

Communication is a part of most peoples' everyday lives that begins with a kick or turn in the womb and follows us until our final day. However, merely practicing communicating every day does not save us from committing the biases and errors in communication regularly, because more often than not, people are not aware of making them. In the conversation between Dave, Ally and Jessica, the two girls sour the quality of their interpersonal perception with the fundamental attribution error and errors in cognition and talk such as allness talk, polarization, indiscriminate thought, and static evaluation.

The fundamental attribution error occurs when one attributes a (usually negative) behaviour to a person's character as a whole (p. 104). The fundamental attribution error is committed by failing to consider the context of the subject's behaviour, and basing one's judgement of a person solely on one action (p. 104). In the case study, both Ally and Jessica are guilty for making the fundamental attribution against Dave. In the text, Dave's girlfriend Ally attributed Dave's rejection to write her essay for her to him not loving her/not wanting to be with her anymore. Ally refuses to recognize the context of Dave's action, which is that he also has a lot of homework on his plate and cannot do both assignments. Being aware of his own context, Dave considers himself to be justified and fails to understand why Ally is crying. The fundamental attribution error committed by Ally skews her interpersonal perception and negatively affects the quality of her interpersonal communication between her and her boyfriend. Jessica committed the fundamental attribution error against her brother, Dave as well. She heard and saw Ally crying, and instantly resorted to the conclusion that Dave is an awful boyfriend because he made his girlfriend Ally cry. Again, like Ally, Jessica ignored the social context of

the situation and attributed the one falsely perceived piece of evidence of Dave treating Ally badly to him being an inadequate boyfriend. It's suggested in the case study that Ally's tendency to fall victim to the fundamental attribution error has resulted in her having a number of failed relationships with men, which seems to have a heavy influence over her overall perception of men.

When Jessica hears Ally crying, she uses contextual cues to build her understanding of the story quickly and respond in a way that protects her (p. 111). To do this, she relies on heuristic thinking to piece together the perceived stimuli (Ally crying in Dave's room) using cues from her unconscious mind. The cognitive unconscious operates on the WYSIATI (what you see is all there is) principle, which individuals develop in order to conserve mental energy and use the cues around them in order to quickly assess and make an instant judgement about the situation (p.109). Jessica sees and hears Ally crying, and to her, that is enough "evidence" to respond to that situation in a way that has been shaped by previous experience, that the man (in this case, Dave), must be at fault. "Dave! What did you say to her! God, you're such a jerk". Jessica's perception is also clouded by the ease of availability rule (p.109) as she attributes Dave's behaviour to that of a scumbag simply because the association of men making women cry to being a bad boyfriend is easy for her to recall, as it's familiar to her (p.109). As her previous experience with men is implied to be poor, it's not a surprise that her instant reaction to Ally's tears is that she had been hurt by Dave, and Dave is a bad boyfriend. Simply relying on the WYSIATI phenomenon encourages miscommunication because important details such as

each individual's side of the story and remaining contextual cues are not considered, thereby giving a false impression of the situation, resulting in an erroneous judgement.

Jessica quickly moves up the inference ladder to transform the ambiguity of the situation into a hard judgement on which upon she can act (p.116). Jessica registers the data, the reality around her which is the sound of Ally crying in the room with Dave, "Dave's sister Jessica passes by his room and hears Ally's crying." Next, Jessica organizes the data that she perceives using schemes (p.116). Her perception of the data is that Dave is at fault for Ally's tears, "Dave! What did you say to her! God, you're such a jerk". Guided by her distrustful attitude toward men, Jessica adds her own meaning to the situation before her, and forms the judgement that Dave is a jerk. Jessica's inferences lead her to engage in an argument with her brother in which she accuses him of being a bad boyfriend.

Both Ally and Jessica commit errors in cognition and talk such as uncalculated risk, allness talk, polarization, indiscriminate thought, and static evaluation. Jessica falls victim to uncalculated risk when she states, "Dave! What did you say to her! God, you're such a jerk, Ally, sweetie, what happened?" Before having all the facts, Jessica jumps to an assumption that Dave is at fault. Allness talk is demonstrated by Jessica as well, when she says, "guys...they'll do it to you every time!" Not only does Jessica make the error of misusing the meaning of "every time", but she generalizes her statement to all men. Ally uses polarization in her communication to make herself seem victimized and for Dave to feel bad about having declined doing her work or her. When Ally says, "you don't care about whether or not I fail. All you care about is

yourself”, she’s showing a very “all or nothing” thought process (p .120), in which she feels if Dave declined to do her work at this time, there must be no other explanation other than that he wants her to fail. Jessica is the culprit behind slipping indiscriminate thought into her communication with Dave and Ally. She does this by generalizing distrust and being a bad boyfriend to all men, “guys...they’ll do it to you every time!” Finally, Jessica also uses static evaluation in saying that Dave doesn’t change in his treatment of his girlfriends, “this is just like the last one. She ended up in tears, too. “

The conversation between Dave, Ally and Jessica could have gone much more effectively had each of them been aware of the errors in talk, cognition and communication biases that they were committing. All people have at one point in time have either been, or have talked to Ally and Jessicas, and know the frustration that comes along with ineffective communication but oftentimes have difficulty pin-pointing what went wrong within the dialogue. The conversation between Dave, Ally and Jessica demonstrates the importance of being cognizant of our communication habits and how they may be negatively impacting the quality of our communication in everyday life.

REFERENCES

Kehoe, D. (2013). *Communication in everyday life* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Learning Publishing.