

## “Spin Cycle”

Kobi Libbi  
Snider High School, Indiana

So, my younger sister, she, uh, brought home a new boyfriend the other day.

She introduced me to him, she said, “Kobi, this is my new boyfriend, John.”

And then, she excused herself, going to the restroom, leaving John and myself alone. Well, I love my younger sister, so I decided to take advantage of this opportunity and have a little, uh, talk with John.

So I sat John down on the sofa, I said, “John, I want you to remember one thing. That is my sister in there. So, if you hurt her, at all, so help me, I will, I will stay up nights thinking of new and inventive ways to make you suffer.”

But apparently John couldn’t handle that. I mean, he broke down and started crying right there on the sofa. But, hey, I guess that’s seven-year-olds for ya.

Okay, so, so that story was a lie. I don’t actually have a younger sister. I don’t actually make seven-year-olds cry – often.

But suppose for a minute that it had been true. It was still presented in a misleading way. While factually accurate, I left out a key piece of information – the age of the children – that was integral to our understanding of the situation. And while this misleading technique can be used for humorous purposes, more often it is used to distort real knowledge and to suppress the truth. What I’m talking about is “spin.”

No, not the kind you put on a little white ball, but the kind you put in a little white lie. Spin – the selective interpretation or representation of the truth.

And you see, good spin is a lot like the web spun by a spider. It’s delicate, intricate, and barely visible. Unfortunately, while the kind of spin I’m talking about may be less tangible than that of a spider’s web, it is equally sticky, and it is beginning to create an equally dangerous trap for the clumsy fly that is America. It seems that we have become caught up in a “spin cycle” where the tendency to lie has woven itself into the fabric of our society and is beginning to create problems for us, both as individuals and as a nation.

The prevalence of dishonesty and the trouble it is causing can be seen, first, in the way we lie to ourselves; second, in the way we are lied to by others; and third, in the way these lies compound themselves and become a cycle.

But first, let us examine how we lie to ourselves.

It is safe to say that some people have more problems than others.

[Cough, cough] “I’m Michael Jackson.” [Cough, cough]

Something in my throat.

But, it’s also safe to say that we all have some trouble that we would like to see reconciled. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to find solutions to our problems when we are lying to ourselves about their causes.

Take, for example, the case of Gregory Rhymes.

That’s right, ladies and gentlemen, from the people that brought you the, “I didn’t know the coffee was hot,” lawsuit, comes more seemingly absurd litigation against the McDonald’s Corporation. At fifteen-years-old and more than 400 pounds, last fall Gregory Rhymes and seven other overweight children sued the McDonald’s Corporation because they said the fast food chain didn’t provide them with enough warning that their food was unhealthy. If you find that a little hard to swallow, you’re not alone.

Just think of the sensational fun that Johnny Cochrane would have had spinning this case.

In his hands, he might have told you, “If you’re overweight, litigate.”

“If you’re big and tall, head for city hall.”

“And if Ronald made you extra large, then you tack on a punitive charge.”

If you found the right smooth-talking lawyer, you could probably sue McDonald’s for tornado damage. I mean, they advertise all natural ingredients, so they should be liable for acts of nature, right?

I mean, yes, this young man has a problem, and, yes, McDonald’s food is unhealthy, but that does not necessarily mean that one is responsible for the other. Now, a judge threw this case out earlier in the year, but if he hadn’t and Gregory Rhymes had gotten the millions of dollars he was asking for without acknowledging his own role in his weight gain, nothing would have been solved here.

In our society of liability and culpability, it seems that we have begun to shed all responsibility for our own troubles. And this victim mindset is problematic, not because we then begin to blame others, but because we then begin to feel that we

have no control, no impact – that we ourselves cannot solve the problems in our lives.

I mean, maybe it is McDonald's fault that sixty-one percent of Americans are overweight. Maybe it is McDonald's fault that twenty-seven percent of Americans are obese. But regardless of whose fault it is, it will become everybody's problem when, according to the U.S. Surgeon General, in the next ten years weight-related illness overwhelms the healthcare system.

We lie to ourselves by believing that the act of assigning blame is in itself a solution. It is not. We lie to ourselves by believing that we cannot affect positive change in our lives. We can.

But, as it stands, the eighty-five percent of smokers who have not quit because they don't believe they are able to, and the thirty-nine percent of high school dropouts who said they left school because they didn't believe they could finish, and the countless other Americans, people around the world, who have given up on bettering their circumstances because they underestimate their own abilities are all lying to themselves. And could all use a healthy dose of the hope that others are not entirely in control.

The truth is, sometimes we are responsible for our own problems. And by honestly acknowledging this we find the opportunity for improvement. But without honest self-examination we may never see the cause of our problems, and the solutions may remain so close to us that we don't even realize they're there.

Second, we are also subjected to spin by others, most predominantly in politics.

For example, when Vice President Dick Cheney had a cardiac episode – uh, the most recent one, I mean – at that time President Bush was quoted in Time magazine as saying, quote, "The Vice President is healthy. He sounded strong." And, not to say that the President was employing spin, but he was lauding the fitness of a man whose heart is so full of equipment that doctors actually had to get building permits to construct all the bypasses.

And while the exact physical condition of the Vice President is probably irrelevant as long as he is competent, the truth is these same politicians have employed these same spin tactics but with much more dire consequences.

For instance, there were many reasons why earlier this year President Bush decided to employ military force in Iraq. In November, the President told reporters of an International Atomic Energy Association report finding that at that time Iraq was only six months away from having nuclear weapons capabilities, and this could have been a very serious concern – if it were true. Unfortunately, the report the

President cited never existed. According to David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, neither the association the President cited, nor any other investigative body ever projected an Iraqi nuclear potential the likes of what the President told the press.

But that's not the only problem the Bush administration had with the former Iraqi regime. They also alleged that Saddam Hussein's government was connected to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, their primary evidence being a supposed meeting in the Czech Republic between a senior Iraqi intelligence official and one of the lead hijackers of 9/11 just months before the attack. And this, too, could have been a very disturbing connection – if it were true. Unfortunately, according to CBS News, the FBI, the CIA and Czech intelligence all backed away from the story because they couldn't find a single shred of evidence that such a meeting ever took place.

There were, no doubt, many reasons why earlier this year President Bush decided to employ military force in Iraq. I just wish he would have told us what they really were.

Third, lies become a cycle.

Both nationally and individually, we have problems about which we lie to ourselves and about which we are lied to. These lies create further problems, but instead of addressing these problems, we simply resort to more lies, and thus the spin cycle repeats.

Well, it is time to break the cycle. Whether we are looking back on individual or medical problems like Gregory Rhymes, or back on a national crisis like 9/11, it is critical that we do so honestly and objectively. It is easy to find someone to blame like McDonald's and it is easy to find someone on whom we can vent our frustration like Iraq, but until we escape the lie, the accusation and retaliation, our solutions, our progress will stagnate and our problems will remain.

It may be too late for Gregory Rhymes to have a healthy childhood, but it is not too late for him to have a health adolescence and adulthood. It may be too late for our country to avoid the tragedy of 9/11, but it is not too late for us to discourage further atrocities by refusing to commit them ourselves. It may be too late for all of us to solve the problems of our past, but it is never too late for us to learn from that past, to look soberly to the future and to dare to dream of what we might become.

If we do this, we will finally break the spin cycle. And that is no lie.