

Advanced 2
Unit 5 Reading
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Full Text:

Intuition

A

In a large, crowded hospital in Zimbabwe, a 30-year-old woman was lying on a gurney about to be wheeled into the operating room for minor gynecological surgery, when Rebecca Bingham, M.D., happened to walk by. Although she'd never seen the patient before - and knew nothing of her medical history - the doctor had a sudden sense of alarm. "I felt I should check her heart,"- says Dr. Bingham. She put her stethoscope to the woman's chest, and heard a murmur - abnormal blood flow through the heart, a possible sign of mitral stenosis, a heart condition that can cause serious complications if the person is anesthetized. Bingham alerted the surgeons, who canceled the operation to further evaluate the patient. Tests confirmed that she did, in fact, have the dangerous condition. An amazed surgeon asked Dr. Bingham why she had suspected the disorder. The family practitioner replied that it was "just a hunch."

B

Psychologists like Timothy D. Wilson, Ph.D., professor at the University of Virginia, and author of *Strangers to Ourselves*, believe such hunches are prompts from the adaptive unconscious. This is not the Freudian realm of repressed memories and primitive emotions. The adaptive unconscious is a mechanism in the brain that processes an ocean of sensory information, sorting it, inferring causes, judging people, and influencing feelings and behavior - all without our conscious mind being aware. These hidden powers of perception, are what allow people to "see the invisible." In Bingham's case, clues lay under the surface of her conscious mind. Experience working in Africa had taught her that mitral stenosis was more common there than in the United States. In addition, something about the woman had drawn the doctor to her.

C

Like Dr. Bingham, most of us have had remarkably accurate intuitions that seem to spring from nowhere. We call these mysterious flashes of insight hunches, gut feelings, animal instinct, ESP, or even a sixth sense. Some people dismiss them as lucky guesses. But Dr. Klein, a cognitive psychologist from Fairborn, Ohio, once a skeptic himself, no longer dismisses the power of intuition. He has studied people who have to make rapid, do-or-die decisions, such as firefighters, intensive-care nurses, and soldiers.

D

In one case, Klein interviewed a fire lieutenant who described a sixth sense that saved his life and the lives of his men. A hose crew was inside a house battling a kitchen fire. But each time they doused the flames, the fire roared back with greater fury. And the room was extraordinarily hot for such an apparently minor fire. The lieutenant sensed danger and ordered his team out of the house. As they reached the street, the kitchen floor collapsed. If they had been inside, they would have plunged into the basement where the main fire raged. Analyzing this episode, Klein realized that what the lieutenant called ESP was actually the subconscious processing of

memory and physical clues. The blaze didn't match the firefighter's expectations. Flames weren't quelled: the room was too hot—not the pattern of a kitchen fire. It set off alarm bells in the lieutenant's unconscious.

E

Klein has heard hundreds of similar stories. Pilots, paramedics, nurses, and others reported that in many emergency situations they did not stop to weigh options or make conscious decisions. They leaped into action, following their gut instincts. But how could they tell if they were making the right move? "Intuition is actually a two-step linking and checking process. First, we rapidly sort memories, looking for a familiar pattern to guide us. Then as we follow the plan that worked in an earlier similar situation, our unconscious mind is vigilant for anything odd or unexpected," Klein explains. "We're constantly reading ourselves, checking for emotional or physical reactions, such as an uneasy feeling or increase in heart rate, that say, 'Watch out, you may be getting into trouble.'"

F

Even when not in emergency mode, our internal radar is on alert for patterns that signal threat to ourselves or those we love. Leah Ingram's daughter, Annie, was a little tomboy who loved to roughhouse. It wasn't unusual for her to come home with cuts and bruises after playing with friends. But something about the five-year-old's recent behavior didn't feel right to her mother. One morning Annie complained that her stomach hurt, and she was too sick to go to school. "Normally, she loves school so much she'd go even on Saturday and Sunday, so my gut told me something was wrong," says Ingram. She sat Annie down for a talk. "I found out that a girl was bullying her." The bruises were not from play. Ingram called Annie's teacher, and the problem was resolved. Luckily, moms like Ingram are sensitive to the language of "gut communication."

G

In fact, the term is more than a convenient figure of speech. A study by University of Iowa College of Medicine researchers revealed that our bodies are smarter than we think since one of the ways our intuition warns us of trouble is through physical sensations. The researchers lent volunteers \$2,000 (in play money) and asked them to turn over cards from four decks, marked with sums the person had won or lost. Two of the decks offered larger wins and losses, but ultimately left players in the red, while the other two had smaller rewards and penalties, but resulted in a profit over time. After playing about 10 cards from one of the losing decks, subjects who were hooked up to skin sensors like those on a lie detector started getting bad vibes. By the time they'd played 50 cards, they began to avoid those decks, even though they couldn't explain why. But their skin was reacting with nonconscious signals, indicating that they sensed certain decks were losers. Yet it wasn't until they'd played an average of 80 cards that they could verbalize what their skin and subconscious mind knew. People with damage to the brain's prefrontal cortex—who were also part of this study—didn't have telltale skin changes and kept picking from bad decks even after they knew they were risky, suggesting that this region of the brain may be where our "gut" knowledge really originates.

H

Learning to listen to your body's cues can have surprising payoffs. An unusual investment approach has helped a fund manager make billions: His back tells him when it's time to sell by acting up. "I used the onset of acute pain as a signal there was something wrong in my portfolio," he once explained. "I rely a great deal on animal instincts." What the financier's

back might be reacting to its shifting market patterns that the intuitive part of his brain has absorbed. And how's his back doing? He had a few setbacks in 2000 when his hedge fund, along with many others, took a beating on high-tech stocks.

I

Our sixth sense can also detect when a situation isn't as menacing as it seems. John Yarbrough was on patrol for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department when he pulled over a car for a routine traffic stop. As he approached the car, the teenage driver stepped out with a gun in his hand. "We were about six feet apart and I had a split second to judge his intentions. Logically, I should have shot him, but for some reason, I didn't." The officer's hunch was right: After a brief face-off, the youth dropped his weapon and surrendered peacefully.

J

Years later, Yarbrough, who now works as a criminal profiler, learned why he held his fire when self-preservation told him to shoot. While participating in a study conducted by Paul Ekman, Ph.D., author of *Emotions Revealed*, Yarbrough discovered that he had a gift for reading faces. This ability, which all of us have to some degree, stems from spotting "microexpressions." "These very intense bursts of emotion only last a quarter of a second but signal a person's true feelings even if he's trying to hide them." says Ekman. "If you distrust someone who is trying to sell you a house, it could be because when he said the roof didn't leak, you saw a microexpression of smugness at fooling you, or fear of being caught in a lie." While microexpressions and pattern recognition don't explain every hunch—some really do seem uncanny—scientists have given us reasons to trust our intuitions.

K

Dr. Bingham thinks so: Her hunches have resulted in some amazing diagnoses, including detecting lung cancer in a patient who came in for a routine physical. "Though this woman didn't have obvious symptoms, I thought I ought to check her out with a chest X-ray." Bingham ordered a chest X-ray, which showed a very small, still treatable tumor. "Now I tell medical students that if they ever get a feeling that something is wrong with a patient, they should listen because it might save a life."

Summary:

The article explores the concept of intuition, emphasizing its role in critical decision-making through various real-life examples. It begins with Dr. Rebecca Bingham, who sensed a patient's heart condition despite lacking prior knowledge, potentially saving her life. Psychologists argue these hunches stem from the adaptive unconscious, which processes information beyond our awareness. Examples include a fire lieutenant whose intuition saved his crew and Leah Ingram, whose gut feeling uncovered her daughter's bullying. Studies suggest intuition manifests as physical sensations, aiding decisions in high-stakes environments. Ultimately, the article underscores the significant, often subconscious, role of intuition in our lives.

New Words & Expressions

A

- **gurney** – a hospital bed on wheels used to move patients.
- **gynecological surgery** – surgery related to women's reproductive organs.
- **stethoscope** – the medical instrument doctors use to listen to the heart or lungs.
- **murmur** – an unusual sound in the heart that shows something may be wrong.
- **mitral stenosis** – a disease where one valve of the heart becomes narrow.

- **anesthetized** – made unconscious with medicine before surgery.
- **hunch** – a strong feeling or guess that something is true, even without proof.

B

- **psychologists** – scientists who study the human mind and behavior.
- **adaptive unconscious** – the hidden part of the brain that works automatically and quickly without us knowing.
- **Freudian realm** – related to Freud’s theory of hidden memories and feelings.
- **repressed** – pushed down or hidden away in the mind.
- **mechanism** – a system or process that works in a certain way.
- **inferring causes** – guessing or figuring out the reasons for things.
- **perception** – the way we notice and understand things around us.
- **clues lay under the surface** – hidden signs or hints that are not obvious.

C

- **remarkably accurate** – surprisingly correct.
- **flashes of insight** – sudden clear understanding of something.
- **gut feelings** – feelings that come from inside without thinking (instinct).
- **animal instinct** – natural, automatic reaction like animals have.
- **ESP (extrasensory perception)** – the idea of knowing something beyond normal senses (a “sixth sense”).
- **skeptic** – a person who doesn’t believe something easily.
- **do-or-die decisions** – choices made in very dangerous or serious situations.

D

- **lieutenant** – an officer in the fire department, police, or army.
- **douse the flames** – pour water to put out fire.
- **roared back with fury** – the fire became stronger again.
- **plunged** – fell suddenly and deeply.
- **analyzing** – studying carefully.
- **quelled** – controlled or put out (like a fire or protest).
- **subconscious processing** – when the brain works and understands things without us being aware.
- **alarm bells in the unconscious** – hidden warning signals in the mind.

E

- **leaped into action** – acted very quickly.
- **vigilant** – watchful and careful.
- **familiar pattern** – something similar to what you have seen before.
- **emotional or physical reactions** – feelings in the mind or body.
- **uneasy feeling** – a sense that something is not right.

F

- **internal radar** – a natural ability to sense danger.
- **tomboy** – a girl who likes to play in ways usually linked with boys.
- **roughhouse** – play in a noisy or physical way.
- **bullying** – when someone repeatedly hurts, threatens, or scares another person.
- **gut communication** – messages from the body that warn you about something.

G

- **figure of speech** – an expression that is not meant literally (example: “gut feeling”).
- **skin sensors / lie detector** – machines that measure changes in skin to show stress or lying.
- **in the red** – losing money.
- **bad vibes** – negative feelings or warning signals.
- **nonconscious signals** – signs from the body that you don’t notice with your thinking mind.
- **verbalize** – to put into words.
- **telltale** – showing something clearly, like a clue.
- **prefrontal cortex** – the front part of the brain used for decisions and control.

H

- **cues** – signals or signs.
- **investment approach** – a way of handling money in the stock market.
- **acute pain** – strong, sudden pain.
- **animal instincts** – natural reactions without thinking.
- **setbacks** – problems or difficulties that slow progress.
- **hedge fund** – a large, high-risk investment fund.
- **took a beating** – suffered big financial losses.

I

- **menacing** – threatening, dangerous.
- **routine traffic stop** – a normal check by the police of a car.
- **split second** – a very short time, almost instant.
- **self-preservation** – protecting yourself from danger.
- **surrendered** – gave up, stopped fighting.

J

- **criminal profiler** – a specialist who studies criminals’ behavior to predict or catch them.
- **microexpressions** – very quick facial expressions that show true emotions.
- **smugness** – showing too much pride in fooling someone.
- **uncanny** – strange, mysterious, hard to explain.
- **trust our intuitions** – believe our natural feelings or instincts.

K

- **diagnoses** – identifying a disease after examining a patient.
- **routine physical** – a regular health check-up.
- **symptoms** – signs of sickness.
- **tumor** – a lump of extra cells that may be cancer.
- **ought to** – should.