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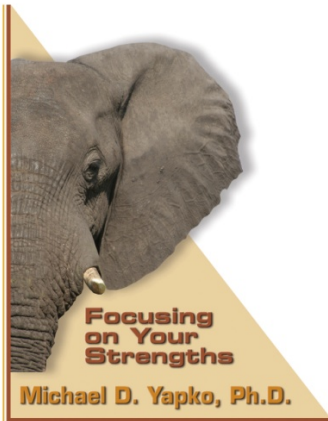
**The Discriminating Therapist:**

**Knowing Why Doesn't Teach You How**

with

**Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.**

**December 11, 2016**



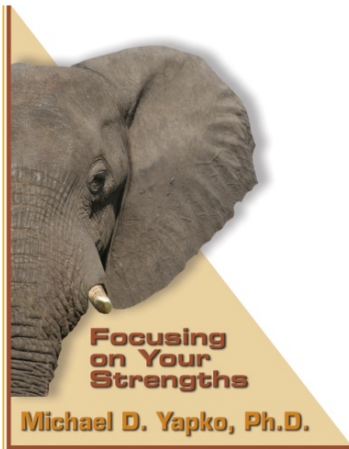
Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.  
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# Today's Agenda

**Part 1:** Goals, overview, contradictory philosophies, global cognition, ambiguity

**Part 2:** Video clips, identifying patterns, building discrimination skills

# Conventional wisdom is often contradictory



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# Consider this recent news story:

High school freshman Ahmed Mohamed, 14, loves robotics and inventing, but when he brought a clock he made to his Irving, Texas, high school, he was arrested.

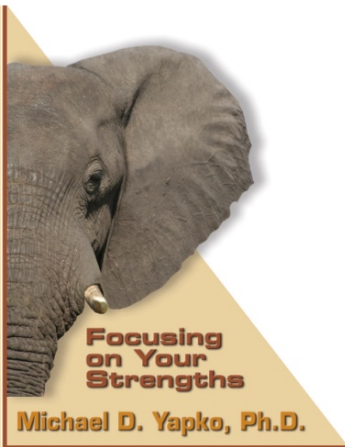
Critics blame Islamophobia.

So, which is it?

Practice tolerance?

or

“If you see something,  
*say* something?”



# So, Which is it?

- Look before you leap... BUT,  
He who hesitates is lost.
- If at first you don't succeed try, try again... BUT  
Don't beat your head against a stone wall.
- Absence makes the heart grow fonder...BUT  
Out of sight, out of mind.

So, which is it? In every instance, the only reasonable answer is, “*It depends on the circumstances...*”

What happens when someone doesn't know that, though, and stays *reflexively* loyal to a philosophy or belief that causes them pain when it works against them in some context?

The goal is to help the client identify ***situational factors*** that suggest doing ***this*** not ***that***, and then help that awareness become reflexive for the person, perhaps using hypnosis for this reason



# **The Discriminating Therapist:**

Asking “How” Questions,  
Making Distinctions,  
and Finding Direction in Therapy



by

**Michael D. Yapko, PhD**

With a Foreword by Diane Yapko, MA

“Man designs for himself a garden with a hundred kinds of trees, a thousand kind of flowers, a hundred kinds of fruits and vegetables. Suppose, then, that the gardener of this garden knew no other distinction than between edible and inedible...

...nine-tenths of this garden would be useless to him. He would pull up the most enchanting flowers and hew down the noblest trees and even regard them with a loathing and envious eye.”

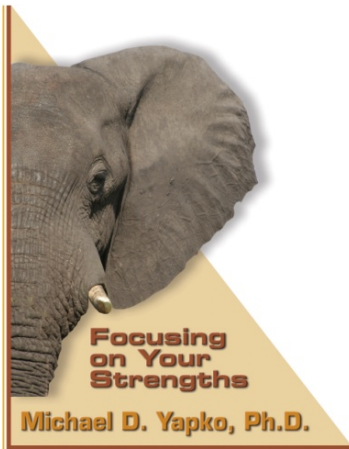
Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf* (p.75)

**A discrimination strategy is an ability  
to skillfully distinguish between two  
or more available options in a  
specific context**

Does someone even *know* when  
there are multiple choices  
available?

Reflexive responding suggests  
that frequently the answer is *no*.

# The Invisible Gorilla



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Even if you are aware there are multiple options available, then how do you choose wisely among them?

# Criteria of Distinction

Your criteria of distinction determine what, out of a wide range of possibilities, you will focus on and respond to

Most of the problems we treat come about directly as a result of the client ***employing criteria that are ineffective*** and thereby give rise to their problems

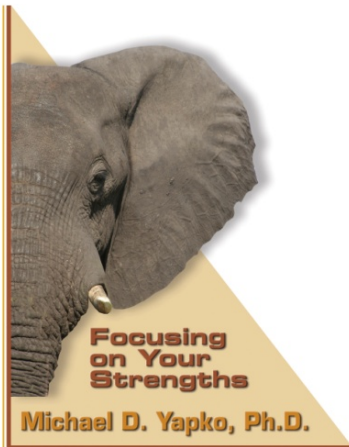


So, what interferes with or even prevents the development of an efficient discrimination strategy?

# Barriers to Developing Effective Discriminations

- Global (over-general) thinking
- Low tolerance for ambiguity (jump to conclusions)
- A personal value system that precludes considering alternatives
- Rigidity (tenacious holding on to a perspective even when self-limiting)
- Narrow, limited range of experience

# Age is another obvious barrier...



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# Children by Nature:

- Are global thinkers
- Have a low tolerance for ambiguity (developmentally, they are concrete thinkers)
- Have a personal value system that is just beginning to develop (kids are by nature impulsive –they want what they want; delayed gratification is a learnable skill)
- Are cognitively rigid
- Have a limited range of experience

# Let's Focus on Global (Over-general) Thinking

# Global Cognitive Style is a Key Factor

**When you can't see the  
trees for the forest...**

# Examples of Global Style in Client Self-Reports

- “I just want to be happy”
- “I just want to feel normal”
- “I ***am*** my depression” (anxiety, history, or diagnosis)
- “I’ m just so overwhelmed”
- “I get so bad I just can’ t think”
- “The symptom just happens to me”

# Global Thinking *in the Symptom Context* Virtually Precludes the Ability to:

- Compartmentalize (e.g., contain anxiety)
- Think linearly, sequentially
- Maintain good boundaries
- Make key discriminations



# Global Thinking Can be Disempowering, Especially When Regularly Encouraged Through the Media

Television not only  
encourages global thinking...

...it *demands* it

# Examples of Global Therapeutic Truisms

- “Trust your guts” (inner sage, unconscious)
- “Life is what happens to you when you had other plans”
- “Just let go...no need to try to control it”
- “Be fully present in the moment”
- “It’s a disease...it’s not your fault”
- “Everyone is entitled to good self-esteem”

# Emotional Differentiation

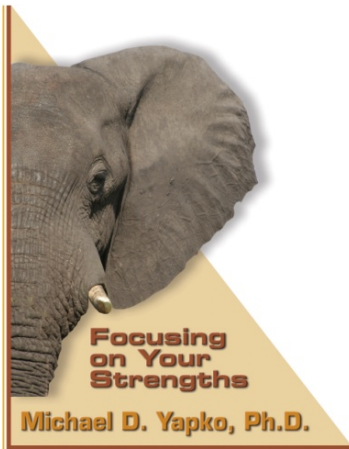
“Individuals differ from each other in the extent to which they differentiate between their emotional experiences, something which has been labeled emotion differentiation or emotional granularity. While some experience and label their emotions in a highly differentiated manner (e.g., I feel angry, but not scared or sad), others tend to report more undifferentiated states (e.g., I feel bad)...

# Emotional Differentiation

...The level of emotion differentiation is generally assessed by looking at how people describe how they feel in response to different emotion-eliciting events...the ability to differentiate between emotions is considered to be a potentially important individual difference variable in the context of psychological well-being...*emotion differentiation appears to be lower in individuals with affective problems, such as major depressive disorder...*” (p. 373) (italics mine)

Erbas, Y., Ceulemans, E., Koval, P. & Kuppens, P. (June, 2015). The role of valence focus and appraisal overlap in emotion differentiation. *Emotion*, 15, 3, 373-382.

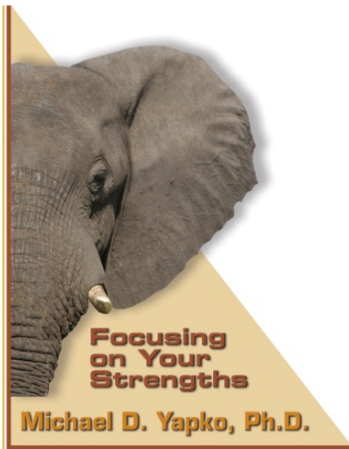
# Ambiguity and Assessing controllability



# Extreme Perceptions Regarding Controllability

- ***Learned Helplessness***: Learned expectations that one's efforts will have *no* effect on the outcome
- ***Illusion of control***: Learned expectations that one's efforts are the *sole* determinant of the outcome

Part 2:  
Video Clips:  
**Group Hypnosis, Pattern  
Identification  
and the “How” Question**





# Making Discriminations; How do You Distinguish...

- When to “hold on” from when to “let go?”
- What you are and are not in control of?
- What you are and are not responsible for?
- When you can and cannot “trust your guts?”
- What is personal from what affects you personally?
- What you feel from what you think?
- What you are from what you’re not sure of?

# Making Discriminations; How do You Distinguish... (continued)

- What you want from what you need?
- What has been from what can be?
- Someone who can from someone who can't meet your needs?
- Realistic from unrealistic expectations?
- What you know from what you believe?
- Realistic from unrealistic goals?

# Types of Discriminations (by dimension)

- Social discriminations
- Cognitive discriminations
- Behavioral discriminations
- Physiological discriminations
- Perceptual discriminations
- Emotional discriminations
- Predictive discriminations

# Types of Discriminations (by diagnosis)

- Controllability (anxiety, depression)
- Responsibility (depression, guilt)
- Locus of control (depression, anxiety)
- Real vs. imagined threat (anxiety, paranoia)
- Real vs. imagined rejection (social phobia, depression)

# Dimensions of Discriminations

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## Discreteness

Category boundaries are clear (e.g., *wood*), somewhat clear, or fuzzy (e.g., *soft*)

## Uniformity

Category members share many features (e.g., fish), some features, or no features (e.g., governments)

## Informativeness

Category tells you a lot of information about its members (e.g., cats) some information (e.g., American) or no information (e.g., Earthling)

## Naturalness

Category tells you whether members are natural (e.g., birds) or artificial (e.g., furniture)

# Dimensions of Discriminations

Based on Linquist et al., *Emotion*, August, 2013, p. 631

## Immutability

Members of the category cannot change ( e.g., Blood Type A cannot become Type O) or can change (e.g., students can become lawyers)

## Stability

Members are the same across contexts (e.g., fruit), somewhat the same or different (e.g., valuable)

## Necessity

Members have necessary features (e.g., books), somewhat necessary features, or no necessary features

## Exclusivity

Members can never be members of another category (e.g., tigers) or can be (e.g., ottoman as a footstool, chair or table in varying contexts)

# Is Modern Life Making Us Dumber?

- In the media, detailed analyses are replaced by sound bites led by the cult of personality
- What about the art of conversation? The friendly exchange of differing but well considered points of view?
- What about the prevalence of “junk thought,” i.e., an uncritical acceptance of pseudoscience and pronouncements about phenomena without critical evaluation?

# Distinguishing Content From Process

The client presents a story, including a description of symptoms. This represents *what* has happened or is happening—the *content* (issues). The therapist's task is to identify *how* the client generates symptomatic experience—the *process* (patterns). Treating only the content of a problem is a reliable path to relapse.



# The Merits of Concreteness

- Reduced concrete thinking characterizes recurrent self-related negative thinking, such as worry and rumination.
- Concrete thought is “distinct, situationally specific, unequivocal, clear, singular.” (p. 320)
- Concrete thoughts evoke more imagery and more vivid imagery than abstract ones  
Watkins & Moulds, *Emotion*, September, 2005, 5(3), 319-328

# Concreteness Training Reduces Dysphoria

- The tendency towards abstract and overgeneral processing contributes to symptoms of depression
- Training dysphoric individuals to become more concrete and specific in their thinking reduced depressive symptoms, especially rumination, in research subjects

Watkins, E., Baeyens, C, & Read, R. (February, 2009). Concreteness training reduces dysphoria: Proo-of-principle for repeated cognitive bias modification in depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 118(1), 55-64.

# Priming and the Interview Process

- Subtle influences can increase the ease with which thoughts or feelings come to mind
- When people are asked whether they intend to do something, the mere asking affects people's conduct (hence the value of motivational interviewing, the use of presuppositions, and building expectancy)

# Influence is Inevitable – and *Necessary*

- *As a choice architect*, you will inevitably influence your client by what choices you offer, and how you steer the client directly or indirectly in a presumably desirable direction.
- People make bad decisions when they: 1) don't pay full attention; 2) don't have complete information; 3) have limited cognitive abilities (e.g., a lack of discrimination strategies); and, 4) lack impulse control.

People can get lost in whatever level  
of analysis seems meaningful to  
them

How do you know when to take a  
micro (smaller) view versus a  
macro (larger) view?

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