3-18-23 confirmation bias

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Hello, hello.

For those of you who are brand new, thanks for joining us, those who have been here a while thanks for coming back. It is always a privilege and an honor that you take your time out of your day and you give it to us. Again, again, today I have my my brother Jason with us, we are going to take on a topic that comes up in the therapeutic world a lot. So for me, not a whole lot of prep work needed. But I'm going to throw a question at Jason. And then we are going to just rabbit hole this, we're gonna go where it goes. So hang on for the ride, because truthfully, I don't think either one of us know where we're going to end on this one. So let me ask you a question. What do you know about the terminology confirmation

bias? It's, it's seeking an answer to a question you already have an answer for. So you're looking to understand something you think you already understand. Okay.

So give me the like, okay, so I'm writing down, I was writing down a thing that came to my mind, what are the components that are necessary in confirmation bias, then like, what, what pieces can be if you were to break it apart? You go, okay, it has to have this and this and that.

Okay, so let me think he, so here's an example of what I mean. And then maybe I can piece it together from there. But it's, if if I think something is wrong with me medically. So let's say I think I'm sick. So then I might research, what those symptoms are trying to find what the thing is that I have, with the assumption that I already have something, I just need to identify what it is. So the assumption, that confirmation bias that the way that it works is I think I have something I'm finding what that thing is, I'm not asking, Do I have something? I'm starting with the premise that? Yes, I do. What is it? Let me find it. And then I search for that. And then once I find something that meets a certain threshold, and depending on where I am, either mentally or emotionally or physically, I find enough to confirm that. Oh, that's it. I have now found what it is that I have.

Okay, you set a lot of really important things in there. So let me let me break down a little bit of what I'm hearing from you. And then let's see if I'm kept capturing it. You didn't directly say this, but you're

assuming things. There's an assumption. Okay, so that's a component. There's a predictive nature, based on the assumption, I'm looking forward and saying, I will be able to come up with a, you know, an answer. Right. So there's a prediction involved in confirmation bias. And then the other part was, there's a threshold, which I'm gonna argue, and I'm wondering what your thoughts are that threshold of of legitimate, what we would say is fact, I have factually found the answer. There's, there's an arbitrary nature to it. Because it crosses over this imaginary threshold that we have established without event, without even saying it out loud. Or maybe even acknowledging that we've set a threshold. If this many pieces of the puzzle are there. I know

what the puzzle looks like. Yes. Okay,

so there's three major components. So let me ask ya, how good are people at predicting the future?

Zero, not good at all.

I'm not sure I agree. 100% something so you see the way that the brain works, I'm just gonna lay this out. And then you tell me what you think the way the brain works? Is it naturally we look for patterns? That's a natural tendency. And we know that when we study math or science, we're looking for patterns. And some patterns are actually very predictable. Right? Like, the example I sometimes use is, you know, you know, back back in the old days, the caveman days, you got you got two people hanging out together because you were relational by nature, right? So they're, they're hanging You know, and one of them goes up over the hill. And they, they, you're probably going to get this reference. Because you listen to the same stories as I did when we were growing up. One guy goes up over the hill. And, you know, the other guy is standing there, and it just hears and, you know, comes up and peaks over the hill, and there it is his buddies getting eaten by a saber toothed Tiger. Right now. Well, that person goes, Okay, they turn around and they run away. Right? Next thing, you know, is that person as they approach a hill, or do they come around a bend in, you know, at the river, and they hear, they don't wait. There's a predictive nature to it, that's relatively accurate. And they just turn and they book it, they get the heck out of there that I saw this before. And I lost my friend. So I'm out of here. So some predictive nature, I think is pretty accurate. Do you agree or disagree with that?

I still disagree. Okay, it's why I because I understand the concept. And that's, that's playing with probabilities. And that we can reasonably assume can lead to certain outcomes. But the actual predictive or the, the actual outcome doesn't yield very high probabilities. In, in, in a lot of cases, because you would say that. Okay, so let me let me kind of turn this around. So if you're saying you can reasonably assume that something can happen, because it has happened, then would you be willing to stake your future on something have something, something happening? Based on that analysis? And by this, I mean, let's say you're, you know, that the statistics for flying are very good. They're very good 100% You this this, the stats say that 99.9% of flights will take off and land without, without issues? But would you be willing to stake your life on this one aircraft? Making it on this one trip? Well, the answer is probably yes. But can you predict Can you predict the future that this aircraft will land or take off and land safely without event? The answer is no, you can't. The stats say in the past, it's historically possible that you're going to have no events. But you cannot Garin

guarantee a future outcome on this one event, just because the vast majority have worked out just fine. You know what I mean? That's what I mean by this. It's, it's each in each event is independent of the last, regardless of how the math has played out. It's still independent, this flight is independent of every other flight that has ever occurred in history. So that's what I mean by No,

yeah. Okay. Now, that makes sense. It's well, yeah, no, that it doesn't make sense. I gotta throw this at you, then. The if we live off of the model that the past cannot predict the future. Do we then what is the role of fear in the equation at that point that

Oh, geez. Well, fears unreasonable.

So okay, so I'm using your argument now, Mokhtar? Yeah, I'm gonna use yours, if fear is unreasonable, and yet, you can't use the good, predictable, like, what I would suggest is relatively predictable. 99 99.9. Yes, there are going to be some anomalies. Absolutely. Because there's, there's a lot of variables, especially when we're talking about predicting people and people's behaviors, right. But if we can't rely on some of that, what looks like predictability to reduce the fear? Why do we leave the house?

Whoa, true. But then that doesn't. That's a different question than the nature of the original question. Which is confirmation bias? No, which is the predictive nature of the future. Can you predict can you reasonably predict the future? That's a different question? Right.

Okay. Explain the difference.

So can you predict the future? The answer is no. But should you be afraid of the future? Because you can't predict it? The answer is no. So so they're, they're different questions. Okay, so just because I can't predict the future doesn't mean I need to be afraid of it. Right. Even if this like you, if you jump out of out of an airplane with a parachute, most of the time, you're gonna be just fine. Right? You're gonna be, you're gonna be fine. But gravity wins. And it will always win. Which is why you come down softly with a parachute. But if it doesn't open, that's not a soft landing. But you since you can't predict that, does that mean you should never jump out of an airplane? I

know some of our audiences right now going yes, you shouldn't ever jump.

But I'm and I, I feel them to some degree. But no, I eat. You can't be afraid of it. Because like you said, you would never leave your house. You just wouldn't. Because there's, there's an animal out there somewhere. There's a bear somewhere. And if you walk out of your house to your car, that bear might be there at that moment. Yes, that is 100%. True.

Yeah, it reminds me of the Did you ever see that video where the professor's is talking to people, their students? And they they have a piece of chalk. Right? They're holding the chalk up. And they say, Well, I can reasonably predict that when this lands, it's going to break. And, you know, in the they were using it in reference to faith, a you know, like a godly faith. And they they, you know, that's one of the people in the audience as well. You know, I believe in God. And I think that God could intervene. And, you know, he's like, the professor's like, no, no, no, because I will drop this. And anyway, it comes down to at the end, the professor drops it in somehow or another, it hits, you know, his sleeve, or his pant leg or whatever, it ends up rolling off of his shoe. And doesn't break. And it's the idea of, you know, things can be reasonably predictable. But something can be thrown in the mix. That's unexpected. Right? That's what you know, maybe a miracle and that particular example. Or maybe it's, you know, a screw comes loose in that plane. And now we're all trying to jump out, but we only got three parachutes. Yeah. It's something unpredictable is, oh, there's this inherent possibility. But if we're fearing the possibility of the unpredictable, then we could actually freeze up and say, like, I'm not leaving

the house. Yes. Okay. Yeah. So,

why, okay, why why then, do we look to confirm our bias? Why Why would we? Why would we do that? Is there a reasonable explanation as to why that happens so much?

I think so. I think because we want, we want to know, and we want to understand. So I would say I mean, okay, so I'm thinking out loud on this one. I, I think confirmation bias helps us gain purpose, and meaning in something that we cannot yet explain. Because if we don't know something, we want to know it. And we want to know why that might be the case. And so in our search for understanding something, we have to confirm something that is not understood yet. And so yeah, did I just say a bunch of words that maybe don't make sense.

But let me tell you what I think I heard you say you're talking about the scientific method. I think that's what you just described, you're saying, you set an idea. And then you go in and you test it to see if it works,

sort of, except for that the scientific method comes with questions that we're looking at that that we're trying to questions we're trying to answer that we don't yet understand, in an open way, whereas confirmation bias is more of a closed way. So we so let's say as a scientist, we say I have a hypothesis. I think this might be what's happening. So let's see if I can disprove that. And if I cannot disprove it, then it must be right Eight. Whereas confirmation bias is the other way. You ask questions and you say This must be it. So you try to prove that that is it. And if you can't disprove it, then it must be right. Does that make or did I say that wrong? Be wrong? Yeah. So you're trying in the science where you're trying to disprove your question. Whereas in confirmation, you're trying confirmation bias you're trying to prove prove the answers to your question. So they they're, they oppose each other.

They're opposites. Essentially, they're mere reflections. 100 presume if we are using confirmation bias socially? Because that's where it comes out. Right? Typically, the then what you're saying is we are doing the antithesis, the opposite of science.

The opposite? Yes, confirmation bias is the opposite of science.

Oh, my gosh, that opens a Pandora's box. I'm just gonna

be offensive, and it's not meant that way. I don't really care, I guess, in this case, because? Because I don't care. So.

So I know. Okay. So that that opens up. I'm gonna throw this Pandora's box out there. I don't know that we'll wrestle with it today. But I'm gonna throw it out there that it brings into question all that happened during the pandemic, everything. Because if we were really doing science, we would actually have been trying to disprove the the masks, disprove the vaccines disprove the six foot circle thing that we would be trying to disprove. And what we ended up with, is our scientists saying, No, we are going to prove these things. So they did the opposite of science. Now I'm, I'm gonna let that sit, because I don't want to drag you into that conversation right now. But I want to go down a slightly different path, which is probably going to drive my audience nuts, because I'm usually addressing those topics that I just dropped, like, I just dropped a bomb, right? But I want to talk about the psyche of what you're describing, which is, if we are trying to prove that we are right, I would suggest psychologically, that the thing that's getting in our way the most is

our ego. Our,

our, our, our own view of our own righteousness, how we are superior, and, you know, like, because I predicted a, b, c, d. And so it ends up like metaphorically becoming a pissing match. Like, we literally will, yeah, we'll start competing with each other to who can predict better, and then I'm going, okay, so if that's the psychological side of it, that becomes then the Well, now I understand why our culture is going, where it's going. What are your thoughts on that?

Okay, so yes, here, here's my thoughts on that. I think I agree in part two, to the ego component. But what I think we how we get to the ego component, is by trying to prove something is fact rather than trying to disprove it, we're actually lowering the threshold, which goes back to one of your three components that you sort of piecemealed from my initial mini rant, and that is, if you lower the threshold, then the idea is that you will confirm it faster. And and then hence, your ego will then elevate at that point, and and then the rigor is lost. And so because of the lowering of threshold, the ego goes up the threshold or the the rigor then is lost, and and then the follow on questions never come up. The ones we should ask when we should be asking, never get asked. Yes.

So the beauty of that is it comes back to something you and I offline have talked about many times, which is we have to do better at asking hard questions. Always. I think that's interesting. And we aware like this goes down to a totally different track. But you when it comes to confirmation bias, what are the the where then? Or what questions? Should we be asking right from the gate? What's a good question? If we know come from? We're making an assumption here, but we're going to try to disprove it right? Not prove it. All right. So if we, if we make the assumption, that confirmation bias is a process that happens within most of us, all of us, really, right, but that's an aside Jim, what's what's a great question to ask that keeps us open minded keeps us engaged in asking the hard questions.

Hey, let me think. I, my gut reaction is I think the question you would ask yourself is, could I be wrong?

Because if you're late, if you're trying to get to an answer, then the first thing you should say is, is not, am I right? But it could I be wrong? And then if you if you answer yes, which you should? It's in what ways? Or how? And then and then I think you can find the questions that could really get you to an answer. That is at least worthy of asking the next set of important questions. So you got to say, Could I be wrong with this?

I love it. Okay. So this actually comes to ahead for me on some things that I have voiced many, many times in this podcast, which is, we're looking for perspective. We're not looking for right. Right comes when we ask questions about, Am I seeing this? In a way that makes sense? Am I asking the right questions? Am I talking to the right people? Am I exploring the right problem? Because sometimes I spend, and I know I've done this, I've spent hours researching something, only to find out, I was reached researching the wrong thing. I just, I just had to do it. In order to find out that wait a minute, I actually don't want to research this, I actually should be researching this completely different topic. And the only reason I was able to get there is because I didn't assume that I had the answer. Even when I was gaining information. I was learning stuff. But it turned out to be the wrong stuff. Does that make sense? Yeah. And so that's a that's a great place for us to wrap is you know, when I'm talking to this audience that listens to me, don't question yourself. Question your motives. Your question my motives. But don't do that as a precursor. Do that. After you question, what are your motives? Do you come and listen to us in this podcast? Because you want us to give you an answer? If that's what you're looking for, you're probably in the wrong place. And I know some of you out there do look for us, for me to answer your questions to give you my opinion. At the end of the day, if I do a really, really, really great job at doing this podcast, what I have you doing is asking, Do I have the right information? to distill some reasonable answers? And if not, what questions should I be asking myself? Is my ego getting out of my way? Am I potentially wrong? If I've got my audience asking that question, which I actually believe that most of you do ask that question or you're not returning to my podcast. If you're looking to confirm your bias routinely, and not looking to challenge your own thinking and grow and get better, you're probably not coming back. So that's where I'm going to leave you today. For those of you who are out there listening and you, you want to be part of this conversation, check out our website, there's a little thing that'll come up here in a second, like, share, share this with people. Look, we're trying to help people grow and get better. I always appreciate your time, whether it's your first time you you've listened to 100 of my episodes, whatever it is, thanks for joining us. I hope you have a wonderful day.