

RENEWING OUR MINDS – Class Six

Exploring Brain McLaren's

Why Don't They Get It: Overcoming Bias in Others (and Yourself)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2)

Outline

Week One (May 26, 27) – Introduction; Enter Jesus; Confirmation Bias

Week Two (June 2,3) – Complexity Bias; Community Bias

Week Three/Four (June 16,17) – Complementarity Bias; Competency Bias; Consciousness Bias; Comfort Bias

Week Five (June 23, 24) – Conservative/Liberal Bias; Confidence Bias; Catastrophe Bias;

Week Six (June 30, July 1) – Contact Bias; Cash Bias; Conspiracy Bias; Next Steps

Contact Bias (Chapter 11)

Contact Bias: “When I don't have intense and sustained personal contact with ‘the other,’ my prejudices and false assumptions go unchallenged.”

“Think of the child who is told by people he trusts that people of another race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, or class are dirty and dangerous. You can immediately see the self-reinforcing cycle: those people are dirty or dangerous, so I will distrust and avoid them, which means I will never have sustained and respectful interactive contact with them, which means I will never discover that they are actually wonderful people to be around.”

“In this way, the prejudice cycle spins on, unchallenged across generations. As prejudice persists, it becomes embedded in cultures and institutions, creating systems of racism and hatred, marginalizing groups who are stigmatized, dehumanized, scapegoated, exploited, oppressed, and even killed.”

“Contact bias also helps explain why humans are driving so many creatures to extinction and destroying so many ecosystems. Living in our cities, surrounded by other people like us, we lack contact with the creatures and ecosystems that are being ravaged. Out of sight, out of mind, as they say.”

Overcoming Contact Bias (Chapter 26)

In Responding to Contact Bias – “Jesus reached out to the other, included the other at the table, and put the other in the spotlight by giving the other a voice.”

“On page after page of the gospels, Jesus doesn't dominate...avoid...colonize...intimidate ... demonize...or marginalize the other. Instead, he incarnates into the other, joins the other in solidarity, protects...listens to...serves...and even lays down his life for the other.”

~ *After healing a woman suffering from hemorrhages [which made her 'unclean,' Leviticus 15:25], Jesus said to her in front of the crowd “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 15:34) – affirming her as a member of the family of God*

~ *Jesus “made clean” ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19) – and affirmed the faith of the “foreigner” – a Samaritan – who came back to thank him*

~ *Jesus defended a woman 'caught in adultery' [punishable by death, Leviticus 20:10], saying “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:1-11)*

~ *Jesus spoke with the Samaritan Woman at the well, even though “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans” and astonishing his disciples “that he was speaking with a woman” (John 4:4-42)*

~ *Jesus shared a meal with the tax collector Zacchaeus, saying to him in front of the crowd, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)*

“In each case, he moves victims of scapegoating and exclusion from the margins to the center stage so their voices are heard.”

“We see him consistently confront prejudice among his own disciples and followers.”

~ When the disciples tried to prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus, he said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” (Luke 18:15-17)

~ When the disciples wanted Jesus to send the Canaanite Woman away, he engaged her in conversation and healed her daughter (Matthew 15:22-28)

~ When the crowd following Jesus tells two blind men begging him for mercy to be quiet, Jesus, who is “moved with compassion,” spoke with them and restores their sight (Matthew 20:30-24)

Jesus “welcomes those who are normally excluded, and listens to the voices that are normally silenced.”

Ca\$h Bias (Chapter 11)

Cash Bias: "It's hard for me to see something when my way of making a living requires me not to see it."

For example...

"Back in the days of slavery, white slaveholders and their associates resisted seeing the full humanity and equality of the people they were enslaving. Blinded by massive profits, they couldn't imagine abolishing slavery because it would, they said, 'destroy the economy.'"

"Similarly, back in the 1960's, tobacco company executives (and the politicians they wined and dined) were the last to accept clear data that showed a link between smoking and lung cancer."

"More recently, big pharma executives (and the politicians they lobbied) were the last to acknowledge how they were making a killing (financially) by selling pain-killers that were actually killing people through opioid addiction."

Overcoming Ca\$h Bias (Chapter 11)

In Responding to Cash Bias – "Jesus named the power of money and he challenged people to hate it rather than love it."

"When you think of the power of money to blind people, to lock them inside high prison walls of bias, to trap them in illusory values, and to trick them into harming others, themselves, and the earth because of it, you quickly realize why Jesus said that if you love money you'll hate God (and your neighbor too)."

*~ Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."
(Matthew 6:24)*

~ Jesus said, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions," and then told the Parable of the Rich Fool, who decided to build bigger barns for himself rather than share his abundance (Luke 12:13-21)

~ When Jesus was questioned about paying taxes, he asked to see a coin, and said 'give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' [money, which had the image of Caesar on it] and 'give to God the things that our God's' [ourselves, who have the image of God on us, Genesis 1:26-27] (Luke 20:19-26)

~ When a rich man asks Jesus what to do to have eternal life, Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21)

~ Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

~ The Apostle Paul wrote, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." (1Timothy 6:10)

Conspiracy Bias (Chapter 13)

Conspiracy Bias: “Under stress or shame, our brains are attracted to stories that relieve us, exonerate us, or portray us as innocent victims of malicious conspirators.”

“In short, when we feel powerless, threatened, or ashamed, we seek someone to blame, and we are suckers for stories that get us off the hook.”

“These stories wouldn't feel so true if we didn't need them to be true. Even though they may cast us in the position of victims, helplessly defeated at the mercy of dark powers, at least these stories give us someone specific to blame for our troubles other than ourselves ... or reality itself.”

For example...

~ JFK was not killed by the 'lone gunman' Lee Harvey Oswald

~ The Holocaust did not happen, or the death toll is greatly inflated

~ 9/11 was an 'inside job' by the United States government

~ Mass shootings like Sandy Hook are “false flags” – meaning they were fabricated by the “deep state” to promote gun control and other governmental interventions

~ Bill Gates created Covid 19 to insert people with a microchip via vaccines

Overcoming Conspiracy Bias (Chapter 28)

In Responding to Conspiracy Bias – “Jesus told a reverse-conspiracy narrative, in which God is secretly plotting for the ultimate good of all, urging faith, hope, and love instead of fear. In this story, the Creator's revolutionary love outlasts and outshines the dark and malicious intent of any created thing.”

“It's easy to imagine how a person who feels defeated, shamed, and hopeless might concoct a story to make themselves feel better. And it's easy to imagine why, if you attack their story, if you accuse them of being wrong or weak or stupid, you only create more feelings of defeat, shame, and hopelessness.”

“In that light, you can easily see how this bias can only be overcome with subtlety rather than a direct approach. That's why, rather than attacking the conspiracy stories that were common in his day, Jesus spent most of his time telling a different story, a bigger and better story, a story that more effectively offered people a way out of their defeat, shame, fear, and despair.”

“Simply by providing an option, he opened up a possibility for them. His big story of the kingdom of God was bigger and better than their little stories of conspiracy. It flipped their paranoia, inviting them to imagine the greatest love and power in the universe working behind the scenes for their well-being and freedom.”

Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’” (Revelation 21:3-5a)

NEXT STEPS

The Check List (Chapter 31)

If you'd like to review general strategies for addressing bias, here are some suggestions in checklist form:

1. "Abduct" your audience through shock, storytelling, imagination, surprise, unexpected vulnerability, risky boldness, beauty, a provocative question, and compelling graphics/images, keeping in mind that people who need your message most are least likely to accept it readily.

(Confirmation Bias)

2. Lead with 1, 2, or 3 memorable, simple stories or statements and trim away everything else. When necessary, intentionally complexify oversimplifications by showing both sides, with nuance, and don't repeat a falsehood in order to correct it. Use clear visual aids, illustrations, slogans, and aphorisms whenever possible. Always keep in mind that the brain seeks simplicity as a matter of efficiency. *(Complexity Bias)*

3. Present yourself and your group as welcoming of honest seekers and pleasant to be around, refusing to mock or insult those who disagree, remembering that others will probably not fully believe your message until they feel they will find a home in your community. *(Community Bias)*

4. Show script-flipping respect, kindness, patience and curiosity to those you hope to influence - and begin with sincere curiosity and active listening. Treat objections and opposing arguments with exactly the respect you want your message to be treated with. *(Complementarity Bias)*

5. Celebrate people's ability to change their minds & learn. Make it easy for people to discover and admit how much they don't know. Create an environment where curiosity, humility, and learning are admired. *(Competency Bias)*

6. Through art, field trips, or other forms of experiential learning, help people experience a "state" that could later become a "stage," and give them exposure to models at higher stages, with practices to get there. *(Consciousness Bias)*

7. Beware of overwhelming people so they shut down, feel compassion fatigue, or drop into psychic numbing. Give people one thing to do right now about one problem, and affirm the value of simple, doable, convenient first steps. Then prepare people for discomfort so they aren't

surprised. Promise them it will be both hard and worth it. (*Comfort Bias*)

8. Emphasize compassion and fairness, but also appeal to purity/sanctity, loyalty, liberty, and authority in service of an ultimate ethic of nondiscriminatory love. (*Conservative/liberal Bias*)

9. Tell stories of both dramatic and gradual positive change, illustrate positive statistics graphically, warn people of the ways that politicians and media exploit fear & catastrophe for political and financial gain. (*Catastrophe Bias*)

10. Humanize the other by giving them a spotlight and a voice. Facilitate deep relationships. Engage people in storytelling and active, conscious listening. (*Contact Bias*)

11. Name and challenge the power of money. Be sure your own efforts are not discredited by conflicts of interest. Do the right thing even when it costs you rather than makes you money. (*Ca\$h Bia\$*)

12. Display bold confidence, but invite people to question, think, and test. Where you can't offer certainty, boldly offer clarity. Where you can't offer clarity, boldly offer honesty. (*Confidence Bias*)

13. Frame a larger story of love, empowerment, and hope that overshadows smaller stories of malice and victimization. (*Conspiracy Bias*)

Five Ways To Help Others See What They Can't See (Chapter 32)

1. SURPRISE PEOPLE WITH WHO YOU ARE.

Show kindness, empathy, curiosity, fairness, acceptance, patience, decency, boldness, and humility. Put understanding and acceptance before agreement, making it safe for people to confront their biases. Tell stories about times when you failed to face your biases and misconceptions.

Demonstrate fairness by admitting (and addressing) the downsides of your position and the upsides (as well as the downsides) of other positions. Seek to win friends instead of arguments, since people would rather learn from friends than critics, opponents, or enemies. People will not believe your message until they find you, the messenger, believable.

2. SHOW BEFORE YOU TELL.

Use experiential learning (field trips, introductions to "the other," immersive artistic experiences, simulations, demonstrations, learning games, etc.) whenever possible, helping people step into the shoes of others and see from new vantage points, and following up the experience with honest reflection and conversation.

3. KEEP IT SIMPLE AND DOABLE.

Whenever possible, find one simple point of agreement or make one simple proposal for consideration or offer one simple, doable, immediate step that can be taken in the right direction, followed by questions and conversation.

4. CONNECT EMOTIONALLY.

If a person is afraid or angry, don't shame them or tell them not to feel as they do. Instead, try to understand their emotion, and then convey, with emotion, that you can see why they feel as they do.

5. EXPECT THIS TO BE HARD.

Remember that the human brain is structured for safety, efficiency, ease, and comfort, so biases are working against accepting messages that are perceived as unfamiliar, complicated, dangerous, inconvenient, or uncomfortable. Don't expect people to be other than human. Show patience and persistence. And take advantage of research to help you learn what is most likely to work.

Bias-Engaging Scripts (Chapter 33)

If you'd like more specific guidance, here are a few simple scripts that I have found helpful in breaking through reactive bias to achieve respectful conversation. (Not foolproof, but helpful.)

~ When you see tensions rising in a conversation, it can sometimes help to name the primary emotion you see, not as a judgment or accusation, but as a point of contact. Then, as you listen without judgment or accusation, you "change the game" from a win-lose argument to a human-to-human experience in understanding.

Wow. You seem really angry. (*or afraid, concerned, hurt, etc.)*

I'd really like to understand why you feel that way.

~ When they explain, try to put into your own words what you hear them saying, adding a question like, "Is that it?" or "Am I understanding you?"

Thanks for clarifying. So you don't feel angry. You feel ignored and unappreciated. Is that it?

~ Once you've demonstrated sincere curiosity and empathy – without offering corrections or counter-arguments, their biases and other defenses may lower a bit, opening the way for further respectful conversation.

~ Sometimes, you can break out of an unhelpful argument by self-reporting, followed with a question:

I notice I'm suddenly feeling tense and defensive. That doesn't feel like the best way to communicate.

Do you feel like we've slipped into a win-lose argument?

Do you feel OK about that? Do you have any ideas on how we can have this conversation without it turning into something that could hurt our relationship?

~ Sometimes, a person says something that you feel can't go unchallenged. But if you insult them (That was really ignorant!) or correct them (You're so wrong!), you'll only engender defensiveness and start a fight. What can you do then?

Here's a script that embodies the courage to differ graciously.

Wow. I see that differently.

~ Very often, when you clearly self-differentiate in this way, without insult, attack, further explanation, or argument, people will ask you to explain. It may be appropriate to respond to their question, but often it's better to invite further conversation at another time.

I'd rather not go into it right now.

I just wanted to let you know that I see it differently.

By avoiding a potential argument right at that moment, you give the person a remarkable gift: you make it clear that your relationship is not dependent on agreement.

~ That prepares the way for the next statement that reframes the conversation from winning an argument to seeking mutual understanding.

If you're ever interested in learning the story of how I came to see this issue as I do,

just let me know. I'll be glad to share it.

But I don't want to get into an argument.

~ This frames the situation in terms of curiosity about your story. Instead of arguing about the issue, which often only deepens polarization, you can learn and share how each of you came to hold the values that influence your current understandings of the issue.

Stories about values set a very different tone than arguments about issues.

~ Even if you frame the conversation in this more positive way, sometimes the other person will start arguing. That's when one last statement might be of help.

I'm sorry. I didn't want this conversation to become an argument. I thought you were interested in understanding my story. I was trying to share that honestly.

I wasn't trying to make you agree with me.

Or you might say something like this:

Please understand: I don't want to get into an argument, because I don't think an argument will change either of our minds. And it could hurt our relationship, which I really value.

Presented at St. John's Lutheran Church by Pastor Jennifer Shaw

*If you have a question you'd like to ask me, Not for the sake of argument,
but just to understand me as a friend and fellow human being, I'll be glad to try to explain as
clearly and honestly as I can.*

Once again, by reframing the conversation from a win-lose argument to a quest for mutual understanding and learning, you invite the other person outside the walls of bias. You've modeled curiosity, humility, and a non-combative tone that the other person may be able to mirror (engaging Complementarity Bias in a positive way).

~ You want to set a tone where the defensive shields of bias aren't raised, where sincere curiosity sets the tone rather than attack and defense. For that reason, two simple words followed by a sincere question can often help change the tone:

I'm curious ...

We're all so used to being subjected to "gotcha" questions, verbal ambushes, and robotic talking points that when a person shows genuine curiosity, we sometimes feel suspicious. Genuine interest seems too good to be true. But imagine, in a tense situation, hearing, or saying ...

I'm curious. How did you come to that opinion?

I'm curious. What values do you hold that express themselves in that position?

I'm curious. Why is that approach so satisfying for you?

A gotcha questioner will pounce on some flaw or weakness in the answer, and the walls of bias will be raised immediately. A compassionate and curious conversation partner will say, "*Thanks. That really helps me to understand where you're coming from. Do you mind if I ask another question?*" If you demonstrate a greater desire to understand than to be understood ... and a greater desire to be loving than to be right, you will create an environment where your conversation partner just might dare to lower their defenses. And so might you.

Remember: we're dealing with biases that are based in how the brain works, so there are no magic wands or foolproof guarantees that your message will get through. And if you use these scripts in a forced, unnatural, scripted way, chances are they'll backfire! Through trial and error, you'll need to find your own words that feel authentic to you and respectful of your conversation partner.

The Six Commitments Of Common Good Communication (Chapter 34)

Sometimes, we can set up non-defensive dialogue by establishing some ground rules.

That's why some friends of mine and I put together The Six Commitments of Common Good Communication. We expressed these commitments in terms of values because we will only overcome bias and learn to communicate deeply and honestly if we speak from the heart, not just the head, from level of values, not just opinions or arguments. We set up the commitments like this: THE SIX COMMITMENTS OF COMMON GOOD COMMUNICATION

I am committed to the six values of Common Good Communication:

EXAMPLE / CURIOSITY / CLARITY / DECENCY / FAIRNESS / PERSISTENCE.

1. **EXAMPLE:** I will demonstrate integrity and lead by example in my communication, in public and in private. When I fall short, I'll admit it, apologize, and reaffirm my commitment to lead by example.
2. **CURIOSITY:** I will show uncommon curiosity by asking honest questions, staying open to new information, seeking to understand others as I would want to be understood, and listening with empathy.
3. **CLARITY:** I won't hold back, speak half truths, be intentionally vague, or attempt to deceive. I will self-report my feelings and my underlying values whenever possible.
4. **DECENCY:** I will strive to show genuine courtesy toward everyone, especially when we disagree. I will not mock, call names, or dehumanize any person or group. I will establish and uphold ground rules for respectful conversation whenever possible.
5. **FAIRNESS:** I will practice basic fairness in these five ways:
 - I won't compare my side's best with the other side's worst.
 - I will not assume the worst motives in my opponents.
 - I will acknowledge the upsides and downsides of all positions.
 - I will praise my counterparts when they deserve it, and challenge my allies when they deserve it.
 - I will notice who isn't at the table, and I will do my part to be sure they are included and heard.
6. **PERSISTENCE:** I expect this work to be hard and I know we will make mistakes. I will stay in the room with difference, be resilient after failure, never giving up and always seeking the common good.