

Common sense describes what has happened more easily than it predicts what will happen. As physicist Niels Bohr reportedly said, "Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future."

The phenomenon is widespread. Some 100 studies have observed hindsight bias in various countries and among both children and adults (Bernstein & others, 2004; Guilbault & others, 2004). Nevertheless, Grandmother is often right. As Yogi Berra once said, "You can observe a lot by watching." (We have Berra to thank for other gems, such as "Nobody ever comes out to the ballpark, nobody's gonna stop 'em.") Because we're all behavior watchers, it would be surprising if many of psychology's findings had not been foreseen. Many people believe that love breeds happiness, and they are right (we have what Chapter 12 calls a deep "need to belong"). Indeed, note Daniel Gilbert, Brett Pelham, and Douglas Krull (2003),

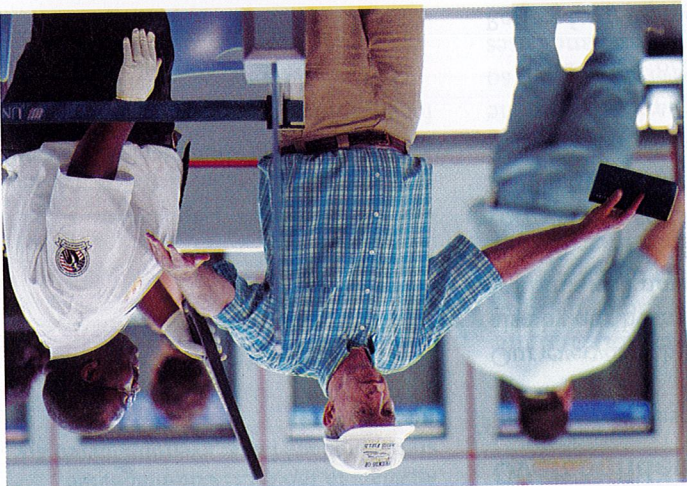
"Good ideas in psychology usually have an oddly familiar quality, and the moment we encounter them we feel certain that we once came close to thinking the same thing ourselves and simply failed to write it down."

But sometimes Grandmother's intuition has it wrong. Informed by countless casual observations, our intuition may tell us that familiarity breeds contempt, that dreams predict the future, and that emotional reactions coincide with menstrual phase. As we will see in later chapters, the available evidence suggests that these common-sense ideas are wrong, wrong, and wrong. Do you know which of the popular ideas in **TABLE 1.1** have been confirmed by psychology's research, and which have been refuted? Throughout this book we will see how research has both inspired and overturned popular ideas—about aging, about sleep and dreams, about personality. And we will also see how it has surprised us with discoveries about how the brain's chemical messengers control our moods and memories, about animal abilities, and about the effects of stress on our capacity to fight disease.

TRUE OR FALSE?

TABLE 1.1

- Psychological research discussed in chapters to come will either confirm or refute each of these statements (adapted, in part, from Furnham & others, 2003).
1. If you want to teach a habit that persists, reward the desired behavior every time, not just intermittently (see pages 330–332).
 2. Patients whose brains are surgically split down the middle survive and function much as they did before the surgery (see pages 83–85).
 3. Traumatic experiences, such as sexual abuse or surviving the Holocaust, are typically "repressed" from memory (see pages 381, 387–390, 604–605).
 4. Most abused children do *not* become abusive adults (see pages 158–159).
 5. Most infants recognize their own reflection in a mirror by the end of their first year (see page 161).
 6. Adopted siblings tend not to develop similar personalities, even though reared by the same parents (see pages 100–101).
 7. Fears of harmless objects, such as flowers, are just as easy to acquire as fears of potentially dangerous objects, such as snakes (see pages 534–535).
 8. Lie detection tests often lie (see pages 520–521).
- (For answers, see page 23.)



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Hindsight bias After the horror of 9/11, it seemed obvious that the U.S. intelligence analysts should have taken advance warnings more seriously, that airport security should have anticipated box-cutter-wielding terrorists, that occupants of the second World Trade Center tower should have known to play it safe and leave. With 20/20 hindsight, everything seems obvious. Thus we now spend billions to protect ourselves against what the terrorists did last time.