



Thinking Critically With Psychological Science

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The limits of intuition
Personnel interviewers tend to be overconfident of their gut feelings about job applicants. Their confidence stems partly from their recalling cases where their favorable impression proved right, and partly from their ignorance about rejected applicants who succeeded elsewhere.

Some people think psychology merely documents what people already know and dresses it in jargon: "So what else is new—you get paid for using fancy methods to prove what my grandmother knew?" Others scorn a scientific approach because of their faith in human intuition. Advocates of "intuitive management" urge us to distrust statistical predictors and tune into our hunches when hiring, firing, and investing. Like *Star Wars*' Luke Skywalker, should we trust the force within?

The Limits of Intuition and Common Sense

As we familiarize ourselves with psychological science's strategies and incorporate its underlying principles into our daily thinking, our thinking becomes smarter. Two phenomena—hindsight bias and judgmental overconfidence—illustrate why we cannot rely solely on intuition and common sense. The critical inquiry that flows from a scientific approach—undergirded by curiosity, skepticism, and humility—helps winnow sense from nonsense.

The Need for Psychological Science

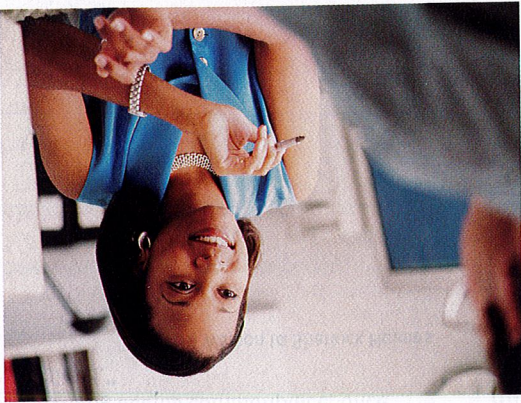
In working with such questions, how can we separate uninformed opinions from examined conclusions? How can we best use psychology to understand why people think, feel, and act as they do?

Others, intrigued by claims of psychological truth, wonder: Do mothers and infants bond in the first hours after birth? Should we trust childhood sexual abuse memories that get "recovered" in adulthood—and prosecute the alleged predators? Are first-born children more driven to achieve? Does handwriting offer clues to personality? Does psychotherapy heal?

Hoping to satisfy their curiosity about people and to remedy their own woes, millions turn to "psychology." They listen to talk-radio counseling, read articles on psychic powers, attend stop-smoking hypnosis seminars, and absorb self-help books on the meaning of dreams, the path to ecstatic love, and the roots of personal happiness.

Adolf Hitler, 1889-1945

What good fortune for those in power that people do not think.



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