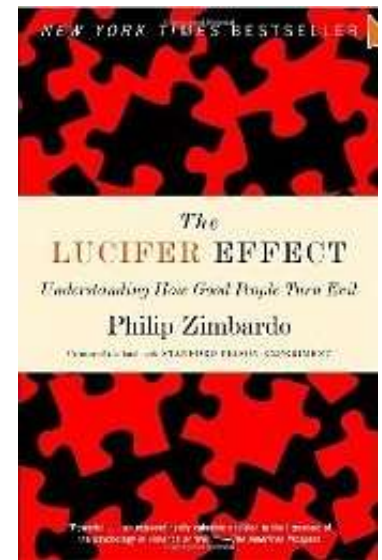
If that research has fascinated you in any way, you need to check this

book out; it essentially offers an “inside look” at much of the data from the study, including things like transcripts.

It's a compelling look at how even “normal” people fall into the roles of situations that many of us in the first world can hardly imagine happening (or would like to deny).

The last chapter is also quite intriguing for those familiar with the experiment: the author outlines a program intended to build resistance to mind-control strategies.

Scary stuff, but a necessary read.

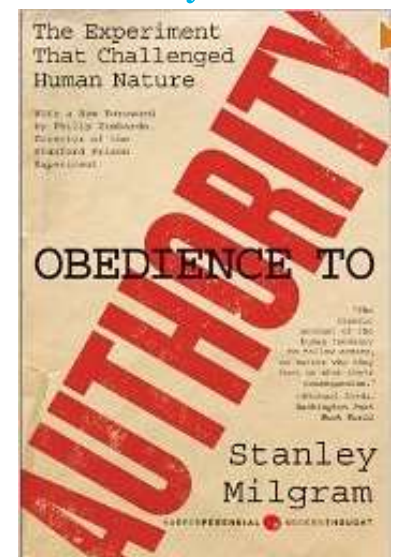


27.) Obedience to Authority

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Obedience-Authority-Experimental-Perennial-Classics/dp/006176521X/>

Another book that is a “tell all” about (yet another) fascinating, provocative, even *horrifying* psychology study known as the [Milgram experiment](#) (after the lead researcher).

If you are unfamiliar with the study, it was meant to test whether or not people would obey authority even when they were asked to do something that they knew was wrong (in this case, shocking other participants, or at least believing they were).



It details many accounts of participants showing signs of severe distress, yet continuing on with the applied shocks as actors in another room (pretending to be other subjects) screamed cries of pain.

This book is a necessary read in understanding the construct and inherent dangers in authority.

28.) The Optimism Bias

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Optimism-Bias-Irrationally-Positive/dp/0307378489>

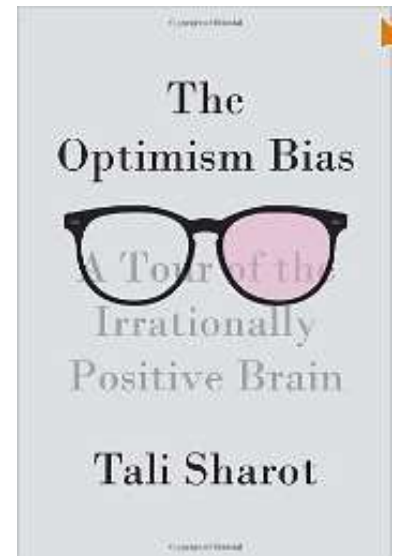
Tali Sharot's in-depth look is one of the better efforts to analyze the current research (along with Sharot's own research) on optimism, memory, and their connections to our emotions and actions.

My single gripe with the book is that it is too long. I wouldn't normally make a statement like this, but what I mean is that certain parts of the book feel a bit wordy, although given the topic and the tendency to pick apart certain aspects of research, it's understandable.

I still feel like the content could have been more concise, but as for what's there, it's great.

This is no pop-psy self-help book, this takes a look at some incredible research from a leading expert.

Definitely worth picking up if you're interested in neuroscience and studies on memory.

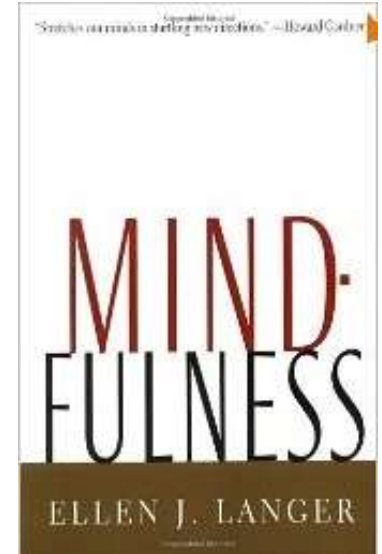


29.) Mindfulness

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Mindfulness-Merloyd-Lawrence-Allen-Langer/dp/0201523418/>

Harvard Professor (and author) Ellen Langer would assert that “robotic” behavior (mindless) can lead to a lot of pain in life.

I would agree, and the fact that so many other books on this list show just how susceptible we are to that sort of behavior, I’d say it’s a problem worth worrying about.



The aim of this book is therefore to be more “mindful” of our actions and to notice when automatic behavior begins to take over.

Again though, as a few disappointed reviewers have noted (read the description, sheesh...), this is NOT a self-help book, the focus is more on the process rather than a “hoo rah, change your life” kind of attitude.

Not that books like that are wrong in anyway, it’s just not what this is.

30.) Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Sway-Irresistible-Pull-Irrational-Behavior/dp/0385524382/>

While I did really enjoy this book, there is certainly some merit to the top

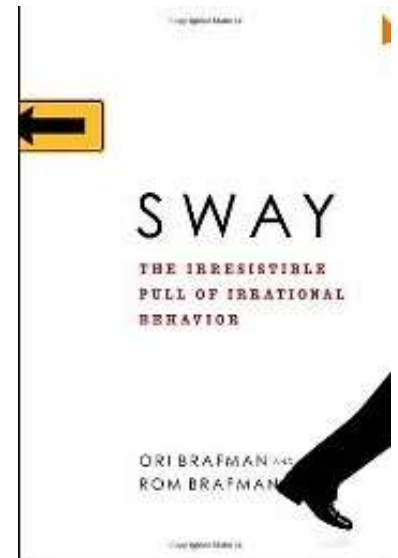
critical review on Amazon: “This book is a rehash of other, better books.”

That’s not to say that Sway isn’t an enjoyable read, it’s that it has predecessors that dive into concepts more deeply.

One of these is *Influence* (#2 on this list for a reason! :)), so at the very least, the book is in good company in terms of the things it talks about, it just did so much later and from a bite-sized perspective.

Again though, this book can serve as a fantastic “rabbit-hole” read that helps you find a TON of other great studies to check out.

The content is also quality stuff and will be new to *you* if you aren’t an avid reader of psychology books, so don’t be afraid to give this one a go.

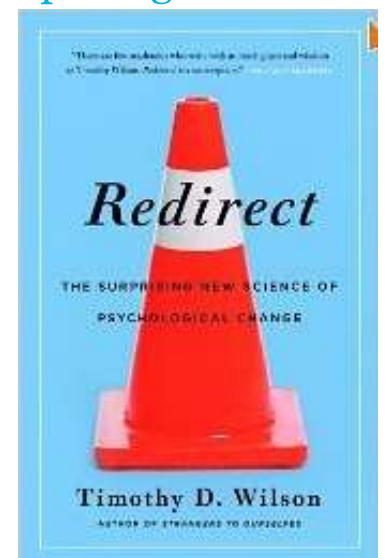


31.) Redirect

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Redirect-Surprising-Science-Psychological-Change/dp/0316051888>

Wilson’s focus on this book can be summed up in two large, overarching points (IMO):

1. Using the process of “story editing” to change our perception
2. That what is true of culture is also true of **individuals**



Again (noticing a trend here?), this book seeks to understand and to pass on knowledge, not to help you change your life.

(Although obtaining this knowledge would certainly help with that)

This book, being all about subtlety and subtle changes, does a good job in giving relevant examples that make somewhat opaque descriptions a lot easier to relate to.

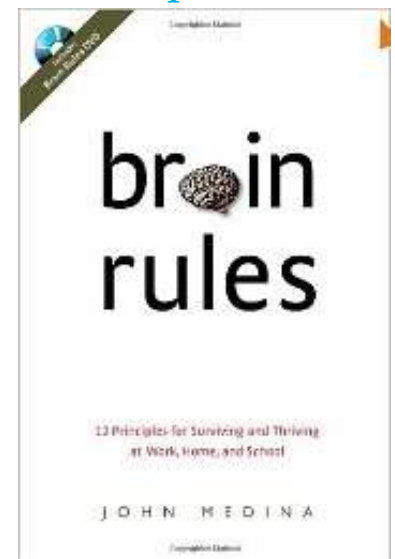
This is a very interesting book and one of few that strays into the positive psychology territory, definitely worth checking out.

32.) Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Brain-Rules-Principles-Surviving-Thriving/dp/0979777704>

I really liked one reviewer's stance on this book:
"It's like MythBusters for the brain!"

Throw misconceptions like *you can't teach an old dog new tricks* out of the window, because Medina does a great job of finding relevant research to put claims like that to bed.



Funnily enough (or perhaps not), this book often appears on **leadership** lists, despite not being an outright leadership or management book.

I'd say that its main two topics seem to hinge on productivity and

relationship management, so it is easy to see why a business and leadership oriented crowd would enjoy this book.

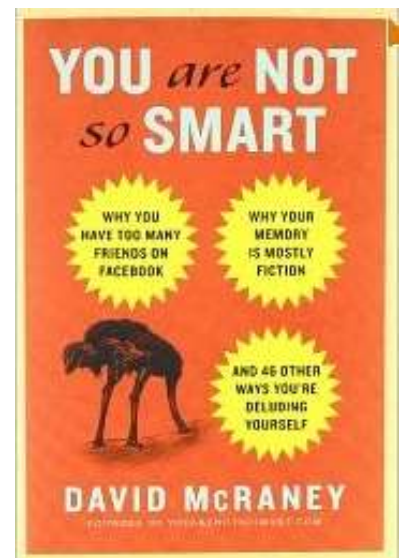
For everyone else, it is a very easy read and very much worth checking out.

33.) You Are Not So Smart

But the book: <http://www.amazon.com/You-Are-Not-So-Smart/dp/1592406599>

Call it pop-psy all you want, this is one of the funnest books on this list!

Largely dealing with fallacies in our minds that happen to make us look very stupid when they're in action, McRaney takes topics that are largely known by those with an interest in the field (like the [Dunning-Kruger effect](#)) and creates an entertaining read on otherwise well-covered studies.



The thing is, the presentation makes this book worthwhile even if you have already heard of a few of these, and McRaney is a great writer (his blog was featured on [my big list o' blogs](#) that are awesome and not about marketing).

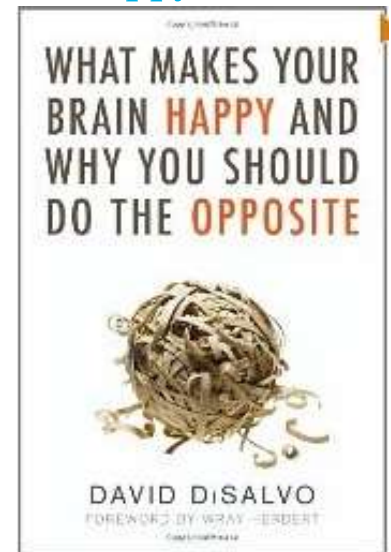
If you're interested in how your brain is sabotaging you and in finding out more about the delusions we all hold, this book is the perfect place to start.

34.) What Makes Your Brain Happy (and Why You Should Do the Opposite)

Buy the book: [http://www.amazon.com/Makes-Brain-Happy-Should-
Opposite/dp/1616144831/](http://www.amazon.com/Makes-Brain-Happy-Should-Opposite/dp/1616144831/)

Take this as a more serious version of the book above (see, I'm getting better at grouping!).

Largely concerned with cognition and specifically with cognitive biases, David DiSalvo makes this book stand out in quite a few ways.



The research isn't rehashed like many books you'll find in this space. Not only that, there are tactics and resource materials included in the book.

My only problem with these is that they are clumped near the end instead of being sprinkled about the many great examples.

An overall exciting book with a lot to offer, I've read this one very recently and was happy that I did.

35.) Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain

Buy the book: [http://www.amazon.com/Incognito-The-Secret-Lives-
Brain/dp/0307389928/](http://www.amazon.com/Incognito-The-Secret-Lives-Brain/dp/0307389928/)

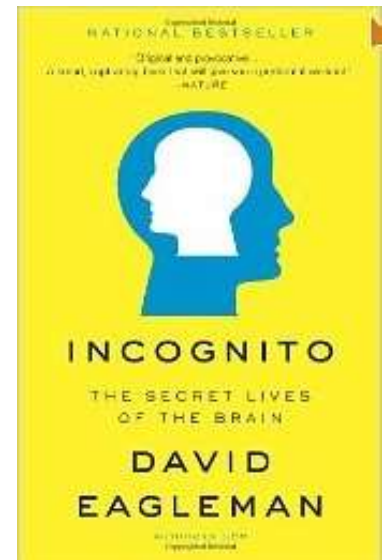
This book is all about the levels of consciousness in the brain, as as we've seen, you're brain isn't just the thing you *think* you control.

While the examples in this book are quite interesting, considering it is a “real” neuroscience book, I expected a bit more from the research.

That is, I felt there needed to be more complimentary research for certain positions (like Aronson is known for).

Despite that, Eagleman has put together a seriously fascinating list of studies that I will shamelessly steal and write about here! 😊

Seriously though, the writing is captivating, if nothing else, you'll learn how to write attention-grabbing headlines as Eagleman sends you page after page into highly interesting findings on our unconscious.



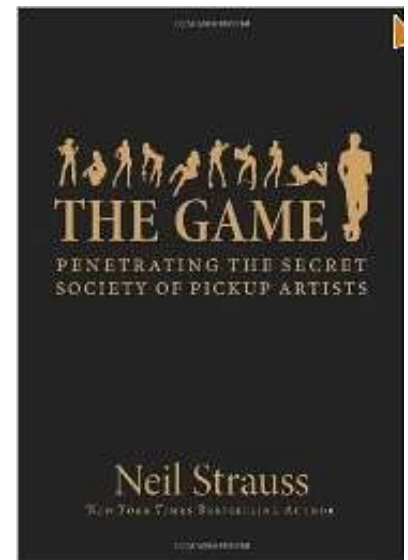
36.) The Game

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Game-Penetrating-Society-Artists/dp/0060554738/>

“Wait just a damn minute, what is *this* book doing here?!”

Allow me to address your concerns: while The Game is largely focused around the PUA (pick-up artist) community and on picking up women, the book and the community at large have surprising ties into psychological research (and a hefty serving of ‘broscience’ as well, don’t be fooled).

As an example, the pick-up artist technique of “escalating kino” (increased touching of someone you are interested in, beginning with their shoulder or arm) is backed by real science: oxytocin and dopamine play an integral role when touching or being touched, and even in business situations, a better handshake has a **noticeable effect!**



Again, this book is more on practice of some sound science in action; I'm not saying everything here is 100% backed by science, or that you should be courting your customers out on hot dates, but it's hard to deny this book's close ties with influence when it comes to a very specific spectrum.

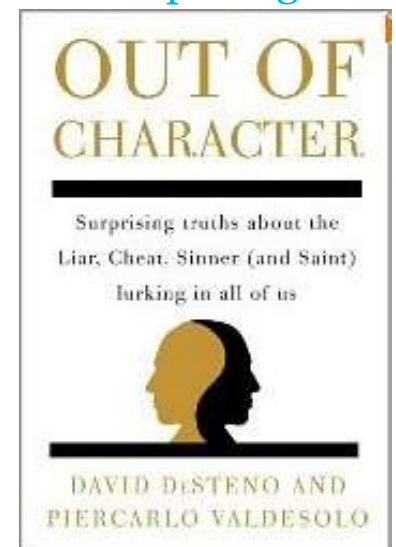
37.) Out of Character

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Out-Character-Surprising-Truths-Lurking/dp/0307717755/>

Just what exactly is happening when someone “breaks” character?

Is character even concrete, or is it more like a shade of gray?

I found this book really fascinating in it's singular focus on character and the psychology of how external events impact it.



Living a humdrum life often makes understanding these crazy acts hard

(not necessarily a *boring* life, but one less extreme by comparison), and this book takes a look at a lot of examples that show us that if we were in similar circumstances, we'd be very likely to act in a similar manner.

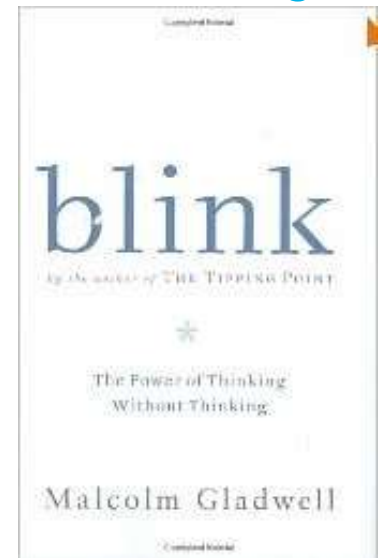
Great examples, great research, and a great focus make this a must-read.

38.) Blink

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Blink-The-Power-Thinking-Without/dp/0316172324>

As per my usual review style, I have two comments about this book (good and bad).

The good is that the studies presented are interesting, and Gladwell does a superb job of showcasing how people are able to develop a “sense” about things; it becomes one of the more interesting books on the unconscious because of this.



The problem with the book is apparent though: it's been pointed out by many others. This book seems like a collection of short stories, and not a unified idea.

That's fine for books like “75 Ways to blah”, it's an acceptable writing structure, but this book isn't about that, and when it comes to this cohesion, it falls flat.

Putting that aside, the different sections are far too interesting to pass up for this general lack of unity.

39.) The Person and the Situation

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Person-Situation-Perspectives-Psychology/dp/1905177445/>

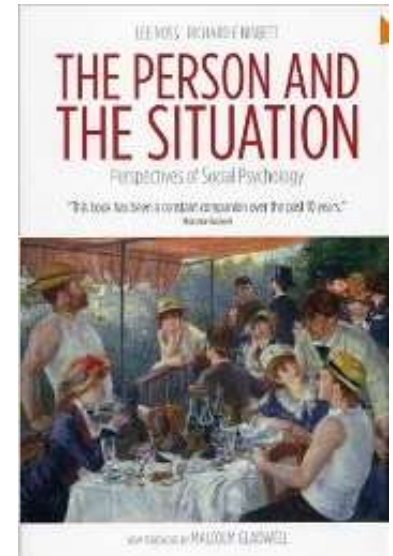
This book is very straightforward, but I like that about it!

It's obviously about situational influence and the effects on our decision making process.

That being said, the authors (Gladwell is one) do a great job in demonstrating the many types of faulty logic that we are prone to in a variety of environments.

This book almost reads like one of those great textbooks that you had in college: the one's that you actually enjoyed, even though they were supposed to be academic.

I would classify this as an introductory book, however, so keep that in mind if you are very familiar with the field.



40.) The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Psychology-Attitude-Change-Social-Influence/dp/0070728771/>

Zimbardo is back!

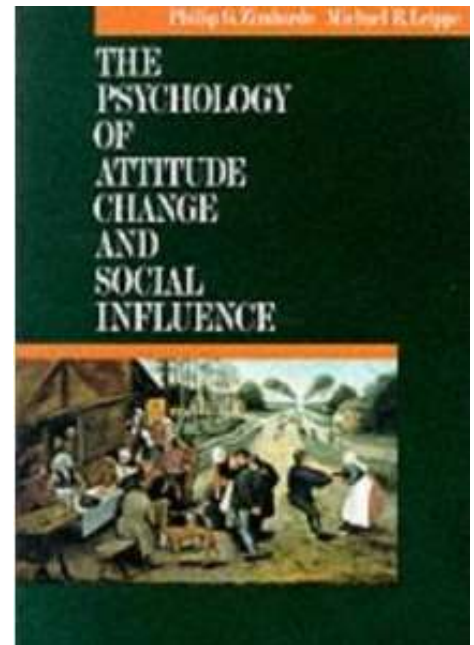
If I could sum up this book in a single phrase, I would call it a “more academic *Influence*”.

What I mean is that the book takes a very scholarly approach to the psychology of influence, but is perhaps a little bit less practical than Cialdini’s work.

For a true academic understanding of persuasion though, this book is fantastic.

It came highly recommended from a former professor of mine, and I’m glad I picked it up.

If you enjoyed the former recommendation at all (the one that covers Zimbardo’s prison experiment), you will need to pick this up.

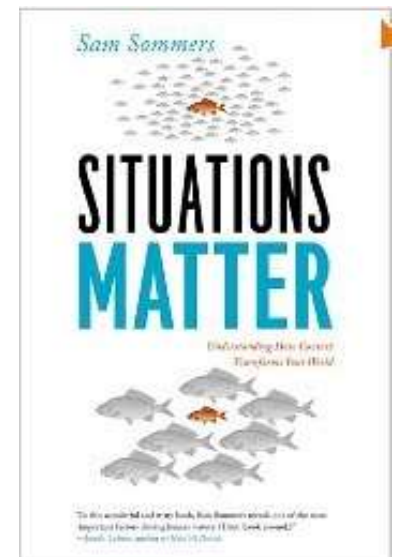


41.) Situations Matter

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Situations-Matter-Understanding-Context-Transforms/dp/1594488185>

I really enjoyed the writing style of this book.

Considering my true role at this blog is to take interesting psychology and neuroscience research and turn it into actionable, digestible posts for readers, I can appreciate when an author has a fun writing style to keep things engaging (I wish I wrote like this!).



That being said, it's not for everyone. The research, however, is enjoyable by academic or laymen readers alike in my humble opinion.

I'd sum the subject matter of being about the psychology of "context", the implications are pretty powerful (for instance, "Who we love is more explained by geography, familiarity and state of mind than we realize.")

One of those books that has a knack for getting your brain to ask intriguing questions... about itself!

42.) The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works

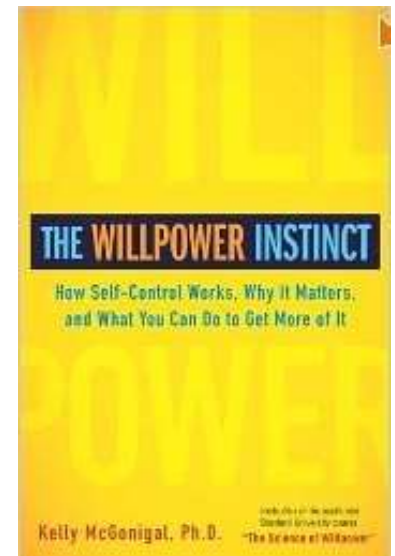
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Willpower-Instinct-Self-Control-Matters/dp/1583334386/>

This actually is a book that falls squarely into positive psychology, but it is, bar none, one of the best out there.

Self-control & work ethic go hand-in-hand in my opinion: many people WANT to work hard, but it's self-control that prevents them from doing so (and let's be frank here, everybody suffers from a lack of self-control from time to time).

If you are interested in applying psychology to improve yourself and your mind, this is the book for you.

If not, you'll still walk away with a great understanding of how self-



control works in our minds.

This book is practical, the science is sound, and the author (McGonigal) is highly recognized: I have no hesitation recommending this one.

43.) Beyond Culture

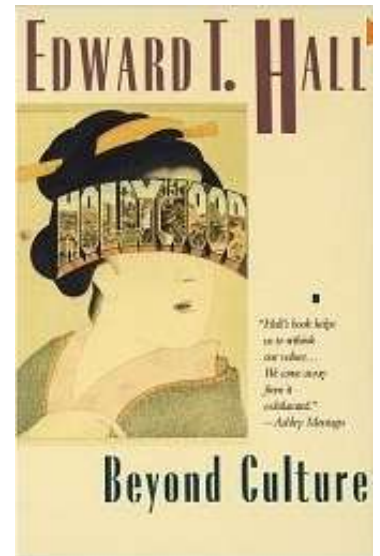
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Culture-Edward-T-Hall/dp/0385124740/>

And on the other side of town... we have this book.

This book is almost the opposite: it's not actionable in any way (that I can see), but the understanding provided by it is enormously important.

I have a lot of praise for this book in that specific regard, in the same way that I once overheard someone talking about *Guns, Germs and Steel* saying: "If you read that book, you'll find it hard to be racist."

Funny, but it makes a compelling point: we aren't often educated on understanding others, and while *GG&S* looks at human evolution and human history, this book is largely concerned with cross-cultural human psyche and its implications on our interactions.

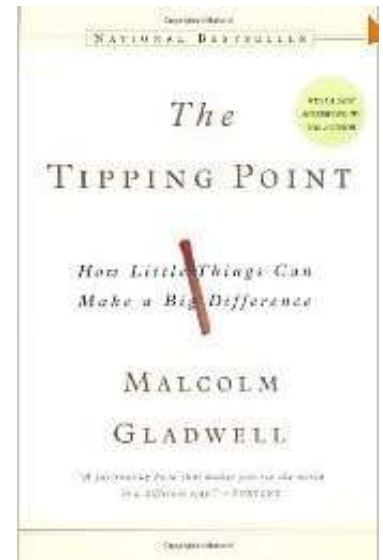


44.) The Tipping Point

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Tipping-Point-Little-Difference/dp/0316346624>

As with much of Gladwell's work, I found this really interesting, but maybe a bit short of the hype surrounding it (there was a *ton* of hype, so it's hard to approach this book with neutral anticipation).

Gladwell would suppose that there are 3 types of gifted people who are essential to "sticky" ideas: Connectors, Mavens and Salespeople.



While all of the information is great on explaining *that* there are critical aspects of things that become "epidemics" or "go viral", he doesn't really get into **how** that happens, just that it does.

Now, it's not like I was looking for a "how to create a viral campaign" from this book, but the examples are lacking in that area.

Still, a highly important book, and it references [the monkey sphere](#), so I needed to include it. 😊

45.) The 48 Laws of Power

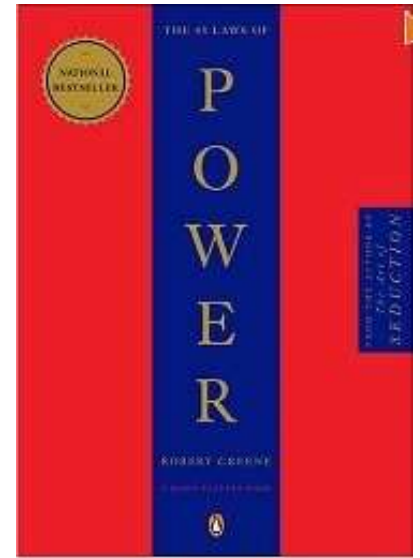
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Laws-Power-Robert-Greene/dp/0140280197>

I can't wait to rile up people with this choice!

This book is a great example of fantastic book marketing: the ideas in this book are sound, and as mentioned, although it is one of the books on this list that aren't particularly "sciencey", the ideas discussed are often backed by REAL research elsewhere.

What the book does well in it's marketing is that it creates this ideal that these are some secret laws for the inner Machiavelli in us all (despite that The Prince was written **as satire**).

The funny thing is, some of the ideas are **not** all that devious, it's just smart interpersonal relationship & persuasion advice.



I've heard that rapper's love this book, it's like the book version of Scarface... yet as I mentioned, despite it's fantastic marketing and seemingly cynical nature, it's just really good advice on interacting with people.

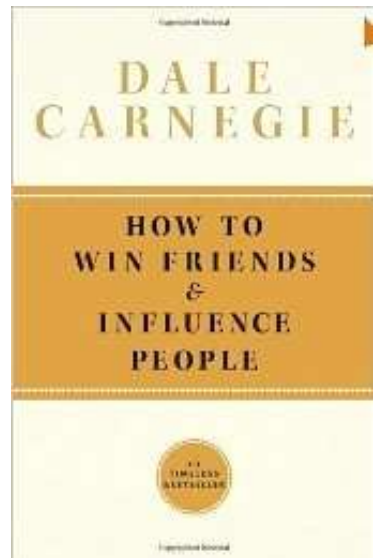
I would warn that you shouldn't let the sometimes negative messages detract your from enjoying this (don't take an "exploitative" view of persuading people).

46.) How to Win Friends and Influence People

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/How-Win-Friends-Influence-People/dp/1439167346/>

With the reach that this book has had in it's long lifetime, it's unlikely that you've never encountered it before.

In order to mix things up a bit (and since this book is so well known), I thought I might offer some fantastic insights from one of my favorite Amazon reviews **of all time**:



The advice is largely sound, but I think the reader should keep in mind the context within which this book was written... [it was] intended primarily as a companion book to Dale Carnegie's classes on how to be a good salesman.

...these techniques work very well in the context of sales and public relations, i.e., in relationships that are not expected to be deep and/or long-lasting.

What I found most interesting was that the last chapter... was to describe those individuals with whom none of Dale Carnegie's techniques work. In this unpublished chapter, Carnegie wrote that there were some people with whom it was impossible to get along. You either needed to divorce such people, "knock them down," or sue them in court.

Why is that chapter absent from this book, you ask? Well, Dale Carnegie was in the middle of writing this chapter when he was offered a trip to Europe, and rather than complete this last chapter he decided to take the trip. The uncompleted book was sent off to publishers, and Carnegie shipped off to Europe.

Interesting stuff to consider before you dig in!

47.) Strangers to Ourselves

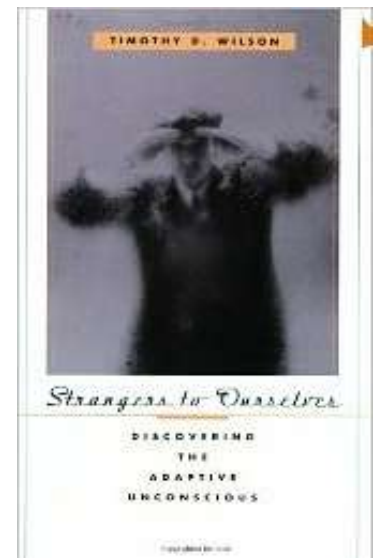
Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Strangers-Ourselves->

[Discovering-Adaptive-Unconscious/dp/0674013824/](http://www.amazon.com/Discovering-Adaptive-Unconscious/dp/0674013824/)

Your conscious mind isn't always in control.

If many of these books on the brain teach you anything, it's probably this.

This book is one of the biggest jolts in this category of understanding that concept; it's definitely a psychology book, but the questions it brings up almost make it feel like the book was written for philosophy majors.



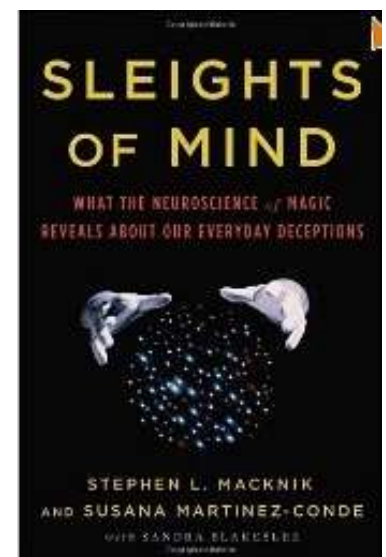
While it's an “easy read”, it's certainly challenging to the mind, I didn't find the research as compelling as some other similar books, but the questions raised by Wilson are by far some of my favorites.

48.) Sleights of Mind

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Sleights-Mind-Neuroscience-Everyday-Deceptions/dp/0805092811/>

The main issue that this book tackles is more on *how* we are influenced, with the author taking a very specific look at the tricks of “magic” and some related neuroscience studies.

This book therefore reads like “The Psychology of Magic”, and if that sounds interesting to you, this is a must read.



As for practicality, I would say this book is another one of those books that is about understanding, and through this understanding there are some practical applications to be had.

All that being said, to me it was damn interesting, and it's one of the most unusual books on this list.

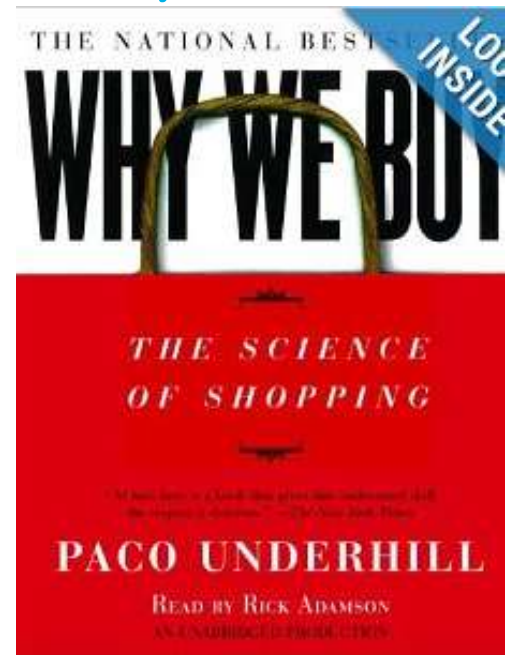
49.) Why We Buy

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Why-We-Buy-Science-Shopping/dp/o684849143/>

I'll agree with the many reviewers of this book that it ends... uneventfully, shall we say.

It gets very sales-y for the author's company, which was a huge letdown.

The rest of the book is a fun read. Be sure to verify claims by checking the actual studies, as this is definitely the 'fun' side of science.



Still, it's interesting to see some data on how people shop.

Some of the examples definitely left me scratching my head, especially in areas of business where I'm clueless, such as product placement in grocery stores.

50.) The Invisible Gorilla (How Our Intuitions Deceive Us)

Buy the book: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Invisible-Gorilla-Intuitions-Deceive/dp/0307459667/>

Before reading this book, watch this video and count how many times the players in the *white shirts* pass the basketball:

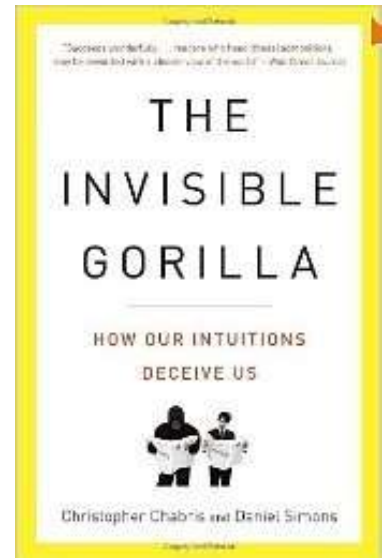
Go on, I'll wait...

...

...

...

(spacing done for the book's alignment to the right)



How many did you count?

...



That's the study that the book gets its name from, and it looks at how we often have massive illusions about our attention. Even if the study didn't "get you", you'll still enjoy the book, I promise! (If the study did get you, you'll love it even more).

Over To You...

First of all, thanks for stopping by and for reading my post! I hope you found this list of books useful.

A humble reminder: The list was compiled based off of a large scope (social psychology, persuasion, understanding one's mind), and it was also not limited to strictly scientific books so that it could be enjoyed by a wide variety of people (some pop-psych is obviously going to be prevalent in a list like this).

Other than that, feel free to recommend any other good social psychology books on your bookshelf!

If you're interested in some of the deeper stuff out there, feel free to shoot me an email, it mostly comes to me in the form of research papers (not full books), but I'm always glad to share.

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