

Perfectly Logical Explanations

<p>Overview</p>	<p>This discussion guide is intended to serve as an example of how to engage with “perfectly logical explanations” or dominant narratives (well-known and widely accepted explanations or narratives that are typically in service of the interests and ideologies of dominant social groups) raised in classroom discussion. While the guide below specifically uses a discussion about the representation of women in video games as an example, it is designed to exemplify the kinds of questions that could be raised to critically interrogate any dominant narrative. More information about Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLE) and the related concepts of multipartiality and powerbalancing.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To help students recognize the weight of dominant narratives and the power they have (i.e., that PLE’s already have a lot of cultural weight and power without the class needing to spend equal time on those perspectives). 2) To illuminate how dominant narratives are political and biased and why it is easy to think they are not. 3) To raise students’ awareness of how we learn, absorb, and reproduce dominant narratives. 4) To help students learn to rigorously interrogate dominant narratives.
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>This discussion-based activity can be implemented or adapted to suit the needs of a class. For example, it can be done when a PLE is raised (or in the following class period), adapted to help students work through the specific PLE that was raised, or it can be used as a stand-alone lesson in critical inquiry of dominant narratives, using any PLE that the students will likely be familiar with. In the example below, we use gender and games as our topic. The discussion guide can be easily adapted to the PLE of concern in your classroom.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Because dominant narratives are, by definition, dominant, students may exhibit resistance to participating in a critical analysis of a PLE. PLE’s are often informed by powerful ideologies that students may not be accustomed to interrogating. You will need to push students to challenge their confidence in the logic of dominant narratives. 2) This activity is time-consuming (potentially taking an entire class period). However, the more time spent on it, the more likely it is that students will build the skill to interrogate other dominant narratives/perfectly logical explanations in the future.

**Additional
Context**

Scenario:

In a classroom discussion, a marginalized perspective or narrative is challenged. The student challenging the perspective brings up a dominant narrative that, through its cultural prominence carries more weight and credibility with the majority of students than the marginalized narrative.

For example, in conversations about immigration, students may raise the point that strict policy is important because undocumented immigrants are a drain on the resources that should only be available to tax-paying citizens. This argument is likely familiar to the students, and many may take the rationale behind it as a given. However, it is something of a red herring that assumes citizenship as an entitlement (rather than an unearned privilege), and it doesn't account for the fact that undocumented [immigrants often pay into social security](#) without ever being able to collect retirement benefits.

Giving the student's "perfectly logical explanation" (PLE) equal floor time can add to the already unequal power the dominant narrative carries but dismissing the student's explanation can be perceived as unfair or biased. Ignoring the PLE fails to address the existing weight and power their explanation carries. **The problem needs to be addressed by illuminating and interrogating the dominant narratives and giving students the skills to critically interrogate dominant narratives themselves.**

Session Sequence

Lesson Structure	Time <i>(Estimated amount of time for each component)</i>	Activity Content and Instructions
Introduction	5 mins	<p>The instructor welcomes the class and provides an overview of the lesson, introducing the concepts of Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLE) and Dominant Narratives.</p> <p>Dominant Narrative: An explanation or story that is told in service of the dominant group's interests and ideologies.</p> <p>PLE: A way for an individual, who voices a dominant narrative, to simultaneously provide context to justify their perspectives.</p>
Establish a Critical Perspective to Analyze	5 mins	<p>Ask students to think about a critical perspective (raises a demand or concern that is critical of the status quo or established knowledge) that the class can further analyze. This should represent a marginalized perspective or a narrative that challenges a dominant narrative. If a student raises a perspective, make sure that this is what they meant and adjust as needed.</p> <p>If the class is unable to come up with a critical perspective, one example you can use is: Video games ought to include more playable women characters who are not sexualized or victimized for the purpose of furthering the story of a male character. The repeated representation of women in games as background decorations, passive damsels in distress, victims of violence, and sex objects is socially unjust and perpetuates a sexist culture.</p>
PLE relating to perspective	5 mins	<p>Once a critical perspective is established, ask students to raise perfectly logical explanations to the critical perspective. Make sure that this is what the student who raised the PLE meant and adjust as needed.</p> <p>If using the video game example, a PLE can be: Women are a small minority of game users, so it does not make sense to cater to them, as games with women protagonists do not sell well.</p> <p>Decide on one PLE to analyze and move forward with.</p>
Large Group Discussion	35 mins (~12 mins/block)	<p>Questions for understanding the greater context of the PLE <i>(Choose questions from this list or use these as inspiration for context-focused questions that will best address the PLE you are working with. You can present your questions in any form that is most useful to you, such as a handout or as a loose guide for your own reference during a discussion. Track important contextual insights on the board or overhead):</i></p>

12 mins

- Is the PLE familiar to you?
 - From whom have you heard it previously and in what contexts? (a friend in a social setting, a professor in a class, a blogger on a website, a scholarly article in a cultural studies journal, etc.)
- How does the source and context of this PLE help you understand the function of this claim?
 - Why was it brought up by the person and in the context you heard it previously?
- Who might benefit from this PLE?
 - In what ways do they benefit by furthering this narrative?
 - How do they contribute to the furthering of this narrative (advertisements featuring male gamers, repetition of the narrative or related narratives, criticizing female gamers)?
- Who else might have a stake in this narrative?
 - How are they benefited or harmed by it?

Questions for recognizing the assumptions of PLE (*Choose questions from this list. You can present your questions in any form that is most useful to you, such as a handout or as a loose guide for your reference during a discussion.*)

- What assumptions does this PLE depend on to hold up as a logical response to the critical perspective? (*Write responses on the board or project them so you can refer to these*)
- Some possible assumptions your students identify (help them refine the assumptions to be as specific and thorough as possible):
 - Women do not play games/do not play enough games to be a relevant audience to consider.
 - Games with female protagonists do not sell well because players do not want to play games with female protagonists.
 - The only reason to make female protagonists is to appeal to women as a consumer market and increase game sales OR that the capitalist motive of selling games is more important than the demand to include more ethical representations of women.
- What would evidence for each of these claims look like?
 - Do you expect that there is sufficient evidence supporting these assumptions? Why?
 - *Optional: have students search for evidence for these claims, taking note of the credibility of their sources.*
- Given the lack of credible evidence to support these assumptions, how do we explain why the PLE is so widely accepted as true and reasonable?

	12 mins	<p>Questions for further interrogating the assumptions they have identified (<i>These questions should press on what might be problematic or incomplete about the PLE as a response to the critical perspective. You can also have your students divide into groups and compose questions about each assumption themselves, giving a few examples of the kinds of questions you are looking for.</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What percentage of consumers would need to be women before concerns like the one represented by the critical perspective ought to be taken seriously? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why do we think/How do we know that women do not play games? ○ Why do we think we know that women do not play games? ○ Could there be other explanations for why we think women don't play games that don't necessarily rely on it being true (e.g. advertising, stereotypes of girls as more social and less aggressive, we don't personally know many girls who talk about playing games)? • Why do we believe that games with female protagonists do not sell well? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What could be some possible reasons that games with female protagonists do not sell well? ○ Could there be factors besides the gender of the protagonist that might weigh into the commercial success of a game? ○ If few games have been made with female protagonists, can we be sure that there has been adequate market research to definitively prove that all other things being equal, the success of a game is greatly impacted by the gender of the protagonist? • What are some reasons why someone might want more complex female protagonists in video games besides increasing game sales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the gender of the protagonist does impact game sales, why do we accept game sales as a satisfactory rebuttal to our critical perspective (i.e., why do we accept capitalist logic as a response to an ethical demand)?
Large Group Debrief	10 mins	<p>Questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on what we have interrogated about the PLE, do you think it adequately responds to the initial critical perspective? Why or why not? (<i>You might choose to define for your students what a red herring is and explain how they function rhetorically.</i>) • Why do you think this explanation carries so much weight? (<i>remind them that many in the class were familiar with the PLE raised and that most agreed there was a sympathetic logic to the explanation</i>).

		<p>Review the steps students can take when interrogating PLE's and why they require this rigor:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Identify the PLE and what narratives it responds to2) Understand its context (who says it and why)3) Recognize the assumptions of the PLE4) Interrogate what may be problematic, incomplete, or taken for granted about its assumptions and why
Next Steps		<p>This discussion can be referred to whenever a PLE is raised in the class or in a student's writing to encourage students to think critically about their assumptions and investment in dominant narratives. You can also continue a focus on perfectly logical explanations by having them do independent research and writing on a PLE of their choosing (you can provide them with a list to choose from or encourage them to use one they have encountered in their lives).</p>