

**Why Angry Arguments seldom work!**  
**RP Chamber of Commerce, February 1, 2021**  
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In a 1950s study, psychologists from Dartmouth and Princeton asked students from both schools to watch the film of an unusually rough football game and look for infractions of the rules.

They were to rate the fouls from mild to flagrant.

They all watched **the same film** but—I am sure you can guess—the students' ratings corresponded to their loyalties.

The Princeton students saw many more fouls from the Dartmouth players and rated their own players' fouls as much less serious, and vice versa. **Each accused the other side of intentional rough play.**

So even back in the Fifties when social scientists assumed people were rational, these researchers were forced to conclude **there was no objectivity** when perceiving events in which one has an invested interest.

James Whiting, Ph.D. describes how one of his fellow graduate students (let's call him Joe) loved arguing about Freudian theories.

At one point, Joe told me I was too quiet in class. He suggested that I must come from a family that was uncomfortable talking about sex. I protested that he didn't even *know* my family.

"See!" Joe said. "Your reaction proves my point. You are using defense mechanisms because I am getting at underlying endopsychic conflicts."

The more I pushed back, the more I proved to Joe that he was correct, and the more defensive I became.

In other words, Joe **saw what he was looking for, and my arguing convinced him he was right!**

Research on motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and other illogical leaps of the human brain show it is NOT equipped to convince each other through arguing.

It turns out that our opinions are largely based on our feelings, and we seek communion with others who feel the same way. This helps us hold on tightly to our views and swat away threats to changing them.

## **The reason why angry arguments seldom work**

Scholars have found that when people are presented information on complex topics, they agree with the points that support their existing position and dismiss things that contradict it. In fact, the least informed are often the most zealous about how right they are, and they gain pleasure from their supposed moral superiority. (This is called the Dunning-Druger Effect.)

In addition, heated debates only convince the already converted, and further entrench the opposition.

Have you noticed, dear reader, that the older we become, the more clearly we see how life is incredibly complex.

The rub is that all of us prefer simplicity and certainty. We fill in gaps to confirm our biases and create a preferred reality. Since experience is often ambiguous, it's easy to find evidence that fits our views.

Politics is an obvious example. The issues are loaded with ambiguity, complexity, and subjectivity. The sad fact is that they are boiled down to a simple certainty: "Everything my side says is true, and most of what you say is not."

So...the next time you get into an argument around the family dinner table, remember that aggressively pushing "facts" and accusations will NOT win anyone over.

However, if there was ever a time when we needed each other, it is now!

So, rather than arguing, seek to understand their underlying motivations.

This is far more helpful (and less stressful) than arguing each other into deeper divides.