OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

TRANSCRIPT

"TALKING NONSENSE (AND BENEFITING FROM IT): A CONVERSATION WITH JAMIE HOLMES"

A conversation with Jamie Holmes and Leonard Benardo

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ANNOUNCER:

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LEONARD BENARDO:

It's-- it's great to be here with Jamie Holmes. This is being-- co-presented with the-- the information program of the Open Society Foundations. Darius Cuplinskas is here from the London office with us. I'm Lenny Benardo with the fellowship program and with the Eurasia program.

It's-- it's-- it's a great pleasure to be-- with Jamie because-- and-- and-- and hi to our London-- our D.C. office. Because I feel that the work that we do at the Open Society Foundations is so vested with-- with certainty, and rationality, and-- and putative clarity and coherence where means, ends sort of line up with one another.

And I think that what-- what Jamie has done quite-- thoughtfully and prodigiously in-- in his book-- *Nonsense*, which came out in October, is to show very much the-- the advantages of the-- the sort of sometimes paradoxes within notions of-- of ambiguity, and uncertainty, and ambivalence, which I think is-- something quite significant for our own thinking at the Open Society Foundations. I will also say that one of the people that blurbed your book that will, again, be here in a moment-- Cass Sunstein-- he did blurb it?

JAMIE HOLMES:

He did. Is he gonna be here in a moment?

LEONARD BENARDO:

No, Cass won't be here unfortunately. But the book will be. (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Hopefully that Herb Sturz will bring down. But, you know, s-- Sunstein has this now-- rather dated but I think that the-- the-- the point holds us thesis-- about-- advocacy organizations and the need for a degree of uniformity in thinking and the need-- a sort of rational approach in which people sign onto a set of arguments, or prescriptions, points of view, and the like.

And for Sunstein-- it's-- it was quite-- quite important for people to achieve a degree of consensus and sort of-- or even intellectual uniformity in order to-- advance particular goals and objectives, which is in many ways the inverse of the tack taken at the Open Society Foundations-- at the Open Society Fellowship at the Open Society Foundations, which is that the-- the-- the degree of ambivalence and sometimes contrarianism-- is-- is quite significant and important to-- pushing-- whether it's an advocacy goal or-- or-- or-- a programmatic objective.

That in fact consensus, or uniformity, or-- or degree of clarity, or-- or-- or just non-ambiguity is important to-- to-- to push advocacy objectives. And-- so I think that in many ways, your book-- can tell us a lot about who we are and what we do. And so what I'm gonna do is have Jamie give-- an overview of his thinking on nonsense and how we make sense of it-- and then just begin a discussion on what we can as an institution learn from-- from his framing.

So as you saw in the bio, Jamie is a current Future Tense Fellow at the New America Foundation, where he's also worked. His book came out in October. He's now working now on a magazine piece on randomized control trials, which is something else that I think a lot of people here-- have interest in from various fronts. Maybe-- I wasn't supposed to say that.

JAMIE HOLMES:

No, that's fine.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. So-- (LAUGHTER) so Jamie, over to you.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Thank you so much, Lenny. And-- thank you all for coming. Thank you, D.C. I'm sorry for having notes. I spent the last month-- emptying my head of *Nonsense*. So I've had to refresh my-- my memory a little bit. But-- so in a very academic fashion, I'll just start with-- definitions.

The book is about the psychology of ambiguity. And I define ambiguity as anything that's unclear. So information is missing, contradictory, or complex. And then uncertainty is the mind state-- of encountering ambiguity. So we feel uncertain. And various disciplines define those two words differently to be clear on the-- on the-- up front.

The history of the study of the psychology of ambiguity really begins after World War II. There was a Nazi psychologist named Erich Jaensch. And he wrote this book in 1938. It was called *The Anti-t-- Antitype* (PH)-- *Der Gegentypus*. And he-- he said that-- "The tolerance of ambiguity is what characterizes-- the unhealthy mind.

"And the healthy mind is really characterized by certainty, and clarity, and so forth." So psychologists after World War II were trying to figure out, you know, the psychology of this horrid, horrible event. And so out of that and reversing J-- Jaensch-- Jaensch-- comes Else Frenkel-Brunswik, who was a psychologist in California and, of course, Adorno.

And she had a scale which was gonna measure the intolerance of ambiguity. And she suggested that actually the intolerance of ambiguity is what characterized-- the unhealthy mind. And, of course, in-- Adorno's-- in *The Authoritarian Personality*, which she was a co-author on, they actually have a scale called the F Scale, which stand for-- stood for fascist.

Out of that comes a series of competing scales. And the central concept of the book is one of these scales. It's called the Need for Closure Scale. I think it's the best one. There are others. And I list them all in the-- in the endnotes. It was developed by a social psychologist named Arie Kruglanski.

He was at the University of Maryland. He developed it in the '80s. And then the scale comes out in 1993. And Kruglanski's view is-- a little different than Adorno's and-- and of other scales. He said, "Let's-- instead of pathologizing-- this need for clarity, this need for certainty-- what if it's s-- something very deeply rooted in the human-- human psychology, and that in certain contexts when we're under pressure it becomes raised, and that one of the results of that could be stereotyping and-- and-- and these negative effects stem from that?"

So that's his theory. He defines-- need for closure as a desire for a definite answer on some topic, any answer as opposed to confusion and ambiguity. And he says this

comes from our need to manage complexity and our need to act in the world. There is a great quote by a psychologist named Jordan Peterson.

And he says-- "The need to manage complexity looms above all other psychological concerns." And Kruglanski likewise says, "If we didn't have a mechanism to close our mind--" really, this is about open and close-mindedness-- "we would never act." So there has to be something that's pushing us to resolve contradictions-- in order to act. And that's the need for closure.

I-- I listed just some-- examples of the scale so you all can get a feel for what it measures. It's a self-report measure. It was usually-- it was-- originally 42 questions. There's a 15-question version of it. I have five-- five of these questions. If you want to rate yourself on it, it's-- a scale from one to six.

One is-- strongly disagree. And six is strongly agree. So there's five of these. "I feel comfortable when I don't understand why an event occurred in my life." "I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways." "I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it."

"When I have made a decision, I feel relieved." "I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more." So five questions. Six-point scale. The lowest possible score is five in this mini version, unscientific version. And the highest is 30. If you have-- a low need for closure, five to 16-- here is the-- kind of the attributes that are associated with that.

When you're thinking over a problem, you try to consider as many sides of an issue as possible. You don't mind being wrong as much as most people do. You're more likely to change your mind. In social conflicts, you often see both sides' grievances as partially justified. You-- you like trying new things out.

And-- you make a great negotiator. You're well suited for-- for dealing with a changing business environment. This is kind of the fun version. I'll give you the s-- a little more serious version-- in a second. If you have a high need for closure, you make decisions quickly.

You believe that having clear rules and order at work is essential to success. You s-- may stick to familiar friends. Ultimately, the way to think of a high need for closure is that it's not always bad, but it means you're more quickly-- likely to jump to-- a viewpoint. If it's a viewpoint you agree with, that could be great.

But it really is describing how quickly you're trying to get out of a contradiction, or-- or an uncertainty, or an ambiguity. What I find really interesting about the need for closure is that it's not just a static personality trait. So it began as a investigation of an individual personality variable.

And then they started to test the situational factors which affect it. So it turns out that we become less comfortable with ambiguity when we are rushed, there's a time limit, when we're bored, when we're tired. Actually, alcohol makes us less-- tolerant of ambiguity. And we're not generally aware of these ebbs and flows.

So what Kruglanski is really describing is, you know, this up and down-- m-- more--

more open minded, more close minded over the course of a day, over the course of a week, a month. And that matters. Because a high need for closure is negatively associated with a number of judgments. Being inflexible in the face of threats, who you decide to trust, whether you admit you're wrong, whether you stereotype.

And it even is related to creativity. A lack of creativity. So a lot of the book is about this construct, about guarding against the high need for closure, strategies to lower your need for closure, and then, as you say, in what ways can ambiguity be used to-- help us be more creative.

So there's two parts of this-- of having a high need for closure. One is urgency. And the other is permanence. And both are about getting out of a contradiction, getting out of a feeling of uncertainty-- more quickly. So there's the-- the linchpin study that Kruglanski did, is he-- he told subjects, "Okay, pretend you're part of a jury.

"You're gonna go in. You're gonna argue with another subject." This was actually a confederate working for him. "And you're gonna debate-- a case." An airline had crashed. It burned some timber in a forest. And the timber company was suing the airliner. Now, Kruglanski made some people feel certain and some people feel uncertain before they went in.

And he did this by giving them expert opinions in fa-- in favor of either the lumber company or the airline company. The trick of the experiment was in some cases they had a noisy printer in the background. Just a slight irritant, a slight stressor. When the printer wasn't there, the pairs agreed at about five minutes.

Didn't really make much of a difference if they were certain or not going in. When the printer was there, it-- it kind of polarized-- how fast it took to agree. So if you were uncertain, you agreed much more quickly with the confederate. About three and a half minutes. If you went in with an idea of who was right or wrong, it took you much longer or you didn't agree.

So about six and a half or seven minutes. So in both cases, you're escaping the feeling of uncertainty that's caused by this debate. In one case, it's by deference. In the other case, it's by-- it's by denial. What I find really interesting is how subtle-- some of these stressors can be, that you can think of being bored, or rushed, or being tired as a mental conflict, right?

"I have to do something, but I'm tired." That's a mental conflict. "I'm bored, but you're making me, you know, judge something." But they can be actually really, really subtle. So there's some very cool experiments that show how sensitive we are to nonsense, or contradictions, or anomalies.

In one study, they flashed these words on the stream (SIC)-- on a screen, "Turn frog, quickly blueberry." These are nonsense phrase. After seeing these, people expressed their beliefs more strongly. I think in this case, it was they expressed nationalism more strongly than they normally would.

LEONARD BENARDO:

To the blueberry one.

JAMIE HOLMES:

That's right. (LAUGHTER) And they didn't notice it. So these were flashed very quickly. And the-- the reason the psychologists are doing that is because they don't want you to resolve it. They want the contradiction to still be lingering there, which of course many contradictions are alive-- are alive. They do linger.

Reversed playing cards. They-- they played, you know, blackjack or whatever. And they had reverse color cards. And they had-- red spade cards and-- and so forth. Again, people didn't notice. And, again, it made you-- if you believed that-- social inequality was unjust, it made you-- express greater support for affirmative action than you normally would.

I-- I suspect, and I don't argue this explicitly in the book, that this is one of the contributors to political polarization. And you see this a little more explicitly in a series of-- of studies. So last y-- 2014, they did an investment game at a business school. And you had to transfer a certain amount of money to someone else who was playing the game.

They could transfer it back. When you give it to 'em, it triples. So it's a trust game. How much are they gonna send back to you? They said, "Okay, there's two scenarios. In one scenario, you're transferring money to a friend. In another scenario, you are transferring money to a stranger."

When there was-- when the need for closure was-- not elevated, it didn't matter if you-- if-- if a person was a friend or a stranger. When they were under time pressure, it polarized-- how much money they committed. So much more to the friend and much less to-- the stranger. There's a really fun study which I like a lot-- which is-- they-- they made subjects feel a lack of control.

And then they s-- then they saw whether they would express or they did express greater faith in God or Darwin's theory of evolution (LAUGHTER) as long as Darwin's theory was presented as predictable. So this is content free. This is some anomaly and I'm moving towards meaning. I'm trying to reestablish-- in-- order in some way.

It doesn't have to-- be even related to-- you know, the anomaly, what I'm affirming. After being reminded of death-- which is actually the easiest way to get an experimental effect in social psychology, is to remind people of death. It's the ultimate anomaly. People who had authoritarian views were more likely to-- criticize an immigrant than they normally would be than like-minded subjects who hadn't received such a reminder. And the same for liberals.

The positive effects of the immigrant go up. So you get the idea. One psychologist who I interviewed said-- he speculates that these compensatory attempts-- and it's not just affirmat-- there are other-- a few other ways we do this. Compensatory

attempts to reestablish meaning after experiencing some form of-- ambiguity, contradiction, anomaly may account for up to 60% of human behavior.

And at the far end is extremism. So Kruglanski has looked at extremists in Morocco, Northern Ireland, Palestine, and Spain, Sri Lanka. And he found that there's two attributes that define them. One is-- that this gave them some sense of purpose. And-- but the other was a high need for closure and shutting out anything that contradicted them.

In group settings, as in an organization, it becomes even harder to stick up for ambiguity. Intuitively, that makes sense. (UNINTEL) it's harder to say, "I don't know," when you're in a group. But in group settings when they've done experiments on this and they raise people's need for closure or they put them under pressure in some way, group members who deviate from the consensus are more quickly marginalized.

There was an experiment in 2003. Groups under a high need for closure adopt more dictorial (SIC) decision-making styles. They favor autocratic leaders who tend to dominate the discussion. So in organizations that deal with a lot of ambiguity like, let's say, intelligence analysis, you really wanna isolate people who are comfortable with ambiguity who are gonna be flexible, who are not gonna adopt to conclusions, who are gonna be able to change their minds.

Okay. So I'll pivot from kind of protecting against the pitfalls of-- ambiguity under a high need for closure and say, "When can it be useful? With and do we like it?" The first answer is, unsurprisingly, it depends on the context. So the ambiguity of whether or not I might get fired is just much more threatening than the ambiguity that I might see at MoMA. You know, at MoMA, it's-- I don't have to act. So--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Museum of Modern Art.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Museum of Modern Art. So a contemporary art museum. I don't have to act. There's no consequences. I don't have to evaluate anything. So if you think of all the contexts where we really enjoy ambiguity, they're-- they're all safe, low need for closure contexts for most of them. Poetry. Detective stories. Crossword puzzles.

The way I think about it, and it's borrowed from-- psychologists Tim Wilson and Dan Gilbert, is that uncertainty-- the mind state of uncertainty amplifies the emotions of whatever it is we're thinking about. So-- s-- cool studies on this very quickly. It's more pleasurable to think you're gonna-- to not be sure that you're gonna get one gift or two gifts than it is to know you're gonna get two gifts for sure.

Same is true in romance in-- in an experimental context. It was more exciting for people to be unsure whether someone liked them-- a moderate amount or a lot than

to know for sure that the person liked them a lot. It shows you that we're just trying to resolve. And if it's pleasurable, it's amplifying that pleasure.

But even when ambiguity is jarring, initially jarring, or unpleasant, or under a high need for-- you know, it's threatening, it can still be-- fuel for creativity. And one of the fundamental sources of creativity, if not the-- isolated by psychologists is called diversifying experiences.

That's a term used by the psychologist-- Dean Simonton. He's at University of California at Davis. And this is defined as an experience which pushes people outside of the realm of normalty (SIC), helps them see the world in multiple ways. And that aids cognitive flexibility necessary for coming up with creative ideas.

What are these diversifying experiences? A lot of them are multicultural experiences. So living abroad for a period, being exposed to multiple cultures, identifying with two cultures at once. One study found that-- a recent study found that people who identify with two cultures simultaneously-- have been shown to be more creative, more innovative, more professionally successful.

Having students just remember a time they lived abroad actually made them-- better creative problem solvers. I don't know if anyone knows the-- well, maybe I'll bring it up in-- in a question. It's a very particular-- functional fixedness. This is-- anyway, it's a particular-- in inventing, we-- we fixate on-- on a c-- on a certain function of an object.

So the-- the classic example is, you know, people come into-- and I'm blanking on the-- on the psychologist who ran it. And he's very famous. You-- you come in and you see a box of tacks and candles. And you're supposed to-- put the candle on the wall and light it so that the wax doesn't drip on the floor.

And because the tacks are in the box, you don't understand that you can pour the tacks out, and pin the box to the wall, and put the candle in it. So we're associating-- we're-- we're thinking of box of tacks as one object. So that's functional fixedness. And just-- the reason I-- I bring it up quickly is just thinking about having spent time abroad, lived abroad made people better at solving that problem, which I think is remarkable.

Pairs of two-- on problem solving, Karl Dunck-- Duncker. 1925. Pairs of two who work more creatively together when both had high levels of multicultural experiences. Exposing people to American and Chinese cultures in one study made people more creative seven days later. And that was explained by a higher comfort with ambiguity.

One researcher who's worked on a lot of this is Adam Galinsky. I'm almost finished. He's a social psychologist at Columbia. They did a great study last year where they looked at 11 years of fashion brands and they looked at the top executives and whether the executives had traveled abroad more.

And the more they had traveled abroad, the more creative their fashion lines were. There was an interesting caveat-- which is that it depended on the cultural distance of the country they were living in. So-- if-- if the cultural distance was too far, that it

was t-- you know, it's like a soldier who's going to Iraq.

It's just too far. You don't immerse yourself in the culture. And, of course, if it's-- if it's too close, it's not different. It's not ambiguous. It's not stimulating your imagination. And actually, there was a *New York Times* article recently that showed that-- heterogeneous groups were better at-- pricing hypothetical stocks.

Diversity makes you brighter. That was a fun-- piece. You see this historically, too. Simonton has actually looked at-- the history of-- Japan t-- in 20-year intervals. And he measured outside influences, how many immigrants, how much travel abroad, whether natives were influenced by outsiders.

And 40 years later, that was related to much higher creative outputs. So this is, you know, the idea that periods of artistic production-- like New York City in the 1970's, occur during eras of social turmoil. You may think of-- Orson Welles' line in *The Third Man*, that-- Switzerland had brotherly love for 500 years and they made the cuckoo clock.

And in Italy, you had the Borgias, and warfare, and terror, but they had Michelangelo, and-- and Da Vinci. So is there a set of rules by which uncertainty leads to creativity rather than dogmatism? I think it leads to both. Obviously, it's a personal-- a personal-- personality issue or-- a choice in some sense.

There is one interesting answer which is not in the book but I would-- I thought I would end with, which is in this great book by Ben Goertzel. He's the son of a family who wrote *300 Eminent Personalities*. This was a stud-- they took 300 famous people, famous scientists, famous artists and they tried to find what the common threads were.

And they found two. One is that they-- among artists and scientists, these famous artists and scientists, they develop a habit of carrying out some creative activity early on. And then, two, which is-- the punch line, is they have an emotional or situational need to withdraw from the world into their own universe.

So I think that one of the-- you know, creativity is a spillover effect, just like dogmatism is a spillover effect of uncertainty. And when-- uncertainty-- these-- kind of extra energy from contradictions and uncertainty don't find social expression for people who are loners-- they may go home and-- or they go to the laboratory and do a science experiment, or go home and-- and paint, or whatever their their outlet is.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Excellent. Jamie, thank you very much. Maybe I could just sort of kick things off with a few questions. And then it would be wonderful to hear from our colleagues about ways in which ambiguity would be useful to our work here. Because when you're dealing with sort of high stakes human rights issues, people's lives are at stake-- can ambiguity at any point actually be useful?

Or is it just-- is the-- the idea of even thinking about contradiction or anomalies

ultimately putting people-- people at-- at-- at risk? But I just wanna throw out a few th-- few things. First, how American is all this work? I think the-- from what I heard, only the non-American there was, like, maybe the Nazi in the beginning.

So I'm (LAUGHTER) wondering to what extent you feel a lot of the ideas generated in your research might be considered to be very much a product of if not America then a kinda broader sort of global north or-- or-- or western-- mindset or-- or or not? Or if you feel there's something more universalist about it.

And the other thing I wondered. In the book you talk-- you-- you sort of mention the Fukuyama example who, you know, wrote that famous piece in the late '80s on the so-called end of history and the problems with teleology, the problems with having some kind of preordained end point.

You know, we face that problem here. Because for us, the telos point is open society. And while we accept that there are bumps along the way-- how could we not at this point? There still is ultimately a kind of-- a linearity and an intolerance for forms of ambiguity that stand in the way.

So I'm just wondering at a broad level, and then we can get into-- more-- specific examples, what would you tell an institution like the Open Society Foundations that does have a framework that has a direction to it, and a purpose to it, and an intolerance for things that might stand in its path how we might potentially think differently or be open to forms of contradiction (UNINTEL)?

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah, I think one of the-- so-- to your first question-- the need for closure is a content-free construct. So Kruglanski has measured various cultural differences. There are some. They're not-- extensive. You know, because it's so closely tied to our need to manage complexity, it's universal.

There are cultures who-- that are more comfortable with ambiguity. But the way I think of it is that's where they end. You know, in the same way that you decide not to decide, you kind of-- you stop there. It-- it still means you're closing your mind. You know, you're just-- you're ending with a formulation that may be more ambiguous.

So I think it's-- and Kruglanski would say that this is universal and the ideas in the book are universal. And he's now testing various countries. He has some preliminary data back on-- on Italy and Belgium. And they're not extensive differences-- culturally.

In terms of how does a culture, you know, do better at dealing with ambiguity-- I get the question a lot, and I got it a lot when I was promoting the book, is, you know, "What-- what do I do? How do we fix this?" The more I learn about psychology, the more hesitant I am to-- to put into a to-do list.

But I have some answers. One thing is that there are certain jobs in which-- you wanna have people who are good at dealing with ambiguity. I would guess at an

organization like this, it's because of the intercultural-- aspect it's important. Negotiators, diplomats, intelligence analysts, entrepreneurs, I think politicians.

There was-- a medical researcher who said we should put it on the MCAT because-- a lot of medical decisions involve handling ambiguity. The way that psychologists lower people's-- need for closure and make them better at dealing with it is by reminding them of the consequences.

So they say right before they're about to make a decision-- "You're gonna be accountable some way for this decision," or, "I'm gonna compare your decision to an expert's decision," or, "You know, your decision is gonna affect someone's life. So you better think carefully about it."

So you could find ways to build those kinds of reminders into your decision-making process. The main thing that I take away from it is it's not a single decision point. So it's not like you're-- you're facing ambiguity once. You're facing it a lot. And that what you wanna do is remain flexible.

You wanna be able to change your mind. I think there's a s-- there's a paradox where-- and I touched on this a little. Where in times of ambiguity, especially when something is changing very quickly, we have a strange preference or this natural preference for certainty. So I think this came up after-- 9/11.

You-- we could explain Donald Trump some-- in some way according to this logic. And so at the very times-- you know, sometimes it's a threat. But sometimes it's because things are changing very quickly. So in that context, you want a leader who's calm, who's willing to change their mind, who's gonna be flexible, and who's gonna, you know, not just s-- stick to one decision. And yet the impulse that we have is to look for leaders who have certainty, which in that context is gonna be false certainty. So--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Could you-- could you ever imagine in that case a politician being at-- a political debate, hearing someone's argument, national TV, saying, "I never thought of it that way. I-- I actually agree with that"? (LAUGHTER) Could that-- I mean-- I mean, I'm just-- it's hard with politicians. But just the last thing I just wanna say.

Speaking of MoMA, I-- I-- I remember going to an exhibit with my wife of Mark-- Mark Rothko, who's a prominent American modernist at-- at-- at MoMA in which they sort of totally subverted the-- the linearity of his art. So instead of, like, fini-- he committed suicide in 1970. And so, like, his last sort of triptych paintings were deeply dark, and, you know, morose, and very painful to look at.

Beautiful. Very painful. But everyone-- you know, you make this argument about people's late style. Well, of course, those Rothko th-- and so what they ended up doing in MoMA, which is rare for MoMA 'cause it's not a very radical institution, but they completely flipped around the-- the-- the periodicity so that, you know, you had

sort of late Rothko in the beginning and the like.

David Bowie we've been thinking a lot about recently. Bowie, of course, who died two days ago, 69, you know, w-- we look at his last record now as-- because we-- because we think in this teleological, "Of course it's his late style. He's dead. He's dead." You know, how-- how does one-- post-structuralist I thought, one of the great advantages of-- of that-- that period was really flipping around narrative and forcing us to recognize that, you know, one's late style should not be seen as somehow-- you don't wanna reify it.

That-- that-- that people's styles are constantly moving, and changing, and fluctuating. And having a s-- you know-- a simple kind of-- you know, beginning, middle, and end is-- is sometimes-- corrosive to-- to-- to really understanding the life cycle of-- of-- of an object, or a person, or a movement, or a theme. That we need to be much more comfortable in that. I mean, I'm just curious. Your--

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah, I completely agree with that-- y-- th-- in terms of the political comment. We-- we have made-- changing your mind kind of-- it can't be a good thing. It's like, "Oh, you're-- you know, you're supposed to know beforehand." And so when a politician changes their mind, they're-- that's--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Flip-flop.

JAMIE HOLMES:

It's flip-flopping. Okay. Well, what if it's flexibility? I think linear progress narratives are very dangerous and misleading. You see 'em in science a lot. The idea that-- and it's almost a way in which we like to elevate the present moment over the past. So, like, we're-- you know, look at-- look at-- we've-- look at what we've done.

Look what science has given us. And I think the-- there is an overemphasis on quantitative methods, which is part of that. And-- and what is being painted is-- is a linear narrative in which we are moving towards quantification of everything. And that's gonna lead people to ignore the other methods, that people are-- and also past thinkers.

You know, one of the reasons why I end the book with Chekov (PH) is I'm partly protesting the idea that, like, all good ideas are new. Well, it looks like he had that idea quite a long time ago. And he expressed it in a short story. We didn't need an experiment for it. Now, these things can be complementary. And in the book, they are. But-- yeah, so--

LEONARD BENARDO:

That Chekov, that was nice.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Oh, thank you.

LEONARD BENARDO:

That was nice. (LAUGHTER)

JAMIE HOLMES:

He's my hero.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yeah, and I love Chekov, too. Okay, so let's just open it up to everyone, Washington, and-- and-- and New York, Minsk.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I just wanna confirm that everyone knows Mark Rothko is from Belarus originally.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Oh, that's right. (LAUGHTER) Tawny (PH) is from Belarus. Wait a second. No.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

No, he's not--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Mark Rothko's not from Belarus--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

He's from-- he's from-- Lithuania. No, he was from Latvia.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

No.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Wait a second. Wait a second. Wait a second. Wait a second. (LAUGHTER)
(OVERTALK)

LEONARD BENARDO:

What's his face? Who's the guy who did the-- the-- the kitchy murals?

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

We'll get to--
(OVERTALK)

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Chagall.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Chagall--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Chagall.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Chagall's from Vitebsk.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Oh, there's only one-- famous artist from Belarus. (LAUGHTER)

LEONARD BENARDO:

All right. Let's-- let's get--
(OVERTALK)

LEONARD BENARDO:

--back on point.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Amy (PH), we'll-- Amy, we'll talk.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Andy Warhol was from Slovakia, right? (UNINTEL PHRASE). (LAUGHTER)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yes, please. Sure.

CHRIS:

So--

LEONARD BENARDO:

This is Chris (PH).

CHRIS:

Chris--
(OVERTALK)

CHRIS:

I guess-- two quick questions. Firstly, I wonder-- you know, are there differences in how this framework or this-- this-- model applies at a individual, organizational, and societal level? 'Cause it seems like as if-- as if you laid out obviously very briefly, you kind of jumped between those.

And I wonder if there are important differences in how that applies at-- at those different levels that one should be aware of that also sort of-- points to different takeaways that one should have when thinking about this at-- at different levels.

Also, I guess I also wonder, you know-- sort of-- a corollary to this notion of how-- individuals, and organizations, and societies also think about ambiguity is how-- what role risk takes-- in-- in that, right? So-- I guess I just wonder and-- and perhaps this is something, you know, in the book and elsewhere you get into more detail.

But, you know, to what degree that discomfort with ambiguity-- also has-- consequences for how decisions are made-- relative to risk. And that's also something I feel like here at Open Society when we're making decisions we're constantly trying to wrestle with. And also how to represent risk to other decision makers-- at different levels within an organization and the tendency to perhaps-- minimize or misrepresent risk either to ourselves or to others.

JAMIE HOLMES:

You're defining risk as a decision where there are known odds?

CHRIS:

Well, I guess there's different levels to that, right? But-- I mean, I-- well, I mean, I guess-- you know, I-- I would say here, I mean, actually we deal oftentimes in situations in which the-- there is uncertainty-- even about the uncertainty to a degree. Yeah, so--

JAMIE HOLMES:

Well, the-- the famous distinction-- between risk-- and that's why I ask about you define it is-- the Ellsberg (PH)-- is Ellsberg experiments-- or thought experiment-- in which-- so he's defining risk as it's a decision where the odds are known. So you have a jar, and you have-- you know, 50 blue balls and 50 red balls, and you know the mix.

Versus a jar where you have 100 and they're some unknown mix. And what he was showing was even though to our knowledge they're identical, we don't like the unknown mix. And in fact, our dislike for the unknown mix-- is irrational and leads us to irrational decisions. So, you know, I think-- I argue-- and I use that example.

And I think a lot of s-- you know, economists will say that this is all rationally calculated. But a lot of the decisions, even if we could find out the precise odds, we don't. And we don't know them. So we're acting as if th-- I think there's a lot of cases in which we're--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Acting as if.

JAMIE HOLMES:

We're acting as if there is more information-- either that is possible to get or that we have at the time. And that's leading to-- to aversion away from those kinds of decisions. In terms of the organizational question, there's a psychologist who looks at it in much more depth, or sociologist I think he is, than I do. Marsh (PH). He's got, like, two or three books on organizational theory and ambiguity.

The only distinction that I look at really in-- in depth in the book is the one I-- I laid out. And-- and it is identical. That is the individual reacts-- you know, the idea is to the individual when the person is thinking about it. The dissonant idea, which is rejected in a group setting, is the dissonant person-- who is marginalized and rejected.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Cool. Yes, please.

KATIE:

Just--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Please introduce yourself.

KATIE:

Sorry. Katie (PH). Public health program. Not OSF related. But-- two s-- comments, questions. The connection of kind of this idea of ambiguity with the growth mindset in Dweck's research. And also-- this sense of ambiguity and decision fatigue. Because in the-- like, this area of ambiguity, you work with contingency plans.

And you're constantly tryin' to come up with decisions that you'd make in different contingencies, in turn leading to decision fatigue which I guess gets-- gets-- I mean, there is a lot of research on how that inhibits in some ways-- you know, or lowers your tolerance to make proper decisions at some point. So-- someh-- somehow work related.

But, you know, in the sense of-- and totally understand the need for some ambiguity. But how do you balance that with decision making fatigue, which in turn can be a consequence of ambiguity because you're constantly thinking of contingency plans in a ambiguous situation of sorts? Sorry. It's a bit of--

JAMIE HOLMES:

No, I'm s-- I'm sorry. I'm just trying to understand-- the--

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. C.D.C.

KATIE:

D.C. (LAUGHTER)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Did you wanna get in on this question, Washington, specifically?

LUCIA:

No, it's another one.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. Is that Lucia (PH)?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Yes.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Oh, hi Lucia. (LAUGHTER)

JAMIE HOLMES:

There-- there is-- there is a paper I will point you to. So there's a paper by Eva Jonas, 2014 in which they explicitly address the relationship of their work on ambiguity and uncertainty to the willpower research. This is Roy Baumeister's work. It's actually how I got interested in-- this topic.

And they argue that-- he has just reframed cognitive dissonance research-- and that one of the problems in psychology is that-- because there is a demand for novelty, you-- you have encouraged people to rename old phenomena. (LAUGHTER) So I would just point you to that paper.

KATIE:

Okay. Sounds good. (LAUGHTER) And on the mindset? Growth mindset.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah, Dweck's work. What-- remind me of what that is. Is she-- is she on-- talk about grit? Or that's (UNINTEL) work--

KATIE:

Yeah. It's connected to grit. Like, the idea that you need to have a growth mindset-- that it's more beneficial to have a growth mindset than a fixed mindset and it's the con--

JAMIE HOLMES:

And what's a growth mindset?

KATIE:

The growth mindset is that you are open to new ideas, and open to ambiguity, and kind of open to a challenge rather than knowing that you want to solve something (UNINTEL).

JAMIE HOLMES:

Right, right. No, op-- there is-- openness to experience. There is a literature on that which is related to (UNINTEL) of ambiguity. And one of the scales in *Need for Closure* is about open-mindedness. But I don't know.

KATIE:

Okay.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. Two Italians here. We'll go to Lucia and then to-- to--

(OVERTALK)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yeah.

LUCIA:

Okay, so hello. I'm Lucia. I'm a Open Society fellow here in the Washington office now. And I am researching on-- something that I call solid organizations in a liquid world. So it's how rights-based groups are adapting to a liquid and more complex society. And-- I-- I have two questions for you.

One of them is about how new do you think this ambiguity is? I mean, it's more visible today that we are a complex and ambiguous world and why or this has always been there? If your book was published 300 years ago, this would be the same? Do we have more access to ambi-- ambiguity t-- today that we used to?

So about-- what's different t-- today and if this difference has something also-- to do with-- talking more about mindfulness, presencing, (UNINTEL), and all this stuff that tries to keep up in this moment and with short-- term answers. And so second question. I think it's more or less what-- Lenny was asking on how do we embrace ambiguity and-- continue to promote values that are like dogmas such as human rights.

Because I feel that every time I try to bring challenges that are questions and not answers on how to do it differently, human rights defenders including me, it's hard to-- to-- fear that by embracing complexity, they are-- they will lose their values.

They will be weaker in promoting values that are non-negotiable, that are principles, that are not subject to any kind of ambiguity. You cannot admit that maybe torture in this case was right, there is an ambiguity there. So how do you-- relate value and--

and ambiguity? Thank you.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Sure. So of-- I think-- of course, it's always been there. There are-- ambiguity's always been, you know, something we-- that we've struggled to deal with. I think that-- the communication platforms that we're using-- has certainly been very disruptive to the business world.

I think socially and culturally the world is a lot smaller-- and there's a lot more contradictory information. So there's a study-- that was done last year on-- they had people read contradictory-- blog posts on vaccine efficacy. And that contradiction polarized people's views, as I was saying. So I think some of the overwhelming-- nature of the internet and-- having culture so close together is responsible for polarization.

You know, in the la-- in the United States, the last 10 years have been the most politically polarized on-- on record. So I would say, you know, the cultural ambiguity-- and-- and the role of technology has exacerbated the problem. In terms of the value question, which is a really interesting question-- 'cause I've thought about it a bit, I almost think that whenever you exit the world of morality and try to accomplish something, that problem comes up.

And I'm not sure how you deal with it. We were talking about Chekov. And he talks about that a lot. And he-- he has actually a wonderful story called-- *An Artist's Life*. And he was-- a philanthropist. You know, so he built schools. And he was tending to the sick. And the *Artist's Life* is all about how-- you could-- it was about a landscape painter who wanted to do nothing but go and paint landscapes.

And I think it was a prof-- profound contradiction or struggle that he s-- that he had his entire life, if that you could be over here and you can have this beautiful idea and this theory. But you c-- you know, that is kind of-- you can't have that same purity when you're trying to do something and you have to compromise.

So, I mean, I don't have a solution to it. I think it's a very interesting tension. And-- I think it's pr-- it's-- it's-- in Obama's presidency as well, you know, he has this-- this kind of writing style, and this-- this rhetoric, and this belief. And then he, of course-- was very compromising and-- and willing to take these small steps. So I-- I don't know if I can resolve that, but it is interesting.

LEONARD BENARDO:

So, yeah, Tirza (PH), and th-- and-- and then Mike (PH).

TIRZA:

Just two short questions. One is-- on the organizational level, can-- are there exercises that one can do to become more-- comfortable with ambiguity? And then the second question-- and maybe it's related but maybe not. Somehow I feel. You said-- you mentioned as one of the-- side effects or-- or-- accompanying traits of-- of living comfortably with ambiguity is being able to s-- to see justification in both sides. And (UNINTEL) if you can say a bit more about that.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah. So in terms of exercises-- I mentioned this-- the way they do it in experiments, which is being very deliberate before you make a decision. There are a few other things which make us more comfortable with ambiguity. One-- that has been shown in experiments. One is reading fiction.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Especially Chekov.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Actually, I think there is a study. (LAUGHTER)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Board-- board reading material, Chekov.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Chekov. (LAUGHTER)

(OVERTALK)

JAMIE HOLMES:

As opposed to--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

(UNINTEL) an organizational level, you're saying that would help?

JAMIE HOLMES:

As opp-- yes.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Start with some--

(OVERTALK)

JAMIE HOLMES:

Well, so-- so, you know, people who read fiction then temporarily have a lower need for closure. Why is that? I think it's because fiction is safe. It's a non-threatening-- activity. And you're entering the mind of other characters. Another thing which has been showed to make us more comfortable with ambiguity is thinking about multicultural experiences and having multicultural experiences.

There was a great 2012 experiment which showed that-- you know, they had people write about the time they lived abroad, friends they'd met from different cultures, diverse musical or culinary experiences. That lowered their need for closure. And similar interventions made them less discriminatory and have-- they had a lower tendency to stereotype.

And both these things, multicultural experiences and reading fiction, make us more empathetic. In terms of how lasting those effects are, I don't know. The-- the fiction-- experiment was-- the effect was stronger for people who were habitual readers. So if you do it a lot-- get into the habit of it. Did you have a second part to the question?

TIRZA:

If you can say a bit more about s-- seeing the justification in-- in both sides. Is that something that you would suggest practicing? Again, I'm talking ab-- on an organization level.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah. You know, a lot of this is about your personal experiences, whether you see both sides. A lot of literature has focused on how you get people to stop stereotyping the out group. And there's a really great study that came out last year from Philipps University in Germany. It's a meta analysis.

And they looked at the effects inter-group contact. So spending time with the out group, whatever that-- you know, so in Arizona, they would have people spend time with immigrants. And it would be an orchestrated meeting. And it would be a

structured inter-group discussion with dialogue.

And so this meta analysis looked-- looked at things like that but also-- virtual contacts with other groups. And it turns out that these are really strong effects, that they really help people see both sides of an issue. It lasts over time. It reduces prejudice. It even works in high-intensity conflict areas.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Is there anything counterintuitive about any of that though? (LAUGHTER)

JAMIE HOLMES:

Probably not. Probably not. No. I mean, I think--

(OVERTALK)

TIRZA:

--counterintuitive is seeing ourselves as maybe not having that kind of-- we-- we-- we--

(OVERTALK)

TIRZA:

--to others, right?

LEONARD BENARDO:

The stuff about very subtle stressors and how-- how easily we're thrown off by things we're not-- not even aware of. I think that's-- that's not--

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah. I mean, I think that-- that-- that it works in high-tensity (SIC) conflict areas-- would surprise me. I think-- how lasting the effects are would surprise me. That it works in all different cultures. Oh, and it also extends to other out groups. So, you know, I'm s-- I'm in ar-- I'm sitting with an immigrant or whatever. I have that positive experience. That makes me more willing and more open minded about other groups, even beyond the group that I was in the-- the intervention with. And there was one other thing I was gonna say, but-- I can't remember.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. Maybe we just-- yeah, Mike.

MIKE:

Yeah. Mike from the scholarship program. I'm curious what the impact of language is, specifically-- high-context versus low-context languages and whether or not that has or culturally that makes a difference in terms of how people deal with am-- ambiguity.

LEONARD BENARDO:

What's a high-- what's a high-context language?

MIKE:

So--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Like Chinese? Or just--

MIKE:

--English would be high context, right? Or a language that wouldn't-- that-- that uses specific-- examples to describe what you're doing to have-- or-- or-- my-- the-- the counter-example is Thai where you don't have-- gender. You don't have-- past, present, future in the same way.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there is some good work. There's-- there's a book-- Kruglanski's best book on this is called *The Psychology of Close Mindedness*. And he does have a section there on cultures which tend to be more comfortable with ambiguity. And it finds expression in language.

Where I fell on that was, "Well, that's just your end point." You know, you're still closing. Are you really exploring if you're just kind of, "Well, it's there"? You know, you decide not to decide. You're kind of-- so I think it's more of a cultural norm as expressed in language, but it doesn't undercut to me-- the need to reduce. Yeah.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yes?

ALEXANDRA:

Hi. Alexandra (PH) from the fellowship program. I have a question also on this cultural aspect. And-- essentially, I'm-- I'm just thinking about-- for example, you're saying this is a universal-- you know, situation. So then when you have, for example, a society, you know, Chinese society, Chinese educational system which is constantly telling people-- they're encouraging-- like, the education system is entirely-- you know, bound up in this idea of, you know, supporting-- decision making and-- and answers and-- and not, you know, wrestling with ambiguity.

Where that-- if it was kind of like nature versus nurture question a little bit. Like, sort of how that factors in. Where if, you know, people are encouraged their entire life to be closed to this am-- ambiguity and to-- increase the sort of, you know, decision making-- their abilities, how-- how-- how you see that.

JAMIE HOLMES:

I mean-- that's what-- I think the-- the most interesting aspect of this is, which I like *The Need for Closure*, is the situational factors which affect it. And part of that is culture. And part of that is-- threat. So I think, you know, the way in which-- I go back to after 9/11.

How was the collective need for closure raised? And how did we react as a group? And what were the consequences of that? There's a great study that showed that people's approval of Bush, you know, went up and down with the color-coded threat warning. But also, the-- Americans' approval of the economy went up and down with the threat-- with the threat warning.

So it was completely unrelated. And it shows that you can-- you can raise-- or-- or things raise our intolerance of ambiguity on a collective level and we have less room for ambiguity in general. And one of the things that-- you know, that can nurture that is-- is that kind of environment.

ALEXANDRA:

So-- but is that then, I mean, the, like, endpoint? Or is there still-- you're saying-- I guess I'm-- I'm wondering, like-- so th-- if that's a particular situation but that situation is ongoing for--

JAMIE HOLMES:

Oh, I see. How long--

(OVERTALK)

JAMIE HOLMES:

How lasting would it be--

ALEXANDRA:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Personality. You know, I don't know. I looked at-- I did ask about how this works over the lifespan. There hasn't been much research on it. (NOT IDENTIFIED) -- there hasn't been anything on that question. But it does turn out that adolescents are more tolerant of ambiguity. And the-- rath-- you know, rather than--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

But you don't want 'em to be 'cause you want 'em to follow rules. (LAUGHTER)

JAMIE HOLMES:

Well, rather than-- you know, the counterpoint is, "Oh, they're just more risk taking. They're wild." You know? And-- and the research that I like on this says, "That's not what happening. They're programmed to be exploring early on." And, yeah, you're gonna-- like, some people will die. But you'll-- (LAUGHTER) you'll figure out the new environment, right? The next generation will figure out the new environment.

(FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: UNINTEL)

JAMIE HOLMES:

And then that hardens. It's-- it's like (UNINTEL)-- fast, cheap, and outta control. What is it?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Yeah. (LAUGHTER)

(FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: UNINTEL)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Any other questions or-- or comments? Stephen. Steve Hubbell from the fellowship--

STEPHEN HUBBELL:

Yeah, Steve Hubbell from the fellowship program. Now that we've-- got some guidelines on how to mitigate the drift or the need for closure in our own lives, much of what we do as an organization is confront entities that-- have raised the need for closure to a kind of institutional-- higher art and overriding priority.

Nationalist organizations-- paramilitary organizations, governments that are closing civil society space. Our default approach or one of them is to-- is to weave narratives that introduce complexity and ambiguity. I think we have-- it's safe to say a mixed experience with-- about whether telling the stories of Roma communities in Eastern Europe has had anything-- has had-- had the positive outcomes that we seek.

In many cases, it may have had the effect of reinforcing some of the closure-seeking behavior that is the origin of the problem in the first place. Is-- so is our-- is our misstep in assuming that these-- our counter-narratives can be the antidote to closure-seeking behavior?

Or is it that we are trying to approach people as individuals when they don't see themselves as having taken an individual decision to seek closure but rather an individual decision to join a group and that group has as one of its unifying, cohesive elements closure seeking? Does that make sense?

JAMIE HOLMES:

Yeah. Yeah.

STEPHEN HUBBELL:

Cool.

JAMIE HOLMES:

I think so. So Kurt Lewin-- who's the father-- one of the fathers of social psychology,

says, "In order for group behavior to change or any-- or some opinion, it has to first become unstable." So a certainty has to pass through uncertainty. And then it, you know, re-hardens as something else.

I think that's one of the reasons why narratives, and arts, and film can change people's minds. Because it's unthreatening. And it draws you into a narrative. And it almost surprises you into changing your mind. I don't know how exactly this is done at a pro-- programmatic level.

But one of the things that could keep that from happening is if the message is perceived as coming from an out group or is perceived as threatening in other w-- in-- in any way. You know, you-- so I think the-- the concept I think is right. But it has to be delivered in a way which is probably, you know, from an in-group member in a nonthreatening way. And I don't know if that's-- that's what I'd say.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Any other-- questions or comments? I'll just--

MARTHA LOERKE:

Hello.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yes. Someone on the--

(OVERTALK)

LEONARD BENARDO:

Yes.

MARTHA LOERKE:

Yes. Hi. Len, this is Martha.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Oh, hi Martha.

MARTHA LOERKE:

Hi Lenny. Hi everybody else. I-- I-- I had-- a couple of questions, Jamie. I'm-- I'm Martha Loerke. I'm the director of the scholarship programs at OSF. And so, of course, I was delighted to hear such a strong for multicultural experiences.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Thank you, Martha.

MARTHA LOERKE:

The-- the-- the selection process is rife with ambiguities. But at least perhaps we can be certain or confident that the experience itself-- is-- is a positive benefit, which-- (UNINTEL) perspective. Anyway-- my-- my question is: Has there been any-- disaggregation of the type of contexts-- within which an individual is more or less comfortable with ambiguity?

And if there has, it seems to me that that could be then quite a useful tool getting back to Lenny's earlier point of how do we use this-- this concept-- (UNINTEL) a great management tool then if you can with staff. Sort of help people-- or help understand as a manager-- when people on your team are gonna, you know-- tend to be more dogmatic or not or when they're gonna be more comfortable with-- your own level of-- of ambiguity.

And I just wonder has that type of analysis been done for the-- contextual differences for-- comfort levels with ambiguity. And my second question is not really a question but just something that I-- am I would say highly ambiguous and uncertain about.

Does this have implications for how we conduct evaluation or impact assessment of our work? And I-- it's a poorly formed question 'cause I can't even get at it, but I think there's something here-- particularly in the world of individual grant giving-- when the outcomes are-- are so un-- you know, so ambiguous.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Right.

MARTHA LOERKE:

Thanks.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Sure. So I touched on a little earlier some of the contextual things that make people-- less able to deal with ambiguity. If you're rushed. If you're stressed. If you're tired. So if you're on deadline, that's gonna be a time where people are gonna be thinking more rigidly.

And then in a group setting-- again, if you have a person in that group who is-- you know, who tends to be more certain and more dogmatic, they can kind of-- you know, this is-- again, is-- isn't this obvious? They can bully the person off, you know, engaging with ambiguity and being more flexible.

One of the-- one of the reasons why in negotiations what they're doing now out in-- where is it? Montana? With this group who's-- they're-- they-- you know, ev-- they're letting them even come and go from the ranch. It's like, "Please go buy soda and chips and come back."

And the reason they're doing that is because they found out that that's what works. Lower the need for closure. Don't dress up in uniforms, let them come and go, and wait them out. And they learned that from the opposite tactics not working, which was WACO and r-- and Ruby Ridge.

So-- I would say protect people who are-- who have to deal with ambiguity, and who are exploring it, and who remain flexible from those other group members. To your evaluation question-- it's a really interesting question. It's actually something I'm working on now-- separately.

I would look into the literature co-- on construct validity. And it's really about how when you're doing evaluations you know you're measuring what you wanna measure. So as a f-- a funny of example of that-- an evaluator who was former president of the American Evaluation Association told me-- there's a study where they're de-institutionalizing people-- coming out of-- a mental health facility and putting them back.

You know, reintroducing them into society. And he said, "Okay, well, we're gonna give people jobs. And we're gonna give them a mobile health worker." And they-- they polled people as to how well they thought they would do. And everyone thought it would be great. And it turned out the predictions were highly correlated with how people actually did but they were negative.

And they looked at why this could be. And they looked at the qualitative notes. And the qualitative notes were that people hated their jobs. So they gave them really crummy jobs. So it-- it shows that you can't think of, "Give person a job," in a abstract sense.

I think a lot of evaluation-- problems in evaluation, especially in-- social policy, come from measures that are-- that haven't been thought through well enough or that hard to measure. Some are much harder to measure than others. So I think it's a major-- it's a major issue. It's really an interesting question.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Thank you, Martha--

MARTHA LOERKE:

Yeah. My-- my-- my-- just very quickly, my-- my question on different contexts was not about situational contexts but if there was a difference in-- so I can feel ambiguous and comfortable with ambiguity with certain content. But in other content areas, like as somebody else was talking about when your-- when your values get challenged, where you might tend towards more dogmatism and other types of content or challenges might allow you to be a lot more flexible.

JAMIE HOLMES:

That's really interesting. Yeah, I'm sure-- I'm sure those exist. I'm not aware of-- I'm not aware of that research. But you must be right.

MARTHA LOERKE:

Okay. Yeah. Thanks.

JAMIE HOLMES:

Sure.

LEONARD BENARDO:

Okay. Well, I-- I-- I thank you so much, Jamie--

JAMIE HOLMES:

Thank you, Lenny.

LEONARD BENARDO:

--for all your-- words of wisdom and-- and-- and your really fine book. And congratulations on it. *Nonsense*. (LAUGHTER) And-- and thank you all very much. Darius, thank you for co-hosting this.

(FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: UNINTEL)

LEONARD BENARDO:

We (LAUGHTER) have to do this again. And thank-- thank you all very much. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *