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Fair-Mindedness

*It's You and Me, Kid,
and I'm Not So Sure About You.*

A critical thinker is aware of egocentrism, ethnocentrism,
and the effect of emotions on judgment.

A critical thinker listens and responds to opposing viewpoints
with empathy and fair-mindedness.



Critical thinkers are aware of their own biases and willing to consider the viewpoints of others.

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¹ Richard
1990), p.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER

- Defense mechanisms that cloud our thinking
- The effect of conformity on critical thought
- Rational approaches to emotional reasoning
- Points of logical vulnerability
- Active listening techniques that foster open-mindedness and empathy

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Centuries ago, we learned, contrary to our previous beliefs, that the earth is not the center of the universe. We discovered that the sun does not revolve around the earth; instead our earth, along with the other planets, revolves around the sun.

The fact that we tended to see our earth as predominant reveals the self-centered nature of our perception of reality. That self-centered perspective did not die out with our ancestors; we still tend to view the world from our own individual and group perspectives. Fortunately, however, along with our limited viewpoints, we also have the ability to discover and test new information and to make “course corrections” in our theories and our behavior.

Just as our ancestors made corrections to their theories and actions when confronted with inescapable facts, we as a culture are regularly changing our ideas and behavior when new understanding warrants changes. For example, in the face of increasingly credible threats to our environment, we are rejecting the assumption that the earth is infinitely supplied with renewable resources. Instead, we are focusing on conservation and preservation of our environment as a crucial issue, viewing our resources as precious rather than expendable and searching for alternative sources of energy.

Advances in media technology have enabled us to get a more complete picture of the global interdependence of not only our physical environment but also the world's people. When we see how others live and the problems they face, we can be less ethnocentric.

Ethnocentrism (sometimes called **sociocentrism**) is the tendency to view one's own race or culture as central, based on the deep-seated belief that one's own group is superior to all others.¹ We can only hold on to ethnocentrism when we consider other cultures as less important or deserving than our own. Such an attitude of superiority is harmful to the dialogue that must proceed as decisions are made that involve a diverse and increasingly interdependent world.

ethnocentrism (sociocentrism)

The tendency to view one's own race or culture as central, based on the deep-seated belief that one's own group is superior to all others.

¹ Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking* (Rohnert Park, CA: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, 1990), p. 549.

in reasoning is to examine human defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are “the clever ways we deceive ourselves, protect ourselves, and extract ourselves from uncomfortable situations—they are negative escape hatches that offer us temporary treatments for persistent problems.”⁴ Defense mechanisms are strategies we use to avoid uncomfortable realities and to “protect” ourselves from changing our perspectives and behaviors. For our purposes, we will consider two major defense mechanisms that interfere with clear thinking: rationalization and denial.

Rationalization is a defense mechanism that underlies many others; it is our way of justifying or trying to make sense of things that don't make sense. It's a way of explaining things away that should be brought under examination. When, for whatever reasons, we want to avoid an unpleasant truth, or when we want to believe that something is true, we can come up with a justification for our desired belief. Television writers Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo wrote a book (that became a film) to encourage women to stop making up excuses about why men they like don't call them, such as “he must have lost my number” or “he must be afraid of ruining our friendship.” Greg's response to almost every rationalization women make is also the title of the book: *He's Just Not That Into You*. Greg and Liz note how often women rationalize and help one another rationalize when men are clearly not interested in pursuing a closer relationship.

Note how people use rationalization to distort reality in the following examples.

Examples

- Jorge's favorite political candidate is found to have cheated on his taxes. He rationalizes his continued support for this person by saying, “He may have cheated on his taxes, but he's made up for it by all the good budget cuts he helped pass.”
- Claire finds out that the car she just bought has been criticized by *Consumer Reports* for having a faulty transmission system. She rationalizes by saying, “All cars are meant to fall apart in a few years.”
- Jasmine continues to smoke cigarettes, although considerable evidence supports the fact that cigarettes are a causative factor in several diseases. She tells herself and others, “I'm not going to worry about every habit I have. I could die tomorrow by slipping on a banana peel, so I might as well enjoy life today.”
- Someone that Thom would like to get to know keeps refusing his requests for a date. He rationalizes by saying, “She must be really busy this year.”
- After committing herself to a strict diet, Ginger has a doughnut for breakfast. She then eats three more, rationalizing, “I already ruined the diet, so I may as well enjoy today and start again tomorrow.”
- A clerk at a supermarket forgets to charge a customer for some sodas on the bottom of the cart. When the customer starts to load them into her car and realizes the mistake she rationalizes by thinking, “Oh, well. It's a big company and they will never miss a few dollars.” (See Exercise 9.1, page 424.)

As you can see, rationalization can enter every area of our thinking. Leon Festinger, a sociologist, created a theory to explain why we use this mechanism so frequently. He said that humans are subject to a state of mind called **cognitive dissonance**. This state

defense mechanisms

Techniques aimed at self-protection through the avoidance of unpleasant realities.

rationalization A defense mechanism that underlies many others; it involves justifying or making sense of things that don't make sense and explaining things away that should be brought under examination.

cognitive dissonance

A state of mental discomfort that occurs whenever two ideas (or cognitions) are out of sync or when behavior is inconsistent with beliefs.

⁴ Frank Minirth, M.D., and Don Hawkins, Th.M., *Worry Free Living* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), p. 78.

occurs whenever two ideas (or cognitions) are out of sync and create discomfort (dissonance) in our thinking patterns; we may also experience cognitive dissonance when our behavior is inconsistent with our beliefs. Dissonance is seen as a state of mental tension. We are uncomfortable when we are confronted with evidence that goes against our perspective, whether it is evidence about a person, an issue, or even our own character. We seek to relieve the mental tension caused by dissonance in one of two ways.

1. We try to increase information that is consistent with what we already believe. We seek out more evidence that favors our viewpoint and speak to people who will reinforce our original ideas. Sometimes, we know just what sources will be favorable to our positions regarding an issue or a personal situation. For example, we might find a website that is filled with information that supports our beliefs; we might also call on friends who we know will take our side and agree with us. Increasing positive support as a way to avoid dissonance usually involves rationalizing, as we have seen in the previous examples. We explain away inconsistencies between our principles and our actions rather than facing them and dealing with them.
2. We may also try to decrease or diminish any information that contradicts our view of a person or an issue. If, for example, we are researching an issue and find a credible website that refutes our beliefs, we may just ignore the information on that site and search for one that supports our beliefs. Or, if some of our friends don't like our boyfriend or girlfriend and try to tell us why, we may choose to avoid those friends. That reduces the dissonance by eliminating any contradictory viewpoints. This second form of dissonance reduction is part of the defense mechanism of denial, which we will discuss shortly.

Interestingly, Festinger believes that the need to resolve mentally inconsistent information is a basic drive, like the drive for food; our minds strive to "survive" unpleasant incongruities.

A mentally healthy person is in a state of congruence; that is, the individual's behavior conforms to his or her beliefs and values. Unfortunately, many of us, instead of striving for true congruence by getting our behavior in line with our values when inconsistencies occur, or by changing our viewpoints about an issue when we are proven wrong, will settle for a counterfeit peace of mind through rationalization. If we keep rationalizing, we can become psychologically unhealthy and even detached from reality.

Consider the fate of many people who followed a cult leader named Jim Jones (whose life is chronicled in the 2006 film *Jonestown*) to Guyana and their deaths. When he passed himself off as a man of God and had sexual relations with many of his followers, he rationalized by calling it a form of ritual cleansing. When he humiliated young children for small infractions of his system, Jones (and some of the children's parents) rationalized that he had their best interests at heart.

The more we give up our critical thinking abilities, the harder it becomes to face our errors in judgment, and personal and social tragedies can be the result. People who vote, buy products, influence others, and form relationships need to have accurate information to make the best decisions; rationalization is a form of shoddy thinking we can't afford to use.

A defense mechanism closely related to rationalization is denial. Denial is also a state of mind that blocks critical thinking, because it involves the repression of or refusal to recognize negative or threatening information. Some of us go into denial when we hear we've bounced a check or forgotten to make a payment on a bill. We may tell our creditors they must have made a mistake or that they never sent the bill, when the reality is that we've made a mistake we choose not to face because

denial A state of mind that blocks critical thinking by the repression of or refusal to recognize negative or threatening information.

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³ Dr. Lau
pp. 94-95

of fear, pride, or both. Another personal example of denial is summarized in an anecdote from a call-in radio program excerpted from Dr. Laura Schlessinger's book *How Could You Do That?*

Nancy, forty-seven, called all bent out of shape because her "fella" of six months turns out to be married. Her question was about whether or not it was right for her to tell his wife of the affair ... mostly, I thought to punish him, and only somewhat to warn her.

That isn't the whole picture at all. I asked her if she'd been to his place of residence in the six months of their steamy sexual relationship: "No."

I asked her if she'd even been given his home number or spoken to him at home on the phone in the evenings: "No."

I suggested that she truly knew all along that he was probably living with someone, married or not, and that she ignored that because she didn't want to give up the immediate gratification: the passion and attention. Furthermore, she had a fantasy going that she'd get him.

She begrudgingly acknowledged I was right.

Frighteningly, she couldn't seem to get with the idea that what she did wasn't right. She was too busy displacing all the blame for the current state of affairs on his adultery, not her own lack of conscience in getting involved with an attached fellow (the impact on his partner/wife/kids) and her lack of courage in finding out truths up front and dealing with them. Motivation for this stupid behavior? Immediate gratification. She made a choice of "right now" over good sense or conscience.

Trying to avoid the self-examination, she calls to find out if it was right or not for her to blow the whistle on him. I told her, "That is a separate issue from what is my deeper concern about you, which is your denial that you made a choice, which got you to this point. If you tell on him, it doesn't change you, and you were not an innocent victim."

... There's no denying that sometimes choosing to own up to your own weakness, badness, selfishness, or evil is tough to do. But it's the only way finally to get control and some peace of mind."⁵

Denial, like other defense mechanisms, comes into play when we experience an emotional reaction to information. Sometimes, denial is normal and helpful to our systems, such as when we hear shocking news and give ourselves time, through temporary denial of the facts, to cope with the information.

For example, if you are informed at a doctor's office that you have a life-threatening disease, it may be helpful for you to put off facing this information completely until you are home with supportive family members or in the care of a good counselor. In a case like this, it might be hard to drive home if you were fully immersed in the truth of your condition.

Denial becomes a problem for critical thinkers when they consistently refuse to acknowledge the truth or the possible truth of an argument presented to them. This problem can be summed up in the cliché "I know what I believe. Don't confuse me with the facts." The facts may be complicated, but the critical thinker needs to sort through them in order to make a reasonable judgment on an issue or, at least, to withhold judgment on a complex issue about which he or she is uninformed.

⁵ Dr. Laura Schlessinger, *How Could You Do That?* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1996), pp. 94-95.

Government officials may also deny important information, such as the seriousness of warnings, as illustrated in the following *New York Times* report:

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18—The United States intelligence community was told in 1998 that Arab terrorists were planning to fly a bomb-laden aircraft into the World Trade Center, but the F.B.I. and the Federal Aviation Administration did not take the threat seriously, a Congressional investigation into the Sept. 11 attacks found.

The 1998 intelligence report from the Central Intelligence Agency was just one of several warnings the United States received, but did not seriously analyze, in the years leading up to the Sept. 11 attacks that were detailed today at a Congressional hearing.⁶

Skill

Recognize defense mechanisms we use to avoid uncomfortable realities.

Denial and rationalization are often found together as defense mechanisms, when truth is denied and behavior is rationalized. Note both factors in another excerpt from the writings of Dr. Laura Schlessinger:

I feel sorry for anyone's pain and problems. But when they are the result of betrayals and abandonments coming back to haunt, and the primary issue is not remediation of those actions, I don't feel it to be an ethical obligation to get personally involved.

Trina, twenty-eight, has a sister, thirty-four, who split from her husband and has a new guy who dumped his wife. The sister kicked out her own seventeen-year-old daughter who wasn't going along agreeably with all this and is now living with Grandma. Trina is now wondering about not inviting the live-in guy to a family event.

"Trina," I scolded, "you are displacing responsibility about this situation to him. You want to punish only him, but your sister is the one making the decisions; she chose him and she dumped her own daughter. Your sister's actions are being ignored so you can be appropriately, but safely, righteous. You don't want to upset the family applecart, right?"

"Right."

In discussing what her sister was actually doing wrong, Trina kept trying desperately to pardon her sister (by citing her traits as) low self-esteem, lonely, beguiled, not thinking straight, confused, lost, etc.

Sure, Trina says the guy is a bum, but she's just as sure her sister is merely weak and confused, not really bad. How is that again?

In psychological terminology, Trina is "splitting," i.e., ascribing ever so neatly all the bad behavior to one person and all the good to another. This is a means of coping with the difficult ambivalence of having love and attachment you feel for someone and not wanting that to be marred by ugly realities.

⁶ James Risen, "Threats and Responses: The Investigation; U.S. Failed to Act on Warnings in '98 of a Plane Attack," *New York Times*, September 19, 2002, p. 1.

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Well, in real life, all good people do some wrong things and all bad people do some right things. I've heard many women defend abusing men by saying, "But, other than that, he does good stuff!"⁷

On a personal level, we may see all of the shortcomings of people we don't like and deny and excuse the faults of people we care about, as illustrated in the previous example. Similarly, we may see all of the negative aspects of viewpoints and policies we oppose and only good points in viewpoints and policies we support. By polarizing reality in this way, we leave out important considerations and hinder our ability to make the best decisions.

Critical thinkers take the time and energy required to recognize the weak points of their own side of an issue and the good points of their opponents. They search for truth rather than victory and are willing to change when presented with new information instead of insisting on maintaining a position that can no longer be supported.

Even when we are careful to give credit to the good points of all sides of an issue, we may still find that there are times when our emotional reactions cause us to lose a rational perspective. When that happens, we need to be aware of and adjust for our strong feelings, rather than denying that they have an impact on us.

Conformity and Ways to Overcome It

Most people brought up with the reality assumptions of a democratic society like to think of themselves as independent thinkers who make their own decisions. One of the governing values of those who settled the American West was "rugged individualism," the tough-spiritedness that helped people survive physically difficult and socially isolated conditions.

Although our society has been characterized as highly individualistic, fascinating research in social psychology can help us understand some of the areas in which we may tend to conform unconsciously to others rather than thinking for ourselves. Knowing about these tendencies can help us guard against them when we need to make important decisions.

In his excellent book, *Influence, The Psychology of Persuasion*, social psychologist Robert Cialdini discusses the principle of 'social proof,' which states that "The greater the number of people who find any idea correct, the more the idea will seem to be correct." He gives many illustrations of how the beliefs and actions of others are used to guide our own beliefs and actions, especially in situations of uncertainty.

In general, when we are unsure of ourselves, when the situation is unclear or ambiguous, when uncertainty reigns, we are most likely to look to and accept the actions of others as correct. In the process of examining the reactions of other people to resolve our uncertainty, however, we are likely to overlook a subtle but important fact. Those people are probably examining the social evidence, too. Especially in an ambiguous situation, the tendency for everyone to be looking to see what everyone else is doing can lead to a fascinating phenomenon called "pluralistic ignorance." A thorough understanding of the pluralistic ignorance phenomenon helps

⁷ Schlessinger, *How Could You Do That?*, pp. 94-95.

immeasurably to explain a regular occurrence in our country that has been termed both a riddle and a national disgrace: the failure of entire groups of bystanders to aid victims in agonizing need of help.⁸

Cialdini goes on to detail situations in which pluralistic ignorance takes place, including the famous case of a Queens, New York, woman who was murdered while 38 neighbors watched from their windows. When the murder occurred, reporters grappled with questions about how such apathy could prevail when it would have been so simple for the bystanders to make an anonymous call to police.

Subsequent research suggested that the cause of the inaction was not apathy but conformity to the inaction of others. In study after study, people acting alone were usually willing to offer help and assistance to someone in trouble. But when a crowd was present and no one in the crowd took action, that seemed to indicate that no action was necessary; individuals encountering the inaction of others read the cues of the group and also did nothing to help the person in trouble.

Additional studies show that individuals are much more likely to conform to others who seem similar to themselves. Cialdini cites the research of sociologist David Phillips who discovered that immediately following the reports of suicides of young people, there was a remarkable increase in comparable suicides among the young. When a suicide story involved an older driver, the statistics on suicides committed by older drivers immediately increased. Phillips also discovered a similar trend in homicide rates. Cialdini states, "it is clear that widely publicized aggression has the nasty tendency to spread to similar victims, no matter whether the aggression is inflicted on the self or on another."⁹

When others who resemble us engage in an activity, the activity becomes legitimized. This may account for patterns of high school, junior high school, and even elementary school homicides. Students hear the stories of others who, like themselves, have difficulty in their lives and resolve the difficulty through homicide or homicide followed by suicide. Although they may not conform to their peer group at school, they do conform to their "reference group" of destructive revenge seekers, and they perform "copycat" murders.

The previously noted examples deal with unusual situations, but the human tendency to conform also can be noted in routine, daily activities. One of Cialdini's students, a highway patrolman, reports on a common accident that can also be attributed to social proof, the idea that if everyone thinks or does something, it must be correct.

After a class session in which the subject of discussion was the principle of social proof, he stayed to talk with me. He said that he now understood the cause of a type of traffic accident that had always puzzled him before. The accident typically occurred on the city freeway during rush hour, when cars in all lanes were moving steadily but slowly. Events leading to the accident would start when a pair of cars, one behind the other, would simultaneously begin signaling an intention to get out of the lane they were in and into the next. Within seconds, a long line of drivers to the rear of the first two would follow suit, thinking that something—a stalled car or a construction barrier—was blocking the lane ahead. It would be in this crush to cram into the available spaces of the next lane that a collision frequently happened.

⁸ Robert B. Cialdini, *The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), p. 129.

⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.

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The odd thing about it all, according to the patrolman, was that very often there had been no obstruction to be avoided in the first place, and by the time of the accident, this should have been obvious to anyone who looked. He said he had more than once witnessed such accidents when there was a visibly clear road in front of the ill-fated lane switchers.

The patrolman's account provides certain insights into the way we respond to social proof. First, we seem to assume that if a lot of people are doing the same thing, they must know something we don't. Especially when we are uncertain, we are willing to place an enormous amount of trust in the collective knowledge of the crowd. Second, quite frequently the crowd is mistaken because they are not acting on the basis of any superior information but are reacting, themselves, to the principle of social proof.¹⁰

Many psychologists like Cialdini write extensively about the human tendency to conform. With advances in neuroscience, researchers are now looking at the mechanisms in our brain that cause us to conform to others. In the Netherlands, studies using MRI scans have discovered that individual conflict with a group opinion triggers a "neuronal response. . . similar to a prediction error signal." In other words, when a subject realizes that he or she has a different opinion from the majority of the group, his or her brain triggers perception-adjusting responses. "The present study explains why we often automatically adjust our opinion in line with the majority opinion," says (researcher) Dr. Klucharev. "Our results also show that social conformity is based on mechanisms that comply with reinforcement learning and is reinforced by the neural error-monitoring activity which signals what is probably the most fundamental social mistake—that of being too different from others."¹¹

Conformity occurs when we follow what others are doing rather than relying on our own best judgment. We sometimes find that conformity is a necessary condition for being accepted in a group. When a group member expresses an opinion that is different from the group's opinion, pressure is often applied to get the "deviant" to conform. The pressure may come in the form of reasoning, teasing, bribery, shaming, pleading, complimenting, or, usually as a last resort, shunning. The tendency for individuals to go along with a group's decision has been labeled by Yale psychologist Irving L. Janis as **groupthink**. Groupthink involves faulty decision making by groups that sacrifice sound judgment in order to keep their unity as a group: group members don't offer or consider several alternative solutions to a problem; they don't seek outside, expert opinion; they don't criticize each other's ideas; and they rationalize poor decisions. Janis discovered the principle of groupthink in his study of various actions taken by U.S. government leaders that led to dire consequences for many people. Professor Vincent Ryan Ruggiero discusses Janis's study in his book *Beyond Feelings*:

The actions were Franklin D. Roosevelt's failure to be ready for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Harry S. Truman's decision to invade North Korea, John F. Kennedy's plan to invade Cuba, and Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to escalate the Vietnam War. In each case, Janis found that the people who made the decision exhibited a strong desire to concur in the group decision.

conformity The tendency to follow others uncritically, usually to gain acceptance or avoid conflict; the practice of using the beliefs and actions of others rather than our own best judgment as the primary guide to personal thoughts and actions.

groupthink The tendency for group members to rigidly conform to and reinforce a collective opinion or judgment about an issue.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 162–163.

¹¹ Cathleen Genova, "Social Conformity Starts in the Brain," January 15, 2009, medicalnewstoday.com.

... More specifically, Janis identified a number of major defects in decision-making that could be attributed to this conformity. The groups he analyzed did not survey the range of choices but focused on a few. When they discovered that their initial decision had certain drawbacks, they failed to reconsider those decisions. They almost never tested their own thinking for weaknesses. They never tried to obtain the judgments of experts. They expressed interest only in those views that reinforced the positions they preferred, and they spent little time considering the obstacles that would hinder the success of their plans. In each of the cases Janis studied, these defects in thinking cost untold human suffering.¹²

More recently, scholars have cited the effects of groupthink as causes for other disasters including the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger and the policies that led to financial and housing meltdowns in the United States.

How can we overcome the effects of conformity and groupthink on our actions?

1. Realize that as humans, we have a tendency to unconsciously accept social proof, the proof that is based on a broad acceptance of an attitude or action. This tendency may manifest in personal social choices as well as in blind ethnocentrism.
2. Understand that as social beings, we work in groups and seek the acceptance of the group. Be aware of the phenomenon of groupthink, and bring it to the attention of a group when appropriate.
3. Watch for and avoid the tendency to conform to others or to rebel against others; instead, base decisions on good evidence and reasoning.
4. When working with a group, suggest that the group divide into subgroups to brainstorm ideas before discussing them as a whole group. Use outside experts to offer opinions on important matters. Have an impartial leader who establishes an open climate where it is genuinely safe to criticize ideas; a good leader will also encourage group members to challenge various solutions to problems and to consider many alternatives before coming to a decision.

Emotional Reasoning and Rational Responses

emotional reasoning

The process of using one's feelings as definitive proof of an accurate analysis of a situation.

Like conformity, **emotional reasoning** causes us to distort the truth of our circumstances and to make poor decisions. We all experience feelings as a result of the words or actions of others. People who reason emotionally *react* to other people and to events, taking their feelings as automatic proof that their own analysis of the situation is accurate. People who reason logically also experience their emotions, but they stop and consider possible interpretations and perceptions before reacting, so that they can *respond* in a rational and constructive manner.

Cognitive psychologists help people use tools of rationality to overcome debilitating emotions and to reason more clearly. A rational approach to emotions is based on the following principles:

We all face numerous challenging situations every day.

Feelings and reactions to these situations are natural.

Our feelings can be traced back to our thoughts, that is, our interpretations of the events.

¹² Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, *Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1990), p. 64.

If we examine the thoughts/interpretations that produced the feelings, the feelings will often change or be diminished.

When feelings are more in line with reality, our actions will be more constructive.

For example, let's say that you say hello to a coworker who is usually friendly, and she quickly walks right past you without returning your greeting. A natural reaction would be to feel insulted, hurt, or annoyed with her. You might decide that the next time you see her, you're not going to say anything. Although your feelings are normal, your interpretation of the event involves "jumping to conclusions," interpreting the event, assuming your interpretation is correct, and then judging the situation accordingly.

But suppose that you find out that your coworker was rushing past you because she had just been told that her mother was in intensive care following a car accident. Now, the natural reaction would be to feel concern and sympathy. You might decide to see if you could help her in some way.

We can illustrate how our thoughts determine our feelings with a simple chart:

Situation	Thoughts (Self-Talk)	Feelings
Coworker ignores you.	"She thinks she's superior to me."	Irritation, anger
Coworker ignores you.	"She is upset about her mother."	Concern, sympathy

Stop and Think

Critical thinkers realize that all events and behaviors are not personally designed to make their lives difficult; they are able to stop and consider other interpretations and respond accordingly.

It takes character, in the form of self-control, patience, and optimism, to stop and question our interpretations of a situation before we react to it. For example, when a flight is delayed, it is common for people to take out their anger and frustration on the clerk at the airline counter, even though it would not be his or her fault that the mechanic found a problem in the engine or that the weather has caused delays. People on the "front lines" of customer service are trained to deal with frustrated and angry outbursts; they are taught not to take the verbal abuse personally and to refer inconsolable or threatening people to the next level of management. Their job is made easier by people who use rational "self-talk" before lashing out, as illustrated by contrasting responses to the same situation:

Situation	Thoughts (Self-Talk)	Feelings	Action
Airport delay	"I'm being taken advantage of by the airline."	Anger-rage	Yell at clerk
Airport delay	"There is a problem with the plane or weather."	Irritation	Adjust/cope; decide on the best course of action or use of time

The first individual rages at the clerk, which only makes the situation more unpleasant. Note that the second individual is also irritated, but his rational thinking allows him to adjust to the situation rather than making it worse. He might even talk to the clerk about getting a flight on another airline, and his polite manner might make her more receptive to trying to help him come up with a creative solution to his dilemma.

When our thoughts are based on a correct interpretation of reality, our actions will be more useful. Even when our negative thoughts seem reasonable, we are able to act more rationally if we stop and think. For example, let's say that your coworker got an hourly raise that you also deserved.

Situation	Thoughts (Self-Talk)	Feelings
Coworker gets raise	"I also deserved this raise."	Anger at boss

This situation may seem and may actually be unfair to you, in which case your feelings are justified. But it is also important to consider the best actions to achieve your goals. You might get angry with your boss and accuse her of being unfair, but that is not likely to help you achieve your goals and may even hurt your case. If you can calmly present the situation to her, she may see that she was wrong and correct the wrong; if she doesn't, there is often recourse through her supervisor or through a union representative.

Dr. Phil McGraw has a useful phrase that helps people examine the consequences of their actions. He often asks his troubled guests this question about dysfunctional reactions to their circumstances: "How's that working for you?" Even when our anger is justified, we need to come up with the best course of action for our lives. Screaming and lashing out at others or giving up in frustration rarely helps us to achieve long-term goals.

There are specific patterns of thinking that distort reality and make it hard for us to make clear decisions or take rational actions. Following are some of the most debilitating ones that we should recognize and avoid.

overgeneralizing Coming to a general conclusion on the basis of a single incident or a few incidents.

1. **Overgeneralizing.** Overgeneralizing involves coming to a general conclusion on the basis of a single incident or a few incidents. People who overgeneralize often use exaggerated terms such as "always," "never," "everyone," and "nothing." They label themselves and others as permanently fixed in some character trait because of a few examples, and they overlook any evidence to the contrary. Overgeneralizing causes prejudice and stereotyping of ourselves and others.

Examples

"I got a D on my test—I'll never understand math."
 "You're always late."
 "We'll never have the time to get this done."
 "I forgot our anniversary—I'm just a terrible boyfriend."

mind reading Assuming that what would be true for you in any given circumstance is true for the other person; making assumptions about the thoughts, feelings, or motives of another and taking the assumptions as true without further proof or discussion.

2. **Mind Reading.** Mind readers assume they know what others are thinking or assume that others should know what they are thinking. Mind reading is often based on the psychological process of "projection"—assuming that what would be true for you in any given circumstance is true for the other person.

Examples

"The only reason he married her was for her money."
 "You should have known that I wanted that job—it was obvious."
 "The reason she said that was because she was jealous."

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3. **Filtering.** When we filter, we focus on the negative details of a situation and filter out the positive—this has also been called “awfulizing” a situation and is a favorite tactic of pessimistic thinkers. When the negative details are all that we allow, those details become larger and more powerful than they really are. Often, the filtering implies and creates helplessness on the part of speakers; they see circumstances as completely out of their control or influence.

Examples

“Our schools are a complete mess. Things have changed so much because of the new policies that education has become impossible.”

“I’ve tried to get a job, but people just aren’t hiring; and even if they are, I can’t live on the salary I’d get.”

“Every time I try to give up drinking, someone has a party; I can’t change because our school is just too much of a party school, and I’m not willing to be an outcast.”

4. **Catastrophizing.** Closely related to filtering, catastrophizing occurs when people expect disaster. People who catastrophize imagine and anticipate problems, and they often use the term *what if*? Creative thinkers can come up with any number of potentially catastrophic events. While rational concerns should always be considered before embarking on a new course of action, and life does involve some risk, catastrophizing is filled with unsubstantiated and exaggerated fears. As Mark Twain said, “I’ve had many troubles in my life, most of which never happened.” On a personal level, catastrophizing reflects a lack of trust in one’s capacity to adapt to changes.

Examples

“We can’t change the stadium’s location. We’ll lose all our fans.”

“Online classes are a bad idea. There’s no way to prevent cheating.”

“Junior shouldn’t be taking gymnastics. What if he falls and breaks his arm?”

“I’ll never be able to get a job with so many other people in my major.”

5. **Personalizing.** When we personalize, we relate everything that happens to ourselves, and we “take things personally,” assuming that general statements or actions are references to us. We also falsely believe that our characteristics or actions are continually being compared, favorably or unfavorably, against others. Personalizing sometimes creates inflated optimism; it often creates defensiveness and pessimism.

Examples

“I know he’s lied and cheated on other girls too, but he broke up with me because I wasn’t good enough for him.”

“The C in history just shows how much that teacher hated me.”

“I only got the solo because the teacher loves me.”

“Our boss told us that we were all working too slowly, but I know she meant me.”

“Our boss told us we were doing well. I know she meant me.”

“Every team I’m on is going to lose.”

“Every team I’m on is going to win.”

6. **Perfectionism.** Perfectionists have a false belief that perfection is possible. They end up minimizing their good qualities or the good parts of a situation and focusing instead on how they or others have not measured up. Perfectionists have

filtering The process of distorting reality by focusing on all the negative details of a situation and filtering out all the positive.

catastrophizing A form of emotional reasoning in which one imagines and anticipates disastrous outcomes or future problems.

personalizing A form of emotional reasoning in which a person relates everything that happens to him- or herself, assuming that general statements or actions are personally directed. Personalizing also involves the belief that one’s characteristics or actions are continually being compared, favorably or unfavorably, against the characteristics or actions of other people.

perfectionism A form of emotional reasoning based on a desire and belief that one should be without flaws; good qualities, good work, or the good parts of a situation are minimized and focus is placed on how others or oneself have not measured up.

a hard time accepting their own humanity as well as the limits of other human beings; their desire to be without fault in any way can make them avoid challenges or berate themselves and others when outcomes are not ideal.

Examples

"I'm so upset that I missed two questions—I should have studied harder for the test."

"Yes, we finally have a new theater, but it's going to be another year before the sound system is complete."

"Honey, I know you spent all day cleaning the yard, but you didn't put away your laundry."

"I know we won and I scored the most points, but my brother was Most Valuable Player when he was my age."

Stop and Think

Do you or someone you know tend to use emotional reasoning? If so, how does the emotional reasoning interfere with good decision making?

Ways to Deal with Emotional Reasoning

When you find yourself involved in the irrational reasoning processes outlined in the previous section, there are several things you can do to get back on track.

1. **Be Aware.** Stop and see if you can identify how your reasoning is distorted. Are you catastrophizing, mind-reading, personalizing, filtering, overgeneralizing, or seeking perfection?
2. **Map Out the General Beliefs Behind Your Emotions.** Common beliefs related to feelings can be generally categorized in the following ways:

Feeling	General Belief
Anger	My rights or someone else's rights or humanity have been violated in some way.
Sadness/Grief	I have experienced a loss.
Anxiety	I am fearful or worried about something happening in the present or the future.
Guilt	I have violated someone else's rights.
Embarrassment	I have lost standing with others.

3. **Analyze the Specific Situation That Caused Your Thinking.** For example, if you didn't receive a grade or a promotion that you felt you deserved, you may believe that your rights have been violated; that belief generated the feelings of anger. If you are unprepared for an upcoming test or interview, you may feel anxiety.
4. **Consider Other Interpretations of the Situation.** Your teacher may have made a mistake in your grading or you may have misinterpreted the grading criteria. You may feel unprepared for an upcoming test because of missing some class time. Come up with the worst case, best case, and most likely case concerning your situation.

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¹⁴ Ibid.,

Sometimes, just asking yourself, "What is the worst thing that can happen?" or "Why does this situation bother me so much?" can bring insight and clarification.

5. **Prepare for Action.** Try to plan for the best possible outcomes and to prevent the worst possible outcomes. For example, you may decide to talk with your instructor about your grade when you are feeling calm and rational. Instead of approaching him with anger and a sense of injustice, bring your work and grades and ask him to clarify how your grade was calculated. If you have a difference of opinion, explain it to him. If you get no satisfactory answer, calmly go to the next level, his supervisor, until you receive the answers or changes you need.
6. **Accept Good Changes and Also Accept Reality.** You can't control other people, and there are also many situations that are out of your control. But you can respond with clear thinking and positive actions that help you make the best of your circumstances, effecting change when possible and moving on when necessary. (See Exercise 9.2, page 424.)

Skill

Recognize and use logical thinking to counter emotional reasoning.

Points of Logical Vulnerability

Professor Zachary Seech has come up with a great description of the trouble spots in our thinking, areas where we have difficulty being rational. He calls them **points of logical vulnerability**. We can be vulnerable to a general topic, such as politics, or a specific one, such as our sister's choice of a husband.¹³

There are topics about which a person, we say, "just cannot be rational." What we mean is that this person has great difficulty being objective on these specific topics. He or she finds it difficult, in some cases, to consider the evidence impartially and draw a sensible, justified conclusion. These topics are the points of logical vulnerability for that person.¹⁴

Each person has different "sore spots" in his or her life, and dialogue on a given issue becomes difficult when our emotions blind our thinking on certain points. If you are a die-hard fan of a particular team, you may not be objective about how they will do in the next game. If fast food fits your lifestyle perfectly, you may not be open to any discussion of health problems associated with a steady diet of cheeseburgers and fries. If you are upset because your roommate is getting married and moving out, you may find yourself disliking his or her new mate.

Points of logical vulnerability affect us so much on a personal level that we are likely to deny or rationalize any evidence that might disprove our opinions. For example, if you dislike a senator because of her views on taxes and then she supports a tax bill you also support, you might rationalize that "she's just trying to appease us; she doesn't really care about the issue."

Conversely, if you like the senator and she does something you consider wrong, you might rationalize that she was forced into making concessions she would not have personally approved. Our points of logical vulnerability cause us to distort or deny information that goes against our deeply held opinions.

points of logical vulnerability Topics about which a person has difficulty being rational or objective.

¹³ Zachary Seech, *Logic in Everyday Life* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1988), pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Keep in mind the difference between having strong, well-considered convictions about which you are not flexible (such as your values), and opinions that have not been thought out, but have been based solely on emotions or identification with others who hold those opinions. The latter opinions are probably points of logical vulnerability for you. (See Exercise 9.3, pages 424–425.)

Antidotes for Points of Logical Vulnerability

You can confront your points of logical vulnerability in several effective ways. The first approach is to apply certain techniques of rational thought to your irrational statements; the second is to learn to listen actively and accurately to people with differing opinions.

general semanticists

Scholars who study the effects of language on mental health and behavior.

General semanticists study the relationship between words, perception, and behavior. They believe that we can improve our mental health by increasing the accuracy with which we speak, and they have come up with several “cures” for irrational statements.

A classic irrational statement stereotypes a whole group of people based on a limited sample of experience on the part of the speaker. Another term for a stereotypical statement is a *sweeping generalization*.

Let’s say a man named Harold has had several bad experiences in his relationships with women. The first woman he wanted to marry left him for another man; the second woman he wanted to marry told him she wasn’t ready for a commitment and that she needed “space”; the third woman he wanted to marry left town with no contact information. In discussing his problems with his best friend, Harold makes the statement: “All women are cruel and selfish.”

Now we can understand how anyone with this record of experiences would be upset about his former relationships, but we also can see, as outside observers, that his statement is emotional and would not hold up to critical scrutiny. You can’t interact with three women and then claim that all women (about half of the human race) are cruel and selfish.

General semanticists, basing their work on the pioneering writing of Albert Korzypski, apply what he called **semantic devices** to help people be more rational about their statements; they believe that if we speak more logically, we will be able to overcome debilitating emotions and reactions. They would ask Harold to do a few things with his statement, “All women are cruel and selfish.”

- Eliminate the word *all* since no one can know every single woman. Change the general term *women* into specifics: Woman 1, woman 2, and woman 3 become Patty, Marcia, and Gina. Now he has: “Patty, Marcia, and Gina are cruel and selfish.” Not perfect, but more accurate; at least in this case, he is not generalizing from three examples to half of the human race.

Semanticists call this technique **indexing**; you take your general label (women, Catholics, Asians, Americans) and change it to actual people. You also delete the word *all* from your vocabulary when it precedes a general category. One can never know *all* about any given group.

- Next, a general semanticist would ask Harold to change his vague labels of *cruel* and *selfish* to specific behaviors. “Patty, Marcia, and Gina did not marry me, although we were dating and I asked them to marry me. Patty married someone else, Marcia told me she needed ‘space,’ and Gina left town without contacting me.”
- For accuracy and perspective, our semanticist would also ask Harold to put a *date* on his statement. “Patty, Marcia, and Gina did not marry me, although we

semantic devices

Tools created by general semanticists that help people make their words more accurately reflective of reality.

indexing A process by which one takes general labels (women, Catholics, Asians, Americans) and substitutes a reference to actual people. Indexing is used to prevent stereotyping.

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were dating and I asked them to marry me. Patty married someone else, Marcia told me she needed 'space,' and Gina left town without contacting me. These incidents happened when I was in my late teens and early twenties."

- The final addition to Harold's statement is called the *etc.* because it includes other realities that add balance and fairness to the original statement. Think of a young child who complains with all accuracy, "Joey pushed me!" This statement is clear and unambiguous, yet we don't know what else was going on in the situation. We don't have the total picture or the context in which the event occurred.

To figure out what was going on, a parent or teacher might ask, "Did you push him too?" It could be that the child who complained was indeed the victim of Joey's aggressiveness, or maybe the complaining child pushed Joey first. Also, it could be that Joey was pushing to get somewhere and was unaware that he had pushed the other child. We can only know what happened in a situation when we get more information.

Think about the times you feel really annoyed with someone's behavior. In recounting your irritation to a friend, do you really try to be fair and objective, or do you tend to present the details that best support your right to be annoyed?

When general semanticists recommend the use of the *etc.*, they are recognizing the complexity of situations and the truth that we can rarely say all there is to say about the factors involved that create difficulties or conflict. They would suggest that Harold add information to his statement to give a more accurate picture of reality:

- Patty, Marcia, and Gina did not marry me, although we were dating and I asked them to marry me. Patty married someone else, Marcia told me she needed "space," and Gina left town without contacting me. These incidents happened when I was in my late teens and early twenties. I knew Patty was ready to get married, but I didn't ask her until she was involved with someone else; I could have still dated Marcia as one of the men she was dating, but I wanted to be the only one; I don't know why Gina left town.

Skill

Use rational thinking aids to overcome areas in which you have trouble being rational.

If you compare Harold's first statement with this last statement, you might understand why the use of semantic devices improves mental health. A counselor might help Harold arrive at the same kinds of rephrasing. If he continues to see all women as cruel and selfish, he might never try to interact with them again; but if he sees that he has had a few bad experiences, he can learn from his mistakes and continue to grow and develop relationships. As humans, we all endure hurtful experiences; people who can apply reason to their emotional reactions can bounce back more easily. The use of reason increases our resiliency.

The semantic devices help us change irrational comments we make about people and issues to more truthful and fair-minded statements. (See Exercise 9.4 on page 425.)

Actively and Accurately Listening: Developing Empathy

Some psychologists believe that the ability to listen to another person, to empathize with, and to understand their point of view is one of the highest forms of intelligent behavior.

Arthur Costa, "Teaching for Intelligence"

Many cultures place a high value on competition, and this competition is not restricted to sporting events—it also comes out in debates and discussions on issues. According to Deborah Tannen, author of *The Argument Culture*, the desire to win and the enjoyment we find in having the most persuasive argument may limit our ability to be fair to opposing sides of issues.¹⁵

Tannen makes a distinction between "having an argument" and "making an argument":

When you're having an argument, you aren't trying to understand what the other person is saying; you're trying to win the argument. Both of you ignore the other's valid points and leap on weak ones, which is frustrating, because neither of you is listening to the other. In making an argument, you're putting a logical train of thoughts together to persuade someone of your point of view.¹⁶

When we sense that someone is trying to win an argument and is not willing to listen, that person loses credibility with us, and we usually tune him or her out. The most persuasive speaker is one who can understand and address the points brought up by those with different opinions. To understand and respond to an opposing argument, we must hear what the speaker for the opposition is saying.

Why do we find listening difficult, and why don't politicians listen more fairly in debates? Some of the reasons we don't listen include the following:

- The thrust of debate is to win; therefore, we tend to listen to the opposition's position only so we can find fault with it. The focus is on victory, not on understanding, especially in public debating forums. Too often a televised discussion or debate models bad behavior; speakers shout over each other, rarely admitting that an argument made by the other person has any merit.
- We are not trained to listen. Some of us have had training in speech, but few have had specific training in effective listening techniques.
- We may fear that if we really listen to the other person, we will lose our train of thought.
- We may be concerned that if we really listen to the other person, we might agree with him or her and that could be unsettling and uncomfortable.
- Effort and energy are required in order to try to understand the viewpoint of another person.
- For many of us, it is more rewarding to speak about our own ideas than to listen to others.

¹⁵ Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture* (New York: Ballantine, Random House, 1999), p. 352.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 354.

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Listening accurately to an opposing position, however, gives us some clear advantages:

- We can learn what the opposition to our cause or issue believes, and we can then address our opponents more effectively on specific points.
- We can grow and adjust our position if new research or reasoning warrants the adjustment.
- When we are seen as secure enough in our position to listen to an opposing argument, our credibility increases.
- Our calm listening is often contagious; as we show our willingness to hear the other side fully, defenses are dropped and our opponents may listen to us as well. We have a better chance of explaining our viewpoint and not having it distorted by interruptions or polarized by angry rebuttals.
- In an atmosphere of reduced hostility, areas of agreement can be found. When areas of agreement are discovered, problems can be solved more creatively.

The Art of Listening Well

The heart's real intentions are like deep water; but a person with discernment draws them out.

Proverbs 20.5, CJB

The late Carl Rogers, a southern California psychologist, created a listening exercise that has become a staple for counselors and teachers of communication. Rogers's technique is simple and very effective; if done correctly in an atmosphere of respect and goodwill, both sides come out with empathy, that is, a deeper understanding of the other's position.

Understanding does not necessarily mean agreement. We may know exactly what the other's position is and conclude that he is completely off base. A critical thinker draws conclusions based on an understanding of both her own and her opponent's position, not solely on an emotional commitment to her original position.

The key element of Rogers's technique is paraphrasing (putting in your own words) the other person's thoughts so that you know what is truly being said before you respond with your own opinions. In normal dialogue, you won't be paraphrasing everything the other person says, but you should stop and paraphrase whenever you aren't sure about what he or she is saying. You can also use paraphrasing to cool down an emotional discussion. When people feel that they are truly being heard, there is no need for loud and strident dialogue.

Here is Rogers's listening exercise that is used to train people in basic paraphrasing skills:

1. Two people with opposing beliefs on an issue sit facing each other.
2. Person A begins with a brief statement about her opinion on an issue.
3. Person B paraphrases—puts person A's opinion in his own words. When person A agrees that person B has understood, then person B states his opinion.
4. Now person A has to paraphrase—restate in her own words—what person B has said. When person B is satisfied that person A has understood him, person A can expand on her opinion.

empathy The ability to identify and understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

5. This process is continued until both people feel they have presented their cases and that they have been understood. It is helpful to allow each person a few minutes to summarize, as best he or she can, the complete position of the other person.
6. During the process, both people attempt to be objective in their summaries of the other person's viewpoint and to avoid sarcasm, ridicule, or exaggeration of any points the other person makes. In some cases, it is best to have an unbiased and tactful third party serve as a 'referee' to ensure that both people are fairly heard.
7. It is also helpful to try to "read between the lines" and understand why the other person feels so strongly about his or her position. Often there is a significant personal experience that shaped the other person's viewpoint in a powerful way.

Person E

Person 1

Skill

Listen with empathy to an opposing viewpoint.

Person

Person

Example

Person

Person A: I believe heroic medical interventions should not be made unless the doctors and nurses have the permission of the patient or the patient's family members.

Person B: So you believe that extending life with technology should not be done unless a patient or his family wants his life extended?

Person

Person

Person A: That's right.

Person B: Well, it's my opinion that sometimes there isn't time for a discussion with the patient or the family members about the patient's chances for survival. The medical experts have to act or there is no decision to be made because the patient is dead!

Perso:

Person A: So you think that using technology is totally up to the doctors?

Person B: (clarifying) I didn't mean that. I mean, if the patient is going to die if he's not hooked up to the machines, then he needs to be hooked up first and consulted later.

Perso

Person A: (trying to paraphrase more accurately) So you think in an emergency the doctors should be allowed to treat the patient in any way that will save his life and talk to him or his family members later.

Person B: That's right. You got it.

Person A: Well, I don't have a real problem with that. But I believe that if the patient doesn't want to be kept alive through technology, and if he or his family members tell the doctors that, then the doctors have to abide by his wishes and "pull the plug."

Person B: So, basically, you believe the patient should decide whether he will live or die—or, if he can't decide, then his family should decide for him.

Person A: (clarifying) That's not exactly it. He may live or die whether he's hooked up to life supports or not. But it's his choice—or his family's choice—whether he will be hooked up.

Person B: Okay, then it's the patient's choice, or secondly, his family's choice and not the doctor's choice to continue him on life supports.

Person A: Exactly.

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Person B: I believe it is part of a doctor's job to assess a patient's chances for survival; the patient or the family can get too emotional and decide to let someone die rather than be uncomfortable; and meanwhile, the doctor may know there's a good chance for recovery. Also, doctors are trained to save life at all costs. If we train them to take the patient's advice, then they could let him die just so they could take off early to play golf.

Person A: That's a lot for me to paraphrase. You believe, if I have it right, that doctors are more objective and less emotional than patients and family members, and they have more of an expert opinion about chances for recovery. And also you think it's dangerous to let patients or family members decide to pull the plug because then doctors don't have to worry about whether the patient could have lived a full life or not.

Person B: You said it better than I did!

Person A: Well, what I really think is that doctors should give their expert opinion to the patient and the family members. If they then decide, for whatever reason, not to prolong life with technology, then the doctors would have to abide by their decision.

Person B: So you think that the doctor should be an adviser or counselor and give them all the information they need, but the family should have the final power to decide what will be done.

Person A: That's exactly right.

Person B: Well, that sounds fair, but I just believe it's better to go for life, whenever possible. There are many cases of people recovering from comas or serious strokes, thanks to life-support systems. If their families had pulled the plug to spare them pain or expense, they would have lost a loved one. Give life a chance.

Person A: Well, my position is more simple. It's his body—or his parent's, wife's, or child's body. That gives him the right to decide what will or will not be done in a hospital. I agree it's important to get the doctor's opinion, but after that, his decision should be honored.

Person B: And I agree with you that it's his or her body, but I also think the doctors are more objective and knowledgeable, so they should be allowed to continue treatment if there's a chance for recovery. I can see why some of these cases have to be settled in court. That's not the ideal solution, but it's the best we've come up with so far.

Questions for Discussion

1. The participants in this dialogue did not end by agreeing with much of each other's positions. How, then, is this form of communication useful?
2. Where did you spot inaccurate paraphrases of the other position? Why do you think these occurred?
3. Often, there is a strong emotional component to someone's position. Do you see hints of emotionalism in this dialogue? How does the paraphrasing minimize emotional outbursts or points of logical vulnerability? Under what circumstances should the emotional reactions of the participants also be brought to light?

active listening

Paraphrasing and summarizing the thoughts and feelings of the speaker with the aim of empathic understanding of his or her viewpoint.

Precautions About Active Listening

Active listening was first suggested as a technique to be used by professional therapists. Over the years, various workshops have been set up for the purposes of training people to use active listening to improve their relationships. These workshops focus on the proper and improper use of the technique.

If you have never been formally trained in active listening, you may find it uncomfortable. However, practice and a basic knowledge of potential problems should enable you to use this very helpful communication tool successfully. Here is a summary of basic precautions in using active listening:

1. Avoid sarcasm and ridicule of the other person's statements; also don't add negative connotations to what he or she says.
2. Don't "parrot" the position of the other person; just paraphrase (put in your own words) the ideas you hear.
3. If you find yourself getting upset, take some time out and assess what it is about this issue that makes it painful for you to be objective. There are some issues we feel so strongly about that there is no room for discussion. These strong feelings are usually connected to a personal experience. For example, if your cousin was murdered, you may believe that the death penalty is justified, and any arguments against it make no impression when you consider the pain of your cousin and your close family. Your belief may be based on a value that you hold deeply; if you believe that abortion is the taking of innocent life, then statistics about overpopulation may not convince you to change your mind. (See Exercise 9.5 on pages 425–426.)

It is helpful, as a critical thinker, to know the areas in which you hold solid convictions. You can then acknowledge points from an opposing side, but make it clear that those points are not strong enough for you to change your mind. The key is to understand both sides of an issue fully and to be open to new information; then you are responsible as a thinker when you, with good conscience, take a strong, even immovable, stand on an issue.

It is unrealistic to assume that you will have many opportunities for this kind of extended dialogue with someone who disagrees with you. The benefit of understanding the paraphrasing technique is that you can use it whenever it seems that something needs to be clarified in a discussion. Your use of this technique gives you credibility and the personal power that comes with a calm, rational approach to dialogue.

The person who stays cool and calm in a discussion seems secure in his or her position. The person who blows it by becoming overexcited and unfair to the opposition seems threatened—that is, logically vulnerable. Shouting the other person down, name-calling, interrupting, and other forms of intimidation and bullying serve only to make the person who uses these tactics seem foolish and unstable.

Your cool, clear mind—don't leave home without it!

Life Application: Tips for College and Career

Use listening skills to uncover the viewpoints of those who believe differently from you on a particular issue. Listen with empathy and try to uncover past experiences or present concerns that make them think as they do. When you experience a conflict with others, stop and paraphrase their beliefs and feelings; express a genuine understanding of their position and then explain your own viewpoint.

Expand your own fair-mindedness by being aware of your own 'points of logical vulnerability' and areas of emotional reasoning. Think through rational responses to avoid personalizing and catastrophizing in challenging situations.

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Chapter Review

Summary

1. Our thinking can become less egocentric and more clear and fair when we recognize our self-protective defense mechanisms and areas of logical vulnerability and when we develop specific skills for understanding the viewpoints of others.
2. Rationalization is a defense mechanism through which we try to justify or make sense out of things that are not sensible or justifiable.
3. Denial is a defense mechanism that involves repressing or refusing to recognize threatening information.
4. Conformity affects our thinking as an unconscious but powerful response to 'social proof' and the human desire to belong to various groups.
5. Emotional reasoning often distorts thinking; there are specific ways to overcome emotional reasoning and to think more rationally.
6. Points of logical vulnerability are topics about which we have trouble being rational.
7. Critical thinkers can manage points of logical vulnerability through the use of semantic devices.
8. Active listening, when used properly, can help us clearly understand the viewpoints of others.

Checkup

Sentence Completion

1. The tendency to view one's culture as central and superior is known as _____.
2. Respect, openness to hearing other viewpoints, and willingness to change characterize the trait of _____.
3. A defense mechanism that involves justifying or making sense of things that don't make sense is _____.
4. The tendency to view everything in relationship to oneself is called _____.
5. A defense mechanism in which we repress or refuse to recognize threatening or negative information is called _____.
6. A state of mind in which an idea and an action or two ideas clash is called _____.
7. The tendency to conform in group decision-making results in what Janis calls _____.
8. Often, the way we feel is based on our _____ about a situation.
9. _____ occurs when negative details are magnified and positive details are ignored.
10. When you imagine disastrous outcomes, you are _____.

Short Answer

11. Define points of logical vulnerability, using an example.
12. What are the semantic devices and how do they help us deal with points of logical vulnerability?
13. How is active listening used to create understanding of opposing viewpoints?
14. What are some ways we can overcome emotional reasoning?

Exercises

EXERCISE 9.1 Purpose: To understand why people rationalize rather than admit mistakes and incongruities.

In a small group, take the examples of rationalization from page 403 and discuss why someone might use those rationalizations.

1. What need might he or she be trying to meet by rationalizing about the situation?
2. How is rationalization related to the attempt to preserve self-esteem?
3. How is rationalization harmful to the critical thinking and decision making process?

EXERCISE 9.2 Purposes: To understand how feelings are connected to thoughts. To change reactions by rethinking a situation.

1. Think of some recent instances where you had a strong emotional reaction (e.g., anger, anxiety, guilt, sadness, embarrassment).
2. Identify the emotion and the thoughts or beliefs that created the emotion. What was your "self-talk" about the situation?
3. Create a different interpretation of the events—different self-talk. Would your emotions have changed with the new interpretation?

Example

I recently had surgery and my mom has been calling me every day to see if I need anything. I got irritated at her last week and told her to stop treating me like a little kid. My thoughts were that she doesn't trust me to take care of myself. I feel like my right to be treated as an adult was violated.

Looking back at this, I realize that she was just really concerned about my recovery and just wanted to be useful and reassured that I had everything I needed. That understanding made my irritation go away. In fact, I feel a little guilty now for being so rude to her when her motives were to help me be comfortable and get better.

EXERCISE 9.3 Purpose: To recognize areas of logical vulnerability.

Discover some of your points of logical vulnerability. Think about people whose opinions are not credible for you. Consider political or social issues (for example, capital punishment, drug legalization, euthanasia, gun control, or global warming), or choose an issue about which you frequently argue with other people.

Can you think of any ways in which you might not have been objective in hearing evidence from others about this issue? Do you use denial or rationalization when confronted with your points of logical vulnerability? How could you respond differently?

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Example

I don't like a congresswoman in my state. I heard her speak once and thought she was rude in the way she handled a question from the audience; also, she is against some of the legislation I consider important.

Once in a while, I'll hear her say something that makes sense, but I notice I discount whatever she says; if there's a negative way to look at her comments, I do. I guess I think she has some ulterior motive, and I don't believe she has any positive contribution to make.

I don't like most of her positions, and I'd never vote for her. But I could be more open and fair and admit that occasionally she does have a good idea, and she might have real concern for the people in her district.

EXERCISE 9.4 Purpose: To practice using the semantic devices in order to make statements more accurate and rational.

1. Using the semantic devices (eliminating the *all*, indexing, citing specific behavior, and adding the *date* and the *etc.*), change the following irrational statements into logical statements. You will need to make up details.
 - a. Women are terrible drivers. (Note the implied *all* before women.)
 - b. Wealthy people are greedy and materialistic.
 - c. Democrats are bleeding-heart liberals and can't be trusted.
 - d. Republicans don't care about the poor and needy.
 - e. People from Ivy League schools are elitists.
 - f. People on welfare don't want to work.

Can you add a statement that you've heard yourself (or someone else) say?

2. Listen to yourself for a week and see if you tend to overgeneralize when confronted with your points of logical vulnerability. Try to stop yourself and to use the semantic devices to rephrase your opinions. What is the effect on your emotions and your conversations? You may note that if you try to get other people to be more specific and less prejudicial in their statements, you encounter some hostility. Why might that be? Write out several examples of instances in which you or someone else could have used the semantic devices to make more accurate statements.

EXERCISE 9.5 Purpose: To practice active listening.

1. In class, or at home, try using this listening technique when discussing an issue with someone who disagrees with you; for class, you can choose a social issue that usually creates opposing viewpoints, such as legalization of drugs, same-sex marriage, or whether spanking is an acceptable form of child discipline. Often, there are interesting controversial issues reported on websites or in daily papers, and you can choose one of those as your topic. For use at home, you might want to discuss a problem that needs to be solved, such as the division of labor or how to spend money. Be sure to tell the other person the active listening rules, and get his or her commitment to abide by them, or you may be in for a good fight. It may help to have a referee who is familiar with the technique and objective about the issue. Then report on your results by answering the following questions:
 - a. Were you able to stay with the paraphrasing process? Why or why not?
 - b. Did you and the other person attain greater understanding? If so, give some specific examples of what you learned about each other's positions.
 - c. Was the relationship between you and the other person improved in any way?

2. Exchange a persuasive essay paper you have done (perhaps earlier in this course or in another class) with another student's essay; then do the following:
 - a. Write a paraphrase of the other's ideas, clearly focusing on thesis statements and evidence used to support the thesis. Ask the other person if you accurately paraphrased his or her position.
 - b. Read the other student's paraphrase of your essay; comment on how well he or she understood and expressed your point of view. If there are misunderstandings in each other's viewpoints, try to discover why these occurred. If time permits, explain to the class any problems you encountered in trying to empathize with each other's ideas.
3. Practice active listening from your side only. This exercise works well if you are not emotionally invested but the other person is experiencing strong feelings about an issue or a problem. Instead of offering advice or analysis, help the other person explore his or her thoughts and feelings by paraphrasing and summarizing the ideas he or she is expressing. You may also help the other person to stay on track by asking questions like, "What is the most troubling part of the issue for you?" and "Why is that part so troubling?" or "What do you think is the worst-case scenario or best-case scenario for resolving the problem?" Questions that stay on topic are usually very helpful in clarifying the root of the problem and in taking the best direction toward a resolution.

You Decide

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to policies that seek to increase the participation of women and minorities in areas in which they have been historically underrepresented. Most affirmative action policies involve college admissions and job hiring and advancement. In the United States, the phrase "affirmative action" began with an executive order by President John F. Kennedy that required "affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin." Subsequent civil rights laws have also supported affirmative action; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 stated that "no person . . . shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Those who favor affirmative action policies believe that they are needed to compensate specific groups who have experienced discrimination in the past and who still experience educational and economic disadvantages. In addition, proponents believe that affirmative action benefits society by creating more institutional diversity. Those who oppose affirmative action believe that it is no longer needed, that it generates "reverse" discrimination, that it punishes non-minorities for the wrongs of previous generations, and that it diminishes the accomplishments of women and minorities who can and do excel academically and professionally on their own merits.

For more information on the debate surrounding affirmative action and additional exercises and tutorials about concepts covered in this chapter, log into MyThinkingLab at www.mythinkinglab.com and select Diestler, *Becoming a Critical Thinker*, Sixth Edition.

*Explore on mythinkinglab.com

Article

Excerpt

Dr. Jerom

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Articles for Discussion

Excerpts from *How Doctors Think*

Dr. Jerome Groopman

How we think affects us in both our personal and professional lives. Dr. Jerome Groopman has written a fascinating book—*How Doctor Think*—about common errors in thinking made by physicians. Many of these errors are also found in other professions:

1. Pattern Recognition and Stereotyping. Groopman notes that there is plenty of time in a medical school classroom to consider various symptoms and hypotheses and then rule them out until the correct diagnosis emerges. In real life, particularly in hospital settings, doctors don't have the luxury of time and they rely on quick judgments.

Physicians at the bedside do not collect a great deal of data and then leisurely generate hypotheses about possible diagnoses. Rather, physicians begin to think of diagnoses from the first moment they meet a patient. Even as they say hello they take the person's measure, registering his pallor or ruddiness, the tilt of his head, the movement of his eyes and mouth, the way he sits down or stands up, the timbre of his voice, the depth of his breathing. Their notions of what is wrong continue to evolve as they peer into the eyes, listen to the heart, press on the liver, inspect the initial set of x-rays. Research shows that most doctors quickly come up with two or three possible diagnoses from the outset of meeting a patient—a few talented ones can juggle four or five in their minds.

Groopman cites examples of well-trained physicians making "attribution errors"—snap judgments based on stereotypes—when they encounter a recognizable pattern. One such error, made during her medical training, was recounted to Groopman by Dr. Karen Delgado:

A young man was brought to the emergency ward of the hospital in the wee hours. The police had found him sleeping on the steps of a local art museum. He was unshaven, his clothes were dirty, and he was uncooperative, unwilling to rouse himself and respond with any clarity to the triage nurse's questions. Dr. Delgado was busy that night attending to other patients, so she "eyeballed" him and decided that he could stay on a gurney in the corridor, another homeless hippie who would be given breakfast in the morning and returned to the streets. Some hours later, she felt a nurse tugging at her sleeve. "I really want you to go back and examine that guy," the nurse said. Delgado was reluctant, but she had learned to respect an ER nurse who felt that something was really wrong with a patient. "His blood sugar was sky-high," Delgado told me. The young man was on the brink of a diabetic coma. He had fallen asleep near the art museum because he was weak and lethargic and unable to make it back to his apartment. It turned out that he was not a vagrant but a student, and his difficulties giving the police and the triage nurse information reflected the metabolic changes that typify out-of-control diabetes.

2. Availability. Availability is the tendency to focus on what seems to be the most reasonable (most readily available) explanation for a behavior or event and to ignore other real possibilities. For example, a pediatrician might see numerous cases of a stomach flu that is going around and miss a diagnosis of appendicitis in a child whose symptoms looked like everyone else's that day. Josephine Marcotty, writing in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, summarizes a story that Groopman uses to illustrate the availability error:

The story of Rachel Stein and her adopted daughter is one of the detailed cases he uses to make his point. When she brought the infant home from Vietnam, the baby immediately crashed. Doctors at one of the best pediatric hospitals in the United States found her riddled with infections and concluded that she had a rare, inherited immune disorder called SCID.

With prayer to give her confidence, and her own determination, the mother did her own research and began asking questions, including: "What could cause a baby to have so many infections other than AIDS or SCID?" Stein thought she could have a nutritional deficiency, but doctors said, no, she didn't fit the profile. They wanted to give her a dangerous bone marrow transplant for SCID.

The day before the transplant, Stein insisted that they test her daughter's immune system again. She persisted in the face of the doctors' resistance to what they often view as a parent's "misconceived demands born of desperation." But she persuaded them that an enterprising researcher might be able to write a paper off the case.

Her story was instead used at a conference at the hospital to teach doctors about how to do diagnoses—and how not to. The baby did not have SCID, nor did she undergo the bone marrow transplant that could have killed her. There was some unknown aspect to her diet in Vietnam that gave her a nutritional deficiency, just as her mother thought.

"Rachel Stein . . . found a zebra (a rare and unusual cause for a symptom)," Groopman writes. But among doctors, "zebra hunters" are often viewed with disdain.

3. Confirmation Bias. Confirmation bias occurs when doctors selectively highlight evidence that supports what they expect to find and ignore information that contradicts their diagnosis. Groopman also cites researchers Tversky and Kahneman who call this phenomenon "anchoring."

Anchoring is a shortcut in thinking where a person doesn't consider multiple possibilities but quickly and firmly latches on to a single one, sure that he has thrown his anchor down just where he needs to be. You look at your map but your mind plays tricks on you—confirmation bias—because you see only the landmarks you expect to see and neglect those that should tell you that in fact you're still at sea.

Groopman says that some doctors whose patients have seen a specialist tend to believe that the specialist has more expertise, and they look for evidence that confirms whatever diagnosis the specialist offers. He also cites other doctors—and wise patients—who don't stop at the obvious, but ask "What else could this be?" ■

Questions

1. Groopman and his colleagues discuss several areas of sales, customer service, borrowing, and payment. Which of these areas would you consider most important in a business? Why?
2. Other than the case of the baby, what are some other cases of unusual or poor decisions?
3. What are some other areas of business that you think are important?
4. What are some other areas of business that you think are important?

In the following sections, you will find more information about his decisions and his journey.

Create

Ryan Guille

If there is a difference between the two, there is a difference in the way they think. Some people believe that the difference is just in the way they think. But they are wrong. The answers are different.

Don't be

There is a difference between the two. Those who do this are wrong.

Questions for Discussion

1. Groopman notes that doctors sometimes misdiagnose by stereotyping patients and making snap judgments about their conditions. Professionals in other areas may also make attribution errors, stereotyping their clients or customers. Salespeople who work on commission may be attentive to well-dressed customers and ignore those who don't look as affluent; lenders may turn down borrowers who are self-employed, assuming that they may not be able to pay back their loans; jurors may assume that a quiet, sweet-looking woman wouldn't be "the type" to steal a watch. Teachers who have had two disruptive siblings in their class may assume that a third sibling will behave the same way. Can you think of other professional stereotypes that reflect the attribution error?
2. Other professionals also make the availability error. If there have been a string of gang-related murders in a certain neighborhood, detectives may miss the case of a husband murdering his wife and instead blame the crime on "the usual suspects." If a majority of students in a particular school are doing well or poorly, the credit or blame may be placed on the faculty. What availability errors are common in other professions?
3. What are some questions that patients could ask their doctors to help them avoid confirmation bias?
4. Watch some episodes of *House* and see if you can detect incidents of pattern recognition, stereotyping, confirmation bias, availability, and anchoring; also, note incidents of *House* having successes and failures as a "zebra hunter" (one who finds an unusual cause or explanation for a medical symptom).

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In the following article, Ryan Guina writes about his own struggles with life choices, his decision to resist the temptation to conform to the expectations of his peers, and his journey on "the road less traveled."

Create Your Own Path

Ryan Guina

If there is one thing I have learned in life it is this: life does not come with a blueprint. There is no clear path to happiness, wealth, or a successful career. Actually, I am inclined to believe that you shouldn't be afraid to stray from the pack and create your own path.

Sometimes the best thing to do is to question established practices and search for a different set of answers. Some of history's most interesting and successful figures did just that; sometimes with great success and other times with massive failure. But they weren't afraid to try. Investigating different options and looking for other answers or a new means to accomplish something spawns creativity and innovation.

Don't be afraid to take a contrarian point of view.

There have been times in my life when I went against "traditional wisdom," and those decisions have shaped me into the man I am today. Probably the best example of this was my decision to join the United States Air Force.

Growing up, I was anything but the military type. In fact, until a few months before I enlisted, I had completely disregarded the military as an option for myself. My decision to enlist shocked those who knew me well, including my family. *Why would this honors student drop out of college to enlist in the USAF as a mechanic?*

Never stop learning or pushing the boundaries of your surroundings.

My action was against the “traditional” way of thinking. But it was also one of the best decisions I ever made. I learned more about myself and the world around me than I ever would have as a college student, and I have learned to truly appreciate my place in life. I learned to embody the characteristics of integrity, honor, and teamwork, and will carry those traits with me for the remainder of my life.

My military travels took me to over 30 countries on 5 continents. I learned how to use hand tools and power tools and gained a basic understanding of mechanics. I learned the *soft skills* of how to give orders, and more importantly, how to follow them. I learned to deal with people of various backgrounds and dispositions. I have earned certain veterans benefits that will stay with me for life, and more importantly, it was in the USAF that I met the woman who would later become my wife.

Make your own path; don't follow someone else's.

Toward the end of my military career I decided to finish college. I took full-time night classes while maintaining a full-time work schedule. The sacrifice was worth it. I graduated from college before I separated from the USAF and professionally, I am on par with my age group.

My life's journey to this point by no means followed a traditional path. But I kept my eye on the ball and I consider my life to be a successful one thus far, however success may be defined.

The path I took is not for everyone. In my opinion, success and happiness and wealth lack a true definition, and you need to feel your own way until you find what they mean to you.

Write a book. Start a business. Take classes for knowledge or fun. Take a job that interests you instead of taking a job only for the salary. Or simply turn left instead of right. The point is to create your own path and make this life yours. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. What benefits did Ryan Guina achieve from following his own unique path?
2. Most people tend to follow expectations of their families and societies, especially in the young adult years. For example, British students usually take a “gap year” between high school and college to get more perspective and direction before beginning higher education studies. According to writers for thinkingbeyondborders.org, a gap year “may include participating in an organized Gap Year program, working in a field of interest, civil service in the military or a national service organization like AmeriCorps, pursuing athletics, or traveling the world as a tourist.” To what extent do you think that a gap year before college would be beneficial?
3. Have you struggled with major life choices, such as where to study and what to study? How have you come to resolution on those decisions?

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4. How would you describe a good balance between considering the wisdom and advice of family, friends, and mentors and “creating your own path”?

The following is an excerpt from Gerry Spence's book *How to Argue and Win Every Time*. Spence is a lawyer and television commentator; notice how he uses his listening skills to “read between the lines” in order to understand a prospective juror.

**The Lock: They Argue and I Argue Back. But I Never Seem to Win.
The Key: Listen—Just Listen, and You'll Start to Win.**

Gerry Spence

If I were required to choose the single essential skill from the many that make up the art of argument, it would be the ability to listen. I know lawyers who have never successfully cross-examined a witness, who have never understood where the judge was coming from, who can never ascertain what those around them are plainly saying to them. I know lawyers who can never understand the weaknesses of their opponent's case or the fears of the prosecutor; who, at last, can never understand the issues before them because they have never learned to listen. Listening is the ability to hear what people are saying, or *not saying* as distinguished from the words they enunciate.

Listening for what is not said: “How do you feel about a widow who is asking you for money for the death of her husband?” I once asked a prospective juror in a case in which I represented the widow.

“I don't know,” the juror replied. “I don't know” did not mean that the juror didn't know. It meant he didn't feel comfortable telling me. If he felt all right about the money for justice, he would have said, “I feel fine about it.”

“Do you have some feeling about this kind of a lawsuit?”

“Not really,” the juror replied. “Not really” did not mean “not really.” It meant probably. The juror did not want to get into a public argument with the likes of me. If he were at home with his wife he would have said something quite different. I followed with this question:

“If you were home and were talking about this case with your wife, is it possible you might say something like this to her: ‘I don't think people should sue for their dead husbands. All the money in the world can't bring the man back. I think those kinds of lawsuits are wrong.’?”

“I don't talk about things like this with my wife,” he replied. Now he was obviously refusing to answer the question at hand.

“If you and I were best friends and were talking about this case over a beer, what would you tell me?”

“I don't drink beer.”

“How about coffee?” I gave him a big friendly smile to assure him I wasn't trying to push him around.

Suddenly the juror blurted it out: “My father was killed and my mother never got a cent.” There it was! You could immediately feel all the pain—a boy without a father, a mother struggling to rear her family without a husband.

“It must have been pretty hard on your mother trying to raise a family by herself.” (The words *It must have been* are magical words that say to the Other, “I understand how it was.”)

"You bet." Now the juror and I were on the same side.

"And it must have been hard to grow up without a father."

He looked down at his hands.

"If you could have had the power as a boy to get help for your mother, would you have done so?"

"Sure. I did everything I could for her."

"Is it all right with you if I try to help Mrs. Richardson get justice in this case for herself and her children?"

"Yes," he said. And that was the end of it—the magical product of listening. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. Gerry Spence states that "Listening is the ability to hear what people are saying, or *not saying* as distinguished from the words they enunciate." The juror in this case responded to Spence's early questions with "I don't know" and "Not really." How did Spence translate the meaning of these phrases?
2. Spence points out in his book that whenever pain or rage is expressed in words or silences, there is a need to be heard and understood. How did his understanding of the juror's pain enable him to establish both empathy and rapport?
3. Spence stated, "If I were required to choose the single essential skill from the many that make up the art of argument, it would be the ability to listen." To what extent do you agree with his statement?

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The following article is about the dangers of "revisionist" history when unpleasant historical facts cause people to deny those facts. The author discusses the consequences of denying, rather than acknowledging and learning from the tragedies of the past.

It Happened

To Deny That the Holocaust Occurred Is to Set the Preconditions for Another One

Richard V. Pierard

The emergence of David Duke as a political figure has again drawn public attention to the contention that no Jewish Holocaust occurred in World War II. The ex-Klansman has said that Hitler and the Nazis did not systematically and successfully destroy most of Europe's Jews.

For years, Holocaust denial has been a stock-in-trade of shadowy creatures on the extreme Right. In recent times, several pseudo-scholars have come forward to argue against the "extermination legend" and "myth of the six million." Through an elaborate process of distortions, half-truths, and falsification of data, these "revisionists" seek to convince the gullible that Hitler did not order the annihilation of the Jews, but instead had this "alien minority" placed in labor camps where they could not subvert the war effort.

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Harsh war-time conditions caused the epidemic diseases and malnutrition in the crowded camps; crematories were necessary to dispose of the remains of the few thousand who died. Cyanide gas was used for delousing and fumigation in order to check the spread of typhus. There were so few Jews left in Europe because most had emigrated to North America or Israel. Pictures of gas chambers and emaciated inmates are fabrications. And so the story goes.

In fact, Holocaust denial is the ultimate Big Lie. The whole process of destruction is so well-attested through eye-witness accounts, official documents, and contemporary press reports that no one in his or her right mind could deny that it happened.

So why is such a monstrous falsehood perpetrated? The answer is twofold. One reason is anti-Semitism—the ongoing hatred of Jews that animates extreme rightist groups in North America, Britain, France, Germany, and elsewhere. The other is the intention to deny Jews the right to a land of their own, where they may live peacefully within secure borders.

Is Holocaust denial merely a Jewish problem? No, it is also an American Christian problem. We must never forget that anti-Semitism has its roots in the theology and practice of the Christian church, from the writings of the church fathers, through the Inquisition, even in the comments of Martin Luther. Moreover, the U.S. government and people did little to help Jews in the years 1933 through 1945. Opinion polls in our “Christian nation” in 1942 found that people disliked Jews more than the German and Japanese enemies, while officials in Washington pooh-poohed the accounts of extermination programs as “atrocious stories.”

Evangelicals may try to evade the issue by arguing that the Holocaust was a product of theological liberalism. But we cannot let ourselves off the hook so easily. Robert Ross excellently shows in *So It Was True* (1980) that while our magazines reported the grim details of the Nazi policies, our modest attempts to persuade the U.S. authorities to do something lacked moral passion.

Likewise, conservative free church Christians in Germany supported the Hitler regime just as fervently as most in the official church did. In 1984, the German Baptists even issued a formal statement confessing that they had been taken in by the “ideological seduction” of the time. They had not stood up for truth and righteousness.

The bottom line is that to deny the Holocaust is to set the preconditions for yet another one. It behooves evangelicals to stand up and utter a forthright no to the “revisionists” and their fellow travelers. The very credibility of our faith is at stake.

Questions for Discussion

1. What would cause a person or group of persons to deny the painful history of another group of people? Do ethnocentrism, egocentrism, and/or conformity and groupthink play a role in this denial?
2. What should be the guidelines for any form of “revisionist history”?
3. Why does the author say that “to deny the Holocaust is to set the preconditions for yet another one”?
4. What other historical persecutions have been denied or minimized and for what reasons?

A number of years ago, linguistic professor Deborah Tannen wrote the book *You Just Don't Understand* in which she discusses research that reveals differences between male and female conversational styles. Tannen found some fascinating and informative differences in how men and women communicate.

The following excerpt is from a more recent bestseller entitled *For Women Only—What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men*, based on the research commissioned by author Shaunti Feldhahn. Feldhahn was surprised by the answers to her national survey and what they reveal about the differences between men and women. Her comments reflect the generalizations that she drew from her findings. Feldhahn also discusses the implications of the research as they relate to improving dating and marital relationships. Since her survey on men and the resulting interest in her gender studies, Feldhahn and her husband Jeff commissioned a survey on women, and they have written a new book on their findings entitled *For Men Only*.

Author Note: The professional survey was designed with the guidance of Chuck Cowan of Analytic Focus (www.analyticfocus.com), the former chief of survey design at the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey was conducted by Decision Analyst (www.decisionanalyst.com) and was designed to deliver a random, representative, national sample of 400 men (the sample size suggested by Chuck Cowan) who were heterosexual, lived within the United States, and were between the ages of 21 and 75.

For Women Only—What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men

Shaunti Feldhahn

When I was a year or two out of college, I went on a retreat that profoundly impacted my understanding of men.

The theme of the retreat was "Relationships," which as you can imagine was of great interest to a group of single young adults.

For the very first session, the retreat speaker divided the room in half and placed the men on one side, women on the other.

"I'm going to ask you to choose between two bad things," he said. "If you had to choose, would you rather feel alone and unloved in the world OR would you rather feel inadequate and disrespected by everyone?"

I remember thinking. What kind of choice is that? Who would ever choose to feel unloved?

The speaker then turned to the men's side of the room. "Okay, men. Who here would rather feel alone and unloved?"

A sea of hands went up, and a giant gasp rippled across the women's side of the room.

He asked which men would rather feel disrespected, and we women watched in bemusement as only a few men lifted their hands.

Then it was our turn to answer and the men's turn to be shocked when most of the women indicated that they'd rather feel inadequate and disrespected than unloved.

What It Means

While it may be totally foreign to most of us, the male need for respect and affirmation—especially from his woman—is so hardwired and so critical that most

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men would rather feel unloved than disrespected or inadequate. Question 3 of the survey indicated that three out of four men would make that choice (to be unloved rather than disrespected). When I originally tested the survey questions, I was perplexed that many men had a hard time answering the “unloved versus disrespected” question—because they appeared to equate the two. Chuck Cowan, the survey-design expert, warned me that might happen. *Why?* I wondered. *Those are two totally different things!* Then one of my readers tested my survey questions on ten men who didn’t know me. When I got the surveys back, only one note was attached: “A lot of the guys fussed over Question 3. They did not feel the choices were different.”

Finally, the lightbulb came on: *If a man feels disrespected, he is going to feel unloved.* And what that translates to is this: If you want to love your man in the way *he* needs to be loved, then you need to ensure that he feels your respect most of all.

The funny thing is—most of us do respect the man in our lives and often don’t realize when our words or actions convey exactly the opposite! We may be totally perplexed when our man responds negatively in a conversation, helplessly wondering. *What did I say?* Combine this with the difficulty many men have articulating their feelings (i.e., why they are upset), and you’ve got a combustible—and frustrating—situation. . . . If a man can’t articulate his feelings in the heat of the moment, he won’t necessarily blurt out something helpful like “You’re disrespecting me!” But rest assured, if he’s angry at something you’ve said or done and you don’t understand the cause, there is a good chance that he is feeling the pain or humiliation of your disrespect.

If you want confirmation of this, consider an extremely telling response from the survey (see Question #14:)

Question 14:

Even the best relationships sometimes have conflicts on day-to-day issues. In the middle of a conflict with my wife/significant other, I am more likely to be feeling. . .
{Choose One Answer}

Base = Respondents Who Answered Question 400

That my wife/significant other doesn’t respect me right now. 81.5%

That my wife/significant other doesn’t love me right now. 18.5%

Total 100%

More than 80 percent of men—four out of five—said that in a conflict they were likely to be feeling disrespected. Whereas we girls are far more likely to be wailing, “He doesn’t love me!” ■

Questions for Discussion

1. The author of the book *For Women Only* used a survey designed by a professional. What elements of the survey design give credibility to her findings? (See author’s note at the beginning of the survey.)
2. What conclusions does Shaunti Feldhahn draw from the answers to Questions 3 and 14? What are the implications of these conclusions?
3. To what extent do the survey findings cited in this article match your experience of the difference between male and female communication styles?

4. For further results, read the full survey in the author's book or on her website. You may also want to look at the national survey of women that Feldhahn completed with her husband entitled *For Men Only*.

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The following story is about a father who finds himself irrationally upset one morning about his daughter's hairstyle. He realizes that her appearance has triggered a strong "point of logical vulnerability" in him, creating powerful and irrational responses. As you read, try to understand how a person's life experiences can negatively affect his or her perspective and communication with a loved one.

Breakfast and Tousled Cornrows

A Tale of Logical Vulnerability

John Dies

I sat staring at the back of her head for at least three hours. All right, maybe it was only twenty seconds, but it felt like three hours. What on earth is going on? In the front most of the braids seemed normal, but in some places the braids were so tight that the hair stood out at right angles before drooping to the shoulders. It looked a little like the action of a horse's tail, just before doing his business. In other areas the braids were loosely started, halfway down the gathered lock of hair. My nearly twelve year old daughter had set a new standard for cornrows, but it was a standard that I did not understand. It was a disturbing beginning for the day, particularly before breakfast.

"I like it," she said.

"Yes, well, I can see that you would. All you can see is the front. The front is fine, nicely spaced, even cornrows. It's the back I'm talking about," I explained. As if I even cared about the neat front rows. I just didn't like it. I was being tested, and I didn't like that either. I rustled about the kitchen gathering the various items to pack for her and her brother's school lunches.

"I looked at the back when I was doing it, it looks fine. I saw it in the mirror," she replied.

Yeah, right. My daughter is a brilliant girl, kind, funny, but not very objective when it comes to her own opinions. The word stubborn comes to mind. She wasn't budging an inch and the two dozen unruly cornrows were staying firmly on her head. Understand, I like cornrows, I even like dreadlocks. But these things didn't even remotely pass as acceptable definitions.

"Listen, you're really pushing the limits here. I mean, I understand that you don't mind being different, but it seems to me that you have an unhealthy desire to be weird or something. I really think you should think this over before going to school like that."

I felt I had some pretty strong ground here. I was giving due respect, appealing to her logic, sharing my judgment on the merits. And if that didn't work then I guess I expected for her to come around to my point simply on the basis that I, as her father, was disturbed.

"Okay, I thought about it and I think it's fine," she offered, and that was the end of the conversation.

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Hmm, this was not going well. It was almost as if she sensed that my arguments were unsound and therefore unworthy of further attention. Was this true? What was the basis of my dislike? Was it entirely based on the asymmetrical braids?

A few days earlier I had found a box that sort of fell out of the pile stacked in the garage. A carton of icons, each one loaded with an entire database of memories. Not a lot of written words, no notebooks of young angst, no diaries of adventures. Mostly objects. A fender mirror from my first vehicle, a half-eaten high school diploma, a paper placemat from a restaurant in West Yellowstone. Oddities with stories attached. My life in a box. And only one box at that. I could at least explain the half-eaten diploma. My dog ate it. He never touched my homework in three long years of high school, but as soon as I graduated, he ate my diploma.

Anyway, sorting through this collection I came upon an old photo of my ninth grade class. It was the typical photo where the entire class gathers on the front steps, and the photographer takes the shot hoping for a minimum of finger gestures, grimaces and general chaos. Somewhere on those steps was a younger and wiser version of myself. As I scanned those fresh faces I was surprised how familiar most of them were even after thirty-five years. Characters from the past, leaping fresh into my consciousness. It was a great time, a time of innocence, and years before any of these people made serious mistakes. It was, in some cases, the last year of the trouble free life of a child.

Laying my finger briefly on each face, I recalled what the future would bring. Here there was death in a traffic accident, speeding on a motorcycle, no helmet. Here there was madness, after a long series of drug addictions. And this fellow, a hopeless alcoholic. This young lady, drugs, welfare, four children before age twenty. More and more, drugs, jail, and death.

The whole class didn't fall into disaster. At least I don't think so. I'm not sure because I didn't know everybody. It just seemed that most of my friends had particularly hard lives. In fact, only two or three seemed to survive out of the two dozen that loosely hung together. I suppose I had thought about this before but this time I was struggling with the reasons. Was there something here, in this last innocent photo that gave a hint?

Suddenly it came to me. None of us fit in. All of us were somehow on the edge, not quite a part of the whole. Different in thought, different in deed. Our stumbling identities only defined by our own association with each other. Bright in some cases, talented in others, but uniformly weird in all instances.

And now my daughter seems bent upon being weird in her own right. I had this mental flash of how many could I save, if I could just go back in time and warn them. Would they listen to a caring stranger? If they wouldn't listen, could I force them? I couldn't do it for them, but this was my daughter, and I was not giving her up to the bleak future of nonconformity. At least not without a fight.

All of this seemed to solidify in the few minutes it took to make her school lunch. As I made the cheese sandwich, I pondered her future. As I bagged her tortilla chips I resolved to make a difference.

"Okay, that's it. No more cornrows. I tried to give you the freedom to make wise decisions and you refused, so now I'll step in and provide the rules. No more weirdness. You will not court weirdness nor seek to be different, or any of that stuff. You're too young and if you go on this way then what wild and crazy thing will you pull when you're eighteen? Later on, you can wear your hair however you want, but for right now, lose the braids."

Dead silence, shocked expressions. My son froze, his toast halfway to his mouth.

"Now?"

I could see in her eyes the deep hurt, even with the one word of acquiescence. She couldn't know what I was thinking, and didn't understand how I could react the way I was reacting. Her eyes just misted over and she prepared herself to walk whatever line I asked her to walk.

Now it was beginning to dawn on me that things hadn't gone quite the way I wanted. I knew I was struggling, but somehow the noose was just getting drawn tighter the more I twisted. I was almost swinging in the breeze due to my own efforts when my wife came in to the picture. Good, I'll explain what I did, she'll understand and together we will force, uh, together we will demand that, umm, together we will make it right.

"So, what do we do now?" I confided.

"Seems to me that you have done what you have pretty much on your own," she said quietly.

Whoops, definitely swinging in the breeze now, twisting slowly in the wind.

"Oh, sure. Now that's being supportive. I ask for help here and this is what I get," I said with some anger but more confusion.

"It's hard to be very supportive of someone who is wrong," she patiently explained.

Yeah, well, uh, huh. I knew it would come down to this. Skewered by the truth. It was the truth. My fear led me to over-control. My love led me to over-react. I can't stop my daughter from being different. I can't protect her from the unknown future. All I can do is love her and equip her with the tools of life. Part of those tools included discernment, confidence, faith in God, compassion, service, and discipline. And ultimately I needed to trust in God as well.

So, I called her over to apologize and to try to explain my actions. I thanked her for being obedient and I hoped that she understood that even parents make mistakes, and when that happens I believe the parent should make it right and apologize. She listened, and nodded, and seemed saddened about my loss of friends. I told her that her hair was her business and that I was just scared. I still didn't like the asymmetrical arrangement. She smiled and said, "That's okay."

She seemed at that moment much wiser than I. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. What was the "point of logical vulnerability," the subject about which this father had trouble being rational? Why was it a point of logical vulnerability for him? What specific forms of emotional reasoning did he use?
2. When the author discovered how his emotions blinded his reasoning, how did he remedy his thinking and his behavior?
3. Has your concern for another person's welfare ever clouded your judgment and your communication with that person? Conversely, has someone's concern for you ever clouded his or her judgment?
4. The author was concerned that his daughter's nonconformity would lead her into trouble. In what ways could her nonconformity be seen as a strength?

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Ideas for Writing or Speaking

1. The United States Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal." How would a world in which all people were treated with equal respect and dignity work? Write or speak about what it would take to live in such a world and what that world would look like. If you don't believe that such a world could exist, write about the conditions that make it impossible.
2. Write or speak about a tragic event in human history. What lessons can we learn from this event? Are there actions that can be taken to prevent a reoccurrence of such an event?
3. Write an exploratory essay or speech on a current problem. List several of the solutions given for this problem and explore the pros and cons of each solution. Some problems you might explore are health care, shelters for the homeless, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, or immigration. You might also want to choose a problem that has emerged on your campus. Use this format in preparing your essay or speech:
 - a. Clearly define the problem.
 - b. Establish criteria for solutions (e.g., consider time and money limits).
 - c. Come up with as many alternative solutions as possible. (If you are working in a group, brainstorm about possibilities.)
 - d. When possible alternatives are exhausted, evaluate each alternative against the criteria for solutions, showing an understanding of diverse viewpoints.
 - e. Choose the best alternative and explain why this alternative is the best.
4. Watch the classic (or remade) film *Twelve Angry Men*. This film depicts the various viewpoints and prejudices of a group of jurors who have to determine the guilt or innocence of a young man accused of killing his father. Before viewing the tape, consider the following excerpt:

The drive to help juries make the right decisions is drawing some ideas from human-behavior experts who have amassed a wealth of research on how jurors think. Decades ago, judges and lawyers assumed that jurors heard evidence piecemeal and began to analyze it in earnest only during deliberations. But extensive interviews of jurors in recent years have given rise to the theory that they construct evidence into mental "stories" that incorporate interpretations based on their personal experiences. "Jurors used to be viewed as passive objects," says Valerie Hans, a jury researcher at the University of Delaware. "Now we know they are very active in filling in missing evidence and making inferences." The studies are influencing some judges to give jurors more information about the cases they hear.¹⁷

After viewing the film, discuss the problems of ethnocentrism and egocentrism that influence the decisions of different jurors and what arguments help them to be fair to the defendant.
5. Do an analysis of another film that deals with egocentrism or ethnocentrism, or with people's failures at understanding the perspectives of others. Some suggested titles include *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Milk*, *School Ties*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Santini*, *Philadelphia*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Schindler's List*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Gandhi*, *As Good as It Gets*, and *In the Heat of the Night*. Explain

¹⁷ Ted Gest with Constance Johnson, "The Justice System: Getting a Fair Trial," *U.S. News & World Report*, May 25, 1992, p. 38.

how the problem of egocentrism, ethnocentrism, defensiveness, or lack of empathy is explored in the film. Then tell how the problem is resolved (or not resolved). Finally, state the applications of the film's theme to similar problems faced by people today. (See *Films for Analysis and Discussion* for more ideas.)

6. Choose an issue about which you feel strongly and argue for the position that is opposite to your own real beliefs. Construct a persuasive essay or speech on this position, using one of the formats outlined in Chapter 10. Do thorough research on the stand you are defending, and be as convincing as you can.

In the conclusion of your essay or speech, explain whether this exercise caused you to be more or less convinced about your original position on this issue. What changes, if any, did you make in your perspective concerning the issue?

7. Create an essay or speech on an issue about which you have no strong feelings. Research both sides of the issue and become acquainted with the benefits and shortcomings of each.

In your discussion of the issue, articulate the conclusions of both sides and the reasons given for each conclusion. Note the strongest and weakest reasons for each side. Point out fallacious reasoning that is used to defend either position. In your conclusion, comment on whether you found either side to be more convincing and why.

Films for Analysis and Discussion

Amazing Grace (2006, PG)

This film recounts the life of William Wilberforce, a member of the British Parliament in 1797, who fought to abolish the transatlantic slave trade. Wilberforce's struggles against his colleagues in the House of Commons caused him to battle illness and discouragement, but he was helped to persevere by the support of his wife and friends. *Amazing Grace* (based on the title of a hymn written by Wilberforce's mentor, John Newton, who was a reformed slave trader himself) is a good example of how groupthink and ethnocentrism can be overcome through empathy, integrity, and perseverance.

Similar Films and Classics

(Also, consider the films listed in #5 under Ideas for Writing or Speaking.)

Clint Eastwood's masterpiece *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006, R) and his American counterpart *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006, R) are companion pieces that tell of the same event (the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945) from two very different perspectives. It's a lesson in fair-mindedness, as Eastwood approached both films with an unwavering commitment to honesty. The scenes of war are harrowing from both perspectives, showing that the human side to tragedy is always profound and compelling.

The Last Samurai (2004, R)

This is the story of Captain Nathan Algren, an American Civil War veteran who is hired to train the peasant conscripts for the first standing imperial army in Japan. Along the way, he learns deep respect for the traditional Japanese Samurai warriors. The film is a great example of the struggle between the beliefs and traditions of the past and the culture's emerging changes; it also explores the integration of important values of both the old and the new.

Freaky Friday (2003, PG)

This film is a comic exploration of a generation gap between a mother and her daughter. Through magical circumstances, they are forced to live in one another's

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bodies until they resolve and respect their differences. Along the way, the daughter Anna discovers that her perceptions about her mother, her little brother, and her mother's fiancé are all distorted, and her mother discovers that she needs to understand and respect her daughter's musical talents and aspirations.

***Pieces of April* (2003, PG-13)**

Pieces of April follows the adventures of April Burns as she tries to make a new start with her family by inviting them to travel from Pennsylvania to New York City for a Thanksgiving dinner. Because her oven doesn't work, she goes all over her apartment building for help and encounters differing perspectives on life and culture along the way. In addition, the film covers her mother's battle with cancer and her family's deep struggle to give April another chance and forgive her for past hurts.

***Legally Blonde* (2001, PG-13)**

Legally Blonde follows the challenges of a southern California sorority girl named Elle Woods as she tries to fit into the privileged and academically demanding environment of Harvard Law School. It makes a strong statement against stereotyping people based on their background and especially focuses on the ethnocentrism and unchecked reality assumptions of people who identify with a particular socioeconomic class.

***School Ties* (1992, PG-13)**

This film explores the tensions between class and religion that were especially powerful and apparent in the 1950s. A talented football player is recruited to help an exclusive prep school beat their rivals. He keeps both his poverty and his Jewish faith a secret until a series of events exposes both, and his classmates' prejudices are revealed.

***The Doctor* (1991, PG-13)**

This film provides a great example of how a professional undergoes a transformation in his thinking because of a significant emotional event. When the doctor himself gets throat cancer, he experiences life from the viewpoint of a patient and is both enlightened and changed as a result.

***Pretty Woman* (1990, R)**

Rich businessman Edward hires struggling prostitute Vivian to accompany him to society parties. As Vivian tries to fit in with the wealthy, she encounters both prejudice and acceptance along the way. Edward also questions his own egocentrism as a result of Vivian's influence.

***Stand and Deliver* (1988, PG)**

Stand and Deliver is based on the true story of high school math teacher Jaime Escalante and the unconventional methods he uses to turn gang members and students stereotyped as low achievers into some of the top calculus students in the country. It is a great illustration of what can happen when people are helped to move beyond limitations imposed by the negative expectations and environments of their past.

***Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967)**

This film explores race relations when a perfect young African American man—a loving, handsome, brilliant doctor—and his family are introduced to a young white woman's family to discuss the upcoming marriage between the couple.

***Gentleman's Agreement* (1947)**

This classic film is about a journalist who pretends to be Jewish in order to write an article about prejudice and anti-Semitism in America. It explores both the overt and subtle effects of racism and the effects on both the reporter and his friends and family.