

The Head-Chatter Honey Trap

Brendan Lloyd PhD, July 2021, r:02.5

Just to recap on the basics, it's the head-chatter that drives those felt experiences of stress, anxiety and depression. It's a simple mind-body connection. If there is head-chatter occupying your mind then consequently you'll have elevated levels of adrenaline and cortisol in your body.

It's the *adrenaline* that gives us that jittery, agitated, churned or knotted gut, tight chest, anxious feeling. The *cortisol* accounts for that exhausted, fatigued, alienating, wanting to hide, depressed feeling. It's the head-chatter that constantly whacks away on the emergency buttonⁱ that keeps these emergency chemicals topped up in our bloodstream.

What we really need to appreciate is that it's the *relentless over production of adrenaline and cortisol* that alters our felt experience adversely. The issue for stress-reduction is to understand how we achieve this *relentless over production* of these emergency chemicals.

If you're experiencing ongoing stress, anxiety and depression then you need to address the head-chatter. Arguably any other approach is papering over the cracks. In other words, by addressing your head-chatter you go directly to the source where you can use your mind skilfully, to change the way you feel.

A skilful mind is useful because the head-chatter is a slippery customer. If only it was as simple as banishing it from our mind altogether. Our head-chatter, which is behaviour of our mindⁱⁱ and a projection of our personality, has its own set of challenges in our quest for stress-reduction.

Head-chatter is sneaky, deceptive and seductive. It will even elude you. It will hide

behind elements of truth. It will always have a confirmatory bias. It will disguise itself as thinking.

Head-chatter will even lead you to do things that seem like solutions at the time. If you do experience unwanted *paradoxical effects*ⁱⁱⁱ in your life it will be because you acted on the head-chatter. What we really need to appreciate is how the head-chatter sucks us in and keeps us hammering away at the emergency button.

We fall into the head-chatter. On any given occasion this is usually a subconscious process. It is subconscious in the sense that you don't notice the head-chatter starting up; and once it gets going you may not even notice that you're doing it. If you do notice it, you'll most likely mistake it for thinking.

For stress-reduction generally a sustainable solution is to manage the head-chatter. We need to disengage from the head-chatter. The honey trap is so seductive and alluring. We get bogged down in the head-chatter's content. This is because the content isn't what it seems.

Perceptual distortions

It was said 2,500 years ago, that *illusion* is the root of *human suffering*.^{iv} Today we don't talk so much about 'suffering'; we tend to talk about stress, anxiety and depression. Also we don't seem to talk about *illusion* these days, but maybe we should. We can certainly talk about *perceptual distortions*.

For example, "*When I saw the mirage^v, I saw what I saw. There was water across the road ahead, that's all there is to it. You cannot take that experience from me. My eyes do not deceive me.*"

Of course that is not true, "*my eyes do deceive me.*" The mirage is a perceptual distortion. "*I really didn't see water at all. My eyes were actually looking at the bare bitumen ahead, but instead I saw water across the road. I drove on through; where did the water go?*"

Have a look at Figure 1. You can put a ruler on the image. You will find that all the lines are dead straight and parallel. Take the ruler away, and the lines go back to looking wonky. All you can say is: that's the way it looks.

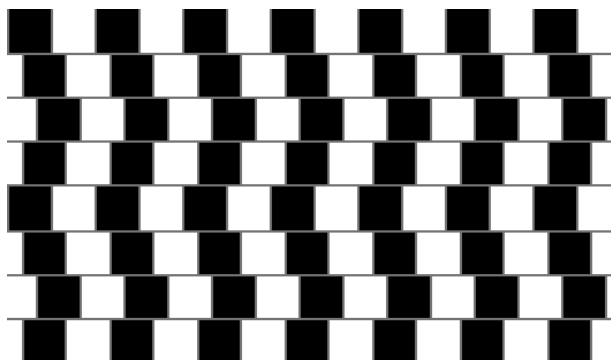


Figure 1: Illusion of non-parallel horizontal lines.^{vi} [Fibonacci/Wikimedia](#) CC BY

With the two examples the illusion can be tested. For example, you can drive through the mirage to see that there's no water, and you can use a straightedge to test the straightness of lines that look wonky. Our head-chatter on the other hand is a different story that brings with it certain challenges, for all of us one way or another.

Head-chatter is triggered into action, and then it continues on from there. There are two distinct events. There is a triggering-event and then there is the continuing head-chatter event. It's not just all one thing. If you break it down into these two components you have more to work with.

The initial triggering is based on a perceived threat. The continuing of the head-chatter is based on the need for completion, or at least the resolution of the threat. You cannot rest whilst your bed is burning, to paraphrase the lyric.^{vii}

In the head-chatter triggering-event there is a perceptual distortion. The emergency button is activated for the *resemblance of a threat*, not an actual threat. In spite of this the triggering is not the issue.

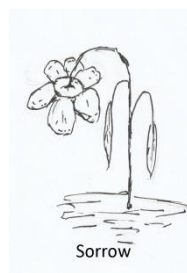
The *continuing* of the head-chatter is the issue. This is where we take the elevated levels of adrenaline and cortisol and keep them elevated.

We're dealing with threats going by what they look like or seem like. The *perceptual distortion* is—*that if it looks like a threat or seems like a threat, then it's a threat*. We take in the symbolic resemblance of a threat as an actual threat. The illusion is continued in the head-chatter; it certainly isn't resolved in the head-chatter. The head-chatter is a continuous expression the threat. Consequently the head-chatter keeps the adrenaline and cortisol elevated, hence the connection between illusion and suffering.

The triggering

The trigger in the triggering-event that starts the head-chatter literally could be anything. All the trigger requires is a symbolic resemblance to the threat. In other words, all that is needed is for the trigger to look like or resemble the threat, in whatever shape or form that may be.

Here is a simple non-threatening example of *symbolic resemblance*. Take a simple drawing of a wilting flower; imagine it; put it in your mind. It's easy to see how it could resemble Sorrow. Just by placing the image of a wilting flower in your mind and by thinking, "sorrow", you'll possibly feel just that little bit of Sorrow.



Whether you actually experienced sorrow or something else in the paragraph above would be theory. We have no need to theorise here. No doubt you had the opportunity to experience something. There could easily have been a shift in your body chemistry; most probably, mainly, a small spike of adrenaline. You could feel this small spike.

The triggering is not a problem. The fact of being triggered is not the issue. It could be that you have the ability to empathise if you're able to feel sorrow from the idea of an image of a wilting flower. That's not such a

bad thing.

At some point in time you will resolve the 'sorrow' from the paragraphs above. You will move on in your mind. This will be easy to do once we stop talking about it. Just drop the subject and move on. If you find that you keep going back to the trigger (the wilting flower image) you will succeed in keeping the feeling alive. Do you think or feel that you'd really need to do that?

Remember that it's a process that needs our attention. Here we focus on the process that gets us to a felt experience of stress, anxiety or depression. At the very beginning of the process we have an event that contains the resemblance of the threat. These are the triggering-events.

Below are some examples of triggering-events. When you read each example, try not to understand the trigger in terms of the content of the particular sample. Try instead to empathise with the *resemblance* of the threat.

Try not to relate these examples to yourself because the specific content may not apply to you. We're talking about *how it works*. We have a focus on the process, not specific content; that's why there are eight different vignettes to demonstrate the one point.

1. *You're sitting in a lecture theatre waiting for the lecturer to start when you notice a mature aged female student, a couple of isles over, is looking at you.*
2. *You walk into your bedroom and you find your wife is sitting on the bed having a giggling conversation on her mobile phone.*
3. *You look across the open plan office and you see two colleagues talking earnestly to each other.*
4. *You notice that you're stuck behind a slow bus on the open highway with no overtaking opportunities ahead.*
5. *You walk into my office and see the cupboard doors.*
6. *You overhear a conversation between two of your housemates and one says, 'he's so slack, he just leaves a mess'.*
7. *You're brushing your teeth after breakfast and you remember something from the social event the night before.*

8. *You're crossing the main road and you see the bus just in time; and you leap out of the way to the safety of the footpath.*

(Examples tabulated in appendix)

The potential content for any triggering-event is wide-ranging and boundless; and for the purpose of this discussion we need to bring it all back to one point. Each of these examples resembles a threat and thus the triggering of the emergency button. So we need to focus our attention on understanding the threat rather than spending time on sorting out the content. This is the coalface of stress-reduction.

These eight vignettes represent four unique threats, namely *shame*, *persecution*, *abandonment* and *deprivation*. Three examples represent the threat of shame. Three represent the threat of persecution. One each represents the threats of abandonment and deprivation. Examples could have been presented for the threats of chaos, catastrophe, invalidation, subjugation, failure, unfairness, etc. The examples given are merely to illustrate a triggering-event.

The four threats that are illustrated may not be your threats. You will have your own set of threats. You will have your own list of favourites.

These examples may not represent your triggers. The content in each of these examples would be unique to each of the eight individuals and their own circumstances.

What is of interest to us all is the way it works. Focus on the process. Not "why" did they get triggered, but rather, "how" did they get triggered; that's the question.

The how-question applies to all of us equally regardless of the content.

There will be objects and events out there that do resemble your threats. Put the emphasis on YOUR threats. Your threats will present in circumstance where you see the threat. It's what it looks like to your eyes.

So let's step behind the eyes of each person in each vignette. To understand the threat we need to listen to the head-chatter with

curiosity and interest.

What's the threat? "*What am I responding to with all this adrenaline and cortisol?*" The head-chatter provides the clue.

1. "God I'm a freak-show... (I'm being judged...)", etc. [Shame]
2. "I knew it, she's not even hiding it from me... (she's having an affair)", etc. [Abandonment]
3. "Oh God what are they up to now, I don't need this... (they're plotting against me)", etc. [Persecution]
4. "Oh come on, what is this, I've got better things to do...", etc. [Deprivation]
5. "Who's he got sitting in there listening to me, they'll think that I'm crazy...", etc. [Shame]
6. "They're always picking on me, it's not fair...", etc. [Persecution]
7. "God I'm so stupid, I fell for it again, can't I just keep my mouth shut... (from a memory, a *faux pas* the night before)", etc. [Shame]
8. "That bastard tried to kill me...", etc. [Persecution]

(Examples tabulated in appendix)

"I saw what I saw. My eyes do not deceive me. I know how I feel. You can't take that experience from me." Yes, you're right, we can't take the experience away, but in moving forward you can change the way you feel.

The head-chatter's content across the eight examples is wide ranging. The examples show different content for different threats and different content for the same threats. The common thread is the reading of the threat and the activation of the emergency button.

We don't even have conscious control over our response to the trigger. Our initial response is too quick. You wouldn't want it any other way. We need that instant recognition of threats; with particular reference to actual threats. Without our emergency button we'd all be dead by now when it comes to actual threats.

In our triggering-events the emergency button is activated by conditioned or learnt responses. We have an instant recognition of the threat. We respond automatically to what looks like a threat. Our body does not question the difference between an actual threat and a threat read from a perceptual distortion. Our body takes no chances with threats, whether the perception is distorted

or otherwise.

We are triggered regardless of whether the threat is actual or apparent. If that's all there was, just one whack on the emergency button, there would be no issues to do with stress, anxiety and depression. The adrenaline from just one initial whack on the emergency button will last for minutes only. We need the head-chatter to continue, to keep the adrenaline and cortisol elevated. Can you appreciate the irony?

The head-chatter continues

The content of our head-chatter will come and go. It can be like a grind on the same topic; this would be in relation to persistent and reliable triggers in our lives. Like the workplace or close relationships for example. Or the head-chatter can flitter about from one topic to another. For example, from the lecture theatre event to the coffee shop event, to the bus trip event, etc.

From the *content perspective* sometimes it will look like the issue has somehow resolved itself or at least just gone away. The problem is we find the threat elsewhere, in different content; and the head-chatter continues on; like an ongoing story or narrative.

For example, if you were triggered by the threat of shame in the lecture theatre, sure the lecture will conclude. You will leave the lecture theatre, problem solved. Then later you could easily be triggered by the threat of shame in the coffee shop, and on the bus home, and when you get home, and the next day at the supermarket, etc. All these triggering-events are different from the content perspective, but they are all the same from the threat perspective. The threat's story continues, but with different content.

The same pattern will apply to any threat that feeds our head-chatter. Take anyone of the eight vignettes as an example. Each represents a slice in time. The vignettes represent a cross-sectional view of life. But life is on a continuum of time. Our personality is a consistent feature in our lives. We take our personality with us where ever we go. We

find our particular threats in the nooks and crannies of our life; regardless of the content in any particular nook or cranny.

We're on the lookout for the threats; the particular threats that are on our list of favourites. If *shame* is one of your threats, then you will find it. If *abandonment* is one of your threats then you will find it. If *deprivation* is one of your threats you will find it. This one point can be said about any threat that triggers our head-chatter; we will find it. We are vigilantly waiting, watching, even hunting for our threats.

When we find our threats, this is our *selective attention* in action; like being locked into the story. You know what you're looking for. You know what it looks like. So when you find it you recognise it. Each of the vignettes is an example of finding the threat, or picking up on the story if you like.

Not only does the head-chatter continue on from any triggering-event but it also continues on from the endless procession of triggering-events in our lives. From our eyes it looks like the story is creating the threat. In fact it's the other way around because it's our threats that drive the content of our head-chatter.

With the head-chatter continuing we keep the threat alive. The head-chatter is the continuing expression of the threat. The threats that trigger the head-chatter only come to life, in real-time, in the continuing head-chatter.

Interestingly, when you add up all your head-chatter across your life, you would be overwhelmed by trying to make sense of the vast array of content. On the other hand, this sum-total of head-chatter would represent a very small number of threats. For any individual it's the same set of threats that keep emerging in all the vastly different content of our head-chatter.

The triggering-events in our lives are a force of nature. The triggers are naturally occurring events. We may even have reliable triggers in our lives. What we can rely upon is that the triggers will just keep on rolling on. We don't

need to be bogged down in the fact that the triggering occurs; and what we don't need to do is keep the head-chatter going.

The head-chatter's seduction

The idea of being trapped *in the head-chatter* is an analogy. It's *as if* we are lured into it and we just can't get out. This is the issue with the continuing head-chatter; we stay in it; we even develop the story. In some cases we will shift our attention from real-time and become absorbed by the story. This is when our mind figuratively *leaves the room* to follow the illusion.

Traps aren't as they seem; there is a perceptual distortion. For a trap to work it needs a disguise or it needs to create a deception of one sort or another. Our continuing head-chatter makes promises it can't possibly keep, like reaching a resolution of the threat. This will forever be a false promise because these particular threats only come to life in the continuing head-chatter to begin with.

For example, there are bananas sitting on the kitchen bench. They contain histamines. You might have histamine sensitivity. You will only have the problem with eating bananas, if you eat a banana. So the bananas can just stay where they are sitting harmlessly on the kitchen bench. In other words, the threats that trigger the head-chatter only come to life when you live in the head-chatter.

The head-chatter sucks us in. The lure or the bait is the *element of truth*. Just to illustrate the point, let's stay behind the eyes of the eight individuals portrayed by the eight vignettes.

1. "I'm being judged". Yes it's true, people judge all the time.
2. "She doesn't care about me". It's true your wife doesn't always put you first.
3. "They're plotting against me". It's a fact that workplace politics is a minefield of power-plays.
4. "This will take forever". Yes, you probably do have better things to do with your time.
5. "I'm nervous". It's true, you really don't know what you're doing.
6. "I'm being picked on". Yes, you're the youngest so they pick on you.

7. "He's a bully." Yes it's like being under a microscope and you can't just be yourself.
8. "Incompetence is dangerous." It's true, if you'd been hit by the bus you'd be dead.

(Examples tabulated in appendix)

In these eight examples we see the head-chatter speaking the alarming truth, or at least an alarming element of the truth. We humans tend to default toward a *confirmation bias*. What we see in the triggering-event is evidence to support our story/theory about the threat.

From within our head-chatter there is no way to question the truth. The truth is the truth and that is all there is to it. For example, "*if I take a flight to Sydney and the plane crashes that will be a disaster*", true or false? It's simply a fact, it would be a disaster. How do you dismiss or even let go of a fact like that?

Likewise with the eight vignettes, there is the apparent truth.

1. That woman WAS looking me.
2. My wife IS ignoring me.
3. They ARE talking intensely.
4. I actually DO have things to do.
5. I really DON'T know why I'm here.
6. They ACTUALLY pick on me.
7. He DOES micromanage me.
8. People DO get killed this way.

(Examples tabulated in appendix)

How can you argue with what you see and what you feel? The answer is, don't argue. There is no argument when the 'truth' is spoken in the content of your head-chatter. You do not need to set up a battle in your mind by questioning the truth. If you do you will succeed in producing more adrenaline and cortisol, which is the opposite of what you need to change the way you feel.

Our selective attention and confirmation bias block our view of the whole truth. An element of truth is not the whole truth; no matter how alarming. For example, consider the whole truth for each of the vignettes.

For example...

1. The woman looking at you was admiring your hair.
2. Your wife was on the phone to her sister.
3. Your workmates were discussing the football.
4. Anything you have to do right now can wait.

5. There is now an opportunity to learn.
6. They weren't actually talking about you.
7. It's not your fault.
8. You weren't actually paying attention.

(Examples tabulated in appendix)

In the first vignette, *of course people judge all the time*, true or false? It is possible to assume that a day would not pass where you have not been judged and where you have not judged another person. Judging is a phenomenon across the board regardless of time, place, or prevailing conditions.

If shame is a threat to you, then you're on the lookout for the judging events. You will look for the evidence. You will spot the threat at 50 paces.

You will notice the judging to the extent of excluding other important information. You will not notice the validating or valuing. We could say that people are *validating and valuing all the time*, true or false? Of course it's true. But with your attention drawn to the judging as the truth you would either not notice validating and valuing occurring, or you would deny that it applies to you.

Vignette two portrays the threat of abandonment. It is true, just because you have abandonment issues, doesn't mean your partner won't leave you. What it does mean is that you would have your attention keenly focused on any signs of what looks like abandonment.

If abandonment is one of your threats then you would pay particular attention to anything that contains what looks like abandonment. For example, your partner's phone rings. "*I wonder who's calling her*", this is the head-chatter starting up. On the other hand you will probably ignore or not notice your partner's efforts to make you happy and comfortable.

Vignette three portrays the threat of persecution. Here we can say with confidence, that *just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean they're not out to get you*. Like the threat of abandonment, the threat of persecution has that paranoid aspect.

"They're doing it to me; they make me feel that way".

By the way, there is sometimes an upside to these threats. For example, sometimes paranoia can be helpful. Not psychotic delusional paranoia, but the normal personality trait that predisposes you to focus on threats and dangers. So if a real threat turns up, you'll spot it coming. If you're paranoid then you'll be vigilant and you'll *step out of the way* (figuratively speaking) just at the right moment every time.

The problem with paranoia is that it's relentless; it abounds with threats both actual and apparent. If we allow it to rumble along in our head-chatter we will suffer. So, if your personality leans toward paranoia, do you need to ditch the paranoia or do you need to manage your head-chatter? Since it's not really possible to change your personality in any significant way, then managing your head-chatter is a sustainable solution.

Deprivation is the threat in vignette four. The head-chatter will justify the grievance. The head-chatter says that the suffering is caused by the slow bus and the narrow winding road. The suffering will follow the bus for the duration of the journey and perhaps beyond. The facts are there before your eyes. *The bus is too slow, there are no overtaking opportunities, true or false?*

In the slow-bus vignette, if we step outside the head-chatter and observe the present moment for what it offers, we see a human suffering quite unnecessarily. Whatever it is in your mind that needs doing can wait for sure. It doesn't matter how much you huff and you puff, you will not blow down the house of bricks.^{viii} The point is to *change the way you feel*.

Our threats are personal. They are based on well-established belief systems.^{ix} They are well worn grooves in our mind. These are our stories, our theories. These belief-systems that are embedded in these stories will pretty-well define our personality. The head-chatter is behaviour of our mind but it gains meaning as a projection of our personality. It

reflects the way we see the world in terms of threats. This is not the only way to look at life, but if you want to change the way you feel then you need to resolve your threats one way or the other.

Resolve the unresolvable

The objective is to get back to real-time and to disengage from the head-chatter. We need to move-on from the head-chatter, to get off the emergency button as soon as possible. To change the way you feel.

For the main part the threats that trigger our head-chatter are by their nature unresolvable. That is to say they are unresolvable in any absolute or permanent way. This is because they are part of you. These threats, your threats, are woven into the fabric of your personality. Therefore, the resolution for these threats is required every-time they're triggered.

If we think about threats generally, we can talk about them as either *external* or *internal*. The *external threats* are in the queue with all of the daily demands and challenges. The external threats are resolvable for the most part. They are part of our physical world. For example you get the electricity bill; you're more likely to say it's a demand rather than a threat. All the same, there is the resolvability about the demand/challenge/threat. You do what it takes and you pay the bill.

Our internal threats are the Unresolvable. We're talking about the threats such as those illustrated here and illustrated in the *Threat Thesaurus User's Guide*.^x The resolution, of the threats that trigger our head-chatter, is an ongoing project in our lives; and of course practise makes perfect.

Resolvability becomes a perspective. There are the demands, challenges and threats of everyday living. Resolvability for the external threats comes down to verbs such as, doing, fixing, finishing, finalising, etc. This aspect of stress-reduction is summed up by the verb *to adapt*. For our external threats, the adaptation is the resolution. For example, the bus is about to make you into pancake, so you

jump out of the way.

The resolution of our internal threats comes down to the skilful use of our mind. It comes down to how well we're able to manage the head-chatter. We need to understand and do what it takes to come back to real-time, to disengage from the head-chatter, every time the head-chatter is triggered.

So here's the thing. The threat of shame can serve as the example. If the threat of shame is one of yours, where does the shame reside? How do you know that it's shame that you experience? Why don't you call it excitement, or motivation? How do you know that it's shame as such?

"I know that it's shame because of the way it feels; it feels like shame". Or you could also say, *"I feel embarrassed",* or *"I feel exposed".* To sum it up, *"I feel threatened".* Yes, and that's adrenaline that you're feeling. You feel something. No doubt about that.

We take the *non-specific arousal*, the elevated adrenaline, and we give it meaning. We experience the effect of the adrenaline in our body and we give it meaning, we attribute a cause. This becomes our *attribution theory* or *blame-story*.

If the threat of shame is one of yours, then you will be triggered into producing adrenaline from time to time in social situations. This is because social situation will provide you with plenty of reliable triggers.

Social situations demand that we let our guard down and become light and playful. This is threatening because the situation demands that you expose yourself. The shame is about exposure and ridicule; *"they (the audience) will reject me when they know what I'm really like".*

From the shame head-chatter come back to real-time, where is the audience now? Where did they go? Just like the mirage. The water was there across the road, and then it was gone as soon as you approached it.

If we talk about shame as a felt experience, we can certainly account for the feeling. If the head-chatter stops the adrenaline stops. The

adrenaline will return to baseline soon enough, if you let it; the cortisol will follow. You will change the way you feel, if you let it happen.

Whatever we can say about resolving the threat of shame we can say about any threat that triggers the head-chatter. It's the disengagement from the head-chatter that will change the way you feel; unless of course you fall back into the trap.

The elements of truth will return with vengeance. Your head-chatter will try to drag you back into the honey trap. For example, *"you're ignoring the fact that I'm a freak-show. You can't just ignore it".* This is when you might find yourself being seduced by the content. *"It's true, it's true; I'm a freak-show".* This is how the head-chatter loops on itself.

In the heat of the moment your objective is to allow your adrenaline and cortisol to return to baseline. Sounds hard to do; but it's probably easier than you'd expect.

There is an important factor in our favour. The adrenaline's effects will last for minutes, not hours or days, just minutes. This means that potentially the initial triggered experience will last for minutes; not hours, not days if you let-go or disengage from the head-chatter. Therefore the experience of *shame, abandonment, persecution, deprivation,* etc, will pass all in good time if you let it. In most cases we'd be talking about minutes or seconds; certainly not days or weeks.

Recovery rate

Recovery rate is the time it takes to get everything back in the box, so to speak. Recovery rate is a measurement that's factored into calculating physical fitness for example. For measuring fitness, recovery rate is the time it takes to get your heart rate back to baseline after a demanding activity.

It is worthwhile to think about *mental-fitness*. We can extend the definition of recovery rate to include the time it takes to get your adrenaline back to baseline, the cortisol will follow. Recovery rate could be a measure of

time that ranges from one second to infinity. The question is, how long did it take?

The principle behind recovery rate is that you could always make improvements. You'd want to get the recovery rate down to seconds. Think of it in relative terms. Try not to be fixed on the numbers. If you have a recovery rate at all, then this is a start; but it can probably be improved upon.

There are no clear exit signs in the head-chatter. Sometimes the way out is not clear. Sometimes the content is very challenging; and it's more than likely a very compelling story. All the same, the time it takes is the issue. Keep at it.

Often you'll need to breakdown some seductive perceptual distortions. Figuratively speaking, you might need to drive through the mirage, which is another way of saying break down the illusion to get out of the head-chatter. From the head-chatter you need to get back to real time. You will need to be susceptible to the complete truth and look beyond the elements of truth.

Positive disengagement

The objective is to become skilled enough in your mind to bring your attention back to real-time and to disengage from the head-chatter in the heat of the moment. You can call this resilience at the very least. You would do this because you intend to change the way you feel; not because you want to solve the problems of the world.

Your conscious intention is crucial for your successes in changing the way you feel. Your body will not give up so easily with the emergency chemicals whilst your mind holds a threat.

The threat must be resolved intentionally or your body won't buy it, so to speak. The opposite of a *conscious-intention* is a placebo-effect. The thing about placebo is that it is not a sustainable solution. For one thing it is a strategy that replaces one illusion with another. In the end the placebo illusion will wear out, as will any illusion. At some point

your haphazard attempts to feel better will wear out.

The active ingredient for your success is your conscious-intention. In other words, are you conscious of your intention? Do you actually know what you're doing? For example, have you caught on to what your mind gets up to when you're not looking, when your attention is elsewhere, off in the head-chatter?

Our main challenge for *mental health* is to disengage from the head-chatter. We need to turn off the *sympathetic response* (emergency button) when it's not needed. If you are successful in doing so, you will leave your body open to the possibility of triggering a *parasympathetic response* (relaxation switch).

To positively disengage from the head-chatter requires skill and the intention to resolve. We could characterise negative disengagement as having overtones of resentment and undercurrents of anger. This is like stomping your feet on the way out and slamming the door behind you. A positive disengagement would be to excuse yourself kindly as you withdraw quietly. Like saying "good night" before you go off to bed.

To escape the honey trap we have certain obstacles to overcome. The honey trap is a metaphor that demonstrates our human tendency to get caught up in our head-chatter. The main obstacles for disengaging from our head-chatter are our perceptual distortions, selective attention, confirmation bias and our attribution theories (the blame story). These are all perfectly natural and normal human activities.

Natural humans can also develop new skills. We can learn from observations of ourselves. Even if shame is one of your threats, you can become comfortable with Mindful self-observation; to change the way you feel.

Firstly we need to get past the fact of being triggered. Here we need Mindful acceptance of the fact^{xi}. Or we could go one step further into radical acceptance; this is where we really-really accept the fact^{xii}; the fact of being triggered.

We need our focus of attention on solutions not the problem. Focus on the doughnut not the hole. Express gratitude as much as possible, but keep it to yourself. No need to make yourself into a pest just because you're happy.

Secondly, recognise the presence of adrenaline and cortisol in your body. Don't be afraid of how you feel. Your body chemistry will ebb and flow according to your needs; **if you let it**. Learn from your observations for how to get your adrenaline back to baseline. Work on your recovery-rate; remember this is something that you do in your mind **on purpose**.

Thirdly, recognise the head-chatter as different to thinking. Sometimes the head-chatter will be disguised as thinking, sometimes it might be no more than a mental image. For starters, if you can feel the adrenaline in your body for no good reason then there will be head-chatter lurking somewhere in your mind. Most likely it will be lurking behind an element of truth. Perhaps it will be cleverly interwoven with thinking. Perhaps it will be just a stream of images.

Be grateful for the triggering from the triggering-events. For one thing, it proves beyond a doubt that your nervous system is working properly.

Be thankful for the head-chatter. The head-chatter provides you with useful information about the threat.

Be confident in naming the threat.^{xiii} This is how you resolve (defuse) these head-chatter causing threats. You bring your attention back to real-time and name the threat. Call it out. Use its name to expose it as a perceptual distortion. In naming the threat, the positive disengagement is in putting the head-chatter to rest; or you can have the head-chatter out there orbiting at a safe distance, *so to speak*.

By naming the threat you bring an end to the threat, you shine in the light. Go to the trouble of naming the threat. Take the time to figure it out. That's the only task, apart from breathing, when dealing with head-chatter. Practise doing it; the *figuring it out*. Get better at doing it and you will be a master of changing the way you feel.

Let the adrenaline and cortisol go back to baseline in their-own good time. It will be quicker than you expect if you let it. Bring it back to real-time. Come back into the room as it were, with your focus of attention. It comes down to where and how you focus your attention whilst living your life.

Appendix: Tabulated head-chatter examples

	Triggering Events	Head-Chatter	Element of Truth	Whole Truth
1	<i>You're sitting in a lecture theatre waiting for the lecturer to start when you notice a mature aged female student, a couple of isles over, is looking at you.</i>	God I'm a freak-show... (I'm being judged...)", etc. [Shame]	That woman WAS looking me.	The woman looking at you was admiring your hair.
2	<i>You walk into your bedroom and you find your wife is sitting on the bed having a giggling conversation on her mobile phone.</i>	"I knew it, she's not even hiding it from me... (she's having an affair)", etc. [Abandonment]	My wife IS ignoring me.	Your wife was on the phone to her sister.
3	<i>You look across the open plan office and you see two colleagues talking earnestly to each other.</i>	"Oh God what are they up to now, I don't need this... (they're plotting against me)", etc. [Persecution]	They ARE talking intensely.	Your workmates were discussing the football.
4	<i>You notice that you're stuck behind a slow bus on the open highway with no overtaking opportunities ahead.</i>	"Oh come on, what is this, I've got better things to do...", etc. [Deprivation]	I actually DO have things to do.	Anything you have to do right now can wait.
5	<i>You walk into my office and see the cupboard doors.</i>	"Who's he got sitting in there listening to me, they'll think that I'm crazy...", etc. [Shame]	I really DON'T know why I'm here.	There is now an opportunity to learn.
6	<i>You overhear a conversation between two of your housemates and one says, 'he's so slack, he just leaves a mess'.</i>	"They're always picking on me, it's not fair...", etc. [Persecution]	They ACTUALLY pick on me.	They weren't actually talking about you.
7	<i>You're brushing your teeth after breakfast and you remember something from the social event the night before.</i>	"God I'm so stupid, I fell for it again, can't I just keep my mouth shut... (from a memory, a faux pas the night before)", etc. [Shame]	He DOES micromanage me.	It's not your fault.
8	<i>You're crossing the main road and you see the bus just in time; and you leap out of the way to the safety of the footpath.</i>	"That bastard tried to kill me...", etc. [Persecution]	People DO get killed this way.	You weren't actually paying attention.

Endnotes

- ⁱ The *Emergency Button* is a metaphor to denote the *sympathetic response in our autonomic nervous system*, aka *autonomic arousal* or the *fight or flight* response.
- ⁱⁱ If your mind is *doing* something, the something is *behaviour*. It's a simple definition; doing is behaviour.
- ⁱⁱⁱ A *paradoxical effect* is where you put out one thing and you get back something unexpected and unwanted.
- ^{iv} For example: Velleman, J. David. "So It Goes." *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy 1* (2006): 1–23. http://www.amherstlecture.org/velleman2006/velleman2006_ALP.pdf
- ^v A mirage is a naturally occurring optical phenomenon in which light rays bend via refraction to produce a displaced image of distant objects or the sky. The word comes to English via the French (*se mirer*, from the Latin *mirari*, meaning "to look at, to wonder at". <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirage>
- ^{vi} For example: *Animals could help reveal why humans fall for illusions*. <https://theconversation.com/animals-could-help-reveal-why-humans-fall-for-illusions-23957>
- ^{vii} Midnight Oil, *Beds are Burning*: <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/midnight-oil/beds-are-burning>
- ^{viii} According to the Three Little Pigs, you can blow down a house of straw or sticks, but not a house of bricks.
- ^{ix} A good model for personality based belief systems is Dr Jeffrey Young and Dr Gary Brown's *Maladaptive Schemas*: Cognitive Therapy Centre of New York, 36 West 44th Street, Suite 1007, New York, NY 10036.
- ^x *Threat Thesaurus User's Guide*. <https://byronbaypsychologist.com.au/psychologist-byronbay/mind-skills-articles/The-Threat-Thesaurus-2019-11-13.pdf>.
- ^{xi} Acceptance is an attitude that is practised and developed. Jon Kabat-Zinn PhD (1990), *FULL CATASTROPHE LIVING: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.
- ^{xii} Marsha Linehan talks about the need for radical acceptance, particularly when we are flooded with emotion due to the difficulty of the content. Linehan, M. M. (1993b). *Cognitive-behavioural treatment of borderline personality disorder*, The Guilford Press: New York
- ^{xiii} To help with naming you threats see the *Threat Thesaurus User's Guide*. <https://byronbaypsychologist.com.au/psychologist-byronbay/mind-skills-articles/The-Threat-Thesaurus-2019-11-13.pdf>