

# Risk in the eye of the beholder

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# **Risk in the eye of the beholder: Cognitive bias and risk assessment instruments**

by *Jennifer Kamorowski*

1. Forensic mental health practitioners acknowledge—albeit with notable variation—that forensic risk evaluations are no less susceptible to the influence of cognitive bias than evaluation procedures in other forensic sciences. (*This thesis*)
2. The limited empirical research about structured risk assessment instruments as a debiasing strategy suggests they are limited in the extent to which they can remove the influence of cognitive bias on the part of forensic evaluators. (*This thesis*)
3. Structured risk assessment instruments may be effective in mitigating the influence of some external sources of biasing information, although they appear less effective in mitigating attitudinal bias among users of structured risk assessment instruments and among consumers of the information derived therefrom. (*This thesis*)
4. Presenting lay jurors with a list of risk factors and observed recidivism rates appears to minimize the influence of a “halo effect” stemming from the perceived likability of the respondent in a sexually violent predator civil commitment case. (*This thesis*)
5. Mock jurors’ preexisting beliefs in grossly overestimated sexual recidivism rates exhibit a significant effect on their estimates of individual sexual recidivism risk, suggesting an anchoring effect that is not eliminated by an objective estimate of the likelihood of sexual recidivism in the individual case. (*This thesis*)
6. To the extent that actual jurors exhibit gross overestimates of sexual recidivism rates, these overestimations should be expected to make them relatively insensitive to base rates of sexual recidivism, thereby increasing the likelihood of unjustified civil commitment.
7. Jumping to conclusions is risky when the situation is unfamiliar, the stakes are high, and there is no time to collect more information. These are the circumstances in which intuitive errors are probable, which may be prevented by a deliberate intervention of System 2. – *From “Thinking fast and slow” by Daniel Kahneman (2011)*

8. You might think the goal of forecasting is to foresee the future accurately, but that's often not the goal, or at least not the sole goal. Sometimes forecasts are used to advance political agendas and galvanize action—as activists hope to do when they warn of looming horrors unless we change our ways. And some forecasts are meant to comfort—by assuring the audience that their beliefs are correct and the future will unfold as expected. – *From Superforecasting: The art and science of prediction by Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner (2015)*
9. The deliberate application of reason was necessary precisely because our common habits of thought are not particularly reasonable. – *From Enlightenment now: The case for reason, science, humanism, and progress by Steven Pinker (2018)*
10. In science, you move closer to the truth by seeking evidence to the contrary. Perhaps the same method should inform your opinions as well. – *From “You are not so smart: Why you have too many friends on Facebook, why your memory is mostly fiction, and other ways you’re deluding yourself” by David McRaney (2011)*
11. There are no facts, only interpretations. – *Friedrich Nietzsche*