

## **Part Three: Groups and Social Processes**

### **13 Decision Making Overload**

01:15:40:15 --:--:--:--

- Eggs or pancakes?

01:15:41:17 --:--:--:--

Golf or church?

01:15:42:15 --:--:--:--

The front page  
or the crossword puzzle?

01:15:44:12 --:--:--:--

Even on Sunday morning,

01:15:45:20 --:--:--:--

it's decisions,  
decisions, decisions.

01:15:47:18 --:--:--:--

- You know, I like  
to think of life

01:15:49:07 --:--:--:--

as just one decision  
after another.

01:15:51:00 --:--:--:--

I mean, this is everything  
from the most mundane decisions,

01:15:53:19 --:--:--:--

what kind of toothpaste to buy  
all the way up to who to marry.

01:16:05:24 --:--:--:--

- Science writer Jonah Lehrer  
sees every one of those choices

01:16:08:16 --:--:--:--

as a tug of war--

01:16:09:14 --:--:--:--

an exhausting battle  
between our gut feelings

01:16:11:19 --:--:--:--

and our reasoned thoughts.

01:16:13:01 --:--:--:--

- For a long time  
people have said

01:16:14:15 --:--:--:--

the best way to make a decision  
is to be rational.

01:16:17:05 --:--:--:--

And yet, in recent years,  
scientists have discovered

01:16:19:14 --:--:--:--

that the rational brain  
can only take in a few bits

01:16:21:15 --:--:--:--

of information  
at any given moment.

01:16:22:27 --:--:--:--

So you start giving it  
too much information,

01:16:24:23 --:--:--:--

and it starts to short-circuit  
and sputter.

01:16:26:21 --:--:--:--

- To eliminate the sputtering  
when buying a car,

01:16:28:22 --:~:~:~:~:~

a computer, a house,  
or making any complex decision,

01:16:29:21 --:~:~:~:~:~

Lehrer says stop all  
the thinking.

01:16:33:01 --:~:~:~:~:~

Just go for it.

01:16:33:28 --:~:~:~:~:~

- Our emotional brain  
is actually much better

01:16:35:26 --:~:~:~:~:~

at taking in lots

and lots of information,

01:16:38:00 --:--:--:--  
summarizing lots of data very  
efficiently and saying,

01:16:40:08 --:--:--:--  
"Here's a feeling.

01:16:41:09 --:--:--:--  
"Don't worry about  
all the details.

01:16:42:29 --:--:--:--  
"Here's a feeling.

01:16:44:00 --:--:--:--  
We've already taken those  
details into account."

01:16:46:10 --:--:--:--  
- We process emotions  
in the front part of the brain,

01:16:48:17 --:--:--:--  
and damage  
to those frontal lobes

01:16:50:01 --:--:--:--  
can spell disaster  
for decisions.

01:16:51:07 --:~:~:~:~:~  
Take the strange case of a  
brilliant former business exec

01:16:53:16 --:~:~:~:~:~  
known only as Elliot.

01:16:54:18 --:~:~:~:~:~  
Surgery for a brain tumor left  
his intellect intact.

01:16:56:29 --:~:~:~:~:~  
His doctors were thrilled,

01:16:58:29 --:~:~:~:~:~  
until they realized what  
the surgery had not spared.

01:17:02:04 --:--:--:--  
- He lost the ability  
to experience emotions.

01:17:13:11 --:--:--:--  
It turned out, though,  
that Elliot

01:17:14:27 --:--:--:--  
became pathologically  
indecisive.

01:17:17:02 --:--:--:--  
He would spend all day trying to  
figure out where to eat lunch,

01:17:19:16 --:--:--:--  
or which pen  
to sign his name with.

01:17:21:03 --:--:--:--  
I think the larger point here

01:17:22:14 --:--:--:--  
is about just how essential  
our emotions are

01:17:24:09 --:--:--:--  
in the decision making process.

01:17:25:16 --:--:--:--  
- Essential and unavoidable.

01:17:28:03 --:--:--:--  
- You know how,  
when a storm comes in,

01:17:29:20 --:--:--:--  
it affects everything  
in its path?

01:17:31:05 --:--:--:--  
That's what an emotion does.

01:17:34:03 --:--:--:--  
- The work of psychologist  
Jennifer Lerner

01:17:35:04 --:--:--:--  
at the Harvard Decision

01:17:37:01 --:--:--:--  
shows how impossible it is

01:17:38:08 --:--:--:--  
to make the rational decisions  
we all think we make.

01:17:40:18 --:--:--:--  
- This is a band  
that's going

01:17:42:01 --:--:--:--  
to measure your respiration.

01:17:39:25 --:--:--  
- She demonstrated an experiment  
for us

01:17:41:19 --:--:--:--  
in which she shows subjects  
emotional movie clips...

01:17:44:01 --:--:--:--  
No one could watch this  
and not feel sad.

01:17:49:16 --:--:--:--  
Once subjects are sad,

01:17:50:20 --:--:--:--  
she gives them a decision  
to make,

01:17:52:05 --:--:--:--  
like how much they'd pay  
for something.

01:17:53:21 --:--:--:--  
And she's found she generally  
can predict their answers

01:17:55:27 --:--:--:--  
just based on their mood.

01:17:56:24 --:--:--:--  
- These are feelings you  
just happen to have

01:17:58:21 --:--:--:--  
at the time you're making  
a judgment or a decision,

01:18:00:27 --:--:--:--  
but they really should not be  
an input to your decision.

01:18:03:14 --:--:--:--  
And these are things like,  
you're cut off in traffic.

01:18:05:29 --:--:--:--  
- Get mad about the commute,

01:18:07:08 --:--:--:--  
and you're more likely to make  
a risky decision at the office.

01:18:09:20 --:--:--:--  
And oddly enough,  
being happy works the same way.

01:18:12:15 --:--:--:--  
- Happiness and anger  
are remarkably similar;

01:18:14:15 --:--:--:--  
they both make you  
under-perceive risk,

01:18:16:23 --:--:--:--  
they both make you  
take more risks,

01:18:18:15 --:--:--:--  
and they both are associated

01:18:19:24 --:~:~:~:~:~  
with this sense  
of certainty and control.

01:18:21:18 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- Which can be  
downright dangerous.

01:18:23:08 --:~:~:~:~:~  
Take seatbelts.

01:18:24:29 --:~:~:~:~:~

If you're happy or angry,  
you're less likely to wear one.

01:18:27:14 --:--:--:--  
You're also less likely  
to use a bike helmet,

01:18:29:10 --:--:--:--  
lock your car,

01:18:30:03 --:--:--:--  
or buy life insurance.

01:18:30:28 --:--:--:--  
And if you're sad,  
stay away from the mall:

01:18:32:26 --:--:--:--  
You'll probably spend too much.

01:18:34:13 --:--:--:--  
But sadder still?

01:18:35:14 --:--:--:--  
- We've never succeeded,  
never,

01:18:37:00 --:--:--:--  
in having people recognize  
the irrational influence

01:18:39:08 --:--:--:--  
of incidental emotion.

01:18:40:22 --:--:--:--  
- Never?

01:18:42:00 --:--:--:--  
- And then to make steps, no.

01:18:43:12 --:--:--:--  
Never

01:18:43:29 --:--:--:--  
- I'm sorry.  
- Yeah.

01:18:45:03 --:--:--:--  
- [laughs]

01:18:44:02 --:--:--:--  
Baseball legend Yogi Berra

01:18:45:10 --:--:--:--  
once had some great advice  
for making decisions:

01:18:47:11 --:--:--:--  
"When you come to a fork in the  
road," he supposedly said,

01:18:49:17 --:--:--:--  
take it."

01:18:50:03 --:--:--:--  
But what if you have more  
than two choices?

01:18:52:01 --:~:~:~:~:~  
What if you have five or ten  
or 100

01:18:53:20 --:~:~:~:~:~  
or, as they claim at Starbucks,

01:18:55:01 --:~:~:~:~:~  
87,000 choices  
for a cup of coffee?

01:18:56:23 --:~:~:~:~:~  
Then what?

01:18:56:16 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- There's a mocha, a latte,  
a cappuccino,

01:18:58:06 --:~:~:~:~:~  
a peppermint mocha,  
Frappuccino,

01:18:59:20 --:~:~:~:~:~  
a Vivanno, a smoothie,  
a cafe au lait...

01:19:01:04 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- Americans certainly love  
choice more

01:19:02:28 --:~:~:~:~:~  
than anywhere else in the world.



01:19:04:13 --:--:--:--  
- Columbia University professor  
Sheena Iyengar

01:19:06:18 --:--:--:--  
says her experience as a blind  
person gives her

01:19:08:16 --:--:--:--  
a different take  
on all those choices.

01:19:09:23 --:--:--:--  
Her book, The Art of Choosing,

01:19:11:01 --:--:--:--  
argues more  
isn't always better.

01:19:12:19 --:--:--:--  
- Certainly, in theory, the more  
choices I have out there,

01:19:15:02 --:--:--:--  
the more likely I am to find  
that perfect dress

01:19:17:03 --:~:~:~:~:~  
or that perfect ring  
or that perfect food item

01:19:19:02 --:~:~:~:~:~  
that I want to eat  
or that perfect job.

01:20:37:18 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- Is that true?

01:19:20:26 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- For the most part, we don't  
have the resources to find it.

01:19:23:28 --:~:~:~:~:~  
I mean, we get overwhelmed.

01:19:25:10 --:~:~:~:~:~  
- Two-pump sugar-free vanilla,

01:19:26:27 --:~:~:~:~:~

two-pump cinnamon dulce,

01:19:28:07 --:--:--:--  
three pumps white mocha,

01:19:29:16 --:--:--:--  
soy, 180-degree...

01:19:29:18 --:--:--:--  
- Even experts on decisions  
are not immune.

01:19:31:16 --:--:--:--  
- This is a slightly  
embarrassing confession,

01:19:33:16 --:--:--:--  
but I got interested  
in the subject

01:19:35:02 --:--:--:--  
in large part because  
of my own chronic indecision.

01:19:37:18 --:--:--:--  
I was the type of guy who  
would walk into a drug store

01:19:39:21 --:--:--:--  
for toothpaste  
and lose an entire afternoon.

01:19:41:20 --:--:--:--  
- Don't tell Baskin Robbins,

01:19:43:02 --:--:--:--  
famous for its 31 flavors,

01:19:44:20 --:--:--:--  
but in fact more choices

01:19:45:26 --:--:--:--  
may make an actual purchase  
less likely,

01:19:47:20 --:--:--:--  
as Professor Iyengar discovered

01:19:49:04 --:--:--:--  
with her supermarket

jam experiment.

01:19:49:23 --:--:--:--

In one display,  
she put out six samples of jam.

01:19:51:26 --:--:--:--

In another, 24.

01:19:52:24 --:--:--:--

Result:

01:19:53:14 --:--:--:--

Shoppers mobbed the table  
with 24 varieties,

01:19:56:09 --:--:--:--

but they were 10 times  
more likely to buy jam

01:19:58:03 --:--:--:--

when they were staring  
at only six.

01:19:59:19 --:--:--:--

- I know everybody wants  
to go to that store

01:20:01:15 --:--:--:--

that offers you 1,000 options,

01:20:03:04 --:--:--:--

and that's the best recipe

01:20:04:11 --:--:--:--

to walk into that store,

01:20:05:19 --:~:~:~:~:~

get completely overwhelmed,

01:20:05:13 --:~:~:~:~:~

and walk out and buy nothing.

01:20:06:05 --:~:~:~:~:~

- What is  
the accumulative effect

01:20:07:20 --:~:~:~:~:~

of, you know, having  
to make all these choices?

01:20:09:25 --:--:--:--

- Essentially what happens is,  
they get so tired

01:20:11:27 --:--:--:--

and emotionally drained  
that we even find

01:20:13:21 --:--:--:--

that their immune system drops.

01:20:15:08 --:--:--:--

- Come on--because they've had  
to make too many decisions?

01:20:15:13 --:--:--:--

- Yes, they even more likely  
to get a cold, to get a flu.

01:20:17:20 --:--:--:--

- We're very fragile beings,  
aren't we?

01:20:19:16 --:--:--:--

[laughs]

01:20:32:03 --:--:--:--

- I think there's this  
tug-of-war in our brain

01:20:34:02 --:--:--:--

that we've all experienced,  
perhaps most clear on a diet.

01:20:37:01 --:--:--:--

You've got part of you  
that wants

01:20:38:16 --:~:~:~:~:~

to lose that last ten pounds,

01:20:39:26 --:~:~:~:~:~

and then there's another part  
of you

01:20:41:15 --:~:~:~:~:~

that wants to gorge on  
double-stuffed Oreos.

01:20:42:29 --:--:--:--  
- When it's literally a battle  
between our guts and our heads,

01:20:45:15 --:--:--:--  
the Heath brothers recommend,  
well, tricking yourself.

01:20:48:17 --:--:--:--  
- And so, if you want  
to go on the diet,

01:20:50:07 --:--:--:--  
store away the dinner plates

01:20:51:18 --:--:--:--  
that you feel like you have  
to fill up

01:20:53:08 --:--:--:--  
in order to have a good meal,

01:20:54:16 --:--:--:--  
and eat off your salad plates.

01:20:55:16 --:--:--:--  
And studies have shown that  
you eat 20, 25 percent less

01:20:57:20 --:--:--:--  
by doing that.

01:20:58:12 --:--:--:--  
If you're having  
trouble spending

01:21:00:03 --:--:--:--  
because you're being bombarded  
with messages

01:21:02:05 --:--:--:--  
about the things  
that you should have,

01:21:03:28 --:--:--:--  
then freeze your credit cards  
in a block of ice

01:21:05:28 --:--:--:--  
and force yourself to go through

a warming-up period

01:21:08:03 --:--:--:--  
before you actually spend.

01:21:08:09 --:--:--:--  
- By now, you may feel  
decidedly decisive,

01:21:10:02 --:--:--:--  
so start a diet,

01:21:11:00 --:--:--:--  
choose a new toothpaste,

01:21:12:09 --:--:--:--  
buy a house.

01:21:13:03 --:--:--:--  
What will it be?