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To Make Better Decisions, Pretend You're Deciding for Someone Else

By **Melissa Dahl**



Perhaps the very last person you should turn to for advice is yourself, according to a new **post**

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(<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index/php/publications/observer/obsonline/need-to-solve-a-personal-problem-try-a-third-person-perspective.html>) from the Association for Psychological Science, which references research **published last year**

(<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/09/0956797614535400>) in *Psychological Science*.

We tend to make wiser decisions when thinking about someone else's problems than when thinking about our own issues, researchers from the University of Waterloo and the University of Michigan found, but there's a way around this. Think through your own decisions from a third-person perspective, suggest the researchers, led by Igor Grossmann at the University of Waterloo.

First, Grossmann and his team asked about 100 people, all of whom were in a long-term relationship, to either imagine that they'd been cheated on or that their best friend had been cheated on. They then were asked to imagine what their friend should do, and they answered a questionnaire designed to measure their "wise reasoning" skills — things like considering multiple perspectives and multiple possible outcomes, or seeking out a compromise. As the researchers expected, the people who were thinking about what their friend should do tended to answer in ways that demonstrated more wisdom than those who were thinking about themselves.

But is there a way we can manipulate this human quirk to make better decisions for ourselves? To find out, Grossmann and the rest of the researchers conducted a second, similar experiment, asking another set of study participants the same question: You (or your best friend) just got cheated on. What do you do? Some of the study volunteers were told to answer the wise-reasoning questionnaire from a first-person perspective, using words like *I* and *me*. ("Put yourself in this situation. Ask yourself, Why am I feeling this way?") The rest of the participants were instructed to think about the problem from a third-

person perspective. ("Put yourself in this situation. Ask yourself, why is he/she feeling this way?")

As it turned out, the people who were looking at the situation from the third-person vantage point showed better judgment, considering the issue from multiple perspectives and imagining many potential outcomes, regardless of whether they were imagining themselves or a friend in the infidelity scenario. The best way to figure out what to do next may indeed be to imagine how you'd advise a friend in the same situation.

SOURCES: PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

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