

We are all probably to some extent aware of the fact that diverse factors contribute to our missing information and aspects of our complex reality. Kelly Boys writes that ‘we are like computer algorithms: simpler than our complex environments yet always learning based on new input’. It is impossible for us to take it all in or be aware of everything coming to us at any given moment and the bigger picture often eludes us. She makes a reference to optical illusions ‘to point to how easy it is to fill in what we “see” based on memory, the biology of vision, and our brain’s need for coherence’. So we often perceive things that may not be there or blink out what is there. Also, our brains combine prior knowledge, beliefs and expectations with the incoming stimuli or information to create narratives and when information is missing we tend to fill in the gaps and reach quick conclusions that may not be accurate and may lead to inappropriate responses based on this prior knowledge and learning.

I will share a benign story to demonstrate how often when we do not have all the facts we use the available information and fast top down processing to fill in the gaps to construe versions of reality and of what might have happened. We all do this and to some extent we always will because we cannot perceive or hold more than a certain amount of stimuli and information from our complex environment. It is a fast way of processing information; conserves energy and to a great extent serves our daily living. So, many years back a friend who lives in the same village told me a friend of hers that happened to live nearby had found a viper snake in her wardrobe. I too had had encounters with small viper snakes in the countryside and in my garden, but still to find a little venomous snake indoors causes concern. Then someone else told me that a doctor that also lived nearby had been rushed to hospital because he was bitten by a snake while gardening and someone mentioned that there were more snakes than usual on the island due to some ecological imbalance. Anyway, all these stories soon drifted out of my conscious awareness, until a few weeks later as I was sorting out clothes and emptying out pockets to do the laundry I found a snake shirt in my jacket pocket. Yikes! In a fast top down manner the stories were validated. They now seemed to hold more truth and power. And of course, I cleaned out cupboards, dusted corners, moved furniture and went behind bookcases wondering if the snake that had left its shirt in my pocket could still be in the house, even though I did have my doubts of whether it is possible for a snake to shed its skin in a cramped area like a pocket. However, just to be on the safe side I made sure I did not leave unattended open doors and had the stone wall around the house sprayed with some sort of supposedly eco friendly snake repellent. Then a few months later we had friends and their children over for lunch and I chose to share the story. And then one

of the girls casually told me she had found it during the hike she, her sister, my son and some more of their friends had gone on the previous time they were at our house. She had meant to show it to us along with the other nature finds they had brought back. She had apparently worn my jacket, put it in the pocket and then forgot all about it. So we had a laugh and I wondered at the workings of our minds. Why had I decided to share the incident within this particular context that day? Was it maybe that at some level of awareness I had registered the girl wearing my jacket when the kids had previously set off on their hike? Had this snippet of information lain dormant until this new similar setting had allowed associations to be made or simply surface? Had I known then or had I considered it worthwhile to stay mindfully with my immediate fear response when I found the snake shirt in my pocket then the information might have been immediately available to me and it could have saved me the frantic cleaning and the snake repellent spraying procedure. So, when we don't have all the information we fill in the gaps relying on prior knowledge in order to create a coherent narrative or rather a cohesive one despite our doubts.

However, a lot of our unhelpful core beliefs and behavioural patterns were created during childhood. If we had to deal with difficult experiences we automatically resorted to instinctual defenses which became bodily memories and habitual responses to stress or overwhelm. But unfortunately, life saving mechanisms like dissociation or denial that protect us from collapse and overwhelm during trauma or childhood adversities are fertile soil for blind spots. Kelly Boys writes 'those obscurations were often created when we were young, to help us see other important stuff and to survive and get by okay (just as our physical blind spot means we need to rely on surrounding detail to see the world, our psychological ones helped us navigate life when we were too young to see the whole of our experience). When we're children, we often don't have the tools to cope with the fact that our needs for acceptance, safety, and love aren't getting met, in ways large or small, so we develop creative mechanisms to overlook the hurt and seek out other strategies and behaviors to try to fill our needs. Denial can be a good thing when we're under stress and don't have the tools to cope with our experience, but it's not great when it becomes a habit. It creates a breeding ground for blind spots, and if we don't see them they can hang around for our whole lives, driving our behavior without our knowledge'.

In her book she refers to the necessity for us to decode our unconscious stories because they filter the truth and influence behaviour and decision making and ultimately the quality of our life, and to uncover the core

beliefs that shape our emotional landscape. She also discusses how through somatic, contemplative, and mindfulness-based practices we can reclaim our capacity to perceive more within each given moment and how through increased awareness we get to navigate our life from a deeper place of knowing. She suggests we use self-compassion, welcoming practices and our vulnerability and moments of crisis to reveal blind spots, in order to reach deeper clarity. For only when we can become fully immersed in our daily living without the filters that label us, box us, keep us bound in an old battleground and diminish our inherent and natural way of both perceiving and being, do we get a chance at living our own life and becoming who we are.

After reading the book I had a look at some old psychology notebooks and I found class notes on top fast down processing and categories of cognitive biases and an anecdote from one of the professors I had jotted down. I suppose the story was to ingrain deeply in us the devastating effects that blind spots can bring about, but it had sent discomfort through my body as I sort of fitted the description, just maybe. The story went something like this. She had once failed an A student, with a proclivity for writing because during her last oral assessment and after she had successfully passed the exam she was asked a few very personal questions about her childhood. Her answers had made it apparent that she had unresolved wounds and blind spots, and thus she failed her. So although I was familiar with a lot of the material in this book, what I found really helpful and I think others too may find useful are how she combines theories and research findings with clear examples that we may relate to that demonstrate how we are rendered blind by our underlying or semi conscious beliefs, natural tendency for fast processing and cognitive biases and unmetabolized traumatic material and how they can all lead to disempowering behaviours and ways of being, disappointment, 'cringing' regrets, losses and suffering, but also biases and racism. Were our attention freed up or stabilized we could attend to more information and cues both from our external environment and our bodies at any given moment, and thus, avoid traps and trips down rabbit holes.

For instance, many of us may have stories where we have personalized others' behaviour towards us instead of setting boundaries. They may have taken place in a familial context, an outing with friends, a meeting at work or a presentation in a learning setting, where that guy, for instance, who for reasons and blind spots of his own attacks when I mention anything to do with depth psychology, psychodynamic concepts or interventions, inner child work, childhood abuse, trauma, mindfulness, as if these ideas or perspectives threaten to overthrow the government or

some sacred established order of things. In situations like this there are usually more than one path to be taken. As Kelly Boys writes there are different paths we can take in life in general and in situations like this and she provides a clear example of a work setting where a woman called Alice is in a meeting and a colleague discredits her ideas about a project. Then she provides two paths of adventure Alice can go down on. For Path 1: Alice feels the hurt and anger and without pushing down that felt experience, she defends herself against the bully, asks for help from other team members, and does what she can to ensure she is protected from a future attack, She recognizes that her colleague may be feeling insecure and trying to compete with her because he has a blind spot: a belief that he's unworthy. So he acts out with bravado.... Or Alice can choose Path 2 of the adventure and make the innocent and common mistake that something is wrong with her. She feels helpless and shamed, and rather than simply feeling what is there and finding an appropriate action, she pushes her emotions down and has looping, judgmental thoughts about herself (summary of vignette from the book). Boys writes 'this version of the story tends to be a lot longer — and its plot is bumpy and confusing. Whereas Path 1 gained Alice the respect of others and her 'led her back into feelings of ease and confidence. Path 2, in contrast, created ongoing stress and suffering — internal and external — and kept those old ideas alive and well'. When we ignorantly choose path 2, which we often do if we have not hacked our blind spots and shed light on wounds that keep the deepest and more erosive ones in place we will end up reinforcing the blind spot/s that we have probably carried since early on.

These emotions that keep showing up in diverse contexts (Boys refers to them as 'recycled' emotions) could actually be viewed as keys to discovering our blind spots that hide and get affixed to present day situations. If we can mindfully stay with our emotions and bodily experience insights tend to surface, and also, as we allow them to rise and recede we liberate our body from unnecessary and potentially cancerous knots and increase our resilience. Every emotion and blind spot has some useful information for us, which can potentially allow for a more creative and life-affirming response in the here and now. Instead our instinctive and learnt responses are to either push emotions down or dump them on others. Boys writes that 'however innocent it is to feel shame in a moment of helplessness, it can cause a lot of suffering when we don't see that we feel shameful, because in pushing that feeling down we are really letting it run the show. We think we've hidden our shame but instead it becomes an unrecognized driver of our behavior — it gets bigger and louder when we try to avoid it. But the shame is actually so

nonthreatening at heart! It's simply a message from the body that something in the environment feels "off" or "wrong."

She explains how mindfulness practices slow us down, help us get in touch with our bodily cues, and eventually, build more self-awareness, which facilitates the unearthing of our blind spots. Once we recognize our blind spots and start working on the underlying core beliefs we stop reacting from a place of lack, deficiency and emergency and we start responding from a more informed and empowered place. Once we have made meaning of experiences and realised our dominant and most significant blind spots we free up energy for living more in flow and less in constriction and also for dealing more effectively to what life throws at us in the present instead of carrying the burden of both the past wounding and whatever we are called to deal with in the here and now. However, acquiring visibility into our core blind spot/s, which is a filter for our experience and defines our behaviour is not always straightforward and is often kept in place by old wounds we cannot visit without support or knowledge, so doing trauma work may often be required to avoid overwhelm before dismantling of layered experience and deeper understanding is possible.

Finally, the highlight of this book for me was the fact that apart from delving into our attentional, emotional, and cognitive blind spot patterns, and also, the interpersonal: blindness in love when our blind spots and unmet early needs all come into play, Boys discusses the need for us to illuminate the biggest collective blind spot that most of us have and to wake up from the illusion of an isolated and separate little self, and how this creates suffering to us and others and robs us of the chance of a less fearful, more peaceful, humane, egalitarian and dignified existence. She writes 'Those moments of awakening — while staring at the wall, sweeping the floor — helped me see what seemed *unequivocally* to have been right in front of me all along'. Awakening can occur suddenly or gradually and maybe more often it is a process and not just a onetime event or a mere understanding at a cognitive level, and as Steve Taylor has found through his research trauma, loss, bereavement and turmoil is the most common path to entering a more wakeful state. He writes 'in our sleep state, we see ourselves as individual waves, separate from the whole ocean. But when we wake up, we realize our oneness with the ocean, that we are the ocean, that we've emerged from it and are always part of it. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that we lose our identity as a wave. We can have an identity as a wave at the same time as being part of the ocean — at the same time as being the ocean. We can still function as individuals, with some degree of autonomy and in the whole universe.

One way to look at this is to see wakefulness not as a dissolution of self but as an expansion of self. In our sleep state, our identity is constricted, more or less confined to our own mind and body. But as we wake up, our identity opens up, expands outward. It incorporates and encompasses wider realities. It expands into other people, other living beings, the natural world, the earth itself, until eventually it encompasses the whole cosmos' (from his book *The Leap*).