

## *Original Paper*

# Critical Thinking in an Age of Intense Emotional Exploitation

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Critical thinkers use reason, rationality, logic, clear, concise, exact, specific focused thinking and reasoning to approach problems and determine solutions to difficulties. The average person, on the whole attempts to think fairly logically, reasonably, and with some thought to ramifications and repercussions and long and short-term outcomes.

However, certain realms have of recent date have attempted to manipulate and exploit emotional nuances to sway the values, attitudes, philosophies and logical rational, reasonable. realistic thinking, and perspectives of many others.

While in debate, individuals may attempt to use highly charged emotional events to sway the appropriate thinking of others, in politics and in the mass media, certain highly charged emotional events are catapulted to the forefront in an attempt to garner support of whatever position, a group may have.

This may be surmised to be an incidence of “the end justifies the means”. If a certain group cannot make a logical, sequential, systematic, rational reasonable argument with facts, data and evidence, or existing laws, they employ gross emotionality to at least distract the opposition from a rational examination of the problem, and a reasonable examination of the long, and short term, implications of certain decisions.

They plead about emotionality and appeal to very primitive emotions to sway their followers and attempt to gain support for their less than substantive position. When confronted with a dilemma, often some individuals rely on gross emotionality and exclaim loudly about pain, hurt, harm, injury when faced with a losing proposition or when faced with existing legislation that they cannot change or do not want to go to the trouble of changing it via the legislative and political process.

There are some who would say that moral development is also exploited at times. Rather than examining empirical evidence, some naysayers would attempt to appeal to the higher levels of Kohlberg's stages of development. In this way, laws are circumvented.

Said laws may have been reasonably established and followed for many years- and obviously in other cases, have been broken for years- and gone unpunished or not prosecuted.

In terms of the present zeitgeist, little modeling of higher order critical thinking skills is seen. There is much ranting and raving and yelling and screaming and name calling.

I will not repeat the various names that are used- but rather call for a more cordial, congenial calm discussion so that individuals discussing issues can demonstrate their knowledge, their ability to apply thinking skills, to foster higher order thinking and to integrate, synthesize and compare and contrast things as well as look for long term ramifications and repercussions as well as short term issues. Further, hopefully the issue of unintended consequences can also be addressed in a calm agenda like fashion.

Certainly, individuals have feelings and emotions about certain issues. These feelings may have come from family- from parents, or peers or siblings. But in a logical, rational, reasonable debate or discussion, facts, laws, data and information should be paramount.

Often there is a history that needs to be explored and examined.

The interpretation of the past and of data is in the realm of historians, and is open to interpretation- and in fact may be interpreted again in a decade or two or three.

Teachers and educators are faced with the dilemma of the fact that in a debate or discussion, one can employ emotional outbursts and emotive issues- but in order to win a debate or discussion, one must employ logic, reason, rationality and good solid thinking.

Facts, data, evidence and the law must be examined. Certainly, certain people may not like a certain law- and they can express their thoughts and feelings about the law. Sadly, in some instances, people attempt to circumvent the law. In other words, they break the law. They engage in illegal activities. They could be prosecuted if apprehended.

Certainly, there may be times when breaking a law is warranted. I might drive over the speed limit to take a pregnant female to the hospital to deliver a child. I break the law, I acknowledge breaking the law, I may pay a fine, or perhaps do community service, and also, I may have a record on my driver's license if apprehended and prosecuted.

Higher order thinking skills should be employed, perhaps posted, and the levels of Bloom's taxonomy should be critically employed. Other theorists can of course be employed, and as many books read as possible so as to encourage both critical thinking and higher order thinking. We can think critically about laws and we can think evaluatively about the reasons behind these laws, and why some individuals may feel that they need to be broken.

In some schools, scientific thinking and hypothesis testing should also be encouraged, and there should be minimal emphasis on "feeling" that a certain variable is going to impact another variable.

Scientific thinking relies on the scientific method, experiments and control conditions. A hypothesis is established, perhaps a control group set up, an experiment is conducted under controlled conditions, and an outcome measured.

In terms of critical discussion, and debate, it is quite difficult to debate what might be called the "pulling of the heartstrings" effect. Sure, we are saddened by certain situations, but the law is the law- and needs to be obeyed.

There is a certain history- Rousseau talked about the social contract- that people engage in certain behaviors for the good of society.

Certainly, a debate can result and as a result of the debate perhaps steps can be taken to change laws or policies. But convincing individuals to make changes based on tears and fears and emotions and gross exorbitant exaggeration is not a critical thinking debate.

It is difficult for some to debate a highly emotional person who is not thinking logically, rationally, reasonably, soundly with any semblance of normalcy. Often debaters will rely on ranting and screaming and talking above or more loudly than the other individual so as to appear to win the argument or debate.

Speaking and screaming loudly does not make any one person correct, or exact or precise. I may scream that 4 plus 5 is 10 very loudly, but the facts remain that 4 plus 5 is 9.

Students in the schools need to be aware of the current zeitgeist and trained in the age old principles of debate. Unfortunately, these things are not always being modeled by our current crop of politicians.

While television is a wonderful medium, it is still a medium that has to project positive aspects and decorum. By decorum we mean that there are rules and regulations regarding debates and discussions and that there is civility.

Manipulation of the "Case Study" or "One Constituent".

Many politicians (note I do not say "all") utilize what I refer to as the single case study approach. They get in front of a microphone or on a television or talk show and proclaim loudly, with deep emotional feeling and perhaps even tears that they have a person who recently talked to them about a problem. And this politician's heart was touched. They shed tears. They prayed for this person. Their heart went out to them. And therefore something should be done to help all of the citizens of a certain state in spite of the fact that the vast majority are doing quite well- even in this age of COVID. They are employed paying their bills, setting aside a small amount of money for their children to go to college, and scraping together enough money to have food on the table every night. The vast majority of these individuals pay taxes, go

to church, support the community and donate to whatever charity they feel is important.

The politician on the other hand is doing all of this whining and wailing and screaming and shouting yet never donates to charity, never donates to any religious group or any specific society (for example, the American Cancer Society).

Observation:

Students in schools need to be taught to observe public speakers, and said “authorities” on certain topics- and be taught to question the credentials of the speaker or writer.

Anyone can go online and review my publications and presentations and books and come to some decision as to whether I have anything valid, sensible, appropriate and logical to say. As a beginning point, I would refer them to my book on Critical Thinking and Higher Order Thinking: A Current Perspective and (Shaughnessy, 2012). Now, some can certainly criticize me and indicate this this is “shameless self-promotion”. Au contraire, I wish to highlight the various contributors to the book- who are really more scholarly and erudite than I. The contributors are Linda Elder, Gerard Casey of Ireland,

Colin Hannaford of Oxford, Belle Wallace of England, David Moshman of the University of Nebraska, Bruce Gans, John Baer, Donald Elder III, Enoch Hale, Rush Cosgrove, Margaret Kirby, Jen Glaser, Slava Kalyuga, Greg Schraw, and Tammy Lynne Moore.

And of course critics can say that I am name dropping- but I am not screaming or yelling or calling on a flood of emotionality to assist the reader to become more literate and understanding of the field of critical thinking, higher order thinking, and scientific thinking also.

There are those who rely on cunning manipulation to divert the attention of the masses from the truly important, and there are those who attempt to place guilt and blame on others in the past or on others where it does not belong. We can only hope that some teachers will take it upon themselves to clearly examine the curriculum, determine logically, rationally, reasonably what should be taught and then attempt to examine all sides of any issue- be it historical or civic or philosophical.

## Reference

Shaughnessy, M. F. (2012). *Critical Thinking and Higher Order Thinking: A current perspective*. Nova Publishers, Hauppauge, NY.

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