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Thought Paper

(Judgment and Decision)

I found the video about Judgment and Decision and the process our brains go through in order to make daily judgments and decisions both very informative and intriguing. The video mentioned that there are two reasons or ways that we can have a lapse in our judgment. The first reason is called 'Influence of the crowd' or the people around us. An example of this was Hitler and his political rallies. Not everyone in Germany agreed with Hitler, but they followed the crowd and supported him. The other reason is when we become irrational when driven by primal need, like sex or aggression. Revenge is also a very common primal need that can cause us to make irrational decisions. In 'Exploring Psychology' written by David G. Myers, it tells a story of Charles "Andy" Williams, a student that his peers described as a "freak, dork, nerd, etc." He went on a shooting spree at his suburban California high school, killing 2 and wounding 13 (pg. 371). Charles Williams wanted revenge and revenge is a very strong emotion that can cause us to become irrational and act out.

During the video it was mentioned that cognitive illusion can cause us to make bad decisions and an error in judgment. Cognitive illusion is a systematic way of thinking that is responsible for our lapse in judgment. This comes into effect when you are in what is called a "groupthink" situation, like a board meeting or a strategizing meeting. Groupthink can cause distorted reasoning, and especially when cognitive illusion is in effect. Also, people in the meeting can be fooled to believe something that's contrary to their previous beliefs. Groupthink causes people to make decisions as a group that discourages creativity or individual responsibility. There are three symptoms to that are seen in a groupthink situation. The first one is the illusion of invulnerability; thinking that nothing can harm or

hurt you. A great example of this is Pearl Harbor. The U.S. had intercepted a Japanese message telling of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. sent word to Hawaii about it and the warnings were not taken seriously. The Navy and Army in Pearl Harbor shared one of the main reasons why they did not take immediate action was because no one thought that the Japanese would never dare attempt a full-scale surprise assault against Hawaii. Japan would realize that it would be considered an act of war, which the United States would surely win. The second symptom is mind guarding; self-appointed members who shield the group from dissenting information. Usually they are the leaders of the group but they keep the other people from sharing or bringing up information that are contrary to the outcome they want to see. A good example of this is during a debate. Your opponent will try to refute everything that you try to bring up, because it is the opposite of what they want to talk about. The third and final symptom is self censorship of doubt, where no one will express their doubts on the subject so people take their silence as agreement to the situation. Everyone who has ever been in a meeting has probably encountered this and probably hasn't even realized it. A good example of this is back when the Constitution was being discussed and the judge or head of the party asked "All in favor say aye. All opposed say nay." They would count the aye(s) and nay(s) and all of those that didn't vote either way would be counted as aye(s).

In the video it showed an experiment where teenagers were asked to perform really boring tasks, and at the end the man sitting in the room with them asked if they would be willing to tell the other participants that the activity was really fun and interesting. He offered fifty percent of the participant's twenty dollars and the other fifty percent one dollar. All of the participants agreed that the amount of money was sufficient incentive to basically lie and tell everyone else that it was a fun experiment. The participants actually convinced themselves that the experiment was enjoyable, but only after making their decision to reduce the conflict between their prior beliefs and their behavior. The video actually showed footage of the participants telling the other people how fun the experiment/task

was. The “other” people were actually part of the experiment so they knew how tedious the task actually was. The people said that they had heard that the experiment was actually super boring, and the guy that got paid twenty dollars said, “I don’t know what experiment your friend did but I personally thought that it was fun to try and figure out what all this was actually for, like why are we doing this for? I thought it was actually really fun.” The people that got paid one dollar as incentive had two discrepant thoughts. They know they didn’t have sufficient incentive to say that it was fun, when actually wasn’t for them. There was the dissonance. They ended up resolving the problem by changing their opinion about the dullness of the experiment/task. People who had the least amount of incentive had the most dissonance happening, because they were holding two incompatible thoughts at the same time. They were trying to get themselves to believe that the experiment/task was actually an enjoyable experience, but in truth they knew that this statement was false. In the video one of the researchers said, “People come to believe and love the things that they suffer the most for.” In ‘Exploring Psychology’ Mr. Myers says that “the adaptation level phenomenon describes our tendency to judge various stimuli relative to those we have previously experienced” (pg 395). The participants were asked if they would ever do this experiment/task again and all of them answered yes, even though they at first thought that the experiment/task was boring. They had convinced themselves that it actually was quite fun, so they were willing to do it again.

The video also mentioned the anchoring bias, which means that information tends to have a weight of impression that weighs your decision in a certain direction depending on the weight of the impression. For instance some people will never do drugs, because they have certain standards or opinions that have a heavy weight of impression for them, so when making their decision it will probably weigh more towards them not doing it according to the anchoring bias. In ‘Exploring Psychology’ Mr. Myers never truly mentions the anchoring bias. The only thing that comes anywhere close to it is overconfidence which is when we are too confident with our decisions and we’re right and everybody

else is wrong. When we are over confident, we refuse to see the situation from the other peoples' point of view (pg 296). The video also mentioned the availability heuristic theory which is when our brains seek out information to base our judgments on. If the information isn't there our brains will never believe it. Like if you had said that people evolved from trees and you had no information or evidence to back it up then it must not be true according to our brains. In 'Exploring Psychology' Mr. Myers mentions the availability heuristic, and how casinos will entice us to gamble by signaling even small wins with bells and lights—making them vividly memorable—while keeping big losses soundless and invisible. Our brains see that everybody is winning, so therefore you would win also if you gambled even though you have a 50/50 chance of losing. Our brain goes off of the availability heuristic and sees that no one has lost yet so it's not likely that you will lose if you gambled (pg 295).

This video was truly fascinating to watch. The different processes our brain goes through to make decisions and everyday judgments is incredible. It's amazing how we can experience one thing then be enticed to see our experience in a completely new way. When asked later how our experience was we will remember the experience the way we were enticed to see it. It's like the actual experience never happened. When we have a lapse in judgment it means that we were being either influenced by a crowd or we were actually acting upon an emotion. Our brains are amazing little machines/computers and it's no wonder we are the most intelligent life forms around.