

Anxiety of a Woman at a Marriageable Age:

“Is He Going to Break up with Me?”

Betty Li-Chen Lai

Betty Li Chen Lai graduated from Warwick Business School of Warwick University in England, where she received her MBA degree. She operates her own college in Beijing, Knights of the Round Table Philosophy College (KRTPC), focusing on teaching students to apply philosophical and critical thinking to their life and business. Helping people to solve their emotional problems and create a positive life is the purpose the college.
Email address: bettylai2010@gmail.com

Introduction

I have combed through my conversations with my client. The two sets of emotional reasoning of my client are presented. Below is my report.

First Conversation (Over the Phone): Sensing the Client’s Emotions for the First Time

On November 16, 2015, I spoke with my client Ling-Ling (“Ling”) over the phone for the first time. The conversation lasted approximately 20 minutes, during which time she briefly mentioned her recent love trouble and requested to meet in person as she felt uneasy talking over the phone about this issue. Her voice sounded tense, slightly trembling and rushed.

Second Conversation (Face-To-Face): Introduction of The Client, Her Issue, and LBT

Ling, a single, 35-year-old fashion designer at a clothing company, is the niece of a good friend of mine. 4 years ago, Ling was about to tie the knot with her then boyfriend, but before the couple could walk down the aisle, they broke up as a result of incompatible personalities. Though still living under the shadows of that unpleasant relationship, Ling has been dating someone from the publishing industry for two years.

On November 20, 2015, Ling met me at a quiet music café, which I picked purposefully with the intention of creating a comfortable environment that encouraged conversation. As we began, I took the initiative to chat about female fashion, in the hope that this causal opener could slowly lead to her relationship issue. I noticed a transition in her posture - from uptight to more relaxed - as she gradually leaned back in her chair and spoke with increased body language. Before long, she started opening up and told me what had been weighing on her.

She said that recently her boyfriend always seemed eager to end a conversation with her, saying that he was busy. Ling was fine with it the first few times, but as the frequency increased, it began to upset her. (I noticed her voice turned tense and rushed when speaking of this.)

Confirming The Client’s Emotions

B: Would you please describe what it’s like when you feel upset?

L: I feel like vomiting. I can feel myself becoming increasingly tense. He is always in such a rush to end our conversations without letting me finish, so I have to hurry every time. But the thing is I don't really have anything important to say to him. I just want to chit-chat.

B: You said he is "always" in a rush to end your conversations?

L: Yes, but I think he is lying. How is it possible that he is busy every time? I suspect he is cheating on me!

B: But it's only a guess, correct?

L: Yes, but a reasonable one! He must be thinking about breaking up with me. *How irresponsible!* I have given so much to this relationship! (Ling became emotional.)

B: Ling, relax. We will sort this out together, one step at a time, ok? It may not be what you think it is.

L: How can it not be? This is just like my previous relationship. I poured all my heart out only to be betrayed. *Don't I deserve to be loved?* Men are all irresponsible animals! (She once again used the word "irresponsible.")

(After confirming that the client is emotionally anxious, i.e. having some sort of assumption about future events, and that she puts all blame on the other party and doubts her own self-worth, I began telling her about Logic-Based Therapy, LBT.)

1. Confirming Her First Emotional Reasoning (I Wrote Down Her Deductive Logic on a Piece Of Paper. She Read It and Nodded in Agreement.)

E (*anxiety*) = O (*My boyfriend is in a rush to hang up on me*) +
R (*He must be thinking about breaking up with me and he is irresponsible*)

Rule (If O, then R)

-If my boyfriend is always in a rush to hang up on me then he must be thinking about breaking up with me, and he is irresponsible.

Object (O) - *My boyfriend is always in a rush to hang up on me.*

Rating (R) - *He must be thinking about breaking up with me and he is irresponsible.*

B: Let's take a look at this emotional reasoning, shall we? Does this describe your situation?

L: Yes, it's a perfect description of my situation! (She was very anxious and upset. I felt a tad awkward, but not wanting the flow of our conversation to be broken by her emotional swing, I tried redirecting her attention back to LBT.)

B: Ling, LBT is designed to help you understand your own emotional reasoning. Following LBT, you will gradually find the correct philosophical antidote to open your mind, solve your trouble, and lead a happy and contented life. You want to be happy, right?

L: Hm. (Though not yet completely calm, she was willing to read the paper again.)

2. Examining the Fallacy in Her Premise:

B: You say your boyfriend is "always" in a rush to hang up. Are you sure you mean "every single time" by "always"?

L: Um... Not every single time, but... close enough.

B: So that means sometimes he is not in a hurry to hang up? (Inconsistent with fact.)

L: Um... Yes... (Her voice softened.)

3. Refuting the Fallacy

B: Well, what appears to be wrong in the emotional reasoning?

L: Hmm. (To maintain her pride, she only responded with noises). He doesn't hang up on me every time. So, you are saying that my deductive logic is wrong?

B: Well. Let's take a look together. If the premise is incorrect, then... (I looked her in the eye, encouraging her to say the conclusion.) What do you think?

L: Then... my conclusion is incorrect.

B: Well done, Ling! So, he doesn't necessarily want to break up with you and isn't necessarily irresponsible as you think because he doesn't hang up on you every time. (Ling nodded in agreement.) Now, let's look at the second emotional deduction of yours.

L: Are there more problems with my thoughts? (She appeared concerned.)

(I wrote down a further syllogistic emotional reasoning for Ling.)

1. Confirming Her Second Emotional Reasoning

Premise rule:

If he is thinking about breaking up with me, then I don't deserve to be loved.

Object: *He is thinking about breaking up with me.*

Rating: *I don't deserve to be loved.*

2. Examining the Fallacy in Her Premise (The Client Projected Her Emotions about Her Past Relationship Failure onto Her Current Relationship.)

B: Ling, this is another emotional reasoning that I drew up based on our talk just now. Please take a look, will you? (Ling did as I requested, and nodded in agreement.)

B: If you consider this to be correct, do you have any argument to support it?

L: Um... (She hesitated. Looking unsettled, she seemed perplexed about how to produce evidence. I encouraged her to reflect slowly and carefully on her deductive logic.)

B: You can take a moment to think it over and then tell me what you think. (Time seemed like it stopped. Ling appeared lost in her train of thoughts. Her facial expression looked so cold and distant that even I started to feel uneasy, which seemed unprofessional on my part as a therapist.)

L: Isn't my emotional reasoning correct? *My previous relationship* was also like this! If I had deserved his love (referring to her ex-boyfriend), why would he have broken up with me? Incompatible personalities? Nothing but an excuse!

B: I am sorry that this brings back unpleasant memories. If I may ask, *did you talk to your ex-boyfriend in person about the real cause of the breakup?*

L: I don't want to talk about him anymore! (Ling appeared very upset; yet, to help her clarify her own emotional reasoning, I couldn't stop here. I signaled the waiter and ordered another dessert to try to lighten up the mood.)

B: Ling, I know it's not easy to talk about the last relationship, but we are only digging deeper to help you better understand your own belief, hoping that it won't carry over and harm the next relationship. You just talked about the pain that the previous relationship has caused you and that means it's possible that it is taking a toll on your current relationship and influencing your current emotional reasoning. (Listening, Ling's facial expression remained cold.)

L: No, we didn't talk in person! He *broke up with me over the phone*, saying that we had incompatible personalities, that he didn't want to continue the relationship, and that he wished that I would find someone better than him. I hung up the phone immediately. I was so mad at him. What he said was nothing but excuses. He was so irresponsible! No big deal.

I don't need someone like that anyway. (She became very emotional again. Tears filled her eyes. Clearly, she was still haunted by the past. I was a bit concerned that her strong emotions might bring an end to our conversation. I reminded myself to keep her sadness and anxiety in check. I sliced a piece of cake and pushed the plate in front of her to lighten up the mood and hopefully create a distraction.)

3. Refuting the Fallacy (Subjective Assumptions Made by the Client Dominated How She Saw Her Relationships)

B: Let's slow down a bit, Ling. Have some cake and drink some tea... So, you are saying that the last time you spoke with each other was during that phone conversation in which he proposed the breakup. Afterwards, you never contacted each other again?

L: Correct. Like I said, I don't need people like that anyway. There is no need to talk! (Her voice was stern, as if she was venting her anger towards her ex-boyfriend on me.)

B: You never spoke to each other again. You think that his breaking up with you means you don't deserve to be loved, and you don't want to think about that relationship anymore. So that means the assumption is entirely subjective?

L: Yes, but the assumption is right! If I had deserved to be loved, why did he break up with me?

B: But this is still your own unproved assumption. This type of thinking is very likely to carry over and harm your other relationships because you are likely to impose the same reasoning on your current relationship and, trust me, it won't do you any good. The conclusion "you don't deserve to be loved" is deduced from your own subjective assumption! Do you still think it is a fair judgment?

L: Are you saying that I am too quick to judge? You mean my current relationship might be impacted by this incorrect assumption?

B: I'll leave that to you to figure out, Ling.

L: Hm. I admit that my reasoning isn't entirely correct and my premise is faulty.

B: By using LBT, we have been able to see that our emotional reasoning may not always be right. We have drawn up two premises for you and you have seen and refuted the fallacies in your reasoning. Now, LBT will help you to find the right guiding virtues and the corresponding philosophical antidotes so that you may have a clearer idea about how to regulate your emotions and lead a happier life.

4. Identifying Guiding Virtues regarding the Fallacies

L: So guiding virtues can help me regain control of my own emotions and stop my boyfriend from hanging up on me?

B: Well, I can't promise you that. I am not your boyfriend and I don't know how he thinks. I'd be the irresponsible one here if I promised you this. And this is not what a therapist should be. (I responded with a smile, not wanting her to get the wrong idea that LBT can solve everything.)

L: What are my guiding virtues then?

B: There are 11 sets of destructive fallacies and corresponding guiding virtues in LBT. Let's take a look at these descriptions and see which one or ones fit your situation, shall we?

L: Sure. This is why I wanted to see you today.

B: OK. Now, please look at the 2 premises that I wrote down for you earlier. Which fallacies do you feel best describe your deductive logic? (I explained the 11 sets of fallacies and virtues.)

L: I think my anxiety comes from the fact that I can be *arbitrary and self-centered* sometimes; I at times exaggerate how bad things are; and I tend to *blame others*. (I was more than delighted to see her regain her senses.)

B: Wonderful. You have found your fallacies, which are “the world revolves around me,” “Awfulizing,” and “Damnation”. (She looked at the chart of fallacies and virtues I drew up and pointed out her fallacies one by one.)

4-1 About the Fallacies

B: For the fallacy “*the world revolves around me*”, LBT suggests using *empathy* as a guiding virtue; that is, learning to stand in the shoes of others to make real connections without being overbearing.

Your second fallacy is “Awfulizing,” which indicates a tendency to deduce *conclusions that are near-catastrophic*. This prevents truth from being seen, miring things in a pessimistic, counter-constructive cloud, and bringing an end to something that might have otherwise been salvageable. The guiding virtue for this is *courage*, courage to find and face truth. Whether the truth is to your liking or not, you should *be brave* to face it, and learn to see everything rationally and calmly. This way, you won’t fall victim to negative emotions again or let them take control of your life.

The last fallacy is *Damnation (of self, others, and the universe)*. This means placing blame on yourself or others without inquiring further, which tends to lead to disrespect, terminates communication, and plants the seeds of hatred. Obviously, this doesn’t solve any problem. LBT suggests *giving oneself and others respect* so that both parties have an opportunity to express themselves and clarify their thoughts. This is also a good way to re-establish the relationship.

5. Philosophical Antidotes Regarding the Guiding Virtues

L: Would you please be a little more specific? Can you give me an example?

B: Ok. Do you have any religious belief?

L: Yes, I am a Christian.

B: What a coincidence. I am a Christian, too. Ok. Now, let’s take “the world revolves around me-empathy” as an example. In Philippians 2, it says “Not looking everyone to his private good, but keeping in mind the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.” Also in Mathew, it says that “All those things, then, which you would have men do to you, even so do you to them: because this is the law and the prophets.” These are evidence that empathy is the key that helps us to better understand others and brings people closer.

L: I have read these texts, but I never put them into practice. I feel so ashamed. Then, what is the *guiding virtue* for awfulizing? I seem to awfulize things a lot.

B: Greek philosopher Epictetus said that when comparing something bad with something even worse, you should be glad the worse thing did not happen to you. He also said that it is not pain that is to be dreaded but the fear of pain.

L: You mean that I single-handedly created the fear that my boyfriend would break up with me and that my emotions were affected because I saw breaking up with him as the end of the world? Then what about damnation? I can’t think of anything that’d be encouraging to me.

B: (Laughing) It seems you have grasped the meaning of courage to some extent. In terms of *respect*, in his *Discussion on Making All Things Equal*, Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi said that “All subjects may be looked at from (two points of view), from that and from this.” On a certain level, it means that everything is one – you are me, and I am you. We create each other. He also said that “That view comes from this; and this view is a consequence

of that: which is the theory that that view and this (the opposite views) produce each other.” In simpler terms, it means that you are a result of how I treat you, and I am the result of how you treat me. You and I create each other. Therefore, when lacking respect for each other, that is, damnation, then both parties will feel hurt and no good will come out of this. (Ling listened attentively, nodding in agreement from time to time. I could feel that she was much happier.)

6. Applying Philosophical Antidotes (Action Plan)

B: Next, I'd like to move on to the last step of LBT – applying philosophical antidotes. In other words, how to put your antidotes into practice. Any thoughts on this?

L: You gave some quotes from the Bible and ancient philosophers. I think I can try to read the Bible more and even pray when I feel down, but I am afraid I might lack perseverance.

B: This is great because perseverance is your homework! The key to making LBT work is *perseverance*. After all, it is your own happiness that we are talking about here and you are the only person who can work diligently to make it happen, right? Just a quick tip for when you feel down. Maybe try going to a church and have some alone time with Jesus Christ. *Imagine* that He is comforting you, telling you to not be sad and be joyous because joy is the best remedy for pain. What do you think?

L: Thank you. I feel a lot better. If possible, I would like to know more about LBT. I think this will be very helpful to myself and some of my friends.

B: No problem! There are two books that I think will be very helpful to you.

1. *The New Rational Therapy*, and
2. *What would Aristotle do*

both by Dr. Elliot D. Cohen, creator of LBT.

(I wrote down the names on a piece of paper and passed it to Ling, smiling.)

L: Thank you. Coffee is on me today.

I walked out of the café, feeling refreshed. There's nothing more joyous than helping people unload burdens from their hearts. As I walked, I decided that I would give her a follow-up call a week later to see how she was doing.

What I Have Learned from this Experience

I think the best part about this experience is that I learned how to use the six steps of LBT to help my client see her own fallacies. Also, during my conversations with her, I was constantly examining myself to ensure that I didn't fall victim to the same fallacies as she. Most importantly, in the process of learning LBT, I collected a large amount of philosophical quotes to use in conjunction with the guiding virtues, which will be very handy in the future.

What I Would Do Differently Next Time

This meeting took longer than I had expected. The planned 90 minutes stretched to 150 minutes. I think that was because I carefully observed the reactions of the client and thought about how to move the conversation forward without causing her to feel uneasy. I did feel tired as the meeting drew to a close. I knew how the client wanted to solve her problem in one meeting and I did not have the heart to end the meeting abruptly.

However, I don't want to consume all of my energy in one meeting. To improve, I will make the meeting duration clear next time I see my client, and set a clear discussion agenda beforehand so that we don't have to cram everything into one single meeting.

What the Client Learned

From our conversations and observation of her reactions, I feel that the client was quick to pick up on the basics of LBT. I must admit that she was very intelligent! She was able to quickly find her own fallacies and realize that she needed to regulate her emotions and examine her beliefs to prevent her current relationship from getting worse. After returning home, I called her to ask about the helpfulness of our meeting today. She expressed her gratitude for my help and told me about her plan to ask her boyfriend out for coffee to talk about this. She said she would use the virtues in LBT to communicate with him so that she wouldn't fall victim to the same fallacies again.