

Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts

By Carol Tavis, Elliot Aronson

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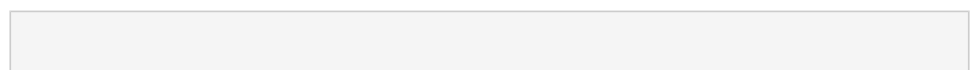
“Entertaining, illuminating and—when you recognize yourself in the stories it tells—mortifying.” —*Wall Street Journal*

“Every page sparkles with sharp insight and keen observation. Mistakes were made—but not in this book!” —Daniel Gilbert, author of *Stumbling on Happiness*

Why is it so hard to say “I made a mistake”—and really believe it?

When we make mistakes, cling to outdated attitudes, or mistreat other people, we must calm the cognitive dissonance that jars our feelings of self-worth. And so, unconsciously, we create fictions that absolve us of responsibility, restoring our belief that we are smart, moral, and right—a belief that often keeps us on a course that is dumb, immoral, and wrong. Backed by years of research, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)* offers a fascinating explanation of self-justification—how it works, the damage it can cause, and how we can overcome it. This updated edition features new examples and concludes with an extended discussion of how we can live with dissonance, learn from it, and perhaps, eventually, forgive ourselves.

“A revelatory study of how lovers, lawyers, doctors, politicians—and all of us—pull the wool over our own eyes . . . Reading it, we recognize the behavior of our leaders, our loved ones, and—if we’re honest—ourselves, and some of the more perplexing mysteries of human nature begin to seem a little clearer.” —Francine Prose, *O, The Oprah Magazine*



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Editorial Review

Review

PRAISE FOR CAROL TAVRIS'S ANGER

"Witty, provocative, and impressively documented, this work lights a candle in cursed darkness."—LOS ANGELES TIMES

PRAISE FOR ELLIOT ARONSON'S THE SOCIAL ANIMAL

"A rare gem of a book, easy to read but also scientifically sophisticated."—CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY

"Social psychologists Tavris and Aronson, each of whom has published other works, here tackle "the inner workings of self-justification," the mental gymnastics that allow us to bemoan the mote in our brother's eye while remaining blissfully unaware of the beam in our own. Their prose is lively, their research is admirable and their examples of our arrogant follies are entertaining and instructive."

"A fascinating book... I recommend it to anyone who enjoys psychological and sociological studies. Sometimes floored, sometimes angry, sometimes sad, sometimes amused, but always interested, I can only hope that I will be able to apply some of what I learned in my own life."

"A pathbreaking book that could change forever how leaders think about the decisions they make . Crackles with new insights and understanding. A must read!"

"This book should make it to the top of most summer reading lists. It speaks to the forces that keep us repeating harmful mistakes, whether it's an everyday personal issue or an organization-wide problem. I'm interested in reading this book for a deeper window into my own behavior, but also for insight into the reasons that corruption persists around the world and vexes so many organizational and individual efforts to fight it."

"In this pre-election time, Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson's book bears a very prescient message: Just how does one learn from one's mistakes if one refuses to admit culpability? With straightforward language and a readable style, Tavris and Aronson's book will open your eyes and improve your life - that is, it will if you let it."

"This book is charming and delightful. But mainly, it's just damn smart. Armed with reams of scientific data and loads of real-world anecdotes, Tavris and Aronson explain how politicians, pundits, doctors, lawyers, psychotherapists--and oh yes, the rest of us--come to believe that we are right and reasonable... and why we maintain that dangerous self-deception in the face of glaring evidence to the contrary. Every page sparkles with sharp insight and keen observation. Mistakes were made--but not in this book!"

"To err is human, to rationalize even more so. Now, thanks to this brilliant book, we can finally see how and why even the best meaning people may justify terrible behavior. *Mistakes Were Made* will not turn us into angels, but it is hard to think of a better -- or more readable -- guide to the mind's most devilish tricks."

"Tavris and Aronson-a dream team of two of psychology's greatest communicators—investigate our self-serving explanations and malleable memories, explaining how well-meaning people stay the course when pursuing ill-fated ventures, then shuck responsibility when failure arrives. This is a fascinating exploration of our astonishing powers of self-justification."

"Combining far-ranging scholarship with lucid, witty prose, Tavris and Aronson illuminate many of the mysteries of human behavior -- why hypocrites never see their own hypocrisy, why couples so often misremember their shared history, why many people persist in courses of action that lead straight into quicksand. A delight to read, with surprising revelations in every chapter."

"This eye-opener of a book is essential reading, not because we've all made mistakes - certainly not! - but because we've all been victims of mistakes made by others. Why do these people behave so badly? Tavris and Aronson's explanation is illuminating, entertaining, based on solid science, and highly relevant to our public and private lives."

"Please, somebody, get a copy of this book to the President and his cabinet right away. Read it aloud into the Congressional Record. If this book doesn't change the way we think about our mistakes, then we're all doomed."

"A revelatory study of how lovers, lawyers, doctors, politicians--and all of us--pull the wool over our own eyes. The politician who can't apologize, the torturer who feels no guilt, the co-worker who'll say anything to win an argument--in case you've ever wondered how such people can sleep at night, a new book by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson supplies some intriguing and useful insights. Thanks, in part, to the scientific evidence it provides and the charm of its down-to-earth, commonsensical tone, *Mistakes Were Made* is convincing. Reading it, we recognize the behavior of our leaders, our loved ones, and--if we're honest--ourselves, and some of the more perplexing mysteries of human nature begin to seem a little clearer. By the book's end, we're far more attuned to the ways in which we avoid admitting our missteps, and intensely aware of how much our own (and everyone's) lives would improve if we--and those who govern and lead us--understood the power and value of simply saying, 'I made a mistake. I'm sorry.'"

"Tavris and Aronson have combined their formidable skills to produce a gleaming model of social insight and scientific engagement. Make no mistake, you need to read this book."

"Written with the perfect combination of science and snap, this is a book that will change the way you think about self-deception--how it works, the harm it can cause, and how we can overcome it."

"Anecdote-rich...a ramble through the evasive tactics we employ when we've done something wrong and don't want to face up to it. "Mistakes Were Made" is by turns entertaining, illuminating and--when you recognize yourself in the stories it tells--mortifying. It is certainly true that we can be artful to the point of self-delusion when we feel guilt for something we have done."

"This book casts a bright and penetrating light on how and why nation-states, organizations, and individuals get into malignant messes. But it also shows how they (NOT us) cluelessly keep repeating these offensive, sometimes criminal acts. Tavris and Aronson don't let any of us off the hook but they do teach us how to avoid hanging ourselves on that hook again and again. One of the most needed and important books for our time."

From the Inside Flap

"Tavris and Aronson have combined their formidable skills to produce a gleaming model of social insight and scientific engagement. Make no mistake, you need to read this book." -- Robert B. Cialdini, author of *Influence: Science and Practice*

Why do people dodge responsibility when things fall apart? Why the parade of public figures unable to own up when they screw up? Why the endless marital quarrels over who is right? Why can we see hypocrisy in others but not in ourselves? Are we all liars? Or do we really believe the stories we tell?

In this terrifically insightful, engaging new book, renowned social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson take a compelling look into how the brain is wired for self-justification. When we make mistakes, we must calm the cognitive dissonance that jars our feelings of self-worth. And so we create fictions that absolve us of responsibility, restoring our belief that we are smart, moral, and right—a belief that often keeps us on a course that is dumb, immoral, and wrong. Backed by years of research, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)* offers a fascinating explanation of self-deception—how it works, the harm it can cause, and how we can overcome it. Turn the page, but be advised: You will never be able to shun blame quite so casually again.

From the Back Cover

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CAROL TAVRIS is a social psychologist, lecturer, and writer. Her books include *Anger* and *The Mismeasure of Woman*. She has written op-eds, reviews, and articles for the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and many other publications. She lives in Los Angeles.

ELLIOT ARONSON, one of the world’s most eminent social psychologists, has received numerous awards for his scientific research, teaching, and writing. His books include *The Social Animal*, *Nobody Left to Hate*, and his memoir, *Not by Chance Alone*. He lives in Santa Cruz, California.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Herold:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a guide. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the e-book entitled *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts*. Try to face the book *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* as your good friend. It means that it can for being your friend when you truly feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortunated in your case. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , we need to make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

Christopher Mills:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be up-date about what going on or data even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era that is certainly always change and progress. Some of you maybe can update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to a person is you don't know what one you should start with. This *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and want in this era.

Teresa Burns:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something

different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book could be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the publication untitled Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts can be very good book to read. May be it might be best activity to you.

Sheila Rivera:

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