

RENEWING OUR MINDS

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

Complementarity Bias (Chapter 4)

Complementarity Bias: "If you are hostile to my ideas, I'll be hostile to yours. If you are curious and respectful toward my ideas, I'll respond in kind."

"This reciprocity or complementarity is a general pattern, of course, not an ironclad rule. Some people will be hostile no matter how you treat them, and some will be respectful even if you're not. But in general, what you give, you receive.

This bias has been studied by contemporary social psychologists, but elements of it go way back to Aristotle, who, in his Rhetoric, said that we are persuaded not only by the logic of an argument (*logos*) and not only by its emotional impact (*pathos*), but also by the character of the speaker (*ethos*)."

Jesus

– *Logos*, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

– *Pathos*, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:14)

– *Ethos*, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form

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

of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

(Philippians 2:5-8)

“Another old saying captures this bias: *people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*”

“Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.” (Matthew 7:28-29)

The Golden Rule – Basic Moral Code in World Religions

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18)

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.” – Hillel the Elder

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” – Jesus (Matthew 7:12)

“Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” – The Buddha

“Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” – Muhammad

Overcoming Complementarity Bias (Chapter 20)

In Responding to Complementarity Bias – “Jesus ‘flipped the script,’ teaching his allies to ‘Do unto others as you would have them do to you,’ not ‘Do unto others as they have done to you.’”

“He taught them to love not just people who like them, and not just people who are like them, but also those who dislike them, are unlike them, misunderstand them, and even mistreat them. He repeatedly challenged them to treat the alien, the refugee, the outsider, the outcast, even the enemy with not only tolerance, but with genuine love.”

~ Jesus taught that the two Greatest Commandments are “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40) – and gave the Parable of the Good Samaritan to express that enemies/outcasts/stranger are our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37)

~ Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

~ Jesus told the Parable of the Prodigal Son after Pharisees and Scribes “were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” (Luke 15:1-32)

~ Jesus engaged in kindness and respect with Nicodemus (John 3); the Samaritan Woman (John 4); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-11); the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13); the ‘sinful woman’ who anointed him (Luke 7:36-50) ...

~ Jesus said of those who were putting him to death on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

Competency Bias (Chapter 5)

Competency Bias: “We don't know how much (or little) we know because we don't know how much (or little) others know.” – also known as the Dunning-Kruger Effect

“In other words, incompetent people assume that most other people are about as incompetent as they are. As a result, they underestimate their incompetence, and consider themselves at least of average competence.”

“Meanwhile, competent people assume that most people are about as competent as they are, which means that they underestimate their competence. They don't know how far above average they actually are.”

“Competency Bias can make unknowledgeable people assume they already know what you want to tell them. They become overconfident and unwilling to learn because they assume they already get it. And conversely, Competency Bias can make knowledgeable people underconfident and unwilling to stand firm in the face of uninformed opinion or misinformation.”

Metacognition

Metacognition is, put simply, thinking about one's thinking. More precisely, it refers to the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one's understanding and performance.

Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one's thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner. (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/metacognition/>)

Overcoming Competency Bias (Chapter 21)

In Responding to Competency Bias – “Jesus praised child-likeness and helped people learn that they have a lot to learn, building their confidence that they can enjoy life beyond their current biases. He praised people for wise answers and ‘caught them doing good,’ and boldly confronted ‘blind guides’ and ‘hypocrites’ who were unaware of their ignorance. In addition, Jesus asked questions, listened, learned from others, and even changed his mind in public, modeling the heart and habits of a humble learner.”

~ Jesus praised child-likeness – “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’” (Matthew 18:1-5)

– *The Apostle Paul wrote*, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3)

– “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

– “...lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

~ Jesus praised people for wise answers – after she identified herself, Jesus said to the woman who had touched the hem of his garment for healing, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” (Matthew 9:8)

~ Jesus confronted those who are unaware of their ignorance – Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes who asked why his disciples broke traditional food laws, “You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’”

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.'"

(Matthew 15:1-20)

~ Jesus changed his mind in public (?), modeling the heart and habits of a humble learner

- when his mother Mary informed Jesus the wedding party was out of wine, he said, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come," and then he turned the water into wine (John 2:1-11)
- after Jesus rebuffs the Canaanite woman who asks him to heal her daughter, and she responds in faith, Jesus says to her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish," and her daughter was healed. (Matthew 15:21-28)

Consciousness Bias (Chapter 6)

Consciousness Bias: “Some things simply can't be seen from where I am right now. But if I keep growing, maturing, and developing, someday I will be able to see what is now inaccessible to me.”

“Consider this: a child learning basic addition or simple multiplication tables isn't ready for an algebraic equation yet, much less a differential equation or calculus problem, no matter how smart he or she is. The child's limitation isn't simply a lack of intelligence; it's a lack of development... If you're not ready to get it, you just won't get it, because you can't.”

McLaren builds on the work of Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, William Perry, Ken Wilber, Soren Kierkegaard, Richard Rohr, James Fowler, Lawrence Kohlberg, to describe a four-stage model: **Simplicity** – “a stage of dualistic thinking...where [people] immediately judge things by binaries such as like/dislike, us/them, good/bad, right/wrong, familiar/unfamiliar.”

Complexity – “a stage of pragmatic thinking...where everything is a problem to be solved or game to be won.”

Perplexity – “a stage where everything is a deception waiting to be unmasked or a power-play waiting to be exposed”

Harmony – a stage where people “see from a place of deep openness and compassion, beyond the judgments of earlier stages”

“Each new stage builds on the stage it grows beyond, so you can think of each new stage as a ring on a tree, including and transcending what went before.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:11-12).

Overcoming Consciousness Bias (Chapter 22)

In Responding to Consciousness Bias – “Jesus introduced people to immersive and ‘transcendent experiences’ (states) and offered practices for growth in and through stages. He practiced, modeled, and taught with both dual (conventional) and non-dual (mystical/contemplative) thinking.”

“Transcendent states, we might say, are temporary peak experiences through which we ‘visit’ or taste a stage of consciousness that is not yet habitual and normal for us. In this light, what we call mystical experiences are ‘visitations’ or ‘short vacations’ into a state of union, love, and connection that are not yet normal for us.”

~ Jesus led Peter, James, and John “up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.” (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; Luke 9:28-36)

~ Jesus called Mary's name in the garden outside the empty tomb after his resurrection (John 20:1-18)

~ After his resurrection, Jesus suddenly appeared to his disciples in a room with locked doors, said “Peace be with you,” showed them his scars, breathed into them the Holy Spirit, and sent them out as the Father sent him (John 20:19-23)

~ The disciples were together on the day of Pentecost when, “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:1-4)

~ While in prayer on a rooftop, Peter “fell into a trance,” and saw a vision of ‘unclean food’ that the voice of the Lord said to eat because “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (Acts 10)

“Once we know this new state is possible, we can learn the practices that will help us make what was temporary and extraordinary more natural and instinctive. In that way, what once was an extraordinary state can become a stage.”

“Jesus used conventional dual thinking as a baseline, connecting with people where they were, and then he invited them through parables, field trips, spiritual practices and experiences, and other bias-busting methods, to explore non-dual or post-dual forms of consciousness.”

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)

“It's not surprising that Jesus spoke of being ‘born again’ as a metaphor for entering a new stage of consciousness or development. He seemed to understand that we don't think ourselves into a new way of living, but we live ourselves into a new way of thinking. Or to put it differently, intellectual thought and life experience are inseparable.”

Comfort Or Complacency Bias (Chapter 7)

Comfort Bias: "I prefer not to have my comfort disturbed."

As we seek to conserve intellectual energy with Confirmation and Complexity Biases, so we seek to conserve emotional energy with Comfort Bias.

"This means that if you bring me information that emotionally disturbs me, arguments that demand action from me, or new understandings that challenge me to do something difficult, strenuous, upsetting, or risky, my brain would rather ignore, reject, or resist you in order to preserve the equilibrium I currently enjoy."

"Psychologists call this psychic numbing or speak of compassion fatigue, and it's what makes it so easy for me to simply change the channel when unpleasant news comes on, or hit dismiss when a certain incoming call shows up on my phone."

"My brain doesn't want to take on more responsibility than it can handle, or better put, more than it currently is handling. In fact, whenever I take the plunge and get involved, I have to overcome comfort or complacency bias first."

Overcoming Comfort or Complacency Bias (Chapter 23)

In Responding to Comfort or Complacency Bias – “Jesus was careful not to overwhelm people. He would tell them that their current faith, as small as a grain of mustard seed, was big enough to save them. But he never stopped there. He always led them out of complacency and into action, out of comfort and into courage.”

“Jesus started with people where they were, but invited them to keep moving forward. He affirmed even a little faith, but then called people to greater faith.”

After the disciples said to Jesus, “increase our faith,” Jesus replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” (Luke 17:5-6)

Jesus said to the woman who touched the hem of his garment, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5:34)

After Jesus calmed the storm at sea, he said to the disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40)

“Similarly, Jesus validated the small action of giving one simple cup of cold water to a thirsty person, but he also challenged people to give their all, even to the point of giving up their lives.”

Jesus said, “...and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” (Mathew 16-24-25)

Jesus said to his disciples during the Last Supper, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (John 15:13)

“And most important, he repeatedly modeled this courageous willingness to go beyond comfort, to ‘walk into the storm,’ to ‘suffer for the sake of justice,’ to accept even a cross. He inspired others to ‘step out of the boat’ of comfort and complacency by doing so himself.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in “The Cost of Discipleship”

“Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a person his or her life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: ‘you were bought at a price,’ and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son to dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”