

## Foreword

In 2014 I was eight years into what would become almost eleven years as senior vice president of People Operations and a member of Google's management team. I was in the midst of hosting our first re:Work conference, a convening of 175 leading thinkers and practitioners in behavioral science, economics, and human resources. There had been a series of superb talks, but then something exceptional happened.

Dolly Chugh took the stage. She delivered a talk entitled "Are We as Ethical as We Think We Are?" She bounded up, introduced herself, and then, paraphrasing Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical, announced: "I am thrilled to be in the room where it happens."

She had me at *Hamilton*.

And then she blew my mind.

Dolly asked: "How can it be true that some of the time all of us act in ways that aren't perfectly ethical, but amazingly every one of us believes him- or herself to be a good person?"

Let that sink in.

All of us sitting there agreed that we were good people. I certainly was!

But. But. But.

I could think of moments of which I was less than proud. Maybe something as trivial as jumping ahead of the car that pulled up to the stop sign just before I did? Or using my body language to edge out the person who had lined up next to me to board a flight? Or that moment when I'd read a homeless person's cardboard sign, but looked away before my eyes could rise to meet his face? Or when I saw something offensive online, wrote a bold comment in response, and then my finger hovered

over the button—for so very long—as I debated whether or not to post it?

If we are honest with ourselves—and I mean deep inside with that voice that no one else in this world except you will ever hear—would a truly, completely good person behave the way we do?

Spoiler alert: no.

The person I want to be, the kinds of people we all aspire to be, are better than we actually are.

And then Dolly made it okay:

The idea that we're capable as human beings of perfect ethicality, of being as perfectly ethical all the time as we imagine ourselves to be, is a unicorn-like idea. . . . The truth is all of us sometimes inflate the invoice, or stereotype the student, or favor the friend.

That anguish I felt in the first part of her talk is universal. We all have an idea of who we believe we are, which stands in modest contrast to the person we actually are. The faint tickling of that disconnect, like the moment you first feel an ant's tread halfway up your calf, is part of the human condition. It's normal. Natural. Commonplace.

But that doesn't mean it's okay.

Because others see us not through the gauzy glow of our own self-regard, and not just through our words and actions, but also through the words and actions that we don't take. The latter is especially pernicious because of a little flaw we've all got in our brains called the "fundamental attribution error."

Here's how it works. Think about the last time you were rushing through traffic, cutting lanes, zipping around the cars ahead of you. Maybe you couldn't wait to get to a party, or were late for the airport, or had a sick child to get to the doctor.

Now think about the last time some jerk cut you off on the road. (Don't those people just drive you crazy?)

This is the fundamental attribution error. When I do something that's aggressive or offensive toward you, there's a perfectly reasonable explanation. When I see you do something, it's because deep down you are—in my estimation—just that kind of jerk. I can know the factors shaping my actions, but because I don't know the ones shaping yours, I assume it's just because of who you are. And I forget that you might also have a sick child.

If I fail to stand up for you, you are likely to perceive me as simply not caring. Or worse, that I condone or even agree with whatever bias or abuse you've just endured.

*The Person You Mean to Be* is Dolly's road map from the messy, imperfect, conflicted person that each of us is today toward becoming a little more perfect, a lot less conflicted, and meaningfully more active and impactful on the world around us.

## What Is Special About This Book and Its Author

Dolly Chugh is one of those people whose résumé intimidates and overpowers. She was a varsity collegiate tennis captain, holds degrees from Cornell and Harvard, and worked in banking, consulting, and publishing before earning a tenured professorship at New York University. She still finds time to work with the faculty and leaders of the KIPP schools, volunteer in prisons, and—as you'll read—sneak in a little holiday shopping for her family.

But if you're lucky enough to meet her in person, you'll find someone so warm, gracious, generous, and laugh-out-loud funny that you can't help but want to be near her.

Dolly comes through in every page of this fantastic book. One of my favorite lines from *The Person You Mean to Be* comes just a

few pages in: “The person I mean to be stands up for [equality and equity and diversity and inclusion]. The person I mean to be fights bias. Sometimes, I do. Sometimes, I don’t.”

And then she proceeds to explain, drawing on research, anecdotes, and a bracing honesty and openness about her own life, how to take this reality and move from “believer to builder.”

She continuously surprises by describing concepts like “cookie seeking,” using it to explain why allies can inadvertently burden those feeling the weight of oppression just when that weight is at its heaviest. She reframes the discussion about “growth mindset” to introduce the best way to react—and build bridges—when you are at your most upset and defensive. And she arms the reader with a lucid narrative for explaining how so many of us benefit from “ordinary privilege,” including the simple fact of having white skin, or being straight, or being a man.

The benefit on this front, for many readers of *The Person You Mean to Be*, will be a deeper understanding of the science behind why bias exists, why society seems to tolerate so much of it, and why even 1 percent bias in a system leads to wildly disproportionate results for winners and losers.

### Why I Know This Book Will Make a Difference in Your Life, and in the World

The benefit for each and every reader, however, will be a path to self-acceptance and action.

Acceptance is vital to address all those moments of self-doubt and questioning, those instances when our fingers hover above the keyboards, or when we wonder if we have the standing to intervene when we see small slights in our daily lives. Accepting that these hesitations are universal means accepting that they are

also unimportant. Everyone behaves imperfectly sometimes. Everyone pauses sometimes. Therefore, don’t beat yourself up over it. Get on with acting.

Dolly offers a wide range of ways to act in the latter third of the book, but her message is a pragmatic one. We can still be good people, indeed we can be better people, as long as we do more. Not everything. *Just more.*

She shows how builders use whatever power and stature they have to amplify the voices of others, to encourage, to educate, and sometimes to confront. And she offers the reader clear, actionable techniques to do the same, often in the form of small nudges.

Google, for me, was a tremendous learning experience. One of the biggest lessons was about the power of “nudges,” a term coined by professors Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, and which I described in my own book as something that “influences choice, but doesn’t dictate it.” At one point we observed that female engineers were being promoted at a lower rate than male engineers.\* At the time, engineers could nominate themselves for promotion, in addition to being nominated by their managers. We found that while women were slightly less likely to nominate themselves, when they did they were actually more successful than men in being promoted. We also found that with a small nudge—an email from Alan Eustace, then senior vice president of engineering, to all technical employees describing this finding and encouraging women to nominate themselves—the promotion gap went away.

It was more than just a simple email. It came from an executive. From a white, male executive. The email didn’t prescribe, but rather encouraged: “Any Googler who is ready for promotion should feel encouraged to self-nominate. . . .” And it nudged

\* I hope the reader will forgive the binary—that’s how the data were coded at the time.

managers and shaped norms as well: “. . . and managers play an important role in ensuring that they feel empowered to do so.”

I believe so deeply in the power of these small interventions that I left Google and in 2017 co-founded a company, called Humu, with a goal of making work better through machine learning, science, and a little bit of love. Central to our technology is the idea that small nudges have a profound ability to increase employee happiness and productivity, and reduce employee bias and attrition.

*The Person You Mean to Be* is replete with small interventions you can make in your daily life that will have a disproportionately positive impact. For example, Dolly reports that people approach interracial interaction differently, depending on whether they are instructed to “avoid prejudice” or to “enjoy the opportunity to have an intercultural dialogue.” A tiny shift in language with a tremendous impact.

Similarly, she shows why it’s powerful to downshift from “I just want to explain where I’m coming from” to “Help me understand what I did that upset you.” Same conversation, different words, vastly different outcomes.

## Why This Book Is Worth Reading Today

The perceptions of the majority always seem to lag the experiences of the minority. As Dolly points out, in 1963, 80 percent of white Americans felt that racial minorities were treated equally—at a time when it was illegal for whites and blacks to marry in sixteen states, from Florida to as far north as Missouri and Delaware, and as far west as Texas.

On September 1, 2016, the San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began to kneel on one knee during the playing of the national anthem. “I am not going to stand up to show pride

in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color,” he explained. He later continued: “This is because I’m seeing things happen to people that don’t have a voice, people that don’t have a platform to talk and have their voices heard, and effect change. So I’m in the position where I can do that and I’m going to do that for people that can’t.”

Kaepernick’s actions were controversial. In 2017 he was both awarded *Sports Illustrated’s* Muhammad Ali Legacy Award and vilified online using the harshest, crudest language possible. A CBS News/YouGov poll in September of that year found that almost 75 percent of black Americans approved of football players protesting this way, but only about 30 percent of white Americans did. How will Kaepernick’s protest—and the fact that he was joined by thousands of professional, college, and even high school athletes—look in five or ten years?

Recent years have been exhausting for those who believe in—as Dolly says about herself—equality and equity and diversity and inclusion. Yet many Americans (and citizens of many other countries) tell pollsters that people are treated equally today. That is simply not true.

Reading *The Person You Mean to Be* is like having a conversation with Dolly herself, and I suspect after reading it you’ll feel as much affinity and affection toward her as I do. She’ll help you to see how to do just a bit more, and how to *be* a bit more of the person you mean to be.

Laszlo Bock, October 2017

CEO and Co-Founder of Humu

Former SVP of People Operations, Google, Inc., and author of *Work Rules! Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead*

## Preface

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.

—REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.,  
*LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL*

I was lying on the ground, playing dead, in the Times Square Toys “R” Us store. With at least one hundred other people, I was part of a Black Lives Matter “die-in” in the toy gun section. It was December 2014 and we were protesting yet another police shooting of an unarmed black person, this time a twelve-year-old boy named Tamir Rice, killed while playing in a Cleveland park with a toy gun. “Silent Night” played over the speaker system while I lay still with tears in my eyes.

I was terrified, but not because of the protest, which I knew was necessary for change. It was organized, peaceful, and disciplined, unlike many negative media portrayals of the Black Lives Matter protests and protesters.\* While I was proud to stand with them and lie beside them, I felt out of place. I had never participated in a protest before, though I am grateful for those who protest. I am scared of controversy, though I respect those who

\* The origin story of the phrase “black lives matter” begins with activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi in 2013. Today, the phrase has come to refer to at least three different things: a decentralized social movement, a formal organization with official chapters across the United States and Canada, and a social media hashtag. More on this history can be found in the book *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele as well as the article “The Matter of Black Lives” by Jelani Cobb, published in the *New Yorker*.

can handle it. I am not anti-law enforcement (nor is the Black Lives Matter movement), though I believe that abuse of authority needs to be addressed. Nor am I an African American who bears the burden of racism, though I know the burden is great. I was terrified because I am a not-very-bold, suburban, middle-aged, Land's End-wearing, Ivy League-educated, married-to-a-doctor mom of two, not your standard protester identity. This was not my usual Saturday night.

Still, none of us are only one thing. I am also an expert in the psychology of bias. As a professor and social psychologist, I use data, experiments, writing, and teaching to explore the unconscious biases held by good people like you and me.

And, I am a female, foreign-born person of color. I am a daughter of Indian immigrants who left everything and everyone behind in a tireless pursuit of a better life for their children in America. I am the Hindu wife of a brown-skinned, bearded Sikh man who wears a turban. I see our country through my proud perspective as an American with a fierce love for this land, and through my pained perspective as a person of color who is not always seen as "one of us."

Sometimes, I am described by a well-meaning white friend as her "Indian friend." Sometimes, I am handed a dirty plate by a polite parent at a kids' birthday party who assumes that I am there to clean up after the guests. Sometimes, I walk into a restaurant with my husband and children and pretend that I do not see other customers staring or glaring. America is not always the country it means to be.

To tell the truth, I am not always the person I mean to be, either. Yes, like you, I am a believer in the American values of equality and equity, diversity and inclusion, the values underlying the founding of this country and many major spiritual teachings. Race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender,

gender identity, ability—I believe bias of all forms is wrong. I am a believer.

Still, the person I mean to be is more than just a believer. The person I mean to be stands up for those values. The person I mean to be fights bias. Sometimes, I do. Sometimes, I don't. Sometimes, I want to, but don't know where to start. Sometimes, I don't notice bias and am surprised or defensive when others point it out. Sometimes, I—the one who studies bias for a living—*am* the problem. I am that well-meaning friend, that polite parent, that staring customer. I mean to do better. As a believer in these values, I need to do better.

### Not Everyone Is Ready for This Book (but You Probably Are)

Not everyone is a believer. Being a believer requires more than believing in the values. It also requires us to believe in the reality of a crushing volume of scholarly studies, research papers, and firsthand reports that offer excruciating detail on how we devalue the bodies, minds, souls, careers, incomes, life spans, and humanity of people who are not white, or male, or straight, or gender-conforming, or Christian. I am not writing a book that summarizes that voluminous evidence, though I have read a lot of it, experienced some of it, and done scholarly research that supports it. If you are absolutely convinced that these biases are not serious issues in America today, my book is not the place to start. My book is for those who have at least a vague belief that this reality might exist for some people and who want to understand and do something about that reality.

What makes things messy is that there are many people who are believers in the values but not in the evidence about the reality

of bias. As an example, let us stick with racial bias. In 2011, psychologists Samuel Sommers and Michael Norton asked Americans to share their perceptions of the extent to which black and white Americans were the targets of discrimination. The average white respondent felt anti-white bias was *more* prevalent than anti-black bias. According to a more recent Reuters poll, only 37 percent of Americans believe minorities are not treated fairly. In another study, participants overestimated by 25 percent the progress our country has made in narrowing earning and wealth gaps between blacks and whites. Despite the evidence otherwise, not everyone is a believer.

Maybe this is to be expected. According to antiracist activist Tim Wise, “In every generation, white people have said there is not a racial problem and people of color have said there is. History has proven [the people of color] right. What are the odds that white folks are suddenly getting it right this time?” Wise, who is white, reminds us that two-thirds of whites felt that Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was pushing too hard and too fast for change. They said this in the same month as the 1963 March on Washington where King delivered the “I Have a Dream” speech. During that same time period, four years before the Supreme Court declared that whites and blacks could legally marry in every state, 80 percent of white Americans said they felt racial minorities were treated equally in their community. It is predictable, then, that our generation—like every generation—should have its nonbelievers.

According to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University, we have forgotten white Americans’ resistance to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Peaceful protests, which we revere now, such as the March on Washington and the lunch counter sit-ins, were viewed negatively by the majority of white Americans. Three years after the “I Have a Dream” speech,

only 36 percent of white Americans believed King was helping the cause of civil rights; 14 percent were not sure and 50 percent said he was hurting the cause. In roughly the same time frame, 94 percent of black Americans felt he was helping. The stark contrast between the views of white and black Americans—36 percent versus 94 percent—washes away with the passage of time.

Consider that Muhammad Ali was once “the most hated man in America.” Even Jackie Robinson was mad at Ali in 1967. Ali refused to go to war for a country that had “called me n— . . . lynched me . . . put dogs on me . . . robbed me of my nationality, raped and killed my mother and father.” Yet, within fifty years, the majority of Americans regarded Ali with affection, not hatred. People would not only give him humanitarian awards, they would even name humanitarian awards after him. What appeared to be radical change at the time seems more moderate and even inevitable-sounding within a generation.

## The Number of Believers Is Growing

Some say that 2016 was the new 1968. The 2016 presidential election generated and unlocked deep divides. These divides are bringing some people from the mainstream into discussions of inequality and injustice for the first time. I don’t think being a believer is a partisan issue. Conservative columnists Matt Lewis and Leon Wolf note an emerging interest among white Americans in issues facing African Americans. I have lived in some of the more politically conservative areas of America (including the Bush family’s hometown of Midland, Texas) and some of the more politically liberal areas (including Cambridge, Massachusetts, known to some as the People’s Republic of Cambridge). I have learned that believers, and nonbelievers, can be found

everywhere, and that the number of believers is growing across party lines.

*Between the World and Me*, *Hillbilly Elegy*, and *The New Jim Crow* are bestselling books whose white, middle-class readership is learning about and addressing class and racial justice. The documentary about mass incarceration, *13th*, found a mainstream audience on Netflix. Organizations like Google and Goldman Sachs have had discussions about allyship. Terms like “male privilege” and “white privilege” each generate a half million Google search hits. The relatively new use of the word “woke” was heralded by a *New York Times* piece about the cultural importance of signifying someone who is “hip to the realities of inequality.”

We are also living in a time of unprecedented integration. This is not our parents’ or grandparents’ America. If your grandparents were living in the United States in the twentieth century, it was possible, even probable, that they would have gone through most days not interacting with someone of a different race or ethnicity, contradicting the melting-pot narrative. They probably worked in single-gender workplaces. They were unlikely to know—or be—someone who was openly gay or gender-nonconforming.

Today, Americans are experiencing a different reality. Seventy percent of Americans, according to a Reuters poll, interact with people of a different race in their circle of friends, coworkers, and relatives. Among people under thirty, this number rises to an astounding 90 percent. According to a CBS poll, 77 percent of us now personally know someone who is openly gay (compared to only 42 percent less than twenty-five years ago). Our workplaces are less gender-segregated. Our definitions of gender fixed at birth are evolving. So we are more diverse, and more divided, than ever before. Believing in the values of equality is no longer enough. We need to be people with the skills to make it better. We need to learn how to fight bias.

## Using Science to Move from Believer to Builder

Where do we begin? If you need to drop twenty pounds, or your marriage is failing, or you hate your job, there are a million books filled with evidence-based research. If you care about fighting bias against groups marginalized in American society, there are fewer evidence-based options. Plenty of books address the structural, political, and macroeconomic solutions for inequality. Few offer individuals a social psychologist’s expertise about how to fight bias at the person-to-person and person-to-system levels. Yet the research is there to help us move from having the identity of a believer to having the skills of a builder.

This insight first hit me when my amazing MBA students organized something called Ally Week at the New York University Stern School of Business. They created a week of programming to which hundreds of time-crunched students voluntarily came to learn how to act as allies for students different than them (e.g., white students for nonwhite students, non-veteran students for veterans, straight and gender-conforming students for LGBTQ+ students, male students for female students). The Ally Week organizers asked me to be the keynote speaker. I spend my days conducting and reading research on bias and related topics. Still, as I looked at this research through the lens of how to help people be better allies, even I was shocked at how much useful, eye-opening, and relevant research is buried in academic journals. As social scientists, we can help people become more skillful builders.

Fortunately, social science is playing a larger role in our national discussion. Many social psychologists, including me, have been studying, discussing, and debating implicit (also known as

unconscious) bias for years, even decades. Many activists have also been having similar conversations. Psychologists Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald recently published the authoritative book on the topic, *Blindspot*. During the September 2016 presidential debate, Hillary Clinton said “implicit bias” five times. In the vice presidential debate one week later, Mike Pence questioned whether a black police officer could show implicit racial bias. (Pence was incorrect. Research shows the majority of white Americans show implicit race bias favoring whites, while black Americans’ implicit race bias ranges from showing implicit bias favoring whites to implicit bias favoring blacks. Similarly, I have published coauthored work that shows that women tend to show stronger implicit gender bias than men.)

Implicit bias research is just one slice of the science that can help us. Research from psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and other disciplines reveals ways that believers like you and me can become builders. The research also reveals ways we can do harm despite our best intentions. I have curated the most actionable and robust of these research findings—the good news and the bad news. Sure, science is dynamic, some answers are incomplete, and there is much more research to do. No single study or research finding offers an airtight solution. But as a scientist living in a bias-packed world, I believe we know enough to act on the science in hand.

## Builders Need Both Heat and Light

The week before the Black Lives Matter protest at Toys “R” Us, I happened to reread Dr. King’s pointed 1963 *Letter from Birmingham Jail* where he spoke of the “appalling silence of the

good people.” That was not the person I meant to be. I knew that research said that protests made a difference, so I found out when the next Black Lives Matter protest was taking place and rallied some friends and family to join me. So there I was, no longer silent. As I lay there, I also realized that this was not my voice.

As it turned out, I am a bad protester. As we chanted our way up the escalators in the 250,000-square-foot Toys “R” Us store toward the toy gun section, my mind raced with inappropriately off-topic thoughts. I am a working mom with limited opportunities to get to brick-and-mortar stores in the two weeks before Christmas and now I unexpectedly found myself at a Toys “R” Us. I could just pull out my holiday shopping list and multitask my chanting and shopping self through the store (without holiday crowds, even, since the protest had scared them off). These were real thoughts that I had. Oh my God, what could be less appropriate? Multitasking during a Black Lives Matter protest and then having the gall to update my to-do list: *Star Wars* Legos—check, *Frozen* dollhouse—check, civil disobedience—check. Protest movements deserve better.

I wondered if the only way to build a better world was through the building of movements and protests. I wondered if there was work for people like me who do not like controversy, who will rearrange the dishwasher but never openly debate which way the forks should go (pointing down, obviously). I admire the temperament and courage of people who are willing to have the acrimonious argument and stage the defiant protest. They apply heat and they take heat.

The truth, however, is that I am better at the teachable moment and the patient partnership. I am good at talking with people. I am good at asking questions. I am good at listening to people. I

am good at learning new perspectives. These are the skills that help generate light. Maybe I, and others looking for their place in the work, was overlooking the importance of light.\*

There are many opportunities to generate light in our homes, in our communities, and in our workplaces. We can be inspired by the research of organizational scholar Debra Meyerson on “tempered radicals.” Tempered radicals are insiders in organizations who do not present as rebels and are often successful in their jobs. They are catalysts for change by challenging the status quo in small, cautious ways. Meyerson writes, “Tempered radicals push and prod the system through a variety of subtle processes, rechanneling information and opportunities, questioning assumptions, changing boundaries of inclusion, and scoring small wins.” While no individual action is a revolution, the sum of their daily efforts leads to real evolution. Said another way, tempered radicals follow the advice of author and activist Silas House, “Be revolutionary, every day.”

To be clear, research shows that turning up the heat is also essential work. Social movement scholar Jo Freeman found that more extreme feminists served as a “radical flank” in comparison to more moderate feminists. Herbert Haines extended this work in studying the civil rights movement, noting that moderate black organizations saw increased rather than decreased funding as the radical black movement emerged. Light is not an alternative to heat in social movements. It is a necessary partner. For some of us, light is our entry point into the work.

This book brings together stories and science that can help us create that light. We will meet people from across the country and from multiple industries, each experimenting with what he or she

\* I find the heat and light metaphor to be powerful and others seem to agree. While I have not been able to trace its original source, I have seen it used in sources ranging from *The Unitarian Register/The Christian Register* to Cathy Young in the *Observer* to Barack Obama’s speeches.

can do to build a better workplace and world. Some have been thinking about things like diversity and inclusion for a long time and others have just joined the conversation. Some are thinking about person-to-person dynamics, while others are thinking about systems that shape our societal lives. Their stories are less about solving and saving and more about growing and grappling. Like me and you, they are good people looking to do better, trying to be the people they mean to be.