Elimination of Bias: Gray Area Thinking™ – A Toolset for Interacting with Diverse Humans

Ellen J. Krug
Human Inspiration Works LLC
Minneapolis
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# Gray Area Thinking™:
A Toolset for Interacting with Diverse Humans

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Everyone habitually categorizes and groups others who appear “different” from “us,” which often lends to black and white thinking, as in “we” versus “them” or “good” versus “bad” or “American” versus “immigrant” and a host of other isolating labels. With this presentation, I offer a toolset—Gray Area Thinking™—for interacting with diverse humans in a mindful and compassionate way.

Because I have experienced what it means to move from one of “us” (as an ostensibly heterosexual Christian white male) to one of “them” (as a bisexual Buddhist transgender female—I know, holy cow!), I have a far better idea of what discrimination and “otherness” feels like compared to when I lived as a high-earning white male lawyer. I also better understand what it’s like to be part of a community that society often marginalizes.

Finally, I believe that 99 percent of all humans want to do the right thing; it’s just that many of us don’t know what the right thing is or we’re afraid to take risks that involve interacting with people who are “different” from “us.” With this talk, I offer a way—a toolset—for getting past our fears to do the right thing.

1. **First, How the Deck is Stacked toward Grouping and Labeling**
   - The absence of a Human Owner’s Manual.
   - Our default to grouping and labeling.
   - The concept of tribalism—insider vs. outsider.
   - Neurobiology at work: Fight or Flight?
   - Awareness that explicit bias and implicit bias exist despite our best wishes.
   - The “Bystander Effect”—operating on cues from others.
   - Saving Grace No. 1; humans want to do the right thing—hardwiring for empathy and compassion (or, how rats can teach us a thing or two!).
   - Saving Grace No. 2: buttressing empathy by remembering the **Four Commonalities**: (1) a desire for our children (or nieces or nephews) to succeed; (2) the need to be free of physical or emotional violence; (3) a desire for 20 minutes of personal peace; and (4) the need to love and be loved.
   - How the Four Commonalities form a basis for radically changing our fear-driven society to one that’s more inclusive and accepting of all.
   - Remembering the person who pours the water at the restaurant tonight.
   - The power of normalization; good and bad.
   - The Identity Game—how self-labeling/categorizing drives humans.

2. **Engaging in Gray Area Thinking™**
   - Societal/cultural biases for black-and-white thinking: good vs. bad; gay vs. straight; success vs. failure; rich vs. poor.
   - Gender translated: there’s only male or female, assigned at birth; the core belief that birth gender should be “forever.”
   - In reality, many persons “live in the gray” relative to gender, sexuality, race, religion, careers, relationships, etc.
• Awareness that explicit bias, implicit bias, micro-inequities, micro-aggressions, and cultural incompetency/arrogance all exist.
• The difference between arrogance and curiosity.
• **Hallmarks of Gray Area Thinking™**: (a) Awareness of human vulnerability (or suffering); (b) A willingness to take risks to soften or lessen another’s vulnerability (or suffering); (c) Compassion/kindness.
• Damell Barton: The epitome of “Living in the Gray.”
• Day-to-day awareness, risk-taking, and the payoffs from compassion.
• Strangers, Weirdos, and “Those People”—the value of openness.
• A pitch for self-help and other groovy stuff: Gray Area Thinking™ works inward as well as outward!
• Remember **ARC** (Awareness, Risk-taking, Compassion/Kindness).

3. **Inclusivity and Allyship**

Diversity is about numbers whereas Inclusivity is about action.

The 3 Levels of Inclusivity: Tolerance, Acceptance and “Party Host.” Ally” is an identity; “Allyship” is a form of action.

Some suggested inclusivity and allyship actions and understandings:
• Get to know people’s stories: “Tell me your story.” In the process, understand commonalities (and remember the Four Commonalities); this is how we learn to accept others.
• Create space for persons who live in the margins; don’t allow for a thin margin for failure.
• No apples-to-apples treatment—SAT or ACT test scores don’t tell the complete story; persons with privilege haven’t learned poverty or marginalized life skillsets.
• Persons of color or from marginalized communities can’t be on every committee; be an ally/engage in allyship in their place.
• Don’t be afraid to speak up for a person: “Don’t touch her hair” “Remember, he uses male pronouns now.”
• Understand that society easily utilizes double standards and ask why that has to be.
• The difference between “opinion” and “experience.”
• Don’t assume that you know what everyone’s experience is; it’s true that society treats “different” persons differently; you can’t get blisters unless you actually walk in another person’s shoes (or vice versa).
• Allyship enriches those for whom you’re speaking up and yourself. It’s all about respectful empowerment in multiple ways.
• Sharing about commonalities not ground in race—children, survivorship (a parent’s alcoholism or divorce) or a sibling’s disability.
• Share about the 3 Levels of Inclusivity (Tolerance, Acceptance and “Party Host”).
• A truly inclusive community is filled with Party Hosts!
• Inclusivity must be a constant value; it requires a positive, on-going culture in the workplace and the community.
Inclusivity will not occur without culture leader buy-in, leadership, and modeling; otherwise, the organization will waste time, money and people.

Writing a check to a cause is just not enough.

Don’t laugh at someone’s jokes or marginalizing—"Not cool."

The dark side of familiarity—humans can tolerate almost anything if they hear it/experience it enough.

What’s happening at your “front counter” relative to customer service and colleague interactions?

4. Shutting Down Micro-Aggressions (aka Confronting Racism, Homophobia, Transphobia and other Marginalizing Behavior)

- **Questioning:** “I’m not sure what you mean by that statement (or question). Can you tell me more?” Or if it’s a joke: “I don’t understand the joke; can you break that down for me?”
- **Educating:** “Actually, I just read an article that says quite the opposite” or “Really? I just read an online article (or saw on TV) that in fact the reality is…..”
- **Empathetic Relating:** “I wonder how it actually feels to be in her (his) (their) shoes.”
- **Expressed Emotions:** “I Statements” such as “I’m hurt by what you just said.” Or, “I’m really rethinking our relationship (project, joint paper, party plans....) because of your statement.”
- **Returning to it later/avoiding the Fight or Flight Emotion:** “Two days ago you said in the staff lounge.....”
- **Direct Approach:** “Not cool dude. Not cool at all.” (My favorite.)
- Double back to Gray Area Thinking™ and internally (as well as externally) fighting against normalization. We’re human and operate off cues from each other; this is sometimes good but often not so good re: being welcoming.

Everything takes work. Remember that, please!

**Personal Contact/Consulting Information**

Ellen (Ellie) Krug at elliekrug@gmail.com
Website: www.elliekrug.com
National inclusivity training and consulting through Human Inspiration Works, LLC (“We Make ‘Inclusion’ an Action Word”) Website: www.humaninspirationworks.com
Author, Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change (2013)
Book website: www.gettingtoellen.com (Book available on Amazon, Kindle, etc.)
Twitter: @elliekrug (feel free to follow me)
Facebook: Ellen Krug Minnesota (feel free to Friend me)
LinkedIn: Ellen (Ellie) Krug (feel free to Connect with me)
Sign up for my newsletter, The Ripple, by clicking on “Newsletters/Media” at www.elliekrug.com

Many of my talks/presentations inspire others to live authentically no matter what the challenges or hurdles (e.g. cisgender people find meaning from my words, too!).
Nationwide consulting services include creating organizational diversity and inclusion plans, assisting employers with employee on-the-job gender transitions, and on-site trainings relative to diversity/inclusion (Gray Area Thinking™), LGBTQ issues, and “Transgender 101” presentations. I’m also working to change the rural Midwest diversity/inclusion landscape with The C* Project presentations.

An open invitation: any human can contact me relative to gender or sexual identity or anything else related to the human condition. I’m a good listener and willing to meet with anyone in a public place or speak on the telephone for up to an hour.

Please have compassion for yourself and for others!

Thank you. Remember the need for Gray Area Thinking™!

ellie

Encouraging open hearts and thriving human spirits
Human Inspiration Works, LLC: We make “inclusion” an action word
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Rubin-Erdly, Sabrina. “About a Girl.” Rolling Stone, November 7, 2013. Centers on a male to female adolescent who forced a Colorado school district to provide female bathroom access.


Gender Resources


Human (and Rats) Connections


Damell Barton, City of Buffalo bus driver who saves a woman contemplating suicide. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtboFQRoCjQ. A must-see video of a human reaching out to another human while risking job and all the unknowns relative to how a person intent on suicide might react. A stellar example of “Gray Area Thinking.”™


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Legal Community


Medical

World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care: http://www.wpath.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=1351

Education


Resources (National and MN-based)

Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ youth (with an emphasis on trans youth): The Trevor Project (www.thetrevorproject.org); Trevor Lifeline 866-488-7386.


Couples in Transition. Peer-based, suburban Twin Cities support group for couples where one partner is transgender: http://couplesintransition.org/.

OutFront Minnesota: MN’s largest LGBTQ advocacy group with a comprehensive list of trans-related resources: http://outfront.org/resources#trans.


Bridge for Youth “So What if I Am?” Weekly support group for LGBTQ youth and frequent parent support meetings. Based in Minneapolis: http://www.bridgeforyouth.org/find-help/support-groups/. 24 hr. crisis number for youth or parents: (612) 377-8800.

RECLAIM. In Minneapolis; provides mental health support for “queer” and transgender youth: http://www.reclaim-lgbtyouth.org/. (612) 235-6743.

Other

Ellen (Ellie) Krug
elliejkrug@gmail.com
www.elliekrug.com
www.gettingtoellen.com

Author, Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change (2013) (Amazon, Kindle, Nook, iBooks)
Columnist, Lavender Magazine, www.lavendermagazine.com

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small sets of predefined ideas, and it is difficult to generalize to non-political contexts (e.g., marketing messages or product reviews). To overcome these limitations, we propose FrameAxis, an un-supervised method for characterizing a document with respect to various 'microframes.' The key ideas are: (i) a 'frame' can be operationalized by a combination of antonym pairs, such as legal–illegal, each of which is called a microframe; (ii) if a document contains many words that are close to the extreme poles of a microframe (e.g., using a lot of words similar to legal and illegal), it is... Figure 1 shows how well the framing bias is aligned with the labeled sentiment when considering the top N significant microframes by $\eta_B$. The alignment is averaged across the aspects. Four problems that biases help us address: Sign up for Better Humans. By Better Humans. Tips, advice, tutorials on how you can become the best version of yourself. Take a look. Better Humans is a collection of the world's most trustworthy writing on human potential and self improvement by coaches, academics, and aggressive self-experimenters. Articles are based on deep personal experience, science, and research. No fluff, book reports, or listicles. The biggest set of 3D characters for figma and blender. 4 different outfits. Easy color changing directly in figma. 4 Outfits. Avatar creation. Where to use Humans. 8 premade scenes. All previews. Download. Humans. by. 20 different poses. Fast color change. 4 Outfits. Avatar creation. Where to use Humans.