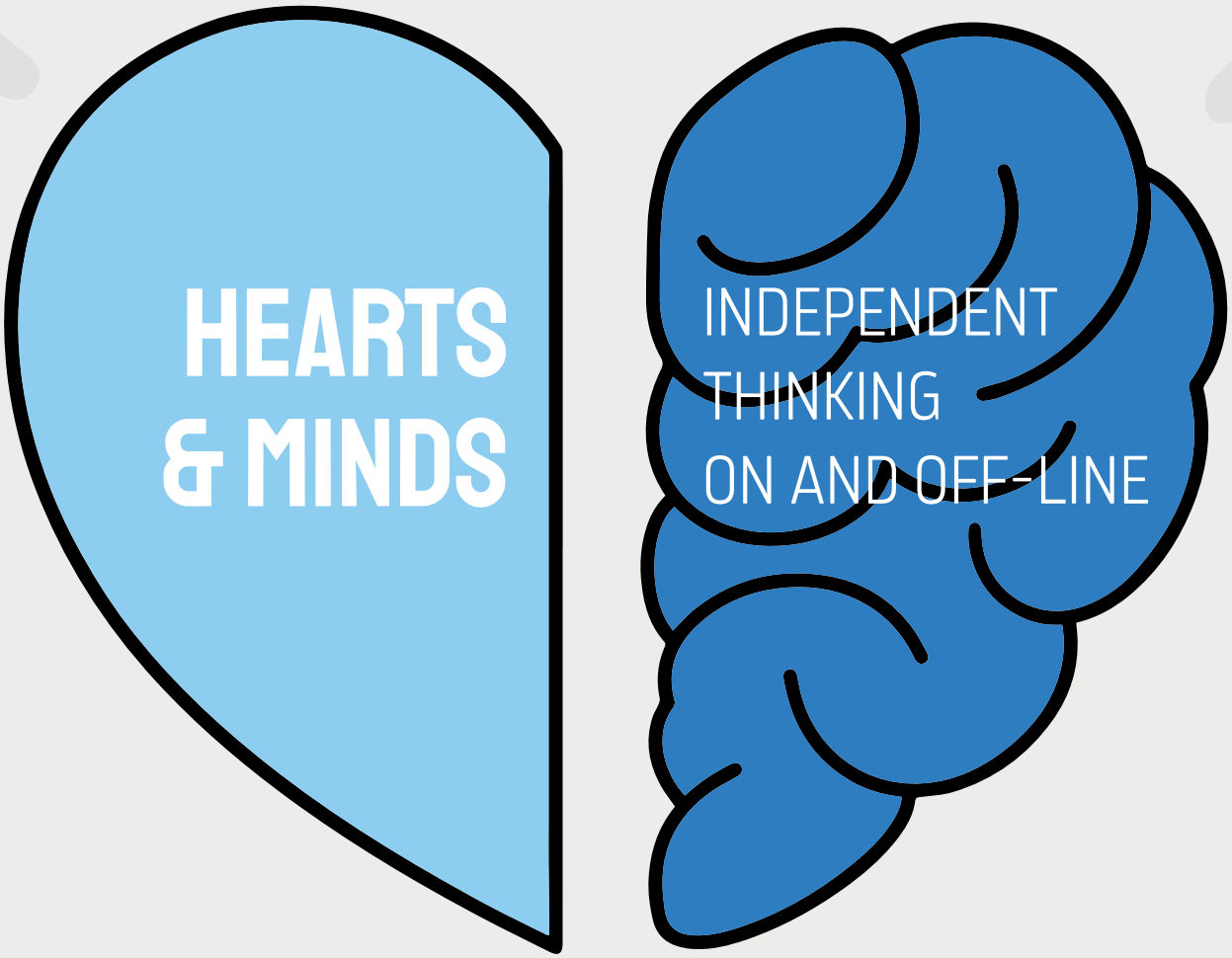

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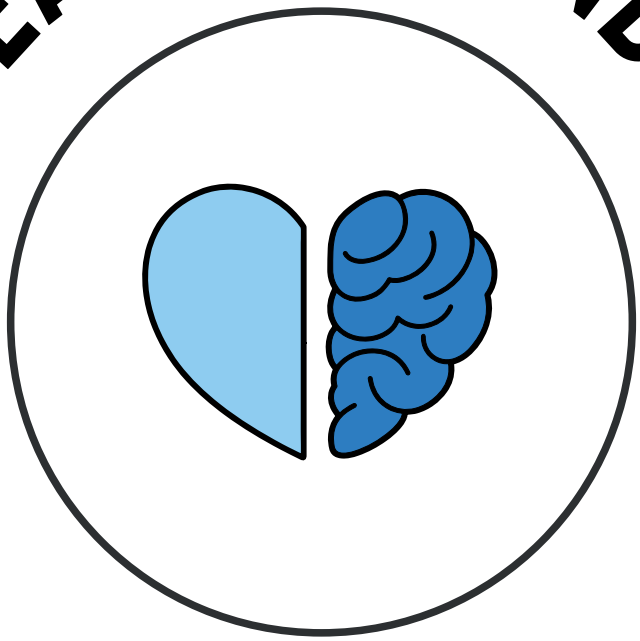

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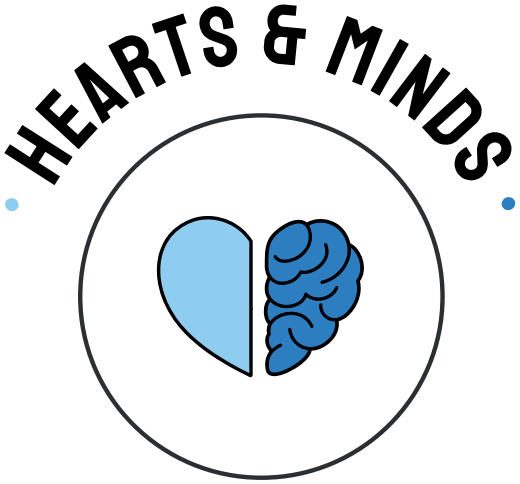

INDEPENDENT THINKING ON AND OFF-LINE

BERNARDO SORJ - ALICE NOUJAIM

I.
PROLOGUE

The online world is more and more present in our daily lives as a primary source of information, means of communication, and interaction. A preoccupation with its negative impact has led to educational efforts that focus on developing a critical discernment capacity within the universes of information and messaging that circulate on the internet.

Without demeriting the results of these efforts, we believe that an educational focus centered on the virtual world, in and of itself, is insufficient given that the values and cognitive and emotional skills needed to socialize online are fundamentally the same as those required offline. Furthermore, these social and emotional skills are mainly formed not in online environments, but during face-to-face exchanges among people — family, friends, classmates, etc.

We are not being ingenuous about the specific challenges that the virtual world brings, such as desensitization in the absence of another person's physical presence, big data's instrumental role in manipulating pre-existing dispositions, the possibility of image and text manipulation, anonymity or identity falsification, the erasure of boundaries between public and private life, and the systematic bombardment of misleading or hateful messages, to name a few of the most important ones. In addition to requiring a good grasp of virtual world mechanisms, these challenges require strengthening values of coexistence and our ability for independent thought.

The intention of this text is to present primary cognitive skills, particularly cognitive biases, that impact our judgement and our emotions. Both off and online biases limit our power of self-orientation, which is guided by our values, such as the respect for others, and by our capacity for reflection and discernment.

This book is intended to be the starting point of a text which we hope will gradually become the product of collaborative effort. We drew on the comments of Ana Bergamin, Miguel Fausto, and Marcio Gonçalves in a preliminary draft, and we hope to have the help of educators to provide their suggestions, comments, ideas for activities, and their classroom experiences.

In the **Portuguese** and **Spanish** versions of this text, each chapter is complemented with suggestions for classroom activities. As we believe such activities work best when formulated within their cultural contexts of application, we hope the readers of this English version develop their own exercises as they see fit for their students.

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INTRODUCTION

OUR OBJECTIVES

The internet's presence in our lives has transformed into a central component of daily existence for people of any age. The online world has become immensely useful, even in the field of education, where information, libraries, and learning games are widely available, and new forms of student-teacher interactions have developed. Alongside the power it holds for good, there is much misuse of the web, such as: threats and bullying, contact from strangers with bad intentions, addictive apps, dissemination of fake news, messaging that promotes hate and prejudice, and the loss of privacy and of control over personal information.

Learning to live with the internet is unavoidable, especially since our communication and social interaction is increasingly taking place online. Children and adolescents, whose main spaces for communication, until just a few decades ago, were at school or at home, now have the internet and social media as their primary source of information, entertainment, and social interaction—to which their parents and educators have little or no access.

To prepare young people to analyze and critically discern information that circulates on the internet, and particularly on social media, there exist a wide variety of initiatives (loosely called media education or media literacy). The content developed in this area has been extremely helpful, but we worry that focusing on online interactions may be limiting, since this isolates young people from the world of experiences and formation of feelings that the face-to-face world offers, and which is the critical space for developing affection, values, and emotional intelligence.

The world of face-to-face relationships and the online world are not unrelated spheres. In truth, qualities necessary to sustain independent thinking and respectful human interaction are fundamentally the same offline and online. These qualities are even more necessary in the online world — especially on social media — where they face new challenges, like desensitization due to the absence of a physical person to talk with, and the colonization of the internet by people and groups who promote hate, fake news, and misinformation. We need, therefore, to treat communication as a singular cognitive and socioemotional ability.

Thus, our pedagogical challenge is to relate offline and online worlds. And we aim to demonstrate how challenges to reflective thinking and sociability posed in the online world, with its specific characteristics, are in fact related to our person-to-person offline experiences. This text

proposes to contribute in the development of abilities and competences which we see as fundamental for young people to socially interact both on and offline, so as not to lose the intellectual and emotional independence that is critical to citizenship and social coexistence in a democratic society.

If we take the existing pedagogical materials as a frame of reference, this text demonstrates the relationship between the fields of media education and emotional intelligence (EI) development. Regarding the latter, we emphasize the link between emotional development and civic coexistence. Combining elements drawn from psychology and sociology, we aim to contribute to the strengthening of values/skills/abilities that develop independence. We believe we can face new online world challenges such as desensitization, time acceleration, and the expectation for quick responses that can inhibit reflection, lack of control over message forwarding, the "eternalization" of personal details in information databases, among others.

This text intends to contribute to the development of reflexive capabilities, personal independence, and emotional intelligence based on values, with particular emphasis on the cognitive biases.

WE HAVE CHOSEN THIS ANGLE FOR FOUR MOTIVES:

1. It allows us to associate three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and valuational. The cognitive bias theme has lent itself to an ample bibliography on thought distortions (often for emotional or prejudicial reasons) that lead to rational or judgemental error. We have chosen an approach that uses this vast bibliography and applies it to a practical objective: to develop the skills to simultaneously affect our **cognitive awareness**, **our emotional self-knowledge**, and **our sociability based on values of respect and dignity for all people**.

2. Cognitive biases affect the skills required for both face-to-face relationships and online communication. As we have already mentioned, the existent media literacy and communication bibliography tends to focus on, and even dissociate, these two dimensions of socializing. The cognitive biases theme permits us to group them, while addressing their specificities and highlighting their presence in each.

3. We believe teaching cognitive bias allows us to deal with themes that are critical in the education of active citizens and that are anchored in democratic values. We seek to do

so through examples from everyday experience, rather than abstractions that are sometimes distant from the lives of young people.

4. Cognitive biases refer to those skills that are relevant to all spheres of life, in various fields of knowledge and interpersonal interaction.

We hope that this material will be useful for educators of the most diverse areas of study, since in all of them there is the need for independent thinking and effective communication. The development of logical argument, the appreciation of scientific thought, the knowledge of Mathematics and its practical applications, the contextualization and perspective that comes from understanding History and the richness of vocabulary — which allows us to find appropriate adjectives and express arguments that suit the subtleties of reality, as opposed to the simplifications of instant messaging and "like" / "hate" polarization on social media — are fundamental skills for respectful interaction and for the education of citizens responsible for the common good.

I- EMPATHY:
THE BEDROCK OF SOCIABILITY

Empathy is the ability to place yourself in another's shoes. It is being able to recognize that social interaction requires accepting alterity, the existence of another being with their very own feelings and ways of seeing the world. Empathy is one of the principal components of emotional intelligence, from which we develop more mature human relationships and interactions based on mutual respect, cooperation, and solidarity. Empathy evolves — if unharmed by psychological difficulties or the greater social context — in a permanent process of concentric expansion. Our empathetic capacity concentrically expands at first from our family circle, then our nucleus of schoolmates and friends, later at work and in general relational activity.

Empathy is different from sympathy. Sympathy, as we commonly use it, refers to a disposition for support, agreement, and caring in relating to other people. Empathy, on the other hand, deals with subjectivity, a disposition for understanding people in order to respect feelings and ways of being which are different from our own. It is not necessary to agree with the other person, but rather to attempt to understand why a person might act, think, or feel a particular way. Empathy, however, entails accepting that each person has their own way of being and interests; living with, and learning from, differences.

Empathy is the ability to step out of our world and try to understand the worlds of others. Empathy evolves from two related mechanisms: identifying with another by feeling similar sentiments, and from the desire to understand different people.

When a child sees someone crying and asks what happened, they are taking a first step in developing their empathetic response. At that moment the child identifies with someone outside their interior world, concerned with what that other person feels, and wishing to understand what happened to them. This acknowledgment of the other as an "I," but an "I" different from "me" — one who has their own subjectivity and their own motives for crying — is a process of differentiation that results in empathy.

Recognizing the other in their differences is empathy's way of helping us to know ourselves better. How? Our emotions are triggered every time that we relate to someone, and this person produces feelings in us. We might feel admiration, trust, or fear of them; be irritated, envious, or angry with them. In our self-knowledge, the development of empathy

requires that we become aware of how these feelings are aroused by the other, and that they are generally projections of our fears, desires, and insecurities. How we relate to a person depends on understanding why they spark these varied emotions and feelings in us.

What would be empathy's greatest enemy? Other feelings that override our empathy and **cause us to do things to others that we don't want done to us**. What are these feelings? Certainly: fear, irritation, envy, anger, desire for affirmation. When we meet someone who is more fragile than we are, inept, different from us, there can arise in us the desire to humiliate, mock, offend. That is, we lose our capacity to empathize, to understand that the other person is a human being, and we objectify them with our problems, difficulties, and insecurities.

Respect for others and their differences are conditions for developing empathic relationships. When we respect others, we do not rush to hasty judgements, label, or offend them, which would generate their suffering. When we judge without knowing someone, we end up treating them unfairly. When we label, we are reducing the person to a negative quality, and failing to see them as the individual with feelings that they are, and, as such, we might end up mistreating them.

When we trust ourselves, we do not feel the need to offend another person to feel superiority, nor to protect ourselves from the offensive behavior of another. Because we understand they who offend us do so because they need to assert themselves or have problems that lead them to act aggressively.

When we negatively label someone, we do so not because of our merits, but because of the other's supposed inferiority; we do it to feel superior. Labeling always harms someone. This is true of any kind of label, because nobody can be reduced to a single characteristic. Nobody is perfect. Everybody gets it right sometimes and everyone makes mistakes. Even when we create positive labels, for example, "she's a winner," we can end up boxing that person in. The "winner" may feel obliged to win, and end up "playing to the crowd" to confirm the expectations thrown at her.

To the extent that we know and respect each other, we develop self-confidence. Self-confidence enables us to accomplish what we desire and bolsters our ideas, by helping us to accept constructive criticism. Self-confidence also helps us to understand that each person is different, and therefore that we must not trust blindly, for we are all fallible.

To live by the Golden Rule, **treat others as you would like others to treat you**, presupposes empathy. This principle requires that we ask ourselves: **and if it were me on the other side?**

Empathy requires a rational understanding of abstract rules, which organize social interaction and allow us to share, to play, to cooperate, and to compete. Sports and games are fundamental to understanding that good rules apply equally to all. It is playing and working in groups that we develop **the ability to cooperate**, joining forces around a common goal. Team activities demand, for example, that we withstand criticism and accept varied opinions. When playing, in particular, we must learn to share our frustrations and defeats. Cooperation, above all, requires negotiation and dialogue skills to seek solutions satisfactory to everyone. If we are able to understand the other we can also comprehend their reasons, and reach the best possible agreements.

THE ONLINE WORLD AND EMPATHY

Empathy is an emotional/cognitive skill that we develop when faced with the physical presence of another person, when our senses are stimulated, i.e., tone of voice, gestures, facial expression, and corporal movement. These *languages* provide relevant information to establish an empathy-based relationship. It is how we seek to understand what is being transmitted to us and the impact we make on the person we are addressing. When that person is not physically present, as it were, in a telephone conversation or via text message, we lose much of our ability to understand what is really happening to the person.

Our understanding of the other is limited to verbal messaging in the form of written or recorded messages.

Virtual communication requires constant thought analysis about the effects our messages can have on the other because, in the online environment, we lose a basic connection with our feelings and our humanity, which pass through our senses.

Therefore, remote interpersonal communication, typical of the web, tends to be desensitizing. Because it is remote, it can be difficult to understand what the other is truly trying to convey or to perceive the reaction we may cause. Sentences we otherwise would not say, to avoid discomfort, for example, are more easily expressed. And just as quickly we might cut off dialogue with a click, or emit remarks that discourage conversation.

Desensitization grows at the speed with which communication is processed and is characteristically made up of short sentences and quick retorts, which can be gross oversimplifications. In most cases, divergent opinions on the web will not survive more than three or four exchanged messages, and often culminate in mutually offending one another and/or cutting off dialogue. Thus, we lose both the capacity to listen and to reflect deeply to develop arguments, enriched through dialogue.

Although social media can be platforms for sharing difficult experiences and for solidarity, in everyday communication, the centricity of social media leads to the predominance of selfies and other simplified photos. These images promote a positive and happy view of ourselves and others, often transmitting an unreal portrayal of our lives that impoverishes our vision of what really happens to other people, while we transmit a unilateral narrative of our lives.

Likewise, many messages posted on social media are made not to generate meaningful dialogue, but to create a "like" or "dislike," or an emoji response. Communicating like this can become an exercise in boosting (or destroying) our own and others' self-esteem based on how many (or how few) responses were received. Thus, we are reduced to a simplified world of feelings and emotions in which nuances are lost. We "love" or "hate" this or that … music, person, product, etc.

This process is an obstacle to our empathy. It deters us from putting ourselves in another's shoes, to listening and considering how and what we transmit to people and its effect on them. To prepare young people for ethical and empathetic experiences, educators can plan digital activities that consider the possibilities and also the limitations of electronic communication, remembering to maintain a mixture of face-to-face interactions and online activities.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

One of the main upshots of being empathic is not producing suffering in others. With empathy we develop skills that are fundamental to living with others, such as teamwork, learning together, and growing up emotionally and cognitively. This applies as much to young people as to educators and family members.

What challenges do teachers have to help young people to see others in their differences? They must explain how there are always thoughts and feelings present that can block an empathic response and can cause us to lose respect for the other. Recognizing this is the first step to stopping

these feelings from controlling us. When we repress our feelings and do not acknowledge them, they can turn up in destructive behaviors against ourselves and others, in speech or acts of intolerance and hatred. When we practice understanding the feelings of others we come to understand why a variety of life experiences can produce prejudice, anger, and envy, and this allows us to know ourselves better. Self-knowledge grows along with empathy, and this results in greater respect for others and ourselves. This is a fundamental process, moreover, in building a student's relatability with peers and the student's self-confidence in general.

SOME ADVICE

Empathy is critical in the teacher-student relationship. It provides the educator with awareness of each learner's particular strengths and weaknesses.

Suggestions for promoting more collaboration in the classroom:

- Organize students into groups of 3 to 4 people, no more than 6, if possible.
- Discuss team skills and guide students to reflect on what successful collaboration looks like.
- Encourage students to establish ground rules and define team member roles and tasks, offering support and guidance.

2- CONFIRMATION BIAS:
CAUTION AND DOUBT AS THE FOUNDATION FOR EVALUATION AND TRUTH SEEKING

We all have opinions about a wide variety of topics and people. We empathize more with some than others. We like certain things and dislike others. When someone expresses an opinion that confirms what we think, we are happy because this reinforces our beliefs and boosts our self-esteem. So, when someone tells us something that confirms what we think, we tend to believe it without prior reflection. Confirmation Bias is what leads us to agree with opinions and information that endorse what we already believe, and to unthinkingly reject what calls our beliefs into question.

For example, if someone says that a person we do not like has done something wrong, we conclude this must be true. In the same vein, it is difficult to comprehend that while disputing an issue with someone, no matter how much data or how many facts are produced, they will reject our argument. We all wish for our beliefs to be confirmed and find it difficult to accept it when they are questioned or rejected.

Whenever we accept an opinion or information solely because it confirms our beliefs, we may be committing an injustice or closing ourselves off from learning something new. In a situation in which something wrong happens for which we are not responsible, and yet someone disagrees and tells us we are responsible for what has happened, for instance. Let us imagine someone judging us before first investigating whether the statement is true.

We may not like a person or something that they say, but that does not mean that their facts and arguments are untrue. In the same way that information may emerge that proves what we think may in fact be false.

At times, “undesirable” information may be related to what we believe is true, but this does not mean that our belief system has to fall apart. For example, it is possible to agree with something said by someone we usually disagree with and about whom we hold a critical opinion.

If someone tells us something that contradicts what we know, it does not mean their information is false. Our beliefs underpin the way we relate to the world. It is understandable that they would be our “starting point,” but we must be alert in order to protect ourselves from this bias, as it could lead us to jump to conclusions or to accept information without checking its veracity. Why are we happy when someone expresses an opinion that coincides with our own? It reinforces our beliefs, but does

that actually mean we are right? If half the world thinks the Earth is flat, does that mean it actually is?

Acting with caution and **doubt,** that is, not jumping to conclusions before we have all the elements needed in order to express an opinion, and not accepting a piece of information before reflecting on it and checking its validity, makes us more receptive to learning new things. Jumping to conclusions means we end up living in an unjust world, which is not good for us or for others. If we close ourselves off from new information that is different from what we already know, we stop learning.

Throughout history, human search for knowledge has questioned established truths and has made advances by putting in check what people believe in. In the 14th century, Giordano Bruno developed theories about the universe that are now widely accepted, but at the time they called into question the idea that the Earth was the center of the world. Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake. During the **Bubonic Plague**, in Europe, medieval doctors did not know that the contagious disease was due to microorganisms and subjected sick people to inefficient treatment, like bloodletting, to balance the body's "four humors." In addition, innocent people were held responsible for the epidemic. They were the "scapegoats," i.e. innocent people condemned for society's problems.

These examples illustrate how our understanding is essentially limited. Therefore, what seems obvious to us today was not in the past, moreover, that which we believe to be true today, may be proved wrong in the future.

What would have become of medicine and humanity, for that matter, if we had continued to insist on the idea of the theory of the four humors? Would vaccination and antibiotics have been invented? How many lives would have been lost? To approach discussions with someone who thinks differently can be an opportunity for growth. Knowledge, like any creative work, demands insights and actions different from what exists. They require trial and error and seeking paths as yet unexplored.

How should we deal with Confirmation Bias? When we are faced with arguments and information we did not previously have access to, we should learn firstly to listen and remain calm, even when we disagree, then to reflect and, finally, if necessary, we can change our minds.

When someone gives us information that casts doubt on what we believe, we feel irritated with them because we feel we are being questioned or undermined. Why stay calm and listen? Ideas or even arguments different than our own that we cannot immediately respond to, do not imply that

our point of view is wrong. Sometimes we should broaden our outlook to include new elements we had been unaware of before.

We should always allow ourselves time to reflect on whether these elements fit with what we already know or believe. Sometimes this is simple, for example if we thought that the country with the largest territory was China and then we discover that it is actually Russia. On other occasions it may be more complex, for example when we have to revise our assessment of another person. At times we will be able to uphold our own opinions, while also becoming aware that there are other possible points of view and that they are underpinned by arguments that cannot be disregarded. The best way to end a discussion is therefore to suggest: "Let's think about it and talk again." And then, really reflect on the arguments given by the other person.

Dialogue with someone who thinks differently can turn into a trying experience. This can be difficult to bear if someone assumes the attitude: "I already know everything and the other person is wrong," or if opposing arguments cause insecurity. Obviously, no one knows everything. Opposing arguments do not mean we have to give in or change our minds. They do mean that we can reflect more about our beliefs, and seek new information to have even more clarity about what we think.

CONFIRMATION BIAS AND THE INTERNET

In the digital world, there is a big risk of search engines guiding us to abandon caution and our capacity for reflection and instead leading us to act according to a Confirmation Bias. This is because when we look for information using a search engine (like for example Google), we usually stay on the first page which has the most viewed responses, not necessarily the most informative or curated. The same is true on social media where we tend to stay in closed groups of people who think like we do and reinforce our beliefs.

A structure of artificial intelligence that combines algorithms with personal data creates a personalized user experience for each user. This means that algorithms reflect our online behaviour, selecting content that is likely to interest us, based on searches we carry out, sites we open, posts we like and share, videos we watch, news we click on. Based on this, social media is programmed to send us messages with which we are likely to have an affinity.

The advertisements that we see on sites and social media are also based on our previous searches. We feed this "artificial intelligence" with

every click we make on the internet. The structure of the network is strengthened and, in this way, forms echo chambers that distance users from alternative content. So, in practice, we are deprived of perspectives that diverge from our own.

In this scenario, we tend to live in echo chambers where we receive messages and read news that confirm our beliefs and ideals. When a piece of information opposes what we think, we tend to automatically delete it from memory. Exchanging content with people who share similar opinions means we are not exposed to divergent views.

When we do not agree, we simply click to the next thing. The challenge is to burst the bubble and avoid only remembering, interpreting and searching for information that confirms our original beliefs and hypotheses.

The speed at which messages circulate and with which we respond, is the enemy of caution and doubt. So, before forwarding information, patience, deliberation, and fact-checking are necessary. If we are held captive by the swiftness of the internet and the resulting need for rapid responses, we lose our independence and may spread erroneous information which could lead to injustice.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

We should always remember that we broaden our horizons when we are faced with information and points of view that differ from our own. Even if this is only to remind us that people think differently and have the right to their beliefs, just as we do. We stop growing and learning, if we only look for information and analysis that confirm what we already know and believe. If we listen, reflect and possibly change our mind, the one who "wins" is not the other but ourselves. **We should not be ashamed of changing our minds.**

SOME ADVICE

To nurture critical thinking, encourage young people to ask questions, to develop and assess ideas by judging their precision and value. Ask questions and present provocative, challenging ideas and encourage young people to discuss and analyse these ideas together. Make sure there is time set aside for deliberation during the lessons and exercises, and not just at the end.

3- COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:
LIVING WITH DIFFERENT VIEWS

We have a tendency to act in accordance with groupthink. Generally this is because we want the approval of the people around us. But when we do this without asking ourselves whether we agree with the group's decisions, we suspend our ability to reflect and to judge. We cease to be individuals and become a herd. Cognitive Dissonance is the ability to be true to what we believe is right, guided by our ethical principles, regardless of what the majority around us may think. Obviously this does not mean we stop considering the opinions of others. It means we make decisions about what is right and wrong with ethical reflection based on collective values. We do not follow the group without questioning it. After all, that would be dangerous, it could lead us to acting unfairly.

Our desire to be accepted by those around us can make being aware of group attitudes challenging, and that may hurt collective and social values, especially among young people who are still forming social identity bonds. The group will always pressure us to accept majority or leader opinions. But, it is up to each of us to question, discern and, at times, find the courage to disagree and propose our individual thoughts to the whole group.

Disagreeing with the group can be uncomfortable, but it is possible to resist the pressure of the collective on our own, as it is also possible to talk to schoolmates and friends to help reflect on what to do. As complementary approaches, both require a bit of courage to deal with the discomfort of going against collective opinion.

Cognitive Dissonance occurs when we are confronted with external opinions that we initially disagree with but eventually accept in order to feel part of the group. When we feel/think in seemingly conflicting directions internally, this too can be Cognitive Dissonance. We might think *"looks good"* about something we do, while another part of us says, *"could be better."* While some part of us says, *"do this, you'll enjoy it,"* another says, *"don't do that, it's dangerous."* How do we choose which direction to take?

Cognitive Dissonance comes when we are faced with the responsibility of taking a stand, while also being aware of the fragile nature of our discernment. Often, we have difficulty assessing what is right. It is natural to experience internal conflict when we come into contact with other ways of seeing the world, and we must live with these differences, seeking the most satisfactory solution at each instance.

Cognitive Dissonance can produce discomfort. We feel torn between cognitive and/or emotional demands that pull us in opposite directions, while we try to keep our desires and actions coherent. However, Cognitive Dissonance is not an erroneous feeling, but part of life's complexity, proof of the wide variety of values, and an opportunity for growth. If we try to erase the dissonance, we will fail to experience doubt, which is precisely the path that leads to reflection. Instead of denying our dissonances, we should accept them as a starting point in our search for adequate responses.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Cognitive Dissonance permits us to understand the value of different potential ways of seeing the world. It leads us to being open to the multiple views of reality, to listening to diverging arguments, and to understanding different people and cultures to the effect of expanding our perception of humanity.

Cognitive Dissonance is at the root of our creativity. Being able to think for oneself, to question what others take as given, to confront our established beliefs is fundamental to the creative process. Creation is facing Cognitive Dissonances and taking a step beyond the alternatives seen by others; looking at the world from one's own particular angle and finding new and more satisfying solutions to problems. To reflect on our own lives and the lives of our friends, to learn how to recognize and deal with Cognitive Dissonance is a powerful exercise in self-knowledge.

SOME ADVICE

Living with opposing values can generate internal conflicts, which often act as a motor for developing creativity. Young people are at a moment in their lives when they are most prone to Cognitive Dissonance. The values that were passed down to them sometimes clash with new values gained on the basis of their experiences. Adults should give them support and guidance to face Cognitive Dissonance naturally, and encourage them to use the unease resulting from this cognitive dissonance as a creative tension. After all, living with different demands is part of life.

Dealing with internal conflicts does not necessarily mean overcoming them, instead it implies learning how to co-exist with them in productive ways.

4- ATTRIBUTION BIAS:
WE MUST BE AWARE OF OUR PREJUDICES

We must be aware of our prejudices when seeking explanations about their causes, because they function at an unconscious level. Our prejudices lead us to make judgements about situations without due caution. They affect the way we decide who or what is responsible for an event or action and how we pass judgement. The same matter might be seen differently from people in the middle of the action and onlookers.

When we make a judgement about something negative that happens, we tend to concentrate on who did it and not on the act itself. If it was done by someone we like or by ourselves, we tend to justify it as exceptional or the result of circumstance. When we do not like the person responsible, we believe it is due to their personality and see the circumstances and reasons as irrelevant.

In short, we tend to be more understanding of people we care about and prejudiced against everyone else. This bias works inversely regarding success. When we, or people we love, are successful we see this as the result of a job well done. When the "other team" is successful we either attribute this to luck or external support or we write it off as an exception. According to the literature, the consequence of this bias, known as Attribution Bias, is that we are lenient on ourselves and with the people with whom we sympathize. And do not delve deeper to consider what has happened, or how we should change, or how we can help those responsible.

On the other hand, we strongly and blindly condemn people we dislike for a wide variety of reasons.

Seeking to overcome Attribution Bias allows us to go beyond the limits and distortions of our immediate emotionally- and experientially-based perceptions and prejudices, as well as our tendency to make quick judgements (or insufficiently substantiated ones). Generally, we judge according to attribution when we are excited or under pressure to make a decision.

PREJUDICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

On social media, discriminatory behavior — arising from Attribution Bias, otherwise known as prejudice — spreads through online attacks, hate speech, cyberbullying, and the reproduction of harmful images. Although these very same platforms are used for all kinds activism (for

example, the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #fightlikeagirl) and offer ways to denounce or block racist publications, it is becoming clear that social media is susceptible to expressions of prejudice, whether racist, gender biased, xenophobic, or of any other kind. These prejudices exist and are reproduced in both offline and online interactions, but they take shape in ways that are specific to each environment. For example, on social media prejudice and hate speech spread via aggressive comments on personal posts, coordinated attacks supported by bots, exposure and public shaming, calls for violence, among other forms.

In terms of regulations, the characteristics that make social networks seemingly "open" and "free" (these terms are in quotes because they are all governed by algorithms that lack transparency) are the same ones that make the fight against online prejudice a challenge. For example, the ease with which anyone can speak out, the democratization of access to data, and, even, the possibility of being anonymous.

Although it is challenging, there are measures we can take. Each platform has its own rules aimed at curbing discriminatory practices and some countries have specific legislation for this. In Brazil, for example, an online racist attack can be reported as a crime.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Attribution Bias hinders our ability to make impartial judgements. When we judge others based exclusively on our prejudices we fail to consider the context in which events happened and as a result form unsubstantiated opinions. Giving an opinion or taking skewed decisions because of preconceived perceptions usually leads to people being unfairly judged.

It is easy to jump to quick conclusions, but if we are to commit fewer acts of injustice, it is important to pay attention to how our attributions are skewing our judgement. Exercises to overcome attribution biases contribute in the long term to developing emotional intelligence.

SOME ADVICE

We all make mistakes because of our Attribution Bias. It is perhaps the most commonly occurring cognitive bias. The best way to look into this with young people and to avoid falling into the attribution trap, is by practicing empathy.

ONLINE RESOURCES

https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hate-speech-social-media-global-comparisons

5- ETHNOCENTRIC BIAS:
EVERY PERSON HAS THE RIGHT TO BE THEMSELVES

Each of us has our own likes, which vary greatly from person to person, in general they are acquired in the family and later with friends. They include food preferences, ways in which we dress, tastes for beauty, sports, football teams, or ways of being — some of us are introverts and others extroverts. The Ethnocentric Bias makes us think that our way of being is the right way and that everyone else is wrong. From our point of view, we have difficulty conceiving that what appears normal or universal is, in fact, singular, stemming from the reference group to which we belong, whereas society is founded on diversity.

What we call "normal" has nothing to do with right or wrong, which pertains to the moral order, those general principles that help us respect and not hurt or offend the other. Preferences in terms of tastes and habits are of a personal order, informed by cultural contexts. Everyone has the right to be themselves, to be the way they want. These preferences should not be used to judge others.

Everything that we now call "normal" in our society, until recently was not. Beauty standards change often, whether idealized body types, or what is fashionable in clothing, or foods that once seemed exotic and indigestible which become culinary marvels. The first women to use pants were looked down upon, flip flops were something "only the poor" would wear, and now they have become a world-wide trend. There is no "normal" in terms of religious beliefs or opinions about diverse themes. Each person needs to find their own way of being and thinking; it is different strokes for different folks. What is not okay is to offend those who think and believe in a way different from our own, or who seek to impose their views. We should reject the idea that we have to do something because it is "normal," or because "this is how everyone does it." What is right is not necessarily our first impulse or desire, but that which we are convinced of because it is in alignment with our feelings, thoughts, sense of fairness, and all else that is the basis for solid arguments and ethical precepts.

If someone is different than we are, it means that we too are different from them. Neither they, nor we are normal or abnormal. *We are simply different and, as such, diverse. Difference allows for diversity.*

If everyone thought the same, no one would ever create anything new, no one would have doubts or curiosity. Every time we have doubts, are curious, creative, or we reflect, we are differentiating ourselves from others.

Recognizing the Ethnocentric Bias is to notice and respect others in their differences without having any expectation that there is a fixed and final definition of what is "normal." Diversity between cultures and between people is something to be celebrated. Once we learn to value diversity — instead of simply tolerating it — it will become possible to learn from difference. This means gaining new perspectives and knowledge, letting go of prejudice (Attribution Biases) and seeking to understand others who are different from us (with empathy).

Often, we think our behavior is "neutral," "normal," and that the person who is different "goes against the grain" or chooses to be different. In reality, the habits we judge to be "normal" or "neutral" can be perceived as strange by others. For example, in India fried manioc — a basic food element in Brazil — is considered exotic. Snails are considered a delicacy in France, while in some countries, horse meat is eaten. The list is endless. For some people eating animal flesh is acceptable, for others it is an unthinkable barbarity. In São Paulo, when people meet they kiss on one cheek. In Rio, a kiss on both cheeks is the common greeting. Being different should not be confused with what is right or wrong. Different is merely different.

So, why do we make fun of or mistreat people who are different from us? The answers are many, including:

- To express our feelings of anger or frustration we might act out by mistreating someone who appears weaker than us;
- To feel superior and stand out we might stand up to the group;
- To feel more confident because someone else's way of being makes us feel insecure.

In the same way we close ourselves off in bubbles, social media tends to support the idea that we are right and others wrong, reinforcing the Ethnocentric Bias. Echo chambers facilitate harassment and offense, because messages circulate among people with the same affinities. Social media desensitizes us — it is easier to send a message when we do not have to bear the suffering that it causes in the other person.

Although social media platforms are places of great exposure, they are areas where we do not see, face-to-face, the reactions our commentaries create. Thus, they are often a refuge for those who offend, harass, or bully.

Speaking calmly, listening attentively, and getting in touch with different ways of being, acting and thinking, does not equate to liking or conceding, but to respecting. *The practice of respecting without agreeing is fundamental in social interaction.*

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Opening ourselves up to different manners of thinking and acting is a way to widen our own horizons. When we do not assume that our opinions and our way of doing things is the only way, it is easier to see different ways as interesting alternatives. Being in contact with different people without adhering to the premise that they are wrong, allows us to learn with the other's seeming strangeness, especially as a way of learning about ourselves, to understand why we are how we are. There is nothing wrong with liking who we are. What is wrong is treating others who are different from us badly.

SOME ADVICE

To the extent that young people absorb values of tolerance and respect in the home and school environment, they will tend to replicate them; after all, we form values based, in large measure, on what we see and experience. Young people need to feel comfortable asking questions — of their parents and their teachers — even when it can seem difficult, and in group situations, potentially offensive. When organizing collective conversations, strong mediation is necessary for everyone to feel respected and secure to ask and respond.

- Introduce references from other cultures in the lessons such as music, film, and photographs. This is a constant and efficient way to place our young people in contact with difference and diversity.

ONLINE RESOURCES

https://new.safernet.org.br/content/infografico-bullying

https://new.safernet.org.br/content/o-que-e-ciberbullying

https://marcuspessoa.com.br/6-casos-de-cyberbullying-que-tiveram-final-tragico/

Cyber Bullying (UNICEF): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asT-ti6y39xI

6- DICHOTOMOUS THINKING BIAS:
THE WORLD IS NOT BLACK AND WHITE

Conflict situations constantly arise in relationships between people and groups. Dichotomous Thinking is the tendency to assume any situation in which there are conflicting opinions is a struggle between right and wrong, where your own side is good and the "other side" is bad. A dichotomous thinker assumes those who are aligned with their beliefs are always right and anyone else is totally wrong. Dichotomous Thinking is the result of a self-centered stance that sees reality in absolute terms. So, it may not be a question of being unaware that there is more than one side to any situation, but rather of being unaware that there are any "sides" at all. On the basis of this absolute vision, absolute oppositions are built — "totally in," "aligned," and "good;" or, "totally out," and "bad."

Dichotomous Thinking dehumanizes both the opponent and ourselves. If the opponent is always in the wrong, they do not deserve our respect. And if we are always right, we are saints, or people who know everything; not human beings who have limitations, who sometimes make mistakes.

Dichotomous thinkers are intolerant. They do not judge, they condemn. Dichotomous thinkers live in a kind of mental straitjacket that prevents them from learning from their own errors and from others' successes. Reality is complex and situations demand sensitivity and the ability to discern based on facts. If we witness a conflict in which people are arguing and blaming each other, we can see that in most cases both sides are responsible, although one may be more than the other.

Dichotomous thinkers turn their adversaries into enemies — into people who can do nothing right. An adversary is someone you disagree with, but that does not mean that the person is a monster. Dichotomous Thinking and Confirmation Bias reinforce polarization and the view that those we do not like are our "enemies," utterly reprehensible and from whom we can expect no good.

As Dichotomous thinkers see those who disagree with them as bad people, everything the other does is in the service of evil, meaning they will use subterfuge to deceive innocent, naive, good people.

Throughout history, Dichotomous Thinking has led to persecutions and massacres. It has been used as a justification to mistreat and destroy anyone who disagrees, as they are seen as evil. It has fostered conspiracy theories, which have historically had a political objective. Information is gathered, some of which has been invented and some which are

distortions or snippets of complex realities, in order to blame one group of people for all societal problems. The power held by certain people is overblown and the rest of the population are positioned as passive victims, with no responsibility or ability to influence their destinies. Likewise, conspiracy theory is used to divert attention away from the facts. For example, when a crime is reported, conspiracy theory is used to steer focus towards the motives of the person reporting it, instead of investigating whether a crime has been committed.

So, instead of facing up to problems that are complex, personal and social, responsibility is transferred onto an external group whose elimination would make everyone happy.

THE TOP CONSPIRACY THEORIES

- "The external enemy" – external figures that supposedly want to do something bad to a community to which they do not belong;
- "The insider enemy" – insiders in a community who could use subterfuge to do bad things;
- "The manipulator of information" – usually journalists who denounce deviations, but who allegedly would do this to benefit an undisclosed agenda.

We should not confuse the principle of doubt, which is essential in critical thinking, with conspiracy theories. The principle of doubt makes us ask questions, be skeptical, seek new, verifiable information, and alternative explanations of reality.

Critical, productive questioning is the kind that leads us to seek different sources of data, concrete, public proof, and to change our minds when we uncover new information. So, while conspiracy theories provide a closed, dogmatic narrative, critical thinking encourages us to seek impartial explanations grounded in facts.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Dichotomous Thinking denies both the complexity of life, which involves contradictory values and feelings, and our need to be responsible for our own destiny and for the common good. Dichotomous Thinking paralyzes our capacity for contemplation, as it determines, a priori, that the opposing side is always bad and that our own side is always good. Dichotomous thinkers, therefore, only see that which confirms their preconceived ideas and ignore any information that contradicts them.

This “all or nothing” type of thinking, in which “my side” is all good and the other side is evil contributes to aggression and polarization. This can emerge in many different forms in people’s lives:

- Prejudice and exclusion — when one group is seen as the “enemy” and when all the members of the group are placed in a fixed category defined solely according to negative characteristics;
- Loss of creativity and flexibility — when we think of ourselves as someone who does “this” and not “that,” we miss an opportunity to understand different ways of behaving, and may lose opportunities for ourselves;
- Relationship difficulties — dichotomous thinking swings between idealizing and devaluing others. Thinking purely in terms of extreme concepts (like, “wonderful versus awful” or “saintly versus monstrous,”) affects all types of relationships — family, friends, romantic partners — with intense cycles of closeness and distancing, as well as extreme feelings of love and repulsion.

So, working towards the deconstruction of dichotomous thinking and avoiding falling into the trap of the Dichotomous Thinking Bias contributes to the formation of reflective thinking, immunity to manipulation by hate messages, openness to interaction, and respect for different opinions.

SOME ADVICE

We can guide young people so that in their everyday conversations, they broaden and think about different points of view without turning their adversaries into enemies and without seeing those who are different from them as wicked.

For example:

Using sentences like “let’s agree to disagree” or “I don’t agree, but I will think about it” are balanced ways of ending a discussion once both parties have presented their arguments. Instead of trying to convince the other person to share the same point of view, use the debate as a way to understand how it is possible to think differently about the same situation. Avoid using extreme terms. Try expressing your viewpoint calmly and in an organized way, without demonizing those who disagree with it.

People usually enter a debate to win. When the initial premise of the conversation shifts to a desire to connect and to exchange ideas with

the other side, it is also a good idea to change debating strategies. When we only use data and statistics to prove our point — although these two resources are fundamental in backing up our views — it is easy to forget that the numbers represent real people. This means that debates often become abstract. One alternative is to begin conversations in a narrative register, sharing stories about real people. Before arguing back, the other person will listen to our story and we can listen to theirs. Rather than one winning and the other losing, both will establish a connection.

7-
THE VALUE OF PRIVACY

Today's young people were born into an online world. Generally, their debut on social media begins when their parents share pictures of their ultrasound, their birth, or their first steps. So, before they even know how to talk, their images and private lives are circulating on social media and being saved on internet databases. Moreover, it is increasingly common for children to use their parents' cell phones when they are very young and to own their first cell phone when they are still children. This means that artificial intelligence and algorithms informed by user databases begin to store information on their behavior from a very early age. As a result, their notions of privacy are different from those of previous generations, directly influencing the way they navigate online.

Even so, being a digital native does not mean that young people know how to participate in the online world safely. Even when children know how to use the most recent technologies and social platforms, they need understanding and discernment to navigate safely and responsibly, to protect their own privacy, distinguishing what is public from private, and to cautiously process information that reaches them. Social media sites have transformed into spaces where private and public lives intertwine, with no clear distinction between the two. The very concept of public and private may be outdated with regard to new communication practices on social media. These notions were established at a time when space could still be understood in concrete terms. For example: home is private, street is public. Today, you can make a public announcement from home and exchange private messages silently in the middle of the street, which means that traditional notions of space are scrambled.

This blurring between public and private lives is not limited to the information that circulates on the user's "Timeline" on Facebook or Twitter. There, extremely personal and intimate information might be followed by a public interest opinion and posts with arguments on general themes might exist alongside posts about personal experiences or emotive rants. The confusion that arises around questions of privacy and security does not only affect young people. Adults and the elderly, who began to use the internet and social media later in life, often have difficulty understanding how things work on the web. Since privacy online presents a challenge for everyone, adults frequently have difficulty guiding young people on these issues.

Privacy is a right that precedes and extends beyond the internet and social media. When it comes to their private life, adolescents are often especially

sensitive with family members and teachers. But, the information-gathering (big data) that occurs on the web and the posting history that is kept on social media present specific and urgent challenges for the preservation of privacy.

The internet has brought an end to the age-old distinction between oral and written communication. In informal settings, spoken communication was contextualized by the public to whom it was addressed, people who were physically present, and it had a strong improvisational component. Speakers expressed their opinions not merely in words, but also with tone of voice and physical gestures. Speakers could be attentive and connected to the emotions they aroused in their listeners. The spoken word left no evidence, except in the memories of those who heard it.

Traditionally and by contrast, written communication was composed and revised at length. The absence of a listener was compensated with consideration for the impact of the text on the reader. Social media have eroded the boundaries between listening and reading and have generated a new model of communication: "written speech;" where short and rapid messaging predominates. Unlike old-fashioned written communication, it is neither formulated nor matured, as it is generally made up of quasi-instantaneous messaging, with the pressure and expectation of a quick response. Also, unlike old-fashioned oral communication, it is unconcerned with the feelings of others, a sensitivity that might be provoked if the listener or reader were physically present.

Despite its seemingly temporary quality, virtual messaging is eternalized in online archives. Modern life follows a system of rights, values, and rituals on which it was constructed surrounding the distinction between public and private space. Despite there being no fixed demarcation of boundaries between these spaces, prior to the popularization of the internet, when someone spoke or wrote to the "public" it clearly indicated a manner of communicating that was differentiated, requiring distinct care when the discourse was directed to a specific person or group of people in the private sphere. It was understood that the communication would be perpetuated.

This separation has been overcome. A personal email can be relayed to an infinite number of recipients and, thus, become a public announcement. When we use social media, the absence of differentiation between public and private space is astonishing: on the same page and timeline, we might read messages of an intimate nature only to scroll down and find debates about a political situation. It might take on traces of a personal communication, since some of the care that would have been taken in

the public sphere is forgotten, and the reactions are made in a manner that is less thoughtful.

Online communication produces, therefore, a confusion between private and public spaces. Social media are places of self-exposure, in which we share our personal information and opinions — with pictures, full names and email addresses, and posts — as part of an identity formation. In these online spaces we present ourselves to known and unknown "friends," but at a distance. Sometimes, as we mentioned above, this can generate confusion about social media as public or private space. And it is common to see people commenting and harassing others, but using their full names, in the misperception that distance protects them from the consequences of their speech.

For example, it is a crime to make a racist comment on social media in Brazil, and individuals do so anyway, exposing their identities when they post publically, without realizing that this leaves them vulnerable to criminal charges. A person may be unaware that when they upload a post about a party, with pictures, or messages, for example, and they imply that illicit drugs were used, this is all stored on a database and can later be used to deny that person work or a vacancy in a public institution.

HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTION?

Many services offered on the web are free of charge. Social media, email services, image editing programs, some games, and numerous other applications do not charge for usage. However, it is common to see news stories about "technology giants" that have sold for billions of dollars or that have bought others for fantastic sums. How do these businesses finance themselves? To understand how social media function, it is necessary to understand how they sustain themselves. The answer is advertising. Moreover, many of the free services we use daily on the internet are funded through what we call targeted advertising. This is only possible because they store our preferences and likes, gathered from posted messages, on databases.

The evolution of these new technologies has afforded a sophistication in advertising, which has become more and more targeted. It has become easier to recognize the profile of the potential consumer by collecting and storing data about anyone who navigates to a site. The search mechanism functions similarly: the person who inputs a query about a product or an address, has already revealed their interests. Thus, knowing the audience helps in the task of reaching only those who might be interested in the

advertisement. Targeted advertising and propaganda sell because they are highly efficient.

All of this is possible because of the massive collection of user data into enormous databases with the most varied information about peoples' personalities. In other words, the services offered by the tech businesses are sustained using information shared by users. Through a complex business model, based on targeted advertising, user data is the main product being controlled and offered commercially. Targeted advertising is based on knowing our likes and preferences.

The struggle to capture users has become the central focal point of internet companies, be they social media, search engines, e-commerce or content portals. The more time visitors spend on their services, the more information they are able to gather and, thereby, their publicity becomes more targeted. The gigantic availability of information and entertainment on the web has made these internet platforms the focus of advertising investment.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Privacy is a basic right, it is the basis of liberty, independence, and human dignity. Privacy allows us to create limitations of what we want or do not want to share. It gives us the space to define the way we wish to relate to the world around us. Relationships at school, with friends, and in the family offer different degrees of privacy and sharing. To balance these relationships it is necessary to understand privacy, our rights and when we wish to keep other people at a distance or invite them in. It is important to value and protect our privacy to develop our self-control, our well-being, and our autonomy.

SOME ADVICE

- Discuss privacy questions online with concrete examples from the offline world. Young people probably know that they should not give out their home address to anyone who asks for it. They also would not show pictures from their weekend to people waiting in the cashier's line at the delicatessen. They should be equally careful on the internet.
- It is common that the first discomfort adolescents experience, with regard to privacy, is feeling that family members or educators are "invading" their private lives. By exploring this feeling, it is possible to draw out the importance of privacy with strangers on the internet.

- Suggest some general rules, especially for young people to follow on social media, such as:
- To only add people whom we know personally or who our friends know personally.
- To remember that everything we post may be seen by people who we do not wish to see it so, avoid publishing content we would not like our family members or educators to see;
- To always think before posting: “could someone use this against me? What is the worst thing that could happen?”
- Do not share pictures of others without first asking for their permission.
- Everyone makes poor choices. If we regret having posted something or are unhappy about seeing something of ours that others have posted, ask for help from a trustworthy adult to try to delete or remove that content from circulation.

8-
INFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

The amount of information available on the internet is enormous, as is the quantity of messages we receive. In this world of information we have to develop the ability to distinguish and assess the quality of the information we receive.

In fact, all information we receive, as we investigated in previous chapters, needs to be evaluated. We rely on media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television for day to day information about events that happen outside our own surroundings. These news outlets sometimes make mistakes and they give preference to certain kinds of information and analysis over others. We must always be aware of what we are reading and try to carefully consider any information we receive.

One of the many changes the internet has brought concerns the erosion of traditional news outlets. Similar to the time of the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, the internet has led to an upsurge of content being produced and there has been a democratization of information published and received via blogs, social media, personal sites, and forums. This, along with an increasing perception of the different biases that exist in traditional journalism — the realization that rather than there being a neutral viewpoint, each outlet has its own editorial angle — has contributed to the general public losing trust in traditional media.

With the internet, it is now possible to stay up-to-date using alternative sources, ranging from independent journalism to messages posted on social media. Information now circulates freely and unpredictably, which has positive and negative consequences for democratic interactions. In this world of information, it is easy to lose a sense of the quality of information received, as the frontiers are disappearing between news published by journalists and the institutionalized press and personal opinions or fake news spread by people who aim to provide false information.

Despite its limitations, professional journalism has a legal responsibility for the news it broadcasts. News that is broadcast by a communications outlet has a date and provides sources. This is quite different from messages, sites, and blogs on the internet, many of which are anonymous or use fake profiles to send out scientifically unfounded messages, without sources or giving unreliable ones.

Some of the most damaging messages for social interaction and the construction of a democratic society that circulate on the internet are

those containing so-called fake news. Fake news is a systematic effort to misinform/contaminate people who are attempting to distance themselves from professional media outlets, in terms of both production and circulation. They do this because fake news answers to authoritarian political projects that foster hatred and prejudice against a wide variety of groups of people (women, homosexuals, Blacks, indigenous, civil society organizations, immigrants). People who spread fake news do not respect diversity of opinion and are not promoting the debate of ideas. Their objective is to demonize people who disagree with them and to bring about the destructive polarization of society. In a polarized society, in which an opponent goes from being a person who thinks differently to someone who is considered the enemy, people cease to think but instead automatically align themselves with one point of view or another.

Under the guise of broadcasting information, fake news actually stirs up feelings of hatred and fear. The information contained in the messages speaks to our prejudices and paralyzes our capacity to think carefully, so we pass them on without checking their veracity.

If we share an offensive message, we are responsible for the suffering it can cause, even if we did not produce it ourselves. Sharing material on the internet may sometimes seem to be a passive act. It may seem that we are not responsible for the content we are sharing. However, once we have shared a message disrespecting another person, there is no going back.

Fake news is a form of political propaganda which is attempting to destroy democratic coexistence and it goes back to before the advent of the internet. The online world, however, is particularly suited to spreading it.

Through access to databases with personal information about likes and dislikes it is possible to build psycho-social profiles that identify affinities, prejudices and fears. Expensive robots are financed anonymously and are becoming increasingly able to interact like humans. There are even sophisticated programs (so-called deepfakes) that are able to tamper with images and speech.

New technology has made anonymity possible. Consequently, those producing content cannot be held accountable, so content that is sensationalist, out of context, exaggerated, untrue, a distortion of facts, offensive, prejudiced or spreading feelings of fear, chaos and general disorder is now at the center of political propaganda, underpinned by techniques of psychological warfare and able to target different types of audience with precision.

Content that goes viral on small private groups, for example, is extremely powerful because it reaches all the members of the group and appears to be trustworthy. Content transmitted through this kind of outlet is much more likely to be read or engaged with. It works through a process of "infiltration." Online groups of friends, family, hobbies, and a wide variety of affinities, ranging from work through to football, suffer from this "infiltration" of news that has nothing to do with the purpose of the group.

A GUIDE ON HOW TO CONFRONT FAKE NEWS AND HELP YOUNG PEOPLE

- Be suspicious about information that confirms your vision of the world. This is the most important recommendation and also the most difficult to follow. Generally, we are suspicious about and actually do not believe information we receive that puts our beliefs in check, and we readily accept anything that supports what we already think. False, manipulated information is produced with our prejudices in mind;
- Do not share any information if you are not sure whether it is true. We tend to immediately share information and images that we find pleasing. Think twice before doing so. You could be contributing to the spread of false information. Resist the thought *"I'm going to forward it anyway, maybe it is true;"*
- Be aware that if a piece of information is important, urgent, and well-founded it will soon appear on a number of outlets. If that does not happen, be suspicious. The market for news has many stakeholders and is very competitive. Even though different outlets have varying editorial guidelines and will interpret the same fact in diverse ways, most of them will not let an important piece of news go unreported;
- Remember that at least the date and the author should appear on the news item, as well as its sources. It is possible to check the authenticity of the author and the information, i.e. if they originate from the sources they mention, by copying part of the text of the article and pasting in a search engine;
- Find out about the history of the different outlets. This is a very difficult recommendation to follow if the person is an occasional reader, but it is part of learning about citizenship to gradually start paying attention to news media and forming an opinion about which outlets practice serious, careful journalism;
- Check the name of the sites. Many of the sites that produce "combative" low quality journalistic information have similar

names to the serious newspapers and this is done to confuse people;

- Check dates. A lot of old, factual information comes back into circulation without people realizing that it relates to another time and a different context. Old information that is true (for example a headline that reads “unemployment rises sharply”), can be completely false, if it is taken out of context;
- Check the relationship between headlines and texts of articles that you read on the internet. Many “sensationalist” headlines draw our attention but have little or nothing to do with the content of the article or link shown in the message.

Rumours that are passed from one person to another without a known origin have always played a role in political communication. Producing and spreading gossip and rumours in order to confuse and misinform goes back to time immemorial and even appears in ancient texts on military strategy.

In modern democratic societies, journalism has created a system for producing specialized public information that appears on communications outlets (like the printed press, radio and television). Although these channels may be criticized for answering to the agendas of their owners, they do provide a space for training specialized professional journalists, guided by professional ethics. Both journalists and the owners of media organizations can be held responsible for information that is published. The very same internet that increased people’s opportunities to participate in public space, also facilitates the spread of anonymous messages, which are often transmitted for reasons that are invisible to those reading them. False identities and pseudonyms have consequences for public debate, as they can be used to manipulate it. Anonymity has made it even more difficult to hold those who misinform accountable.

There are many people who assume fake identities on the internet in order to spread fake news, in practice they are anonymous. In fact, sometimes they are “bots,” in other words automated programs that create posts as though they were people. These anonymous automated profiles are often key players in spreading gossip and false information on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. It is not easy to distinguish between people, fake identities, and bots when we are interacting online with people we do not know. This is one of the challenges of digital interactions. When we are face-to-face with people, we could hardly use false identities or robots to interact.

The internet enables the spread of political ideas through free social media which has led certain political stakeholders to pursue the goal of making information "go viral" (in texts, videos, images and memes). They do this by spreading ideas that confirm prejudices (attribution bias) and the likes and dislikes of the readers, many of whom will immediately share information, without checking its veracity, precisely because they like the content (confirmation bias). In the digital era, the spread of fake news depends on both those producing it and on the willingness of users to forward it.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Fake news spreads unfounded fears and beliefs that can:

- Spark irresponsible behavior, for example, a piece of fake news that alleges that gargling bleach cures a disease could encourages people to adopt behavior that puts their health at risk;
- Unjustly destroying someone's reputation, for example a piece of fake news accusing someone of robbing something without any proof, could lead to a person losing their job;
- Generating fear in the population, for example, fake news that alleges that another country is going to attack could lead to generalized panic;
- Scamming an innocent person, for example, fake news asking for donations for someone who needs financial help could be a scam and could negatively affect generous people who may subsequently become reluctant to help someone who really is in need.

In other words, fake news creates and deepens social divides, wastes public resources and causes emotional upset, without any proof or real grounds.

Knowing how to distinguish between real and fake news protects us at a personal level from developing fears, judgements and beliefs which are actually unfounded and at a social level it equips us to help to combat and limit the harmful effects of fake news.

SOME ADVICE

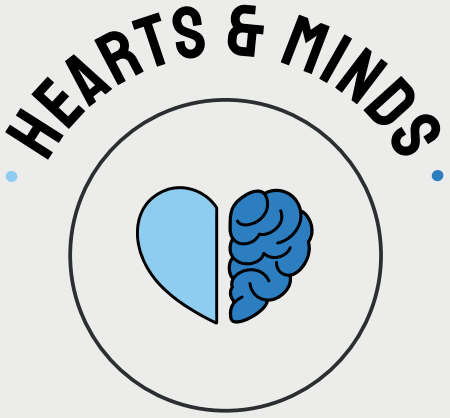
Young people are often taught that when they see something unjust they should not stand by but should intervene in a positive way to put it right. In general, this applies to bullying at school, but the same principle can and should be applied to the spreading of fake news. Teachers and

families should advise young people on how to deal with falsehoods they see online, showing them concrete attitudes they can take to combat fake news:

- Reporting the news to the platform on which it was published (for example, on Facebook, using the option "Report a Problem");
- Sending a direct message to the person who posted it explaining that it is fake news and suggesting that they remove the post or correct it publicly;
- Writing in the comments section or responding to the post with a public correction, indicating that it is fake news, backing up your statement with reliable links that prove the content is false;
- Talking to young people about the news. Educators are usually regarded as reliable sources of knowledge. Nurturing the habit of reading the news together and talking about it contributes to young people having a greater understanding of the information they are exposed to.
- *General internet research tips to guide young people:*

  The internet is an excellent resource for broadening understanding, but as it is a public forum anyone can say anything on the web. In other words, when a piece of information is found that appears to be relevant, it is necessary to analyse it in context to make sure it is trustworthy content.

1. Be clear about what you are researching;
2. Look for the author´ s name;
3. Check the references quoted in the text;
4. Look for the date of publication and make sure it is not outdated information;
5. Preserve your safety: if the site asks you to provide any type of personal data, look for a different source to research.



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