Lesson Six

Most of what we take as "reality" is a cultural construction – "real-ized" through our unseen, unexamined assumptions of what is right, true, or possible.

REAL-IZATIONS

If you are a young person in America chances are that your reality includes a good bit of trying to figure out who you are. Finding yourself is one of your top priorities. And chances are, you see this as deeply intertwined with a second, closely-linked priority, your quest to find somebody, or maybe, "the one." Maybe "the one" is too strong for you, but you probably crave that feeling you get when you truly know someone and feel known by them. Either finding yourself will help you find this person, or, finding this person will help you find yourself. Either way, one or the other and probably both are of utmost importance to you finding a sense of meaning, significance, and purpose in your life. And since finding somebody is so heavily influenced by how we look and who we are, chances are you are also intensely self-conscious about

who you are and how you look. You probably look in the mirror several times per day. You probably wish you were taller, thinner, or bigger. You wish your skin were clearer. You wish this or that body part was a little smaller or bigger. You wish your hair was just so, or your nose was just a little different, or your stomach was a little smaller. You like what you like, but you also are careful about which likes you reveal to others, carefully crafting your identity as you move through life.

These feelings of inadequacy, the constant assessment of who we are and how we measure up, and the intense self-consciousness of everyday life that many of us feel are real feelings. But they are not necessary or inevitable. They are *real-ized*. They are *made real* by our routines, habits, practices and the cultural structures in which we live.

Culture, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, is a powerful structure, but this structure is *con*-structed. The structure is nothing but the total sum of all of our own actions, habits, ideas, ideals, beliefs, values and practices, no matter how big or small. A cultural structure is a powerful force in our lives. It makes us who we are. But, at the same time, our collective actions make the structure. We make the structure. The structure makes us.

When something is not inherent in the nature of reality but is made real by our society and culture, we call it a social construction. It is "real-ized." We know something is "real-ized" or socially constructed when it satisfies two principles:

1. It is taken for granted as real and appears inevitable.

2. But it need not have existed, or need not be as it is. In fact, it could be very different.

Not all social constructions are bad. Many of them are necessary for large societies to function. For example, money is a social construct. The piece of paper representing $100 USD is not inherently worth $100. It is made to be worth $100 by the three primary forces of realization: (1) our shared "common-sense" beliefs and understanding that a $100 bill is worth $100, (2), our behavior in which we routinely exchange currency for goods and services, and (3) institutional structures that enforce and legitimize the reality that a $100 bill is worth $100.

Interestingly, the bill itself only costs 5.4 cents to create while a nickel (a social reality worth 5 cents) costs 9.4 cents to create. The US treasury loses millions of dollars every year producing nickels. Yet, you will not convince anyone to give you 9.4 cents for a nickel, because we all agree that it is only worth 5 cents, it is routinely accepted as 5 cents, and there are larger institutional structures enforcing this value upon it. The nickel and the $100 bill are simple examples of social constructions that have been real-ized. That a nickel is worth five cents is taken for granted as real and appears inevitable, and it need not have been that way. As we saw in the previous chapter, people have used a wide variety of objects, from shells to knots on string, to represent money, and some cultures do not use any money at all.

Most social constructions are more complicated, especially those that shape our core ideas, ideals, values, and beliefs. Beauty ideals, gender roles, and racial prejudices are all real-ized so completely that we have to work very hard to unleash ourselves from their powerful hold. Understanding more about how social constructions are real-ized is an

essential step in helping us overcome their hold, imagine new alternatives, and change our lives and societies for the better.

HOW REALITY GETS REAL-IZED

Of course, there are limits to just how much of reality we can bend. Changing our beliefs about gravity will not allow us to fly when we jump out a window. But the power of our beliefs might be much greater than you think.

For example, do you think that the private thoughts that you have in your head could influence the performance of a rat running a maze? That's the question that opens up an episode of NPR's Invisibilia podcast, "How to Become Batman". Almost nobody thinks this is possible. But when psychologist Bob Rosenthal lied to his research assistants and told them that one group of rats was "smart" and another group "dumb" (even though they were the same kind of rats) the "smart" rats performed twice as well as the "dumb" rats. Careful analysis found that the expectations of the experimenters subtly changed the way they behaved toward the rats, and those subtle behaviors made a big difference.

Other studies have found that teacher's expectations of students can raise or lower IQ scores and a study of military trainers found that their expectations can affect how fast a soldier can run. On the podcast, psychologist Carol Dweck notes that we convey our expectations through very subtle cues, such as how far we stand apart and how much eye contact we make. And these subtle behaviors make a difference in how people perform.

The link between belief and behavior is clear and powerful. While we all understand the power of our own belief

on our own behavior, these studies demonstrate that other people's beliefs can also affect us. This link between belief and behavior can easily become a vicious circle. A teacher's low expectations make a student perform poorly. The poor performance justifies and re-enforces the low expectations so the student continues to perform poorly, and so on. This is one key element of how reality gets real-ized.

But another story from that same podcast illustrates another important component of real-ization. The other story is about two boys. Both of them are "blind" though I will put "blind" in quotes here as a way of designating this as a "reality" we are going to question. One boy, Daniel, has no eyes but is raised as an ordinary boy. He is allowed to run around his neighborhood freely. He packs his own lunch, walks to school by himself, and he even learns to ride a bike. The other boy, Adam, goes to a special school for the blind and has everything done for him, or at least has significant help throughout his daily routines.

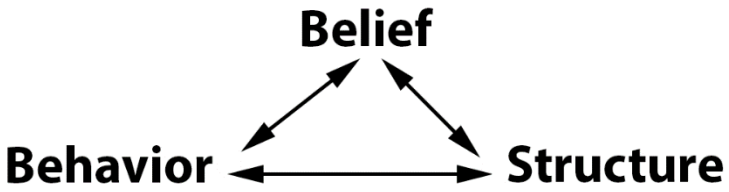
From an early age Daniel realizes that he can sense what objects are around him and where they are by clicking and listening for the echoes. Like a bat, he uses echolocation. This allows him to climb trees, hike alone into the wilderness, and generally get around as someone with perfect vision. "I can honestly say that I do not feel blind," he says. In fact, he does not really think of himself as "blind" until he meets Adam at school and kids start to mix the two up. They were "the blind boys." For the first time, Daniel felt what it was like to have society define him as "blind." He was not just dealing with his own or someone else's specific beliefs and expectations. He was starting to encounter our culture's full system of institutionalized beliefs, practices and structures for dealing with blindness.

He had trouble making sense of it until he found a book by sociologist Robert Scott called The Making of Blind Men. In that book, Scott suggests that blindness is socially constructed.

Scott found many blind people like Daniel who were capable of much more than our culture expected, but throughout the actions and policies of the institutions designed to help them he found the recurring message, "blind people can't do those things." At the time, nearly 2/3 of blind American students were not participating in gym class. The institutions wanted to be helpful, but by carefully escorting their clients everywhere they went and doing everything for them they were constantly conveying that deeply held expectation that "blind people can't do those things."

In other words, blindness as we "know it" is a social construction. We have many misconceptions about what is possible or impossible when blind. It is "real-ized" by our beliefs and expectations of blind people, the behaviors those beliefs create and encourage, and most importantly, by institutionalized structures that continually legitimate and re-create those beliefs and behaviors.

We now see the full triad of real-ization forces that shape our reality: belief, behavior, and structure. Each element relates to and re-enforces the others in such a way that we might imagine their relationship to one another as such:



So how far can this go? Can we really construct a different reality? It turns out that Daniel might be right when he says he does not feel blind. Brain scans show that Daniel's visual cortex lights up as he uses echolocation, and studies have found that he "sees" about as well as an ordinary sighted person sees in their peripheral vision. He may not be able to read a book, but he knows it is there.

THE REAL-IZATION OF RACE

Take the example of racial prejudice as it occurs in the United States. Most Americans publicly proclaim that they are not racist, but all Americans know the common stereotypes and how they map on to each racial category. It is part of their consciousness. Blacks are thought to be irresponsible, prone to anger and violence, lack intelligence, and have outstanding athletic abilities. Asians are thought to be quiet, weak, and very good at math. Whites are not as athletic as blacks but smarter, more responsible, and dependable.

Few Americans openly proclaim these beliefs and we can assume that most do not hold them. However, the idea that there are "blacks" "whites" and "Asians" goes largely unquestioned. As Americans look around their communities they see "black people" and "white people" among others. But from a scientific perspective on the entire global human population, the notion of race is a myth. It is a cultural construction. As biological anthropologist Alan Goodman notes, "what's black in the United States is not what's black in Brazil or what's black in South Africa. What was black in 1940 is different from what is black in 2000." Scientists like Goodman note that if you lined up all the people on the planet

in terms of skin color you would see a slow gradation from light skin to dark skin and at no point could you realistically declare the point at which you transition from "black people" to "white people."

So if race is not real and Americans are not racist, why are our cities still segregated? Why are our cafeterias segregated? Why do white families have over 10 times the net worth of black families? Why are whites almost twice as likely to own a home? Why are twice as many blacks unemployed? Why are black babies 2.5 times more likely to die before their first birthday?

The idea of race and the prejudices that come along with this idea are real-ized through the same triad of forces that real-ize the value of a $100 bill or create the ideas we have about blindness.

At the level of beliefs, studies show that Americans hold implicit biases even when they claim to deny all racial biases. For example, one study involves a "shooter task" in which people are asked to shoot at video images of men with guns but avoid shooting men who are not holding guns. People shoot armed black men faster than armed white men, and mistakenly shoot unarmed blacks more often than unarmed whites. Such studies reveal that the stereotype that blacks are prone to anger and violence lays a claim on consciousness, even if we are committed to overcoming racial bias.

Our beliefs, conscious and unconscious, affect our behavior. When researchers sent out identical resumes with only the names changed, they found that resumes with "white-sounding" names like Greg and Emily were 50% more likely to receive a call-back versus resumes with "black-sounding" names like Jamal and Lakisha.

These biases are often shared across races, so that blacks and whites hold the same stereotypes, and these stereotypes affect how they act and perform. For example, Jeff Stone set up a mini-golf course and announced to the players that it was specially designed to measure raw athletic ability. Black players outperformed white players. Then, without changing the course at all, he announced that the course was specially designed to measure one's ability to see and interpret spatial geometry. White players outperformed black players.

But we fail to see how the ideas become real-ized without also looking at structure. One of the most powerful forces that continuously re-creates racial prejudices is a structure that includes black poverty and segregated cities created over hundreds of years of slavery and official segregation. Even though official segregation is now a thing of the past, its legacy lives on as black families are more likely to live in poverty and in impoverished neighborhoods where it is more difficult to find and receive loans, a good education, and good opportunities. This ensures that blacks will continue to have less wealth, less education, fewer opportunities, and live in impoverished areas with higher crime rates. These characteristics then get associated with blackness, thereby supporting the stereotypes that inform the practices that continually re-create the structure of segregation.

Recognizing the triad of forces involved in real-ization is essential to overcoming our biases. If we only try to rid ourselves of our biased beliefs, we run the risk of not addressing important practices and structures that perpetuate the beliefs.

"SELF" REAL-IZATION

This triad of real-ization operates throughout our lives to create reality as we know it and take for granted. It even shapes our most basic and foundational assumptions about who we are. Such foundational assumptions are largely invisible to us until we encounter an alternative, so let me take you back to Papua New Guinea and share a few stories that might jolt us into a new awareness of our "reality."

We experience ourselves as alone, vulnerable, independent, individual, free, incomplete. We contemplate the big questions outlined in the intro to this text – *Who am I? What am I going to do? Am I going to make it?* On a quest to find ourselves, to find meaning and significance, to gain some sense of recognition. This aspect of our lives is so pervasive that it appears inevitable, but my experiences in New Guinea showed me otherwise.

Instead of worrying about trying to "find themselves" or struggling with questions of meaning and significance, my New Guinea friends were much more concerned about an impending attack from a neighboring village. One day we received word that a group of men just over the mountain were planning an attack on us. All of the men from the village, along with a few close friends and kin from other villages, came in from their garden houses and hunting excursions, filling the village with a sense of intense anticipation. Men performed chants and dances in the village clearing, pumping themselves up for the attack, while women peaked out through the cracks and darkened doorways of village huts, anxiously awaiting what was to come.

We gathered trees, limbs, and vines and tied them together to barricade the main path, but we knew this would do little more than slow them down.

Around noon we heard a twig snap just beyond our barrier and the village erupted into a frenzy of action. "Wop! Wop! Wop!" we heard the attackers call out as dozens of them crashed our barricade and came rushing down into our village. Their faces were painted red and their hands dripped with what looked like blood, but they were not armed with spears or bows. They were armed with sweet potatoes dripping with delicious and fatty red marita sauce. They smashed the dripping tubers into our faces, forcing us to eat. They were attacking us with kindness and generosity.

They left as quickly as they came but the challenge was set. We were to follow them back to their village and just see if we could handle all of the food they had prepared for us. We had to navigate a series of booby traps and sneak attacks of generosity along the way, sweet potatoes and taro being thrown at us from the trees. When we finally arrived at the edge of the village, their troops gathered for one last intimidating chant. They circled in and yelled as loudly as they could for as long as they could, letting the giant collective yell drown out in a thumping rhythmic and barrel chested "Woop! Woop! Woop!" We responded in kind with our own chant, and then charged in for the food.

As we entered the village we found a pool of red marita juice filled to the brim with hundreds of sweet potatoes and taro, 6 feet across and nearly 2 feet deep. The marita seeds that had been washed to create this pool littered every inch of ground throughout the entire village. It was no wonder that the attack had taken several days to prepare.

We settled in for the feast with gusto, but an hour in we were starting to fade and the waterline of our pool of food seemed to barely budge. Our hosts laughed in triumph and started boasting about how they had gathered too much food for us to handle, giving credit to those among them who cleaned it, processed it, thanking each contributor in turn, and then proudly boasting again that their generosity was too much for us. We left, defeated, but already taking stock of our own marita produce and planning a return attack in the near future.

In America we tend to think that all humans are selfish and seek to maximize their own material gain. In these New Guinea villages they struggle instead to demonstrate their generosity and minimize their material gain. They are not trying to accumulate wealth. Instead, they are trying to nurture relationships through which wealth can flow.

Anthropologists describe the difference between these economic systems as gift economies and market economies. In both economies the same items might be exchanged and distributed, but in one they are treated as gifts and in the other they are treated as commodities.

Take, for example, a bag of sweet potatoes. In a gift economy, the bag of sweet potatoes is given with no immediate payment expected or desired. Instead, the giver hopes to strengthen the relationship between themselves and the recipient. The giver will likely give a brief biography of the potatoes, who planted them, tended them, harvested them, and so on, so that the recipient understands their connection to several people who have all contributed to the gift. In a commodity economy, that same bag becomes a commodity. It has a price, something like $5, and the recipient is expected to pay this price immediately. Once the price is paid, the transaction is over.

There are strong practical reasons for gift economies and market economies. Gift economies tend to thrive in small communities and where most things of value have a short shelf-life. Wealth is not easily stored, and there are no banks or currencies for them to store their wealth in either. The best way to "store" wealth is to nurture strong relationships. That way, when your own maritas are not ripe or your garden is out of food, all of those people that you have given to in the past will be there to give to you.

Market economies have evolved along with the growth of agriculture, which brings with it an increasing division of labor and the growing complexity of large societies. In a large complex society not everybody produces food. They need frequent and formalized exchange systems to facilitate the exchange and distribution of food and other goods.

These seemingly simple differences between gift economies and market economies have profound consequences for how people think about themselves and their personal identity. These differences emerge because of how different their day to day practices become. They real-ize very different realities.

In gift economies, people are constantly engaged in relationship-building activities as they give and receive gifts throughout the day. The constant reminders of where the gift came from and all the hands that helped give them a profound sense of interdependence. This is in stark contrast to a market economy with money which has just one single owner. A market economy creates a consciousness that thinks, "*I work for money. It is mine. I spend it on something. Now that thing is mine. It doesn't matter who made it or where it came from. All that matters is that I paid the asking price. I have no ongoing relationship with the*

creators or sellers of the object. It is just mine." This creates a strong sense of independence and individualism.

So striking is the contrast between how many New Guineans think about themselves and Western notions of the individual that a new word was invented to describe this type of self-understanding. Instead of "individuals" they are "dividuals," defined by their place in a web of relations, not as "individuals" set apart from all relations.

As dividuals, their identity as well as their sense of meaning and significance are found within this web of relations. They do not need to set off on a lifelong quest to find themselves or find meaning. Recognition is more or less given, and not something that has to be achieved.

In contrast, as individuals in a commodity-economy our sense of identity and recognition must be earned through participation in a consumer culture. In a consumer culture, advertisements and marketing campaigns shape the meanings different products carry with them. We buy commodities not just for their practical value, but for "what they might say about us." When brands are especially successful, they create what marketers openly refer to as "brand tribes" – loyal consumers whose identity is in part shaped by their association with the brand's products.

Over the past few decades, some brands have recognized that they could align themselves with deep cultural values and ideals. Nike does not just sell shoes. When they run an ad that says, "Twice the guts. Double the glory," they are selling grit and determination. When they run an ad that says "I have thunder thighs. And that is a compliment" they are selling self-acceptance and power. Starbucks sells community. Disney sells family. Coca-cola sells happiness ("Open happiness.")

After several months in the village I needed to fly into the main town to restock and brought one of my New Guinea brothers with me. I felt indebted to him for all of his help and support so I offered to buy him some new clothes.

He did not look for brand names. He did not speak that language of brands. He did not look for something unique that could make him stand out. After nearly an hour of careful shopping, he finally found what he wanted: a 12-pack of blank soccer jerseys. I asked him why he wanted those, and he explained that he could wear one and hide the others, rotating them into his wardrobe. In this way he could appear to wear the same shirt, day after day, for years. Nobody would know he has so many shirts, so they could not ask him for one. And he would appear to be just an ordinary humble villager with just one shirt, which he has worn for years and years.

MAKING "LOVE"

A BBC reporter approaches some Massai teenage boys and asks directly, "What does love mean to you?" The boys laugh shyly and one of them rocks back and forth uncomfortably with a broad smile on his face. "That's a real challenge!" one exclaims and asks his friend to answer, who just giggles and turns away.

The reporter is curious what love means in a culture like the Massai where polygyny, one man marrying more than one woman, is common. "When you do get married, are you going to take more than one wife or just one?" she asks. One boy answers matter-of-factly, "I will take one or two but no more than two."

She is taken aback by the nonchalance of his answer. She counters by joking with him, saying if he only takes one he could have her, but she would never be involved in a polygynous marriage. "But the work would be very hard for just one wife," the man explains. "You would have to look after the cows, goats, water and firewood – all on your own!"

One of the Massai women wants to show the reporter that polygamy is actually good for them, and takes her to see the most senior wife of a polygynous family. "Don't you get jealous of the other wives?" the reporter asks. "No, no. Never." "Do you argue?" "No ... we're friends. We never fight. We are all the same age. We tell stories. We have fun."

Marriage practices around the world are especially mystifying for people in the West. Love may be our biggest concern and our strongest value, so when we find cultures that practice arranged marriage or something other than the union of two people, we find it especially strange. But if we look at all humans through all time, it is our ideas about love that are strange.

Over 80 percent of all cultures worldwide practice polygyny (one man married to more than one woman) and a handful of others practice polyandry (one woman married to more than one man).

As hinted at by the response from the Massai teen that the work of a household would be very difficult for just one woman, the common reasons given for why these forms of marriage often come down to practicality. There is no mention of love.

Many cultures do not even allow individuals to choose who they marry. Parents and other family members work together to arrange the marriage.

In all of these examples, it is not that love is absent or impossible, but it is not the primary basis upon which marriages are formed. In a recent survey, 76% of Indians said they would marry someone if they had the right qualities, even if they were not in love. Only 14% of Americans would do so.

Why not? Why is love so important to a marriage for people in America yet plays a much more minor role in some other cultures? How are these two very different realities "realized"?

Love marriage was once uncommon in the West as well. As for most of human history, marriages were more about uniting for practical and economic purposes rather than for love. Arranged marriages have been especially common when a transfer of wealth is at stake. When the wealth of an entire extended family is on the line, everybody in the extended family has a vested interest in the union.

Therefore, it was not until the industrial revolution and the broad cultural changes that came with it that love marriage became the norm. With the industrial revolution individuals were no longer tied to land held in the family name. They became more mobile and less dependent on family and community for survival. People started orienting their lives more toward the market and the state.

This increased individualism had two competing effects. On the one hand it gave people more freedom. They became accustomed to making individual choices every moment of the day. But this freedom came with a cost. As they had more and more choices about what to buy, what to do, and how to act they were also increasingly troubled with the question of whether or not they were choosing the right thing to buy, the right thing to do, or the right way to act. They came to suffer from a sense of what Emile Durkheim called anomie, a

condition in which society provides little guidance and leaves people feeling lost and disconnected.

Feeling empowered by the power to choose, yet feeling lost and disconnected, romantic love marriage seems to be the perfect solution. We go searching for "the one" who can make us "feel whole" that "completes us." This is the key to understanding just how different we are from those Massai teens. They live in small tight-knit communities full of tight bonds to family and friends. They do not need more intimacy. They have enough of it already. We, on the other hand, often feel alone, lost, and insecure. We crave intimacy. We crave a sense of validation. And we find that through love.

THE MAKING OF MEN AND WOMEN

In the toy section of a store you are likely to find an aisle of soft "girly" colors like pink and purple populated with dolls and playhouses. The next aisle has colder colors and sharper edges with guns and cars. We start making "men" and "women" from a very young age. By the time we are making the wishlist for our 5th birthday we already take it for granted that there are two distinct categories of children: boys and girls. But a quick review of gender roles and categories around the world demonstrates that our ideas about gender are socially constructed and can exist in very different ways in different cultures.

It is commonly assumed that one is just born male or female, and while it is true that there are important biological differences formed at birth and ongoing differences that emerge throughout life, these are not easily put into a simple binary of male and female. To understand this complexity,

anthropologists are careful to distinguish between sex and gender. Sex refers to an individual's biological traits while gender refers to cultural categories, roles, values, and identities. In short, sex is biological. Gender is cultural.

In India there is a third gender called the Hijra. Hijra are people who were usually born male but live their lives as a third gender, neither male nor female. Some are born intersexed, having both male and female reproductive organs. Texts dating back 4,000 years describe how Hijra were thought to bring luck and fertility.

Several Native American cultures have also traditionally recognized a third gender and sometimes ascribed special curing powers to them.

The Bugis on the island of Sulawesi recognize five genders. What we call "transgendered men" or "transgendered women" have a ready and identifiable role and place in their society. Bissu is yet another gender category among the Bissu of androgynous shamans. They are not merely thought to be gender neutral or non-binary. A better translation is that they are "gender transcendent." They are thought to have special connections to the hidden world of "batin." The Bugis believe that all five genders must live in harmony.

These more complex systems that move beyond the simple binary of male and female may be better suited for the realities of human variation. Over 70 million people worldwide are intersexed. They have chromosomes, reproductive organs, or genitalia that are not exclusively male or female. In societies where such variations are not accepted these individuals are often put through painful gender assignment surgeries that can cause psychological troubles later on if their inner identity fails to match with the identity others ascribe to them based on their biology.

Ideas about gender play a major role in society and heavily influence an individual's ideas and ideals about what is right, proper, or possible given their gender. Linguistic anthropologist Deborah Tannen points out that boys and girls are raised so differently and acquire such different ideals and values that key miscommunications arise that wreak havoc on our relationships.

Tannen brought in pairs of girls and pairs of boys of different ages and observed how they talked to one another. She noticed that from a very early age, girls and boys were being taught to speak and act very differently. Five year old girls leaned into each other as they talked while five year old boys were generally uncomfortable just sitting and talking at all. They would not look at each other and sat looking away from each other. This basic pattern is even more pronounced as the kids get older. By age 15, the boys will almost never look at one another.

But it was not just the interaction style, but also the content that struck her. Because there she found the roots of what she identified as "genderlects." Just as there are different "dialects" of a language, she suggested that there were also different genderlects, and that oftentimes we misunderstand each other by not recognizing the different communication patterns learned by boys and girls as they are made into men and women.

For example, from a very young age boys tend to compete for status rather than strive for connection. For example, Tannen shares a recording of young boys talking about how high they can throw a ball and contrasts this with two girls trying to find similarities between them that they can connect on. Later in life, when a woman tries to talk to a man in this same way as a way of building intimacy, he might see it as a

threat to his independence. She may seek to build connection, but he will perceive her statements in terms of the status games he has grown up playing.

Because women are socialized to nurture intimacy and connection, they may seem to use indirect communication. For example, a woman might say to a man as they are driving down the road and passing an ice cream shop, "Do you want some ice cream?" He says, "No," and keeps driving. What she really meant was, "I want some ice cream but I want us both to want ice cream and want to assess just how much you might want some ice cream so we can decide together whether or not we are going to stop for ice cream." As Tannen notes, women tend to be better at using and understanding metamessages, the messages that can be inferred from or implied by the message.

One of the biggest disagreements that can emerge out of these different communication styles comes at the end of a long work day. A woman might come home and start talking about all the problems she faced that day. She is trying to build intimacy and connection by sharing what she has been through. She is building rapport. But the man hears a report. He hears problems that need solved and he offers solutions. As he offers solutions she feels like he is not understanding what she has been through. He seems to be saying they are not real problems at all, that they are easily solved.

What can we do about these disagreements? Tannen's solution is to "meta-communicate." We have to look beyond what is said and explore our underlying assumptions, make them visible to ourselves and our partners, and work toward better understanding.

Tannen's realization of the "real-ization" of gender-specific communication patterns is a powerful example of how this insight can change our everyday lives. By realizing that

much of what we say and do has been made real by our beliefs, behaviors and structures, we can move beyond our biases and assumptions, see other people's points of view, and move toward a better understanding of one another.

Challenge Six:
Get Uncomfortable

Your challenge is to do at least one hour of fieldwork, immersing yourself in a cross-cultural or sub-cultural experience – a place, event, activity that makes you uncomfortable. After exploring the differences you encounter, try to come to a realization about how your reality is real-ized.

Step 1: Go to a place, event, or activity that makes you uncomfortable Stretch yourself to experience a different cultural or subcultural reality. For example, if you are atheist, go to church. If you are Christian, go to a Buddhist retreat. In short, do something you would probably never otherwise do and open yourself up to the experience.

Step 2: Identify one of your beliefs, assumptions, tastes, ideals, or anything else that seemed "common sense" to you before this experience that you now see is not so common. that is actually culturally constructed. (e.g. gender roles, racial prejudices, assumptions about disabilities, etc.)

Step 3. Use the triad of real-ization to describe how this reality (your taste, belief, assumption, or value that you thought was common sense) is culturally constructed and continuously real-ized. What behaviors (practices, routines, habits and actions) and structures (institutions, rules, aspects of social organization) perpetuate the belief or assumption?

Go to ANTH101.com/challenge6 for additional tips and information.