

Tied.
Committed.
Bound.

Each weaving in this series represents a different aspect of my life where I have struggled to make decisions and, more specifically, commit to them. At the beginning of my research process, I posed the question, “How do I overcome the impediments in my life that inhibit me from making decisions?” I learned how the brain makes choices and why it is sometimes difficult for the brain to form a decision. I reflected on my past—where I’ve come from—to understand the root of my impediments in making a solid decision. I now understand why it is so hard for me to make a decision and, as a result, have developed empowering solutions to overcome this obstacle.

Each weaving in this installation represents a specific area of indecisiveness. This triptic conveys ideas of chaos, my fear of commitment, and ties in my life. I hope the viewer can feel a sense of beauty, but also experience the feeling of confusion associated in trying to make a decision. The individual titles describe why I was afraid of these aspects of my life; they are written in the past tense as my way of showing that I was once committed, tied, and bound. After weaving these pieces, I now feel a tremendous sense of freedom.

Genevieve

**How Do I Overcome The Impediments in My Life
That Inhibit Me from Making Decisions?**

Genevieve



This paper outlines my journey with indecisiveness as I try to tackle and understand what I call my “inhibitors.” I outline the obstacles I encounter every day in trying to make decisions and discover the root of my impediments that hold me back in my daily life. In the end, I'm trying to comprehend my problems, and finally, discover ways to overcome the impediments in my life that inhibit me from making confident decisions.

I'm hesitant and I do not know how to make up my mind. I have trouble coming to a decision and committing to it. Every decision I make requires extra time to weigh the pros and cons, which, in turn takes me away from experiencing life freely. Even in writing this paper, I'm reluctant because I don't know how to start. I don't know if I should type exactly what I wrote in my journal or write what comes to mind at the moment. I freeze up. I worry. Moments like this impede my ability to have a logical and a smooth thinking process, which in turn affects every decision I make. I have trouble making my own decisions in fear that somehow my choices will hurt others, which makes me rely on others' opinions. Despite my struggle, I've never tried to figure out the root of this aspect because for a long time, I believed I was born a "worrier" and would always be an indecisive person. Up until now, I didn't think anything could be done to change this.

People question whether or not it's actually a bad idea to be indecisive. They say it can be helpful because it means you're "really thinking about your options." No. Being indecisive is not beneficial. Being cautious is a good thing, but being indecisive is not. These are two different things that people need to know. Being unable to make a decision is debilitating. I am unable to fully participate in anything I do. Hesitation follows me wherever I go. I walk around with the feeling that I'm making the wrong choices in life. I live in fear that the choices I make, no matter how big or small will stick with me forever. I'm indecisive about the looks I get from people. Somedays, I believe that no one is judging me, my mind is at a healthy place and I feel productive. Other days, I feel like everyone is out to get me. I get this uncomfortable sensation, when I switch up my routine in some kind of way. Whether it's wearing a different style pant or sitting in a new place in class. When I do something out of my everyday routine, I feel judged.

Because of my indecisive nature, I am convinced the world is out to get me and that everyone wants to see me fail. I believe when I'm not getting praise from others it means people dislike me. This has placed me in a vicious cycle of constant dread. Because of a few bad past experiences, I rarely make decisions based on what I truly want, and more on what I know people expect of me.

I am still coping with conformity in my life. It makes me doubt myself and makes me feel weak. I always feel like I'm a few steps behind everyone else, because I'm looking at each option from every angle, while everyone else is moving forward with the choice they made. Looking at things from different angles can be good for some, but for me it's been torturous. When I look at different angles of scenarios, I examine every which way a person can either embarrass me or see flaws in my work or who I am. This causes unnecessary stress that I don't need. Being indecisive makes me question what my true self is. I used to be confused about who I was -- never sure if I was doing things for myself or because of others' expectations of me. Later, when I finally did figure out how to do things in order to make myself happy, I hid that part of me because I was afraid of judgment.

My appearance, my schooling, and relationships I've been in cause the most debilitating challenge in my life. I constantly worry about these aspects and am never able to make quick decisions and/or feel confident about the choices I make surrounding these areas. There are specific elements in each of these parts of my life that I believe to be impeding on my ability to make decisions and come to rational conclusions.

Appearance. I've always had trouble being confident in how I look and the persona I choose to show off to the world. The only time I ever felt good about myself was when boys would notice me. The attention I continued to receive from boys fueled me to dress for the male

gaze. As I grew older, I still dressed for attention, but I began to feel more uncomfortable with the person I am presenting to the world and began to question why I dressed for others.

This challenge continued throughout high school, wanting to dress authentically for myself but also feeling pressure to dress for others to notice me and think highly of me. I battled with the decision on who I should be every morning, debating whether to dress for myself, wanting to wear those comfy loose jeans or the tight leggings every other girl was wearing. I could never decide on which side I should listen to. I was constantly in limbo on how I should be. If I wore the more “girly” look one day, a part of me felt I was being untrue to myself, but if I dressed in a more casual and comfortable manner, I felt like I was invisible because no one was outwardly giving me comments on my outfit.

These thoughts went through my head daily. In the end, I would conform to what I know would get the “good” attention because I was too scared to go even a day without receiving looks and comments from people based on my outfit. Even though I knew I should be dressing only for myself, I was unable to convince my brain that's what I should do, which caused me to dress (and act) inauthentically.

Throughout my schooling, I've had trouble speaking up in class. I found myself unable to speak my opinion because I am convinced everyone would hate what I was going to say and judge me. This caused hesitation and indecisiveness throughout my schooling; debating if people would care if I made a comment in the class or trying to build up the confidence to say something to the group. There have been a few instances when I was younger when I would say something in class and everyone hated it. I remember during a group presentation, asking a simple question and immediately after asking, getting laughed at by all my peers. Moments like this have stuck with me for years and have prohibited me from sharing my thoughts and asking questions. Part of me is convinced that moments like this don't happen anymore, while the other parts are convinced that it could happen again. For a majority of the time, I came to the conclusion that no one wanted to hear what I had to say because my brain was programmed for so long to believe these false messages I thought about myself.

I have a hard time with the idea of being in a relationship. All my life, everyone around me was getting into relationships and I felt left out because I genuinely thought I was missing out. I thought being in a relationship meant that you were committed to them all of the time. I associated the idea of *forever* with relationships, which skewed my perspective on what a relationship is. This idea scared me. I've always been too scared to be in a “real” relationship because I could never handle that level of commitment. During high school I met a person and became instant friends. Everyone told us that we should “just date” because we already seemed like we were in a relationship. I spent months thinking this concept over. Half of me thought it would be a good idea, while the other half of me said I shouldn't because of other peoples' opinions. My brain was convinced that if we got together, everyone would judge me and would deem me as “weird” and tell me that I *clearly* made the wrong decision. In the end, because my brain was unable to distinguish between my own wants, and what others would think of me, it caused a lot of miscommunication and essentially the end of our friendship.

Every time I get myself into a situation where I have to make a choice about myself and my actions, common phrases like “I'm not good enough,” “I shouldn't,” “I don't matter,” “Everyone else is more important than me,” “I will be rejected.” “No one likes me,” “I am unlovable” play in my head (Schwartz, et al. 16). I've been telling myself these messages for so long, I really believe what my brain tells me--because why wouldn't I? My brain doesn't lie to me. Right?

These are known as *Deceptive Brain Messages (DBMs)*. Scientifically, the reason why I'm unable to make decisions in my life is because of these DBMs. These "are false or inaccurate thoughts or distracting impulse, urge, or desire that takes you away from your true goals and intentions in your life" (Schwartz et. al. 4). DBMs "take you away from focusing on something that is positive and beneficial to you" (Schwartz et. al 14). They cause me to think and later act on things that are just not true. These messages prohibit people from making decisions in their life and perceiving the world in a realistic and rational manner. When the brain acts or thinks in unhealthy ways, the easier it is for it to come up with false scenarios and the more your brain thinks of these scenarios they become normal thoughts (Schwartz et. al 2).

I've incorporated these messages into who I am, and now think of myself as a "worrier" and "over-thinker", when in reality, I've just taught myself to think that is who I truly am (Schwartz, et al 84). It may seem like a simple thing for me to just tell my brain to stop thinking these irrational thoughts, but the challenge is that the brain is unable to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy destructive messages. The brain is just responding to "how you behave and then generates strong impulse responses that create these DBMs into habits" (Schwartz et. al. 2). The more I think about the DBMs, the more my brain thinks that it's okay to think this way and puts those types of thoughts into my brain's storage.

The cycle of the DBMs are hard to break, but in order to do so, it's essential in understanding how the cycle works. First, you experience a DBM then get an uncomfortable physical or emotional sensation, which then leads you to act upon the unhealthy habitual response. This then provides only momentary relief for the uncomfortable sensation. This cycle happens over and over again without consciously realizing it. You have to be able to step back from your DBMs and try to get an objective perspective on your problems to really be able to understand them.

There is a method from the book, *You Are Not Your Brain: The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life*, that outlines a four step plan for trying to tackle and assess these DBMs that prohibit effective decision making. The first step is "re-labeling" your thoughts and finally identifies the DBMs to figure out what issues you're working with. The next step is to "re-frame" your perception on the DBMs. Then it's time to "refocus" and start thinking about the positives in your life and about your current situations. Trying to create a new mindset for you is key. The final step is to "re-value" and to understand that your negative thoughts are just your brain reverting to old ways and to not let these ways of thinking hold you back in your process of growing (Schwartz, et al 3).

Social conformity adds an element of uncertainty to my life, which affects my ability to make clear and personal decisions. There are two kinds of social conformity that humans experience: normative and informal conformity. Normative conformity "occurs because of the desire to be liked and accepted" like peer pressure or "a desire to avoid punishment." This kind of conformity makes us go along with decisions other people made, even if we personally don't agree with them or in order for people to like you like when I wore what other people expected me to wear to be accepted by my community (Cherry). Informative conformity "occurs because of the desire to be correct." Many people in this category "want to do what everyone else is doing because of the lack of knowledge you think you possess" (Social Conformity Definition). In my life, I've been sucked into conforming to other opinions in order to be appealing to others, which causes to lose sight of who I am.

Another reason I have a challenge with making decisions is because I've been challenged with getting out of my comfort zone, in fear I will be judged. A comfort zone is defined as a "behavioral space where your activities and behaviors fit a routine and pattern that minimizes stress and risk." Being in your comfort zone provides a "mental state of security" (Henry). Though the comfort zone can be thought of as safe and as "a state of relative comfort" for people to work in. It's not always the most effective state to be in when trying to get work done though. Psychologists Dr. Yerkes and Dr. Dodson say that to be the most productive, you need to be in "a space where our stress levels are slightly higher than normal" (Henry). I've learned that I'm in spaces that I feel safe with the people around me, I feel better and more successful when I challenge myself.

Many people are unable to make a clear, one hundred percent logical decision in life because of the programmed biases they have. Humans have many different kinds of biases that affect different elements of their decisions. Present bias causes us to pay attention to what is happening in that moment, but not worry about the future. Confirmation bias is when we look for information that confirms or supports our pre-existing ideas. This kind of bias affects me the most. For example, I don't think I'm a smart person, so I look for things in life that confirm these negative perceptions of myself. Negative biases are when negative memories affect and inform your current decision on a situation. This kind of bias is easily remembered. I deal with this kind of bias as well because if I had a bad experience in the past (whether that be in classroom, with an outfit, or in relationship of any kind) I remember that bad experience with my current situation, which will then shift my decision on the current situation.

Another important force of decisions is the idea of "priming". This is the idea that there are external clues that control your bias. Priming does not necessarily have to do with the choice directly. As humans, we aren't aware of these priming moments, so we make up stories of why we think something to make us feel good about the decision we make ("Choice."). Our biases are deeply rooted in our evolutionary past, which makes it incredibly hard to completely rid ourselves of them. "We can't change our subconscious biases but we can be aware of them and that's the first step" (Macdonald). I am working hard everyday to try and recognize my bias and understand how I can break them.

Despite what many people believe, emotions can come in two different forms; "emotional sensations" and "emotions." Emotional sensations are feelings evoked by the DBMs and not based on truth. Where emotions are feelings based on true events. If I have a good sense that I am loved in my community, I am happy. But if one person says one small thing about me in any kind of negative way, I believe this comment more than I believe any kind thing someone says about me. I focus all of my energy on that one comment and feel horrible because I know that they "must be right." When something goes wrong and I feel an emotional *sensation* in my brain that responds in an automatic way (distressed habits triggered by DBMs) I then do that habit in order to get over that distress, which helps for a brief second, but then returns to the vicious cycle (Schwartz et. al 77). I have parts of my brain that work into overdrive, which is why I get distressed and can't make a clear decision in my life.

DBMs →	uncomfortable physical/mental sensation→	unhealthy behavior/habit→	Distress is relieved & unhealthy circuit is strengthened→	DBMs →
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Habitual responses are “repetition of certain actions: avoiding certain people, situations, and location due to uncomfortable feelings” these thoughts and actions can become habitual because the DBMs are becoming stronger in thinking that these responses are what your body/mind *should* do. There are certain responses that my brain has engrained in its memory like avoiding challenging (but beneficial) activities, repeatedly checking something over and over, avoiding people, places or things, and overanalyzing and over thinking are thoughts I have to break (Schwartz et. al 2). I have to convince myself that these are not good and natural things for me to spend my time thinking about.

The more you give into the DBMs, the stronger the connections get which enable these connections to get stronger. So in order to overcome these DBMs, one has to rewire their brain and change their thought processes because “the brain circuits support those uncomfortable sensations and habitual responses and become stronger” (Schwartz et. al 74). These habitual responses involve two parts of the brain; the “Self Referencing Center” or “Prefrontal Cortex” located in the front of the brain and the “Assessment Center” located in the back of the brain.

The “Self Referencing Center” stores autobiographical information, responsible for day-dreaming about the future, allows introspection about the mind, engages during social interactions, and manages emotions automatically. The middle part of the “self referencing center” holds the “inner monologue” portion of yourself, where you envision your future, and remember the past and interfering with other people’s state of mind. The Executive Center, or Orbitofrontal Cortex is involved with error messages and obsessions. Within the Executive Center the Amygdala generates feelings of fear and physical sensations like rapid heartbeat and weird stomach feelings. And the Insula, which generates “gut-level responses”. When the Anterior Cingulate is activated, a rapid sensation occurs that tells you something is wrong because this part directly deals with assessing and detecting errors. (Schwartz et. al 76). When the Basal Ganglia (responsible for automatic thoughts and actions) is active or in distress it starts to go into action as well (Schwartz et. al 76). The Basal Ganglia is responsible for your next move. This part of the brain helps in social situations and relating to other people. All of these different parts of the “Self Referencing Center” affect the way I perceive myself and my thoughts about the world. When one part of brain is activated more than the others, it causes an unbalance, which creates these DBMs.

The “Assessment Center” decreases emotional responses, overrides the habit center, facilitates voluntary emotion management, and enables the self-referencing center to not take things too personally. This part is composed of lateral prefrontal cortex, which voluntarily overrides actions in your habit center that your brain wants to initiate. The Self Referencing Center and Assessment Center work together to shape your thinking processes and gives you your perception of the world. When these two parts of your brain are too tightly connected, it's hard for your brain to distinguish yourself from your DBMs, which leads people to overthink and worry.

The Self Referencing Center goes into alert mode (mis-reads social situations, Anterior Cingulate is activated too often) because your self-assesment center is constantly referring back to you DBMs and acts on them automatically (Schwartz et. al 87). My brain is thinking about the outside world, and only thinking about how my presence is impacting the world. It's important to know how to make a decision. Many people think you're born with the ability to make decisions, when in reality the environment you're placed in as a child affects this ability, and depending on the situation, this means they have to work on making decisions in life.

Temperament, disposition, and nature can attribute to one's ability to make decisions. Learning how to make good decisions depends on a variety of things: development stage, general ideas of right and wrong, and steps on how to make a decision. Some people have bad past experiences with a certain situation and are now afraid to attempt something similar or "they do nothing hoping the change will work itself out, or go away, or that somebody will take care of what needs to be done" (Brenner). I can say that this is me. When I'm hesitant or indecisiveness about a choice, I tend to ignore it and say I'll "come back to it later" so that I don't have to confront the situation.

In order to make an effective decision, there are certain logical steps that should be followed. Number one; identify a decision: realize you have to make a decision, and try to "clearly identify the nature of the decision you have to make". First, gather information (about decision): "collect pertinent information surrounding the decision, try to gather information from the best and most reliable sources. This step involves "internal and external" work. Internal work is self-assessment (what you think based on who you are). External work looks at outside sources like books and online sources. Second, identify alternatives: use new gathered information to create alternatives, which can be good or bad (leads to over thinking and anxiety). Third, weight the choices: picture yourself in each scenario and evaluate you're going in the right direction. Fourth, choose! /act on it! Finally, review your decision and its consequences: identify what went well versus what didn't go well so you can be more informed next time you have to make a similar decision (Dartmouth). These steps help people make reasonable decisions but for some people like me, it's a little trickier than that and there are more variables to take into consideration, like the notion of "gut feelings".

We live in a world that thinks rationality and scientifically proven data is the best and only correct answer for any kind of decision making. "A 2011 study published in the journal Psychological Science revealed how the body is able to speak intuitively to the mind by dealing out a card game. Researchers designed a game based on no obvious strategy but forced participants to rely upon their hunches. Each participant was hooked up to a heart monitor and a finger sensor to measure sweat secretion" (Olson). They found out that more people got an answer correct on a test if they listened to that feeling in their body rather than not. This proves that people should listen to the subtle bodily changes they experience. This change is for many people their "intuition." Intuition is formed by a collection of beliefs, experiences and memories that is formed over the course of their life. This personal intuition is hardwired in our brain whether we acknowledge it or not. For a variety of reasons, many deny this feeling. A childhood of abuse or neglect "can create excessive self doubt, irrational fear, or a clouded thought process" (Olson). Experiences like this can cause people to either not trust their gut or never learn how to trust it. Overwhelming stimuli can also make it difficult to make clear and smart decisions. Women may have a stronger ability to make decisions based on their ancestral skills to "read humans" (Olson). "The brain wants to keep itself safe so it looks for patterns of danger" ("Choice."). It takes the dangerous scene in so that the next time something similar occurs; the brain is then put into warning mode.

I consider myself a person who takes their intuition and gut feelings very seriously. I live my life by what my gut thinks I should do. Whenever I get a sense that I shouldn't do something, it's very hard for people to convince me to do the opposite. I believe that my gut has directed my life one hundred percent and I can't imagine living any other way. I believe that our bodies are powerful vessels and make us feel certain things for a reason, so I can't imagine living a life where I don't trust that sense.

The intuitive mind is much more powerful than is generally thought to be. Many people rely on “gut feeling” but because our world is so keen on being logical, we tend to rely more on “power of reason.” Humans like to believe that we come up with our own decisions because of our logical thinking, but in reality, our brains have already made decisions before we even think we are coming up with a decision. Humans have two systems of thinking: the logical part of our mind which makes logical decisions, analyzes a problem and comes up with a rational answer. This kind of thinking requires the part of the brain that were aware of (good at solving problems, but requires a lot of energy to work, and because of that it tends to be a lazier part of the brain). The second system of thinking is the intuitive, fast and automatic part of our thinking. This part of our brain works so fast, that it tends to make most of the decisions in our life. We have no idea this “hidden autopilot is making decisions without us consciously and actively agreeing to it.” The issue is with this way of thinking is when we let this “auto-pilot” part of our brain make the decisions that the logical part of our brain really should be making.

Our thinking patterns are riddled with “cognitive bias” affecting every decision we make in life. As humans, we don't believe that this bias is taking over our decision-making because that would go against our logical thinking brain. In fact, most beliefs and opinions come from our automatic thinking. Our logical mind *afterwards* creates a reason for why we think what we do. This process is the opposite of how most people think our decision-making process works (Macdonald). There is always a competition between these two parts of our brain. Both sides of our brain want attention. For example, if you have to make a decision, if one of the sides of your brain is more distracted than the other, or thinking about other things, the other side will win making that decision because it's not already thinking about something else ("Choice."). Because I always have home/logical stresses, I always make decisions based on the emotional side of my brain because that's the side of my brain that isn't thinking about these home stresses which is why it also leads me to over think and sometimes analyze decisions too emotionally. Whenever you make a decision, your brain looks at the options and tries to remember all of the memories associated with the things you're trying to pick. All the associated memories start to arise as a feeling and you finally come up with your decision based on all of those memories. Basically our decisions as humans are a “shorthand average” ("Choice.").

In writing this paper, I've learned a lot about how my brain and thought processes work. I've also had the chance to reflect on where I've come from and why I am the person I am today. I'm realizing that past experiences don't define me. I know that I am the only one who can really change my perception of who I am. I am understanding and coming to terms with the notion that I can't please everyone all the time and that I can and should only be concerned about doing things in order to make myself happy. In learning about where my indecisiveness comes from, I hope that I can work to one day be confident in the decisions and the choices I make in life.

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