

# **Fear Based Thinking and Polarization**

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[www.Bringtruthtofear.org](http://www.Bringtruthtofear.org)

<https://bringtruthtofear.org/fear-based-thinking-and-polarization/>

Fear in nature is a brief reaction to the perception of an immediate threat

Fear grabs our attention and provides a surge of energy to restore safety  
(fight/flight/freeze)

Fear narrows our focus and directs our thinking toward perceived threats

# Three Kinds of Fear

- Natural Fear
  - Reaction to an immediate threat to health and well being
  - Fear in nature is a brief reaction to a predator, or a fight for sex or territory
- Mental Fear
  - Similar effect on body/mind/emotion as natural fear
  - Reaction to thinking about fear or fear-based messages
  - Lasts as long as we think about it
- Structural or Habitual Fear
  - Short-term reaction to fear becomes a habit as tension from fear and fear-based messages builds
  - Restrictions on vision and thinking become part of life
  - Common reaction to trauma

# **Fear generates energy that drives us toward immediate action**

- The surge of energy from fear builds tension if not discharged through physical action
- The build-up of tension keeps us in a state of fear. Our mind is continually drawn to focus on perceived threats. Thinking about these threats generates more fear which further increases tension.
- A prolonged state of fear continually drives us to act without careful thought while restricting our capacity to see and think clearly.

# Fear narrows and distorts vision and thinking

- Fear is faster than thought - we tend to react without thinking
- Our focus is drawn to potential threats
  - We lose sight of the big picture – miss context, patterns, subtle influences, and relevant details
  - We put people and situations in broad, dead-end categories that limit understanding
  - We don't ask questions - creativity, curiosity, and learning are blocked - We become fixated on what we think we know and what we did before
  - Short-term thinking leads us to bypass values and ignore the implications or effects of our actions
  - We seek control or a leader who projects strength
  - A need for certainty drives us to seek single causes for complex problems – we accept simplistic solutions

# **Solving human problems requires clear vision and thinking**

- Reacting without thinking can create new problems and make things worse
- The complexities of modern life require considering history, context, relationships, and the effects and implications of our actions
- We need different perspectives in order to clearly understand what's happening and how best to respond
- We need to understand how messages from media and politics affect our thinking

# Fear has increasingly become part of modern Life

- Stress, Pressure, and a Lack of Balance
  - Leads to the continuous build-up of tension
  - Draws our focus toward possible threats
- Media and Social Media
  - Fear is the most effective way to get and keep our attention
  - Our attention is for sale (not by us...)
- Politics
  - Emotion-based beliefs can cement bias. We become immune to logic and evidence
  - We don't ask clarifying questions
  - Blaming and demonizing the opposition creates a dependable base

# Fear Based Thinking

- What is normally a brief reaction to fear becomes a mental habit that restricts perception and thought
- Result of prolonged and/or repeated exposure to fear and fear-based messages (trauma can also play a role)
- We all have it to some degree but can recover when we realize how it limits our capacity to see and think clearly

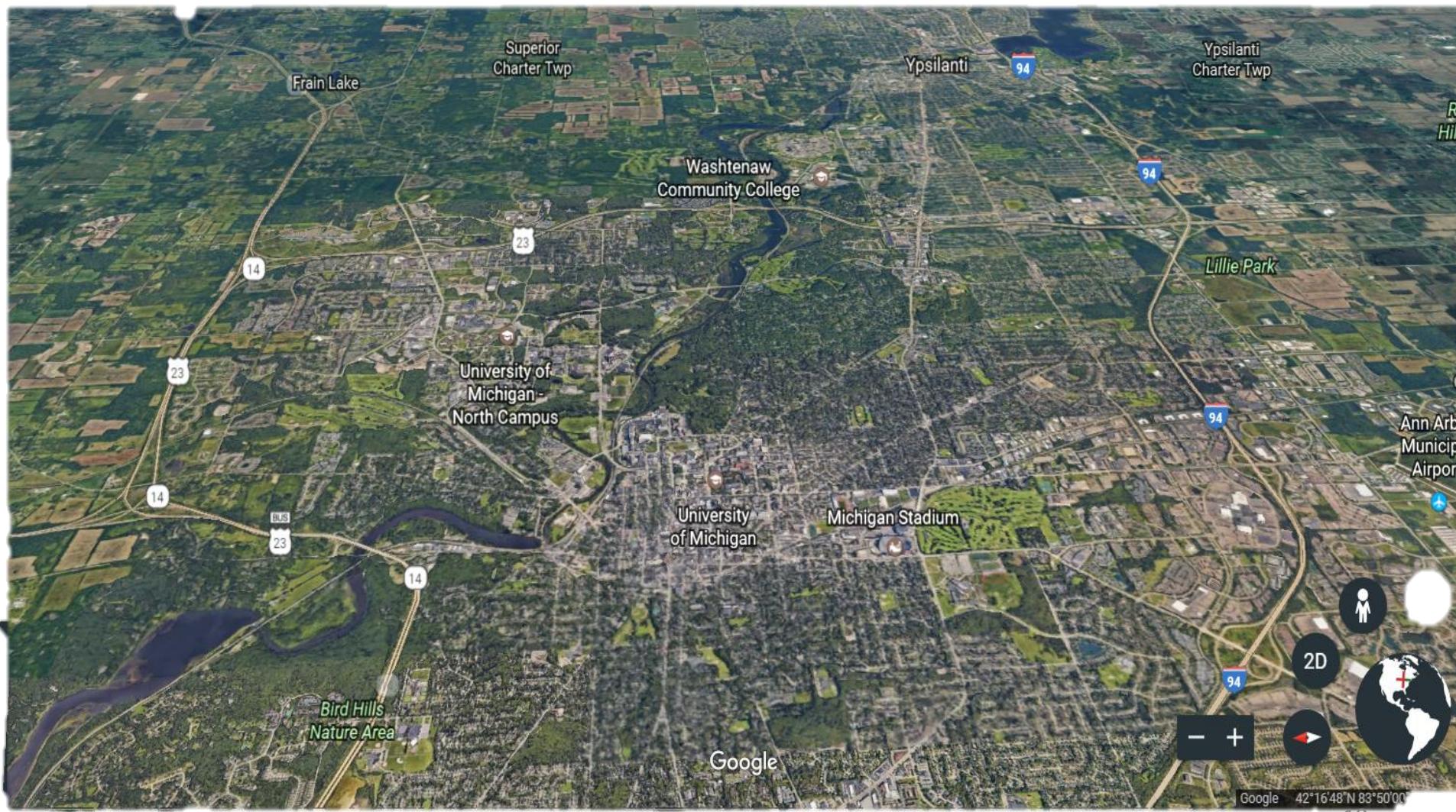
# Effects of Prolonged Fear on the Brain

## - Road Analogy

- Thoughts and memories are connections between neurons called pathways
- Connections that are used more often are faster and easier to access
- Fear restricts the formation of new connections while increasing the speed of older connections

# A healthy brain has multiple, intersecting pathways

## Input comes from different directions



# A Brain Stuck in Fear-Based Thinking Restricts Input



# Fear Based Thinking Makes Us Vulnerable to Manipulation

- Heightened awareness of potential threats draws us to fear-based messages
- We don't take time to ask questions or seek clarification
- We accept labels, categories, and simplistic solutions without considering how they might be misleading
- We tend to trust leaders who project strength and decisiveness without questioning knowledge or competence
- Blame and judgment give us a sense of certainty and control while blocking our ability to work together to solve problems
- We are drawn to media that confirms our beliefs and biases

# Essential Features of Fear Based Thinking

- Self-Centered
- Control, Certainty, Categories
- Adversarial Mentality, Tendency to blame, judge and separate
- Narrow, Fragmented Thinking
- Scarcity Mentality

# Resolving Fear Based Thinking

- Recover from built-up tension
  - Restore balance to body, mind, emotion
- Media Literacy
  - Understand sources of information, their methods and purpose, and how it affects us
- Seeing and Thinking Clearly
  - Transform fear into caution, care, curiosity, and connection
  - Create clarifying “exit pathways” that open our minds to seek what is true, relevant, and possible

# Restoring Physical, Mental, and Emotional Balance

- Send email to [bringtruthtofear@gmail.com](mailto:bringtruthtofear@gmail.com) for a free copy of “Slow Down and Lighten Up: Letting Go of Stress and Tension,” which describes how to restore Physical, Mental, and Emotional Balance

## Videos

- <https://bringtruthtofear.org/restoring-balance/>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAEs06g-6NU&t=2s&ab\\_channel=BobVanOosterhout](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAEs06g-6NU&t=2s&ab_channel=BobVanOosterhout)

# Restoring Balance

**The best first step is often a step back**

# Five Critical Questions of Media Literacy

1. Who is the author and what is their purpose?
2. What techniques are used to attract and hold our attention and what emotions are aroused by this message?
3. What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in this message?
4. How might different people interpret this message?
5. What is omitted from this message?

<https://mediaeducationlab.com/>

<https://courageousri.com/>

<https://mediaeducationlab.com/media-literacy-smartphone>

# Transform Fear into Caution, Care, Curiosity, and Connection

- Caution slows us down, expands our vision, and leads us to consider the effects of our actions
- Care keeps our hearts open – it deepens and expands our awareness
- Curiosity leads to greater understanding, unlocks creativity, and helps us see possibilities
- Connection expands perspective, brings in resources, creates opportunities, and opens up possibilities

# Create “Exit Pathways” Away From Fear Based Thinking

**Self-Centered** → View from other perspectives; Consider needs and interests of others

**Control** → Shared responsibility; Trust through understanding

**Certainty** → Be curious and open to possibilities; Accept confusion

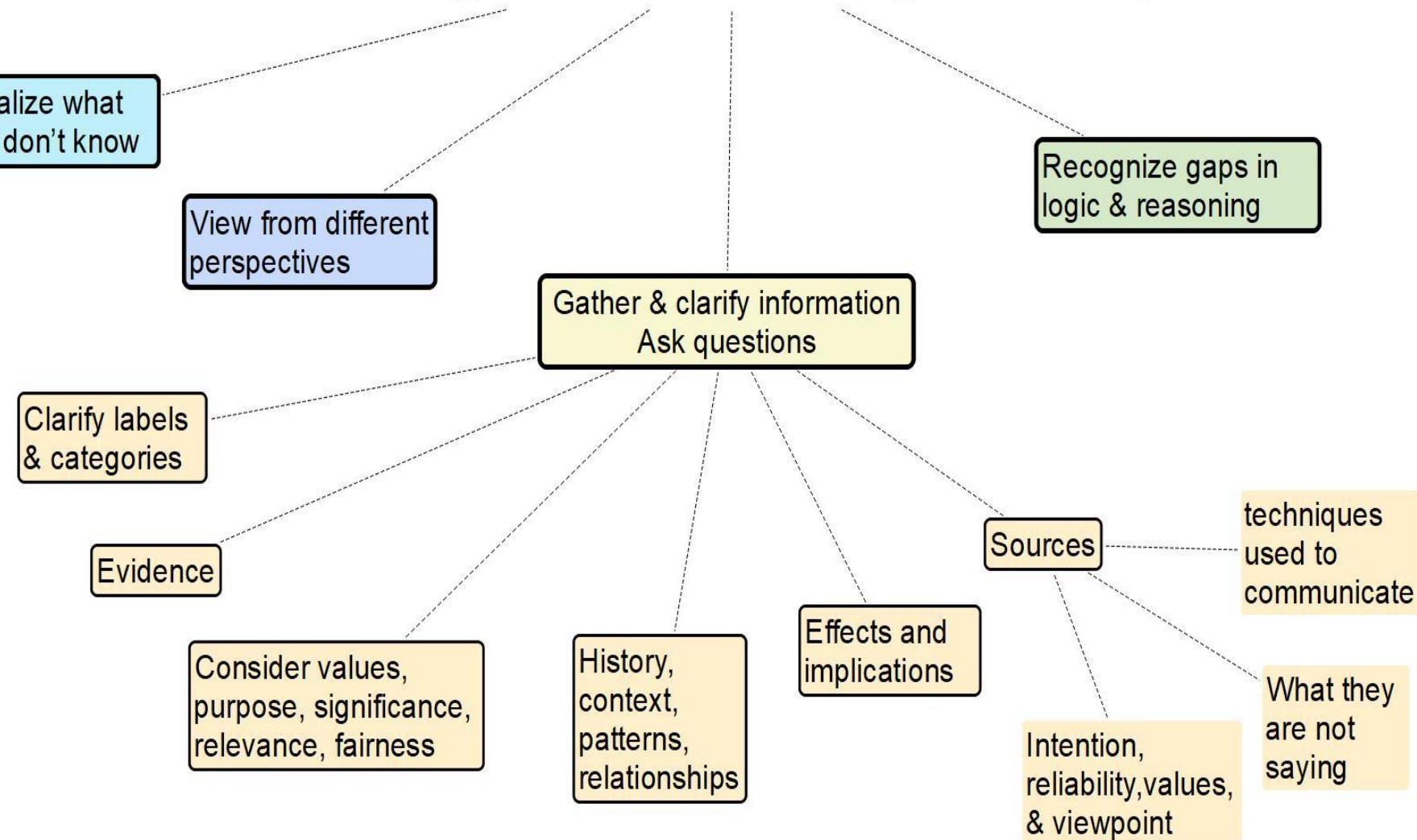
**Categories** → Ask clarifying questions; Recognize unique features

**Adversarial Mentality** → Be aware of needs and interests; Find common ground

**Narrow, Fragmented Thinking** → See larger picture - values, patterns, relationships, effects, implications

**Scarcity Mentality** → Gratitude; Clarify needs; Explore how to best use what we have

# Seeing and Thinking Clearly



# Perception, Fear, and Media: Roots of Polarization

- **MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSE:** Offered online by the Media Education Lab
- **DURATION:** July 21 - August 2, 2024 flexible schedule (total time commitment is 6 hours during two weeks)
- **LIVE MEETING DATES:** Friday, July 26th and August 2nd, 2024 12-1PM EDT
- **INSTRUCTOR** [Bob Van Oosterhout](#)
- **PROGRAM FEE:** \$49.99

<https://mediaeducationlab.com/events/perception-fear-and-media-roots-polarization>