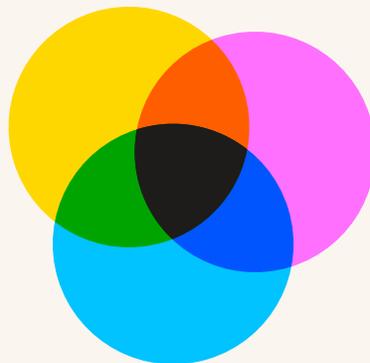


Chatter



Book Club Kit

For the General Reader



Ethan Kross

For the General Reader

1. Discuss a time when you felt you were impacted by your own mental chatter. Were you able to work your way through it? If so, what tactics did you use? Were any of those tactics similar to those described by Kross?
2. Kross explains that our childhood caretakers can have a strong influence on our internal voice as we develop. Do you recognize the influence of your childhood caretakers on your inner voice now? Why or why not?
3. In Andrew Irving's study of New Yorkers' recorded internal speech, he observed that people's inner monologues "often landed on negative content with utterly no transition, like a gaping pothole appearing suddenly on the unspooling road of thought." Why do you think people are often drawn to the negative?
4. According to a study cited in chapter one, what people are thinking about at a given time is often "a better predictor of their happiness than what they [are] actually doing." Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
5. After an incredible high school baseball career, pitcher Rick Ankiel was drafted by the Cardinals. During his first full year in the majors, at age 21, Ankiel was the starting pitcher against the Braves in game one of the playoffs. Despite having pitched at an elite level for nearly his whole life, Ankiel struggled during that high-stress game. He began to throw wild pitch after wild pitch—something he had never done before—due in part to the stress he was experiencing. Have you ever experienced a time when chatter undermined your ability to perform well? Were you able to overcome your mental block? Why or why not?
6. In chapter two, Kross outlines a set of studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s by Bernard Rimé in which he uncovered that, regardless of gender, age, culture, or geographical location, people are very strongly motivated to talk to others about most of their negative experiences. Why do you think this is the case? Who do you most often turn to when you're looking to share your negative experiences? Does talking to them make you feel better or worse?
7. With the advent of social media, human beings "overshare more than ever before," according to Kross. How has social media changed the way that you express your thoughts and emotions to your friends, family, and peers? Do you think it has had a positive or negative impact on your relationships? Does observing other people share their emotions on social media impact you in any way?
8. In 2011, Kross and his colleagues conducted a study that discovered that brain regions involved in physical pain also play a role in people's experience of emotional pain. The findings suggested that when people say their "feelings hurt" they may actually be referring to physical pain in their body. Have you had the experience of feeling emotional pain in your body? Can you describe it?
9. In chapter three, Kross writes, "We can't see ourselves with the same distance and insight with which we see others." Does this ring true to you? Can you recall any examples of this from your own life?
10. Kross describes the phenomenon of the "shrinking of the self," or moments "when you feel smaller in the midst of awe-inspiring sights . . . [and] so do your problems." Have you ever experienced this shrinking of the self? When? Did you notice an impact on your chatter in that moment?
11. Kross defines ritual and routine differently, describing rituals—which help to quiet chatter—as actions that "consist of a rigid sequence of behaviors often performed in the same order" and which "are infused with meaning." What are some rituals you have in your life? Do you see them as different from your routines? How do you and your family benefit from rituals?
12. Many of us would like to have an inner voice that is consistently positive and uplifting. However, Kross argues that "you wouldn't want to live a life without an inner voice that upsets you some of the time. It would be like braving the sea in a boat with no rudder." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
13. In what ways do you think changing the conversations you have with yourself has the potential to change your life?