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@Headline Books Lead Review:Fast and frugal

@Book Title:Blink: The power of thinking without thinking

@Book Detail:by Malcolm Gladwell, Penguin/Allen Lane,
£00.00, ISBN 000000000

@Intro:Speed dating, battle manoeuvres and spotting fakes
have a lot in common. Paul Marsden on cognitive trickery we
all need

Suffering from information overload? Well here's the cure.
You need to "thin-slice". Thin-slicing is a neat cognitive
trick that involves taking a narrow slice of data, just
what you can capture in the blink of an eye, and letting
your intuition do the work for you. This is the
prescription of *Blink*, the new popular-psychology book from
Malcolm Gladwell, staff writer for *The New Yorker* and
author of the cult business bestseller *The Tipping Point*.

Blink introduces us to the power of thin-slicing by
way of example. Take the "Love Lab" at the University of
Washington, where psychologist John Gottman has been thin-
slicing the way couples interact since the early 1980s. In
no more than 15 minutes of observation, Gottman can predict
with 90 per cent accuracy whether a couple will be together
in 15 years. Or consider how an art expert recently thin-
sliced a 2500 year-old Greek statue in the blink of an eye
and was able to tell it was a fake. Or consult the retired
soldier whose thin-slicing intuition can outwit the
supercomputers of the US Armed Forces.

The great thing about thin-slicing, argues Gladwell,
is that we can all do it, especially when it comes to thin-
slicing each other. Evolution has honed our social
intelligence, allowing us read people accurately based on
fleeting first impressions -- which is why the current
trend of speed dating might actually be a good idea. We
don't even need to meet our potential future partners in
the flesh: just a quick peek in their bedrooms is enough to
accurately guess their key personality traits.

Blink draws on cognitive psychology to explain how our
powers of thin-slicing intuition have nothing to do with

the supernatural, and everything to do with our naturally evolved adaptive unconsciousness. Our conscious mind is the tip of the cognitive iceberg, and what we feel as intuition is really the result of unconscious rapid cognition, fast and frugal information processing that goes on subliminally. Thin-slicing harnesses this powerful adaptive unconsciousness, allowing us to make smart decisions based on minimal information and minimal deliberation.

Ironically, *Blink* only falters in its convincing argument when we thin-slice it, taking it as an unqualified celebration of intuition over critical thinking. But it is nothing of the kind, says Gladwell, as he warns how reacting intuitively to a situation can have disastrous consequences. For example, he recounts how an undercover police team recently thin-sliced an ambiguous situation in the Bronx, panicked and shot an innocent man 41 times. The problem with thin-slicing, Gladwell correctly explains, is that it uses contextual cues, internal stereotypes and even prejudice to tell us what to do.

So, to thin-slice or not to thin-slice, that is the question. Unfortunately, *Blink* does not provide us with a clear answer. Gladwell hints that ultimately we should rely on thin-slicing only when our intuition has been honed by experience and training. But, he goes on to suggest, this is not as onerous as it might seem. A mere 30 minutes of training with the experts back at the Love Lab will have you predicting with 80 per cent accuracy, and in the blink of an eye, whether couples will remain together.

The joy of *Blink* is not in the final message that listening to experts instead of our own untrained intuition is a good idea, but in the intellectual adventure Gladwell takes us on to get there. Doing what he does best, Gladwell accompanies us on an exhilarating roller-coaster ride through the latest highlights of cognitive psychology, making the science of mind exciting and relevant to all those who have one. *Blink* deserves to be the success that it will certainly become.

@Endnote Light: Paul Marsden is a research psychologist at the London School of Economics