

## The “What rationalization feels like” game:

**Choose a partner. Then:**

### **Step 1: Try rationalizing. (3-5 minutes)**

- Utter some rationalizations on purpose, to notice how it feels. For example – explain to your partner how of course your dissertation is going well, despite whatever your advisor thinks, because his standards are completely unfair, and he didn’t realize that chapter 2 is anomalously hard and doesn’t count...
- You can use some of the topics below, or make up your own situations to rationalize about.
- Try to actually get into the spirit of it – say these rationalizations as though you were actually feeling that way, and try, as you utter them, *to* actually feel that way.
- *While you do it, notice how rationalization feels, in as much detail as possible.*

Possible topics:

- ❖ How’s your dissertation going?
  - (You could do selective search to explain why it’s going badly, or why it’s going well)
- ❖ If you live with roommates: explain how you do more than your share of the housework.
- ❖ Describe the last fight you got in with a friend, colleague, or romantic partner. Explain why your own actions were totally justified.
- ❖ Was G.W. Bush a bad president? (You could do selective search for either answer.)
- ❖ Is it worth it to be in [math grad school / whatever degree program you’re in]?

If you notice cases where you rationalize in real life, jot down your own situations here:

### **Step 2: What did it feel like? (5 minutes)**

- A. Jot down your impressions of what it felt like. (Goal: notice cues in finer detail, so that smaller pieces of rationalization will become easier to spot.)

- B. Turn to the “What does rationalization feel like?” handout, where you’ll see other peoples’ cues. Circle the ones that apply to you; jot down any new cues you think of.

**Step 3: What “actually thinking” (not fooling yourself) feels like**

- A. Now, try to tackle an emotionally difficult question *without* going into “explaining” or “rationalizing” mode – sticking instead in “actually try to figure it out” mode.
- a. Be sure to look for new thoughts, not just recite existing ones.
- B. Do it aloud with a partner, or by yourself on scratch paper.
- C. Take a question below, or choose one of your own – but try to find a question where it’ll be hard *not* to rationalize, so that you can notice the contrast.

Possible topics:

- ❖ Should you be vegetarian?
- ❖ How’s your dissertation going?
- ❖ How attractive are you?
- ❖ How well do you know your mother? Is she happy?
- ❖ How unbiased in your picture of yourself?
- ❖ Was G.W. Bush a good president?
- ❖ What are your goals in life?

**Step 4: What did it feel like?**

Jot quick notes, or circle items you can identify with from the “What does rationalization / actually thinking feel like” handout.

## Some types of motivated cognition:

**Fake justifications**

**Motivated uncertainty**

**Selective Search**

**Motivated skepticism:**

**Combat reflexes**

**Flinches**

**Motivated stopping**

## What rationalization feels like (varies by person; collected from many folk);

Cues that can indicate rationalizing:

- Imagining a hypothetical audience; trying to explain yourself to that person;
- Content-less emphasizeers such as 'clearly', obviously, 'but I really believe'.
- Feeling tired afterward; having a heedful of static afterward;
- Your mouth responds with an immediate "no" before stopping to think or draw breath.
- It "feels false" or "feels like a salesperson".
- "I can't explain my reasoning to other person without a feeling of guilt that I am slightly manipulating them."
- I feel relief that I did not have to change my point of view after thinking through something.
- I feel quick twinge of fear.
- I feel emotionally invested in a particular fact being true.
- I have an "ugh field" across part of my mental landscape -- it feels almost like literal tunnel vision, and is the exact same feeling as the "ugh field" I might get around an unpaid bill.

Add yours here:

Cues that can indicate "actually thinking; really figuring it out":

- I feel curious -- a chasing, seeking, engaged feeling, like a cat chasing a mouse.
- I find myself thinking new thoughts, hearing new ideas (if talking to someone else), and making updates I'm interested in. The experience feels like looking around.
- I don't know what conclusion I'll come to.
- I spontaneously produce lines of research, not lines of argumentation.

Add yours here: