



Ending the world? How neuropsychology can help us to act more resiliently.

Recently I was able to listen to an exciting lecture by Prof. Dr. Maren Urner on 3Sat (German TV Station). She researches media psychology at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. Prof. Urner confirmed much of what I have often recommended at BrainCandy in the past, and she presented some exciting findings that are especially significant in times of the pandemic. I reproduce here the most important points of her talk from my point of view.

Before we jump into the topic, though, I have four quick questions. Please answer spontaneously, out of system 1. No brooding, no one is asking you questions.

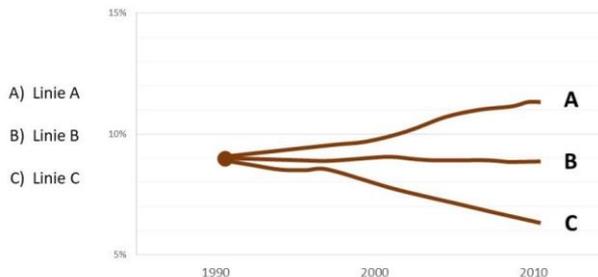
Question 1: What percentage of all adults worldwide can read and write?

- A) 80%
- B) 60%
- C) 40%

Question 2: How has the number of deaths from natural disasters developed worldwide since 1970?

- A) More than doubled
- B) About the same
- C) Reduced to less than half

Question 3: In 1990, 9% of children worldwide died before reaching the age of 5. Which line shows the development of worldwide child mortality since then?



Question 4: What percentage of all one-year-old children in the world are vaccinated against measles?

- A) 20%
- B) 50%
- C) 80%

Well, that wasn't so hard, was it? Now the right answers:

For question one, answer A is correct. The figure is actually 87% who can read and write. In a representative survey, only 28% of Germans answered that correctly. Deaths in natural disasters have dropped to less than half! So answer C. Only 6% of Germans got that right, and that was before the recent flooding. Worldwide infant mortality is down. More than a third knew that. And the last question: Over 80% of children worldwide are vaccinated against measles. Only 10% of Germans knew that. Ms. Urner has been doing this survey for five years - never has a target group answered this halfway correctly. And even more pessimistic are the results among journalists and NGO representatives. Just as doctors see sick people everywhere, for journalists disaster lurks behind every story.



Why do we all have the far too negative view of the world? This is where the media comes in. We are now under a constant barrage of information, theoretically 24 hours a day if we let it. One of the relevance criteria in journalism: negativity leads to more coverage. Leads to more attention. On the proverbial 1st page, first and foremost, is what's going wrong. The media, the journalists see themselves in a watchdog function. They thematize pictorially what is going wrong now or will go wrong soon. A consideration of the actual long-term developments never takes place. As the above questions also show: Things have never been as good historically as they are now. Figuratively speaking, everything that happens in the world runs through a kind of sieve. Only what is negative makes it through the filter and ends up on the best broadcasting slots of the media. The following picture simulates how the news portrays our world.



Ms Urner sees three main causes:

1. our evolutionary preference for the negative. It used to make sense survival-wise. It was the only way we stood a chance against the saber-toothed tiger. Today, our brains are still much faster at understanding negative words, and we respond with physical arousal that increases our chances in fight or flight. But if we get too many negative messages, the body has no chance of breaking down these neurotransmitters. Today, a digital saber-toothed tiger sits in our cell phone and holds our organism hostage.
2. We are in a state of learned helplessness. Editors think when they report on problems that WE get into the action. Unfortunately, that doesn't work that way at all. Many studies show that humans and animals get into this helpless passive state when they have experienced situations where they could do nothing. We learn through media consumption that those up there do what they want anyway. We resign ourselves. And then make jam and tend the garden. Regain some control in our lives. On Twitter the other day there was a heated discussion about the situation of children in schools around the world. One mother mentioned almost in passing that she was apathetic and listless since the Corona measures. Her tweet triggered a huge wave of approval from many participants. She got many times more likes and comments compared to the previous best tweets.



3. our habits very strongly shape our behavior. Our life experience (system 1) automatically controls about 95% of all our decisions. The problem arises when we are no longer able to actively rethink. However, new experiences change our brains - at any age. Our changed brain, in turn, influences our experiences. We lack this circular mutual stimulation if we give habits too much room.

The American psychotherapist Steve de Shazar summed it up brilliantly many years ago: **Talking about problems creates problems, talking about solutions creates solutions.**

So what advice does Mrs Urner give us?

The most important quality of the 21st century: critical thinking. And that doesn't start with criticism, but with actively engaging with the complexity of current issues. The best way to do that is through three distinct behaviors: It's about naivety, forbearance, and curiosity. These are the very qualities that are so sorely lacking in most heated discussions on Twitter or Facebook.

1. **Naivety:** Naivety has a negative connotation. Yet when it comes to complex issues, we are secretly very grateful to colleagues who dare to ask seemingly naïve questions. And thus bring us all further in our understanding.
2. **Forbearance:** Please do not get emotional right away when you have different opinions. Stay relaxed and forgiving - towards the others and towards yourself. In other words: bring more zen into the discussion.

3. **Curiosity:** Is a part of the personality. But you can also actively learn this. Hardly any topic is black and white. It is worthwhile not to experience a topic as closed, but as something dynamic. This is also called lateral thinking.

So, do something to counter the negative information tsunami. Practice naive curiosity and stay forbearing, even towards me.



Source:

<https://www.3sat.de/wissen/tele-akademie/maren-urner-schluss-mit-weltuntergang-100.html>



Book recommendations

By Ralph Ohnemus:

Brand experience. The strategy in hypercompetition and information tsunami [> order here](#)

Brand Astonishment. Winning in the information tsunami [> order here](#)



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