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# BLINK

Malcolm Gladwell

2005

# Sigmund Freud

“When making a decision of minor importance, I have always found it advantageous to consider all the pros and cons. In vital matters, however, such as the choice of a mate or a profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from somewhere within ourselves. In the important decisions of personal life, we should be governed, I think, by the deep inner needs of our nature.”

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# The origin for the book:



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How long is 2 seconds?

# In two seconds...

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In moments where we need to  
make decisions,

Our brain functions at two levels

# Two levels of brain function:

- Conscious strategy
  - Think about what we learned
  - Come up with an answer
  - Logical and definitive
  - Slow and needs lots of information
- Unconscious strategy
  - Quick
  - Less information needed
  - Our brain reaches conclusions **WITHOUT** immediately telling us that it's reaching conclusions.

# You can call it:

- A hunch
- Gut feeling
- Intuition
  
- It's called the adaptive unconscious in psychology

# Conscious Learning:

- Have an experience
- Think it through
- Develop a theory
- Finally, put two and two together

# The unconscious,

While you're sitting there, what is  
your mind doing without you even  
being aware:

# Your mind is:

- Sifting through the situation in front of you.
- Throwing out all irrelevant information.
- Attempting to zero in on what is important.
- This leaves you able to operate on autopilot.

# Adaptive unconscious:

- Completely below the surface of consciousness
- The brain reaches conclusions without immediately telling us that it's reaching conclusions
- Fast and frugal, gut feeling
- Quick decisions with very little information

# The adaptive unconscious:

Sizes up the world, warns people of danger, sets goals and initiates action in a sophisticated and efficient manner



# Conscious vs. Unconscious

- Conscious
  - Invite a co-worker to dinner
- Unconscious
  - Argue with a co-worker

# Adaptive Unconscious

- Meet someone for the first time
- React to a new idea
- Interview somebody for a job
- Faced with making a decision under stress

# Think about:

- Your first thoughts when you saw the topic of this talk? The speaker? Walked into the room?
- Arrived at DIA?
- Looked out your window?
- Met your spouse or significant other?

It is uncomfortable...

It makes us suspicious...

**BECAUSE**

# Decision quality depends upon time and effort

- Haste makes waste
- Look before you leap
- Stop and think
- Don't judge a book by its cover

# As DVMs, we prefer:

- Gathering information
- Spending as much time as possible in deliberation
- What I call:
  - Analysis paralysis

# Tasks of BLINK

- 1) Convince you that decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately
- 2) Answer when should we trust our instincts and when should we be wary of them?
- 3) Convince you that snap judgments/first impressions can be educated and controlled.

# Decision making...

Is two seconds just as effective as two minutes or two years?



# BLINK=THIN SLICING

The thinking that happens in the blink of an eye.

The filtering of just a few factors that truly matter from an overwhelming number of variables.

# Thin Slicing = Rapid Cognition

What happens when you meet  
somebody for the first time?

Walk into a house that you are  
thinking of buying?

# Rapid Cognition

The ability of our brains to make snap decisions in the background, without ever really consciously knowing about them.

# Thin-Slicing

The ability of our unconscious mind  
to find patterns in situations and  
behavior based upon very narrow  
slices of experience.

Thin-Slicing says...

A little bit of knowledge goes a long  
way.

# Thin-Slicing

- Is NOT a gift, everyone has it.
- It is part of everything we do:
  - Meet a new person
  - Having to make sense of something quickly
  - Encountering a novel situation

# Example of Thin-Slicing



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# Love Lab--John Gottman

- Analyze an hour of a husband and wife talking and predict with 95% accuracy whether the couple will be married 15 years later
- 15 minutes: 90 percent accuracy
- 3 minutes: ‘fairly impressive’ accuracy if a couple would divorce or not.
- Basically, it is pattern recognition.



# Gottman

By learning to ignore the mountains  
of irrelevant data and focusing on  
certain aspects, he could thin slice  
marriage

# Adaptive Unconscious

- Sifts through the situation in front of us
- Throws out all that is irrelevant
- Zeroes in on what really matters
- And does this so well that thin slicing often delivers a better answer than more deliberate thinking

# Thin-Slicing the Job Applicant

## Bedroom vs. Boardroom

# Am I right for the job?

- Hard worker
- Honest
- Open to new ideas

# Two options to help you decide

- Lunch/dinner twice weekly for a year, etc. thus become a close friend
- Visit my house and spend half an hour looking around



# Results:

- Friends could more accurately assess extraversion and agreeableness.
- Strangers (room visitors) did better assessing:
  - Conscientiousness;
  - Emotional stability;
  - and Openness to new experiences

# So, to determine if I'm a good employee...

- Visit my room and take a look around.



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# But, why?

- Avoiding face to face meetings allows you to avoid the confusing, complicated, and irrelevant pieces of information that impact your judgment.
- 15 minute hunch...thus using indirect evidence. Undistracted.
- Thin slicing worked...



# Thin-slicing and Doctors

## Insurance and Malpractice

# Who is most likely to be sued?

- Two choices:
  - Examine the doctor's credentials, training, and analyze their records to see how many mistakes that they over the past few years
  - OR
  - Listen in on snippets of conversation between each doctor and his/her patients?

# Results:

- The risk of being sued for malpractice has very little to do with how many mistakes a doctor makes.
- Review of lawsuits show that there are very good doctors frequently being sued for malpractice. There are also lots of doctors who make lots of mistakes and never get sued.

- The majority of people injured due to Dr. negligence never file a lawsuit.
- Thus patients don't file suits JUST because of shoddy care.
- Patients file lawsuits because of shoddy care and WHAT ELSE?

How they were TREATED!!

# Feeling mis-treated...

- Rushed
- Ignored
- Treated poorly

People don't sue Drs they like!

Getting sued doesn't depend  
upon how you do surgery, it depends  
upon bedside manner!

# If you need proof...

- Wendy Levinson:
  - The surgeons who had never been sued spent more than **THREE** minutes longer with each patient than those who had been sued. (18.5 minutes vs. 15.5 minutes)
  - Never sued surgeons engaged in active listening
  - Laughed, were funny



- Nalini Ambady:

- If a surgeon's voice tends to sound dominant they are more likely to be sued.
- If a surgeon sounded less dominant and more concerned, less likely to be sued.

Malpractice = RESPECT

Think about this one...in your life!

And

In your practice!

# Thin-slicing

- Basketball= ‘court sense’
  - Magic Johnson
  - Larry Bird
- Hockey = ‘ice sense’
  - Wayne Gretzky
- Military = coup d’oeil = power of the glance.
  - Napoleon
  - Patton

# Snap Judgments/Decisions

- They are enormously quick
- They rely on the ‘thinnest’ slices of experience
- They are unconscious.
- They with rapid cognition occur behind the “locked door” of our mind.

# Snap Judgments

- 1. Enormously quick relying on the thinnest slices of experience.
- 2. They are UNCONSCIOUS!

# Snap Judgments you might recognize:

# Snap Judgements and Rapid Cognition

Take place behind a  
**LOCKED DOOR**

I just can't explain it...



Sometimes, the explanation just  
can't be explained

# The Locked Door...

- We need to respect the fact that
  - it is possible to know
  - without knowing
  - why we know
  - and accept that
  - sometimes- we're better off that way.

Sometimes we just CAN'T  
explain:

# Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex

- P.59

# Speed Dating

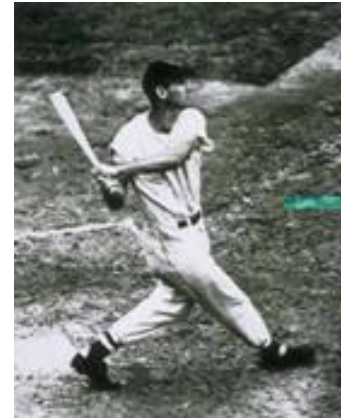


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# Ted Williams/Vic Braden

- Ted Williams



- Vic Braden



# Vic Maier-Swinging Rope

- P.69

We can improve the quality of  
our decisions...

If we can accept snap judgments and  
not try to overanalyze them.



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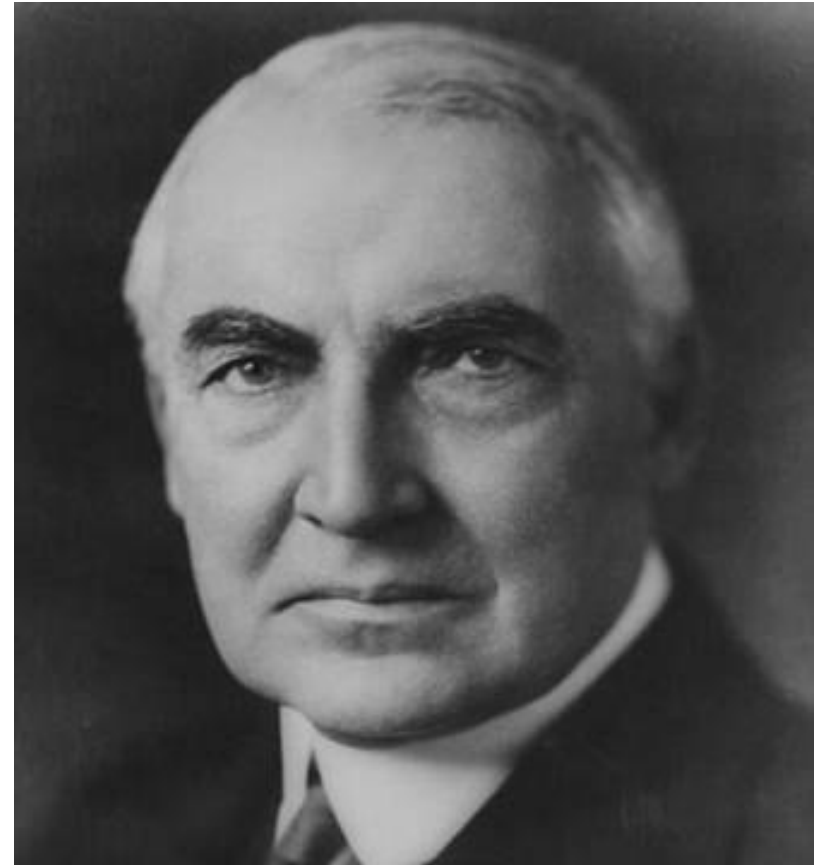
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On the other hand...

Thin-Slicing has its dark side

# The Warren Harding Era

- Newspaper editor from Marion, OH
- 1900 Ohio State Senator
- 1914 US Senator (OH)
- 1920 President of US
- 1922 died of a stroke



# The Warren Harding Error:

- Not particularly intelligent
- Liked to play golf, poker, drink and chase women
- Vague and ambivalent on policy
- Speeches: ‘an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea’.

- Looked like a presidential candidate.
- Historians agree one of the WORST presidents in American history.
  
- HOW? WHY?

# Dark Side of Blinking

- Handsome and distinguished, jumped to conclusion man of courage, intelligence and integrity.
- His looks ‘stopped’ people from looking below the surface.
- His looks carried so many connotations that the normal thought processes stopped

In this case,

Rapid Cognition lead us astray...

And it continues today...

# Height and CEOs



- Fortune 500 CEOs
- On average, male CEOs are almost 6'
- Average US male: 5'9"
- US population:
  - 14.5% are 6' or taller
- CEOs
  - 58% are 6' or taller



# Why?

- Do we unconsciously associate leadership ability with height?
- Do we have a sense of what a leader is supposed to look like?
- So, if one fits in we become blind to all other considerations?
- Is it that sometimes our selection decisions are a lot less rational than we think?

# Pepsi Challenge



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# Nordstrom's



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When are veterinarians like car salespeople?

# Pre-judging?

- Have you ever decided that a client just won't spend the money to care for their pet?
  - Why?
  - Their dress code? Their car? Their attitude?
  - Their pet?
- And what happened?

# Successful salespeople

- Take care of the customer
- Never judge anyone on the basis of his or her appearance.
- Do NOT prejudge!
- Poor salespeople commit a Warren Harding Error by letting first impressions impact them.

# Dark Side of Thin Slicing

- Our first impressions are generated by our experiences and our environment.
- We can change our first impressions by changing the experiences that make up those impressions
- To help impact those first impressions in our lives, we must take steps to manage and control those impressions.

# Odds and Ends

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# Verbal Overshadowing

When you are asked to explain your actions you actually block rapid cognition capabilities because we are better at visual recognition than verbal description.

# Verbal overshadowing...

- A man and his son are in a serious car accident. The father is killed and the son is rushed to the emergency room. Upon arrival, the attending doctor looks at the child and gasps, “This child is my son!”
- Who is the doctor?

# Verbal overshadowing

- A giant inverted steel pyramid is perfectly balanced on its point. Any movement of the pyramid will cause it to topple over. Underneath the pyramid is a \$100 bill.
- How do you remove the bill without disturbing the pyramid?
- Write out your strategy, your solutions, your approach

# Verbal Overshadowing

- When asked to explain how the logic answers were determined, 30% fewer problems were solved.
- THUS, when asked to write down your thoughts, your chances of having the needed logical insight are significantly impaired.

# Heart Attack Triage

Analysis Paralysis

Vs.

Blink

Don't have a heart attack...

# Except at Cook Memorial



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# Cook Memorial ER

- In years of evaluating heart attack patients and those with similar signs:
  - Doctors determined that confining an examination to four key observations results in significantly higher percentages of correct diagnosis of heart attack in the ER than do more comprehensive diagnostic protocols.



# Heart Attack Triage

- Having too much information can interfere with the accuracy of a doctor's diagnosis.
- Try to identify and focus on only the most significant information.
- Eliminate the 'noise' that can confuse the decision making process

- More and more information just reinforces our judgment but does not help to make it more accurate.
- Better judgments can be executed from simplicity and frugality of information rather than the more common belief that greater information about a patient is proportional to improved diagnosis.

# Lessons from the ER

- Successful decision making relies on a balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking.
- In good decisions, frugality matters. There are patterns that once we recognize, in the ER or Love, that allow us to edit (subconsciously). Too much information actually makes it harder to think.

# Mind reading



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# Mind Reading & Rapid Cognit.

- Judgments we make and the impressions we form of other people
- We predict and infer about what a person is thinking or feeling
- Part of this is identifying distinctions in facial expressions
- Inferring motivations and intentions from facial expressions is classic thin slicing.

# Mind Reading

- Paul Ekman:
  - Ten thousand facial expressions
  - Three thousand that mean something
  - Facial Action Coding System (FACS)
- Master FACS and have insight into the messages we send each other through our faces.

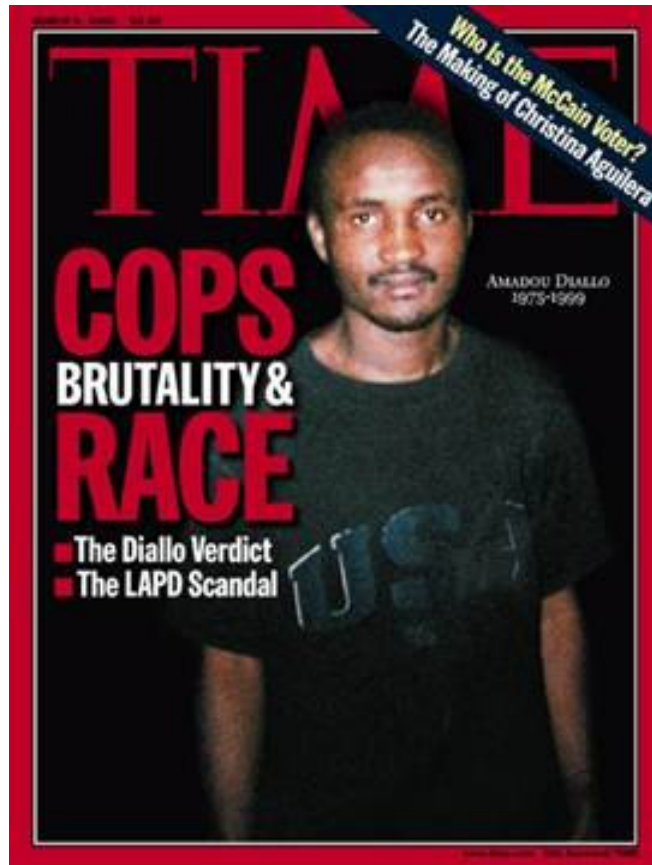
- Face = emotions=what's going on in our mind
- Some of our facial expressions are voluntary but the majority are not and can't be suppressed.
- We can all mind read just look at the face in front of you...

# Mind reading can fail also...

- Autism
- Stress
  - Heart rates of 115 to 145 are when stress improves performance. Greater than 145 stress breaks down performance.
  - HR over 175 you get a break down of cognitive processing. Arousal leaves us mind blind.
- Run out of time--time stressed, too rushed



# 41 Shots



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Be in command but out of  
control--kevin kelly

# In command and out of control

- Enables rapid cognition
- P. 118-

# Coke vs. Pepsi

p.155, 166



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# Market research--tv

p.174

experts

p.176

183

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# Taking Charge of the 1st Two Seconds

We can make better instant judgments by training our mind and senses to focus on the most relevant facts and less input (if it's the right input) is better than more.

- Think small
- Focus on the meaning of thin slices of behavior
- Rely on your adaptive unconscious to help warn of danger, read a stranger, or react to a new idea

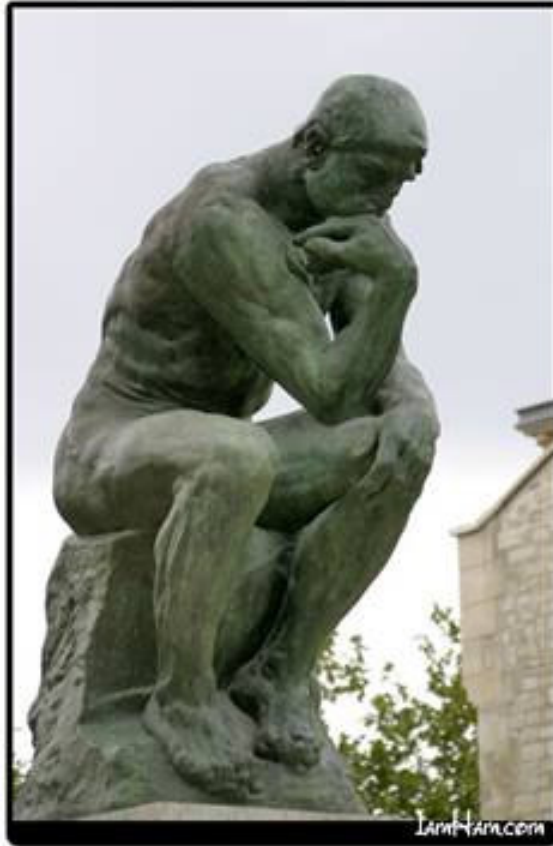
# However, be careful...

- Marketers can manipulate our first impressions
- High arousal moments make us mind blind
- Focusing on the wrong cues leaves us vulnerable to the Warren Harding Effect

# Take Home Points:

- Rapid cognition is real and useful
- Learn to pay more attention to those fleeting first moments when you:
  - Meet someone
  - Confront a complex situation
  - Have to make a decision under stress

# Is it Think or Blink? Let's see!



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# Questions?

Next Session:

Applying Blink and Tipping Point to  
US!

# Gladwell's "Tasks" for Blink

- 1. Convince you that decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately.

- 2. Our unconscious is a powerful force. However, it's fallible. It can be thrown off, disabled or distracted. Our instincts have lots of competition. So, when should we trust our instincts and when should we be wary of them? What are the reasons our instincts go awry?



- 3. Convince you that our snap judgments and first impressions can be educated and controlled.



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# When thin-slicing goes bad...

- Height and CEOs

You don't have to get it right..

You just have to get it going!

# Can we correct WH Errors?

- With laws we can fix them, but what about unconscious actions?
- If something is happening outside of our awareness how do you fix it?

# First Impressions:

- Generated by our experiences and our environment.
- Thus, we can alter how we thin-slice by changing the experiences that cause these first impressions.

# Thusly,

- If you take rapid cognition seriously, both good and bad...
- If you recognize the importance of first impressions in our lives...
- Then you **MUST** take active steps to manage and control these first impressions.



# Millenium Challenge

P99-111

# Logic vs. insight. P121-2

# Mother--Improv comedy

P111-117

# Successful decision making:

- P.141

# Sensation Transference

p.160-165

# Chair of Death

p167

# Mind Reading=Face Reading

194

197

The face is like a penis--p210

Autism = mind blind

p.214



Was this a failure of rapid  
cognition?

# Other causes of mind blindness

221

Stress

232