Promoting social harmony

Objectives and readers

This publication offers advice to anyone who wants to make a positive impact on society and their personal relationships simply by being a good citizen who speaks in a helpful way.

It tackles the challenge of talking about bad behaviour without unintentionally contributing to the social conflicts that are all too familiar to most people.

These are the social conflicts that arise when some people think they are part of a large group, usually demographically or ideologically defined, that is in conflict with another large group. Examples of such perceived or actual conflict include men versus women, races against each other, ordinary people versus some kind of elite or ruling class, religions in conflict, the political left versus the political right, and cyclists against drivers.

This is not the whole of conflict in society. For example, there is conflict between individuals, between sports teams, and between businesses. These types of

conflict are outside the scope of this publication.

You might be talking about the bad behaviour on your own behalf or because you are speaking (more often, writing) on behalf of an organization.

Political neutrality

Social conflict is not limited to the political left or political right and this publication is not arguing that it is, or even that one side is more prone to it than the other.

There are people within the political left who complain about the right, white people, men, straight people, rich people, powerful people, The Establishment, Christians, Jews who are not against Israel, and English people, to list just some obvious examples.

Similarly, there are people within the political right who complain about the left, non-white people, women, feminists, gay people, the metropolitan liberal elite, everyone at the BBC, foreigners, Muslims, Jews (again), academics, and people who are not English.

I have used examples from both sides as far as possible.

As light relief from these familiar examples I also illustrate the ideas with examples based on groups like mathematicians, chess players, and musicians – people not usually associated with any serious social conflict. All these are hypothetical and should not be taken as evidence or claims of genuine ill feeling.

The advice aims to reduce all social conflict with the same broad characteristics.

At some points in this publication particular organizations and individuals are criticized for the tactics they have used. This is not a comment on what they are trying to achieve; it is simply saying there

are better ways to achieve those objectives.

There are also examples where bad tactics are used to promote a belief that you may think is true. In these examples it is the tactic that is wrong and no specific claim is being made about the belief it is being used to promote.

Talking about bad behaviour

'Bad behaviour'

For the purposes of this publication, 'bad behaviour' does not need a precise definition. It is behaviour that is unfair in some way and includes littering, gluttony, laziness, rudeness, robbery, unfair discrimination, aggressive driving, careless driving, boozing, bullying, and many more.

Bad behaviour is not simply behaviour you do not like. It needs to be objectively bad for the collective well-being of society and its individuals. The aim is not to get what you want but to get a better society.

The talking phase

In tackling bad behaviour our first tactic should be to try to use reason and fairness to agree a better way forward. This is the talking phase.

If talking reasonably does not work then power may be justified.

This publication is only concerned with the talking phase.

The people involved

Sometimes we need to tackle the bad behaviour of just one person, such as a family member, friend, or work colleague. Here we can name the person and usually speak to them, or about them, individually.

At other times it is the bad behaviour of a small group of people, such as a family, team, or clique. Again, we can usually name those people and speak to them, or about them, specifically.

The other possibility is that we need to talk about the bad behaviour of a set of people we cannot fully name. Perhaps the identity of a perpetrator is not known or there are too many people doing the bad behaviour to name them even if we could.

In this situation we have to specify the people involved without being able to name them. This is a situation where social conflict can be incited accidentally, which is something we should avoid.

It may be possible to name some wrongdoers from a much larger set. This is another situation where social conflict can be incited accidentally because, if the people named seem to have been selected on some irrelevant basis, it can seem like unfair bias against a particular set of people.

How to talk about bad behaviour

This publication will go over ideas for talking about bad behaviour in a number of ways but here, to get things started, are some simple guidelines:

- Identify the perpetrator(s) by name and/or using the bad behaviour in question.

  E.g. If littering is the bad behaviour then 'people who drop litter' defines the people you are talking about.

It is a mistake to identify the people you are talking about using anything other than their names or the bad behaviour.

  E.g. If littering is the bad behaviour then 'young people' is not a good definition of the set of people. The definition 'takeaway diners' is also not appropriate because, although collectively they are a huge source of

litter, there are takeaway diners who do not drop litter. Criticizing takeaway diners generally would catch some who are innocent of littering.

- Be specific about the behaviour that is bad and try to be objective, factual, and fair when describing the prevalence and importance of the bad behaviour. Explore the consequences for all parties carefully and in detail because these are the main justification for change. But do not exaggerate.

- Do not discuss the motives of those behaving badly. (This may become relevant if reason fails and power is needed to enforce fair behaviour.)

- Try to be objective, factual, and fair when describing the extent to which perpetrators have colluded to perform the bad behaviour. Do not exaggerate.

- Suggest courses of action that will resolve the bad behaviour with the minimum of fuss and prefer to reach a reasoned agreement if possible, through better understanding of the consequences of behaviours. Try to suggest courses of action that are better for everyone concerned.

- Suggest compensation if it is appropriate and only between the (legal) persons responsible and harmed.

In short, simply ask just those who are behaving badly to think about the consequences for themselves and others, and to change their behaviour. Do this without fuss or extra layers of emotion that might trigger obstinacy. If that does not work then some use of power may be needed.

The following example illustrates the central message of this publication, contrasting two ways of tackling a problem: one that helps promote harmony

and progress, and one that promotes only conflict.

> E.g. To tackle littering one might talk about the problem of littering and make it clear that people who litter should stop. There are several consequences of littering. Litter is more effort to pick up than rubbish put in a bin so it increases the chores that have to be done by someone in our society. Litter can be polluting, a fire hazard, and a danger to animals. It can make public areas unusable. It also makes our shared environment look unsightly and encourages other bad behaviour, including crime. Carefully putting your rubbish in a public bin or taking it home avoids all those risks and is easy to do.

> For people who will not cooperate our society already has fines and other punishments for littering. These can be enforced. It might help to include in the punishments some further reminders of the consequences of littering and why good citizens do not do it. It is quite likely that many people who litter have not fully understood and learned those consequences or thought about how to deal with rubbish appropriately.

> In contrast, the wrong way to talk about littering would be to pick on a particular type of person, such as young people or a social class, and angrily denounce them all as bad people who drop litter. This would almost certainly provoke an angry and uncooperative reaction and no reduction in littering. On the contrary, some people who have been angered may drop extra litter to show they will not be pushed around and to show solidarity with their group.

The problem of group conflict theories

If everyone tackled bad behaviours by talking in the appropriate way described in the previous sub-section then there would be much less social conflict in the world. Sadly, there is a problem due to many people believing group conflict theories that are completely false or, more usually, exaggerated.

Group conflict theories defined

At the centre of many social conflicts are **group conflict theories**. When a group conflict theory is held by a person they think most of the following is true:

* There is a group of people, usually demographically or ideologically defined (e.g. men, women, a particular race, people in a profession, people in a religion) that is, collectively, in conflict with another group of similarly-defined people. For example, men versus women, mathematicians versus engineers, chess players versus boxers, rich versus poor, left versus right.

* In one group (the **Harming Group**) everyone is a threat to or harming everyone in the other group (the **Victim Group**). In support of this, the Harming Group regards everyone in the Victim Group as inferior, perhaps even sub-human.

* The Harming Group colludes against the Victim Group.

* Everyone in the Harming Group is bad, dangerous, and oppressive, perhaps also deluded, crazy, or stupid.

* So it is important and morally right for the Victim Group to band together and fight back, doing what they can to weaken the Harming Group and gain power over them.

- The Harming Group has a moral debt to its victims that justifies revenge and compensation, even compensation on a group basis.

These elements should be very familiar to anyone who has been paying attention to topical issues or historical conflicts.

Although group conflict theories are sometimes true, they are often false (i.e. completely false or exaggerated). More often:

- Demographically defined sets of people do not act as groups. They are not coordinating to do bad things to others. To a lesser extent, this can also be true of ideologically defined sets of people.

- Blameless people occur in all large, demographically defined sets of people and, to a lesser extent, even in most ideologically defined sets. There are sociable men and sociable women, caring young people and caring old people, and generous poor people as well as generous rich people.

- The bad behaviours complained of are perpetrated by at least some people in most if not all large, demographically or ideologically defined sets of people. For example, there are idle rich people and idle poor people, vengeful Christians and vengeful atheists, unfaithful men and unfaithful women, and inconsiderate old people as well as inconsiderate young people.

Criticizing all members of a large, demographically or ideologically defined set of people will almost always be unfair to at least some people. That is not to say that the fraction of good and bad people in each set is the same. There might be quite large differences. The point is that there are almost always exceptions, so generalization is unfair.

Group conflict theories about ideologically defined sets of people are slightly less likely to be false. This is because the set is defined by their beliefs and these might be directly responsible for behaviour that is genuinely threatening and a problem for another set of people. Yet, this is still much less reliable than defining a set of people by a specific bad behaviour or specific, repeatedly stated belief.

The core beliefs of an ideology might have little to do with a particular behaviour that is threatening. It is also important that the followers of many ideologies are surprisingly heterogeneous. For example, some Catholics in the USA do not think their god is as described in the Bible[1].

A group conflict theory may be held, to varying degrees (including not at all), by members of the perceived Victim Group and their supporters. It helps to motivate their behaviour. It may be true or false.

In the past this kind of belief system has led to violent revolutions. While this publication was being written in 2020, group conflict theories were responsible for protests that quickly turned into riots, intense wars on social media, political and religious extremism, and endless manoeuvring for power at every level in society.

Incitement defined

Incitement of social conflict involves (1) promoting a group conflict theory that is completely false or exaggerated, or (2) promoting a group conflict theory using unreasonable or needlessly inflammatory means.

---

[1] 28% of Catholics in the USA who believed in god said the god was a higher power but not as described in the Bible (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

How social conflict is incited

Group conflict can be incited by doing the following among other things:

- Exaggerating the homogeneity of a set of people (typically demographically or ideologically defined).

- Exaggerating the extent to which those people work together as a group.

- Exaggerating the extent to which they threaten and harm another set of people, their victims.

- Exaggerating the extent to which they regard the victims as inferior.

- Advocating collective courses of action to give the Victim Group power over the Harming Group.

- Advocating courses of action that constitute a form of revenge.

This is quite different from behaviour that accurately describes the current position of homogeneity, collusion, exploitation, threat, and inferiority, and which advocates nothing more than reform, equality, and compensation that is limited to exchanges between specific individuals, and only where those are justified and reasonable.

Behaviours that incite social conflict range from explicit to very subtle. They may be deliberate or not.

Historical examples

Social conflict can be incited through explicit words. There are infamous examples of this in 20th century history and it remains common in the social media postings of ordinary people when they post on contentious topics.

In *Mein Kampf*, (Ford translation), Adolf Hitler quickly identified the two dangers facing Germany as 'Marxism and Jewry'.

While Marxists are defined ideologically, Jews fall into a grey area legally between religious followers and a race. (Hitler himself claimed that Jews were not merely followers of a religion.) In focusing on the large, demographically defined set of Jewish people, Hitler was identifying a set of people who were extremely unlikely to have homogeneous beliefs and intentions.

Hitler painted a picture of a conspiratorial group that controlled what Germans read and saw.

> 'I saw a great burden of guilt fall upon Jewry when I came to understand how it controlled the press, the influence in art, in literature, and in the theatre.'

He also presented Jews as dangerous to German people. He described them as 'infecting' the people intellectually and morally.

> 'Here they were, infecting the people with a pestilence – an intellectual pestilence worse than the Black Death of ancient days.'

Hitler claimed that Jews were the 'managers' of prostitution and white slavery in Vienna, something which was particularly important to him as he placed a huge priority on reducing cases of syphilis and thought it was mainly spread by prostitution.

He claimed Marxists were Jews and that Karl Marx had invented his ideas to serve the Jewish race by speeding the destruction of free nations.

> 'Consequently, international Marxism itself is just the transformation, by the Jew Karl Marx, of a long existing World-Concept into a definite political profession of faith. Without the widespread pre-existing foundation of such a poison, the amazing political success of this doctrine would never have been possible. Among millions of people, Karl Marx was the one man who, with the sure eye of the prophet, recognized the poisons essential to his

plan were already in the swamp of a slowly decaying world. He separated and identified those poisons, like a black-magic wizard, to make a concentrated solution he could use to speed the destruction of the free nations on this earth. All this was done to serve his race.'

He went on to describe Jews as parasites, stealthily colonizing countries and destroying them. His language included all Jews.

'This has nothing to do with being a nomad because the Jew never dreams of leaving an area or vacating a territory once he is there. He stays where he is, and he holds on to it so intently that he is very hard to get rid of even by force. He only spreads to new countries when conditions necessary for his existence attract him. However, unlike the nomad, he doesn't change his previous residence. He remains a typical parasite, spreading like a harmful bacteria (sic) wherever he finds a suitable place to grow. The effect of this parasite, wherever he happens to be, causes the host nation to die off sooner or later.'

Even though Jews were a minority in Germany at that time, Hitler still saw them as the danger and other Germans as their victims.

The book contained a lot of material on how to band together to gain power, though this was not directed only at overcoming Jews.

In summary, all the main elements of a group conflict theory are present, explicitly, in Hitler's most infamous publication. He ensured that the book was printed in huge numbers and distributed to the German population.

Karl Marx was also quite explicit. On the first page of the 'Communist Manifesto' he and Engels identified the basic elements of their group conflict theory, focusing on class.

'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.'

Their Harming Group was the 'bourgeoisie', i.e. the capitalists who owned the means of production. The Victim Group was the 'proletariat', i.e. workers who did not own the means of production but instead sold their labour.

All bourgeoisie were presented as very bad people – selfish and money-obsessed – who worked together as one cooperative group.

'The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and

political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.'

In response to this perceived situation they advocated that the labouring classes should band together to gain power by force.

'The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working Men of All Countries, Unite!'

Again, all the elements of a group conflict theory are there, explicitly.

The effects of inciting social conflict

Promoting exaggerated perceptions of group conflict has a number of effects.

Group building
People seem to be brought together by shared fear and loathing of others. The recruitment process for religions, political groups, and crime gangs often involves some talk of group conflicts, such as building up the evils of another religion, another political group, or the police.

People who discover this may find they have success in gathering followers. This

may be exciting and encouraging. Unfortunately, their success and tactics will also strengthen their opposition, who may react to being demonized by banding together more closely and using similar tactics for recruitment.

Conflict and stress
Social conflict may be anything from unpleasant to horrific. Personal relationships may be damaged or destroyed. There may be tears. Property may be damaged. People may get hurt emotionally and physically. There may be deaths.

Distraction and intransigence
Social conflict is also wasteful and distracting. People spend time and other resources attacking each other, verbally or physically, that could have been used to solve real problems they share.

Resentment generates intransigence and reactivity. Once resentment is in place, if one side demands change from the other then there is a tendency to refuse to change simply because of who asked for the change and how they did it.

Social conflict is also personal
The impact of social conflict extends beyond politics and into friendships and families. It does this in many ways.

In particular, if a group forms that is trying to get a better life for its members then using a false group conflict theory can itself harm its own members.

Here are four fictitious illustrations to show some mechanisms by which social conflict harms individuals.

A career choice
Becca is 15 years old and enjoys maths and science. She is also good at them and on track for top grades at GCSE. She now has to decide which A levels to choose next year. In her mind the choice is obvious. Her plan is to choose maths,

further maths, physics, and chemistry. She knows this could lead to some kind of university degree in either maths or science. She is particularly interested in physics at university level.

But then she reads an article about discrimination against women in the sciences, especially physics. It paints a picture of women failing to make progress and blames this on male 'dominance'. According to the article, physics degree courses are almost entirely male and women are not welcome. There is an interview with a female physics student who talks about her bad experiences. The statistics quoted seem grim.

The article implies that the same is true for other sciences and for mathematics. Becca feels she has to rethink her life plan. If she goes down this route she will have no friends and be held back in her career at every stage.

She is also quite good at other school subjects so wonders about taking history or English instead. If she does, she will be perpetuating exactly the lack of women in physics that is now putting her off and giving herself a costly career disadvantage.

However, Becca is an intelligent person and she checks the statistics of undergraduates. She learns that there are in fact almost equal numbers of male and female undergraduates across all STEM subjects in the UK[2]. She suspects that there is male 'dominance' in physics only in the statistical sense that most students are male. She notices that the girl describing her bad experiences could be a rare exception. She also realizes that this unfortunate girl is assuming that maleness was the problem simply because people

she had problems with were male. If there had been more female staff then perhaps she would have had a problem with them instead.

Becca looks more widely and finds evidence that her plans to excel in maths and science are still good. Nevertheless, this article, which incites group conflict (male versus female), might have led her to a bad mistake.

Conversation topics
Imagine two men, Peter and Owen. They have been friends since school and meet often for a drink and a chat. They both have families of a similar age and interests in popular spectator sports. This gives them several ready topics of conversation.

Unfortunately, over the years, Owen has become increasingly political. He reads a particular newspaper almost every day and has become increasingly angry about 'the government'. He thinks the party currently in power is a bunch of criminals and idiots. He holds a strong belief in a group conflict theory in which the government, its supporters, and particular classes, are all exploiters.

Once Owen starts talking about this he gets more and more angry, swearing and ranting. Peter is not so interested in politics and thinks Owen's views are extreme and, on some points, obviously wrong. How can the government be idiots and yet at the same time organize the complex conspiracies that Owen describes? These outbursts from Owen are embarrassing and ruin the mood.

Peter has learned to steer clear of current events and moral issues. He sticks to sport and the kids as much as possible. Unfortunately, at most of their meetings there comes a point where Owen can't hold it back any more. His anger bursts forth and Owen shows his visceral hatred

---

[2] According to HESA (Higher Education Statistical Authority of the UK), in 2018/9 about 10% more females went into undergraduate STEM degrees than males.

of the government and anyone who in any way supports them.

Conversations have become stale as their kids have grown older. How much can you really say about football and cricket? But these are the only safe topics.

In this illustration, one person holding an exaggerated group conflict theory is spoiling a friendship and ruining evenings out. It is also preventing them from having meaningful conversations on a wide range of topics that otherwise they might find interesting and even useful.

Relationship problems

A group conflict theory can also lead to poor decisions based on attributing behaviour to group conflict when its cause is something else.

For example, suppose two people, A and B, are living together and A starts to get annoyed with the behaviour of B. The first move for A should be to simply raise the matter and see if B will change or if there is some other accommodation to be reached.

Perhaps B did not realize the effect of the behaviour and is happy to change. Maybe there are non-obvious reasons why it is difficult for B to act differently. Maybe A could easily adapt or is making a fuss over nothing. The point is that there may be a reasonable explanation or an easy way to solve the problem that nobody would object to.

The wrong approach would be for A to assume B's behaviour is the result of a flaw or evil motive in B and that B cannot or will not change. So, instead of trying to understand and solve the problem, A fumes silently, only discussing the issue with friends, but doing nothing to solve it.

Something that could make A more likely to take this second, dysfunctional approach is if A thinks that B is acting badly because of being a member of a

disliked group. Perhaps the belief is that B is being noisy because he is a musician, or B is not helping with chores because B is a man, or B is always complaining because he is a leftist.

Such beliefs may have a different dysfunctional effect. Instead of keeping quiet, A might skip the initial fact finding, exploratory questions and just go straight into the attack against B, speaking aggressively or trying to use power to control B's behaviour. For example, if B is thought to be doing too little to help with chores because B is a man (and men are oppressors who are always trying to control and exploit women), then it makes logical sense to try to fight back in some way.

By this mechanism, what seem like political movements can bring conflict into the home and blight even intimate relationships.

Not solving problems

In the previous illustration it was the person complaining of bad behaviour who held the group conflict theory. In this next illustration it is the person performing the bad behaviour who holds the group conflict theory.

Imagine that a young mother is at home with her one-week old son when a health visitor calls to check how they are both getting on. The mother immediately notices that the health visitor has a different ethnicity to her, one she believes looks down on her kind, thinking them uncaring.

On entering the home the health visitor is concerned immediately. There are unpleasant smells and obvious hygiene problems. When they go into the living room the baby is lying in just a nappy on the grimy carpet. The mother picks him up casually, failing to support his head,

and puts him on her lap where he lies awkwardly.

The health visitor introduces herself and explains her role and the support available from her team and others. She asks if it is ok to give some advice now. The mother nods but remains inscrutable and before the health visitor has spoken four words the mother interrupts, saying 'This is racial profiling. You just think I'm a bad mother because I don't look like you. I am a mother and a mother knows best. Get out of here.' She begins swearing and the health visitor leaves as quickly as possible.

After slamming the door closed the mother turns and hears her baby starting to cry in the living room where she left him. She does not want to be angry with him so she lights a cigarette and goes into another room for some online bingo, while the cats approach the baby curiously.

This story is fiction, thankfully, but illustrates a mechanism by which a person who thinks criticism is just part of a group conflict can fail to address real problems.

Escalation

The description of group conflict theories above described the situation from the point of view of only one side in a conflict.

Often, both sides hold a group conflict theory about the other. Presumably this can happen for a variety of reasons but one obvious possibility is that each side's behaviour strengthens the other's belief in their group conflict theory.

> E.g. Left-leaning feminists occasionally describe men generally in very negative terms, maybe saying they are toxic, aggressive, and abusive. At the same time, their opponents speaking up for men describe feminists and women more generally as having the whip hand in law, enjoying privileges at the expense of men, and making it

hard for opponents of feminism to even get heard. UK Labour MP Jess Philips has spoken about domestic abuse of women by men many times. When an opposing MP suggested a debate on men's issues, including male suicide, she objected, saying that he could have his debate when women were equally powerful in parliament. In response to this she received a great deal of criticism from her opponents for her oppressive stance towards men.

The behaviour of each side provides evidence to the other, creating a cycle of mutual reinforcement and escalation. This is worse if perceptions of conflict are exaggerated.

The interaction can be lead to specific reinforcing behaviours. In particular, if someone from one side is allocating a powerful role then they may be reluctant to allocate it to a candidate from the other side for two reasons:

- First, because they expect the candidate to abuse the role by favouring their own side. This perception is more likely if prominent members of the candidate's side have made statements promoting precisely this kind of favouritism, justified by their belief that they are oppressed and need to push back.

- Second, because they fear that their own side will react badly to the appointment of an opposed candidate leading to, for example, loss of business or votes.

When corporations, charities, and government agencies start to act like this the stakes rise and conflict is intensified.

Realities of social conflict

Deciding if a group conflict exists or not is complicated by the fact that, if enough

people think it exists, then it does. With an effective approach and enough repetition, a group conflict can be created out of nothing. Some illustrations will help to clarify this.

First, here is an illustration to show what a genuinely dangerous group looks like.

Imagine an isolated community of several hundred people. One day a new religion is founded within the community and slowly gathers followers. The followers hold secret meetings, carrying out rituals and receiving 'teachings'. Unknown to the rest of the community, those teachings include the absolute necessity of gaining complete control of the community as a whole in order to please a terrifying supernatural being. Everyone who is not a follower or fails to become one is the enemy and must be driven out or killed. All followers believe this unquestioningly.

In short, this group of people is working together and plans to mistreat others. This was not spurred by mistreatment of the group. If a non-believer were to find out, warn the rest of the community, and propose getting together to defend against the followers of the religion, then this would be reasonable and justified. Their belief that the religious group means them harm would be a factually correct group conflict theory. Furthermore, focusing only on the intended mistreatment by the religious group would be reasonable because they are the only people intending this type of mistreatment.

Now here is an illustration at the other extreme.

Imagine that in a different but equally isolated community of similar size there is a shortage of hats. There are only enough hats for about half the community to wear one. In the interests of fairness it is decided to draw lots to decide who is going to get the hats and about half the

population get hats while the rest must go without.

The allocation of hats has been entirely random and yet, over the next few days, some disgruntled citizens begin to spread rumours of cheating. According to them, the lottery was rigged, there are secret hats, it is all a plot by the town council to take tyrannical control, and the hatless are being exploited.

In this illustration the group conflict theory is entirely false. However, believing it and acting on it has consequences.

For years this hat issue rumbles on with complaints about the 'stigma' of the hatless, unfair discrimination based on not having a hat, a hat 'wage gap' is claimed, and every incident where a hatted person is mean to a hatless person is held up as another example of hat motivated hate crime.

More and more of the hatless resent those with hats and start to feel a real hatred of them. The hatted people are at first nonplussed but resent being portrayed as evil so often. There was no cheating in the lottery and there was no unfair discrimination on the basis of hats by the hatted people, but now that the hatless are being so resentful and unpleasant the hatted begin to avoid them.

The hatless increasingly blame their ordinary problems on unfair treatment by the hatted. Instead of sorting out their problems they demand that the hatted do more. The living standards of the hatless really do start to fall behind. The hatted begin to see the hatless as unproductive, feckless, difficult, and inferior. They begin to prefer living in 'all hatted' areas and going to 'hats only' social gatherings.

In this illustration a distinction with no real significance is turned into a social conflict with real consequences by behaviour that creates and amplifies the perception of

group conflict and promotes actions that make the conflict worse.

These illustrations show that there are situations where pointing out group mistreatment and suggesting defensive action is justified, but exaggeration and more aggressive actions might make a situation worse than it needs to be.

Why people incite social conflict

If a person believes a group conflict theory, even tentatively, then they have a good motive for warning their family and friends. They pass on their belief in the group conflict theory. The theory might be true, in which case the warnings may be valuable. Or the theory might be false, in which case they are inciting social conflict.

They may also spread the theory to gather support for themselves or for a political group. Describing an enemy helps bond supporters and makes them more committed. Their support can become fanatical if they really think they are in imminent danger from the Harming Group.

Beyond that, exploiting existing group conflict theories can sometimes get you more of what you want. If someone has the power to give you resources then it may help you to present yourself as a victim who needs help and is owed compensation. Mentioning and endorsing a relevant group conflict theory is a way to do that.

Saying things that incite group conflict can also attract attention, which provides a motive for some people. For example, if you post a comment on social media on a topical issue that is logical, factual, intelligent, and constructive you will get a handful of 'likes' if your timing is good. If you post something inflammatory because it stokes a group conflict then you will often get far more likes, along with a mix of hostile and supportive responses.

This provides a motive for people who like the feeling of being noticed and producing a reaction.

It also provides a motive for the people who post material that starts the threads if they are rewarded for the size of social media response they generate. For example, if a journalist writes a piece for a website that incites group conflict and that generates hundreds or even thousands of comment postings then this may be taken as a sign of 'audience engagement.' This in turn may be used to persuade people to pay to advertise on the site.

People producing articles, videos, TV shows, and radio shows compete with others for the attention of the audience. One way to do that is to target just one ideological group. This repels people who do not agree with the ideology but can win an audience by being more wholeheartedly focused on the ideological group than competitors. Promoting a group's conflict theory is one way to attract them and it incites social conflict at the same time.

Prevalence of incitement

Behaviours that incite social conflict are extremely common today. Social media postings by ordinary people in relation to sensitive subjects like politics and religion are awash with references to group conflict theories and exaggeration is common. Campaign groups do it. News media people also participate, despite having a responsibility to do better and being selected and trained to write the news. Politicians do it too, with some basing their careers on stoking group conflicts.

If you doubt this then keep your doubt in mind as you read the following pages, which describe in more detail how incitement is done. You may then be able

to think of examples from your own experience more easily.

As a consequence of incitement being widespread and frequent, most people are exposed to the messages and arguments daily and quickly learn them. Even when we are trying hard not to incite social conflict we can find ourselves using inflammatory phrases, simply because they are the clichés that come to mind.

Sensitivity to incitement

Most people have learned to identify even subtle references to group conflict theories. These are often sensitive, emotionally charged issues. Occasionally some people react to words or actions that they incorrectly think are references to group conflict theories. They can be 'triggered' by nothing at all.

For this reason, even mild or accidental references or ambiguities can turn conversations into arguments.

Incitement by insinuation

A further problem is that the modern style of incitement of social conflict, used by experts such as journalists and politicians, is not the explicit style of Hitler and Marx. Instead, expert incitement today is more often by insinuation through leaving information out so that unspoken implications are conveyed.

A politician or journalist might use an argument that predictably suggests something that incites group conflict. They could easily add a qualification that clearly contradicts the inflammatory interpretation and restricts interpretations to something else, but they don't. The lack of such clarification is strong evidence that the inflammatory suggestion was intentional.

If challenged later they may fall back on the innocent interpretation, complaining that they have been misunderstood or misrepresented.

Even with people and groups who most people know often incite social conflict it can still be hard to identify any specific words they have said that are plainly incitement (and could result in law enforcement action).

Several of the items in the next section provide detail on how incitement by insinuation operates.

Specific mistakes to avoid

It is all too easy to incite social conflict accidentally when we experience incitement so often and when it can be done by mere suggestion. The guidelines below identify very specific mistakes to avoid if you would rather not incite conflict. They also help you make your points successfully.

Typically, the consequence of making the mistakes below is to incite group conflict. That usually means you are less likely to achieve any positive, constructive objectives you might have, such as keeping the kitchen tidy, relieving poverty, reducing cruelty or unfair discrimination, and improving resource efficiency. Instead of progress you will create unproductive controversy. Instead of discussing positive courses of action you will be drawn into bitter arguments about who is a bad person. Instead of changing the behaviour of people you will be strengthening the resistance of a group.

When identifying people

It is crucial to avoid mis-specifying the set of people whose behaviour is a problem. Do not use words that include people who are blameless, or leave out people who are not.

Do not identify perpetrators of the bad behaviours on an irrelevant

basis. Do it using their names or using the bad behaviour itself rather than by, for example, using demographic or ideological characteristics.

> E.g. If your focus is idleness then do not identify the set of perpetrators as 'young people', 'rich people', or 'men'. This would be unfair on diligent people who are young, rich, or male.

> E.g. If you want to tackle cyclists who ride through red lights then do not criticize all cyclists. Some do not ride through red lights. If you focus only on those who do the bad behaviour then you may even get support from the organizers of groups for cyclists. They too may be concerned about cyclists riding through red lights, perhaps because of safety.

If you make this mistake then you will criticize blameless people and this can cause more than just resentment.

Suppose that, within a demographic set of people, some are doing a bad behaviour but the others are not. You criticize all members of the set for that bad behaviour, aggravating the innocent members. There is a reaction against your criticism. The perpetrators feel defended and supported by their demographic set.

You can make this even worse by reacting angrily against the criticism, once again criticizing all members of the set as bad people. In response, they start to complain that you will not let them speak out. The perpetrators gain further comfort and defence and can more easily ignore your suggestions for better behaviour. The innocent people accused by you feel resentful and unsympathetic to you and your points.

The problems of over-generalizing about groups are discussed in detail in Leitch (2019).

Do not use unfamiliar, abstract words that might be taken as implying everyone in a set of people is to blame (even if that is not your intention). The mistake of defining the perpetrators by criteria other than their bad behaviour is made worse by words that suggest everyone in the set is guilty. Words to avoid unless you are quite sure they are helpful (which they rarely are) include 'systemic', 'historical', 'institutional', 'structural', 'privilege', and 'unconscious'. All these poorly understood words now tend to create the impression that you are saying that everyone in a set is in some way guilty, even if they don't know it.

> E.g. Dr Priyamvada Gopal, a Cambridge academic, responded to a message that read 'White lives matter', by Tweeting that 'White lives don't matter. As white lives.' She followed it up with 'Abolish whiteness'. Not surprisingly this caused a storm. Later she explained how her Tweets had not said anything against white people. The explanation is too complicated and hair-splitting to be paraphrased and will have made no difference to how most people, white and otherwise, reacted to those Tweets.

This tactic amplifies the negative effects of criticizing innocent people.

Even if you think using one of these words would be factually correct it is still not helpful to use them. The impact of the words is still to create bad feeling and resistance rather than positive progress. Instead, use plain language. For example, if you think that a law is leading people to behave badly to a set of people then say that rather than saying there is an 'institutional' problem.

Do not narrow your set of perpetrators using irrelevant characteristics. Narrowing the focus on

an irrelevant basis leaves some guilty people out of consideration for no good reason.

> E.g. If your focus is idleness then do not identify the set of perpetrators as 'the idle rich' or 'idle young people' or 'idle men'. These would let off the idle poor, idle older people, and idle women. They also make the people you select feel unfairly picked on.

This can leave some badly behaving people feeling they are doing nothing wrong and have no need to improve. That in turn may be to their detriment as well as the detriment of society as a whole.

The apparent double standard also antagonizes the badly behaving people you have criticized, who may react by asking why they should change when you don't expect change of others who are just as bad or perhaps worse.

Even if you are sure that your set of perpetrators leaves out nobody (e.g. because you think only the rich are ever idle) it is undermining to use an irrelevant characteristic in the definition. Other people may think that you are leaving someone out and that is enough to generate bad feeling and resistance. The rich will still feel picked on for no good reason.

It is reasonable to limit the set of perpetrators geographically. There is nothing wrong with only being concerned with bad behaviour that is near you, or that is within reach of your influence.

Do not be vague about who is doing the bad behaviour. Vagueness about who is doing the bad behaviour is more likely if you are also vague about the bad behaviour (see below) because the behaviour should be used to define the set of people to blame. Be precise.

> E.g. Conservative author Douglas Murray often talks about 'we' when he

means a much more specific group. For example, with phrases like 'we have forgotten…', 'we are mistaken if we …', and '…yet we don't talk about it.' It is fairly clear that 'we' rarely includes Douglas Murray but not clear who it does include.

> E.g. A person who cares about environmental issues but says 'We need to stop taking two or three foreign holidays a year' is aggravating all those people who take one or fewer foreign holidays per year. In this example it is everyone who comes under attack. It is better to say 'people who take more than one foreign holiday a year should consider taking fewer.'

The key problem is that, if you do not identify the perpetrators by name or by behaviours, you suggest that all members of the implied set are to blame.

> E.g. A complaint about 'anti-black prejudice' that does not mention the nature of the prejudicial acts or who is committing them leaves people to speculate. They will tend to think that white people generally (the usual implied oppressors) are doing a variety of bad things.

I suspect that people sometimes feel it is more tactful to avoid mentioning names and be vague instead. However, it is easy and much better to use the bad behaviour to define the people being criticized or asked to change. If the perpetrators still do not realize you are talking about them then you may need to go further and identify some individuals.

When referring to homogeneity and collusion

Do not use words that exaggerate homogeneity within sets or differences between sets. Words like 'gap', 'divide', and 'chasm' have this effect

if there is really no gap. There are two commonly occurring statistical situations where this mistake is often made.

Many human attributes (e.g. height, intelligence, wealth) vary between people in such a way that if you plot a histogram the distribution is unimodal. There is just one 'peak' in the mountain, like the following image.
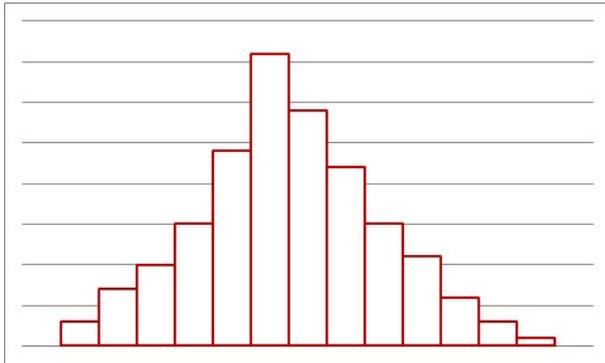
There is no natural basis for drawing a line somewhere and saying that everyone to the left of the line (e.g. shorter than a particular height) falls into one set (e.g. 'short people') and the rest go into another. In some statistical analyses it can be helpful for technical reasons of convenience, but there is no reality to the idea of two sets of people naturally divided by the one attribute.

In contrast, if the histogram is bimodal, like this next picture, there is some sense in drawing a line somewhere between the two peaks and suggesting that people to the left are a set and people to the right are another.
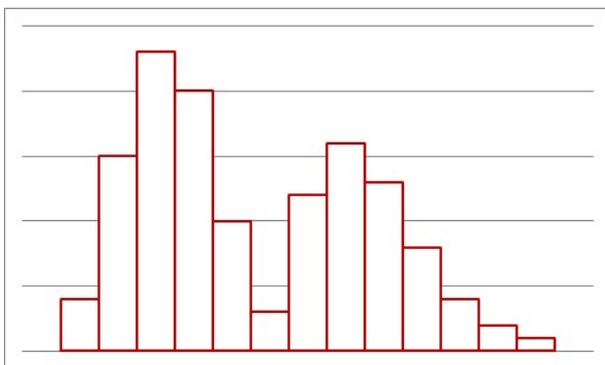
Do not suggest two sets when the distribution is unimodal.

> E.g. Scientist and author Charles Murray has written books about the influence of intelligence differences on society in the USA. He sometimes uses the term 'the cognitive elite' to refer to people with high intelligence. The term suggests a set of people who live and work together and are separated from others. While it is true that people today in the USA tend to live and work with others of similar intelligence, the distribution of intelligence is unimodal and there is no real basis for a dividing line between 'the cognitive elite' and everyone else. There are differences between people and they are sometimes huge, but dividing people into two groups verbally is not the best way to express this.

Where people are divided into two sets and then another attribute is measured (e.g. the income of people living in the north compared to people living in the south) the resulting histograms (shown here as line graphs for easier comparison) might look something like this:
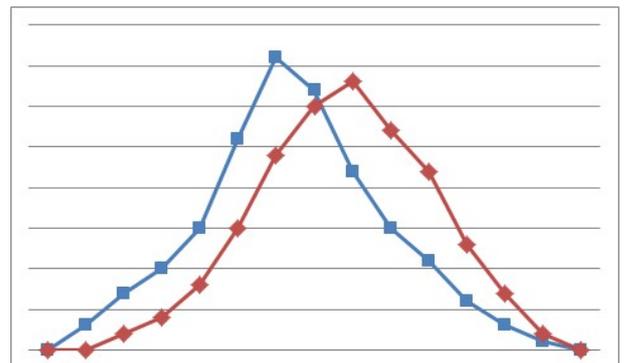
There is a huge overlap between the two sets of people. Although one has a lower average than the other, there are many people in the 'lower' set who are higher than many people in the 'higher' set.

Do not ignore this overlap and focus on just the difference between the averages of the two sets, calling it a 'gap' or

'divide'. These words tend to suggest that everyone in one set is higher than everyone in the other, which is not true in these cases.

Do not be vague about the extent of collusion. If you are vague then other cues may lead readers/listeners to think that collusion is implied.

A sense that people in the Harming Group collude makes them seem more threatening and suggests that perhaps everyone in the set is involved.

Avoid words that suggest greater collusion than is in fact occurring. The words 'group', 'community', and sometimes even 'the' can have this effect.

> E.g. The sentence 'The group responsible is young people.' uses 'group' in a demographic way, and yet the connotations of 'group' are more than this, suggesting people who cooperate. It may be that the young people concerned are not cooperating together, in which case 'group' is not accurate. The idea of cooperation is often part of group conflict theories.

> E.g. The sentence 'The problem is the littering community.' suggests that people who drop litter are cooperating to do it. The word 'community' has those connotations of cooperation.

> E.g. 'The left' implies a single group in a way that 'people on the left' does not.

Avoid words that suggest a greater degree of cooperation among the victims than is true. Just as with talking about the perpetrators as cooperating, do not use words like 'group' and 'community' unless they are truly justified. Falsely creating this impression would complete the pattern of conflict between two groups. Individuals independently being mean to other individuals should not provoke social conflict.

When identifying the behaviour

Do not be vague about which bad behaviours are being discussed. It is very annoying to people to scold them without even saying what you are scolding them for. Also, it is unlikely that behaviour will improve if it is not clearly identified in practical terms.

Do not tell people things they do not need to be told. In human communication it is generally implied that if you tell someone something then you thought they probably needed to be told it. Telling people something they already know in a reproachful way can be particularly insulting and irritating.

> E.g. A slogan like 'Musicians are people too' repeated often will annoy most people at some level because almost nobody thinks otherwise.

This last example is a proposition ('Musicians are people too'), but other examples involve telling people to do something, or not to do something, when they do not need to be told. This will happen when the message is sent to a large group and some (often most, and sometimes all) do not need to be told.

> E.g. Here are two slogans from demonstrations against alleged racist violence by police officers: 'Black is not a crime' and 'Black lives matter, stop killing us'. It is hard to imagine anyone in the UK or USA who thinks being black is a crime and police officers have much more knowledge of the law than most people. Likewise, almost nobody in the UK or USA will think that the lives of black people have literally no importance, especially police officers, who spend an unusual amount of their time trying to keep people safe. On both counts they do not need to be told these things. The reaction to this kind of message included a row about whether it was

racist to say 'white lives matter' or 'all lives matter'. All this incited group conflict and none of it helped either side make progress.

These mistakes are more serious if it is unclear who is the target of the messages.

When describing prevalence and impact

It is vital to avoid exaggeration and to keep criticism focused on all and only the true perpetrators.

Do not raise bad behaviour more often than is justified by its actual significance. If you keep raising an issue then you imply that it is important. The implication stands if you are not clear about the evidence of seriousness and the true severity.

> E.g. If intellectual prejudice by mathematicians against engineers was repeatedly raised in the news media then it would begin to seem that this is an important issue. This would be so even if the actual impact of any such intellectual prejudice was trivial and even if none of the news stories, think tank reports, or questions in the House of Commons provided anything more than harrowing cases, which might have another interpretation. Mathematicians would start to feel they were coming under fire for something most, if not all, are completely innocent of.

What any rational person would try to provide is statistical evidence of the incidence and impact of any exploitation. Leaving out this kind of evidence but still complaining repeatedly suggests bad treatment even though little or no evidence is presented.

If the importance is uncertain then it helps to explain this uncertainty rather than act certain anyway.

Exaggerating the severity of bad behaviour, even in an implicit way, is antagonizing. You are asking for more attention and other effort than is fair.

Do not select information on bad behaviour on an irrelevant basis. Raising the issue of harm by just one demographically or ideologically defined set of people creates resentment among them and those whose suffering is being left out.

> E.g. If the problem behaviour is academic prejudice between disciplines, then do not give details of incidents where mathematicians have been cruel to engineers but leave out incidents where engineers have been cruel to mathematicians.

> E.g. If the bad behaviour is killings involving a police force and others then do not dwell only on incidents where an officer has killed a civilian. There are also incidents where civilians kill officers. Also, do not focus only on cases where the person killed is young, or cases where they are white, or cases where they are male. Doing this suggests that either the cases left out do not exist (which undermines your credibility if they do) or that they are not important (which creates resentment among those ignored).

A similar problem arises if you say you are speaking against all perpetrators of a bad behaviour but only ever go after individuals in one demographic or ideological set.

Even if you think that the bad behaviour is mainly by people in one demographic or ideological set it is still better to discuss all possibilities, acknowledging the actual levels of bad behaviour and uncertainty about them.

Do not form an organization specifically to address only bad

behaviour selected on a demographic or ideological basis. Organizations have been formed to campaign specifically on harms in one direction only and this generates resentment.

E.g. The organization known as Black Lives Matter reacts energetically to incidents where a black person is killed by a police officer. The organization does not make a similar effort to react when a person of another race is killed by a police officer. It also does not react to killings of police officers by black people or killings of black people by people who are not police officers (which are usually much more common). This selectivity on the basis of race has generated resentment and also attracted criticism for missing the much larger problem of killings by black civilians of black civilians.

Do not mention only unfair treatment as a possible reason for differences in outcomes. When trying to explain the severity of mistreatment of one group by another it is common to point to differences in life outcomes, on average. For example, average pay (usually lower for women) or life expectancy (usually lower for men). Typically, it is hard or impossible to establish the extent to which unfair treatment has contributed to these differences, if at all.

In this situation, do not mention unfair discrimination as a possible explanation but stay silent on others[3]. Simply mentioning the one hypothesis implies it is the only one worth considering. It presents the alleged exploiters in a bad light and leaves them feeling attacked even though the words simply raised the possibility. More importantly, it also leaves alleged victims feeling that they probably

have a reasonable grievance against the alleged exploiters.

E.G. In 2016 the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, asked David Lammy, MP, 'to investigate evidence of possible bias against black defendants and other ethnic minorities' within the criminal justice system (Prime Minister's Office, 2016). No other possible explanation for the relatively high rates of BAME (black and minority ethnic) people at all stages of criminal justice from arrest to imprisonment was mentioned by the Prime Minister, David Lammy, or anywhere else in the press release announcing this, or in the analytical summary that was produced as a starting point (Kneen, 2017). Unfair discrimination was the only hypothesis mentioned.

The research then conducted consisted of a consultation in which people were invited to write in with their opinions. Those interested in doing so were mainly of the opinion that racism (presumably by white people) was the problem, but no new empirical evidence was gathered or considered that might have established the truth (Ministry of Justice, 2017).

In a full blown group conflict, speakers for the Victim Group will typically say that their poor outcomes are solely the result of bad behaviour by the Harming Group, while speakers for the Harming Group say they are solely the result of bad behaviour by the claimed Victim Group. When the causes are uncertain it may be that the problems come from the behaviour of either or both sets of people, or have nothing to do with their behaviour at all.

E.g. When Prime Minister David Cameron asked for an investigation into ethnic minorities within the UK justice system there were other possible causes he could have

---

[3] Leitch (2019) discusses this type of mistake along with other similar problems in more detail.

mentioned. He might have asked if, perhaps, (1) ethnic minority defendants commit more crime per person, (2) a higher proportion of their crimes are violent, (3) they get caught more often because of the nature of their crimes, (4) when apprehended they more often react uncooperatively or violently, and (5) they more often choose to plead not guilty in the hope of being let off by a jury.

I do not know if any of these is true, but neither did David Cameron at that point and so they were alternative hypotheses that could have been mentioned. Leaving them unmentioned pointed the finger at just workers within the criminal justice system.

Do not be selective in considering and discussing possible contributors to better future outcomes. Most outcomes for people are influenced by the actions, or omissions, of many people. That is, many people have an opportunity to do something different that would be helpful, even if it might be difficult for them. None of these should be left out of the analysis. Reasoning with each of those people, providing more information, or providing better incentives, might get them to change their behaviour positively, contributing to better outcomes.

It is a mistake to ignore any possible contributor and this includes the element of personal responsibility, even when some would see this as harsh.

E.g. Imagine a person who is gaining weight and at risk of becoming obese. Whose actions have influenced this situation? Manufacturers and advertisers, takeaway food shops locally, their parents who bought and served food during childhood, their obese friends who encourage over-eating, the advanced and generous society that makes it possible for even

relatively poor people to overeat, and the person who is gaining weight. They may have a genetic predisposition towards obesity arising from stronger feelings of hunger, but this just means they have to try harder to resist temptation, not that they have no choice.

A frequent pattern is to try to identify someone who is to blame and imagine that only that person should change their behaviour. Sometimes there is conflict between those who argue that the most powerful person or group is to blame (e.g. 'the government') and those who argue that it is the individuals most closely involved in the problem behaviours (e.g. criminals). In reality, many can and should contribute even though it would be unfair to say they are to blame, let alone solely to blame.

E.g. Imagine that a demographic set of people has an average pay that is lower than for others. In a typical group conflict, one side will say this is solely because people in the low paid set are relatively unproductive, make poor career choices, and do low value work. The other side will say that the higher paid people discriminate unfairly against people in the low paid set, who have no personal responsibility for their lower pay.

Ignoring personal responsibility overlooks opportunities for improvement. Doing it selectively is usually obvious and inflammatory.

Do not use statistics selectively to suggest guilt. The statistics you choose to mention often insinuate the guilt of one type of person.

E.g. Imagine that the average hourly pay of one set of people is less than that of another. Considered on its own that difference will suggest to many that the lower paid people are being

treated unfairly. As far as we know from this claim, there is no difference between the sets other than this difference in pay. This might be amplified by pointing out that fewer people in the lower paid group are in high status, well paid jobs. However, the picture would change dramatically if it was then revealed that more people in the lower paid set had Special Educational Needs when children, that their truancy rate had also been higher, that they had much more often chosen educational courses with low employment value, and that their IQ scores on average were lower. Clearly, the measures discussed make a big difference to the apparent causality.

It is also inflammatory to mention only outcomes on which one set of people seems to be lagging when there are other outcomes where they are leading.

Do not illustrate the impact just by using harrowing but untypical cases. Using examples rather than giving a fuller picture based on comprehensive statistics or good sampling can give a false impression. Selecting the worst cases and presenting them as if they are typical can hugely exaggerate the problem. This is worse still if you give images of pitiable but attractive victims and people who are emotionally distraught. These obviously manipulative tactics can create resentment.

Do not select video stills or small segments of video, audio, or text to exaggerate or distort an event. Again, this looks blatantly misleading and risks a backlash and polarization. People who think the extract represents the true situation will be incited and people who do not will think you are playing an unfair trick, and be incited.

Do not exaggerate using body language. Displays of emotion too intense to be justified by the issue are exaggeration and counterproductive.

Do not present trivial mistreatment as very serious. Do not describe trivial incidents or impressions as serious, either by using words, body language, or reacting angrily if anyone points out that little or no harm occurred. Distinguish between the harm done and emotions about the harm. If a person is very upset that might be due to a flaw in them, so be sure there are good grounds for the emotion.

Making a lot out of very little may escape without challenge but still undermine your credibility and create resentment. People may feel they cannot challenge what you have done openly, but they still know you are exaggerating.

Do not use statistical and survey tricks to exaggerate the prevalence or impact of bad behaviour. These tricks include picking statistics that exaggerate and excluding others, asking leading questions, and asking questions that give rise to misleading statements of results.

> E.g. A headline from a survey might read '34% of engineers have been abused by mathematicians.' This could be achieved by defining 'abuse' in the survey instructions to include even trivial incidents that might not have been abuse at all. Alternatively, it could have been achieved by distributing the survey to engineers at a march where they were protesting against mathematicians.

Leitch (2020) discusses how to identify unfair bias in assessments of people. This is an area where exaggeration is common.

Do not attribute incidences of bad behaviour to social conflict

regardless of lack of evidence to that effect. This can be extremely inflammatory so do not assume social conflict is the driver. The evidence needs to be more than just the group membership of perpetrator and victim.

E.g. The organization, Black Lives Matter, has an established pattern of reacting to deaths of unarmed black people in contact with the police in the USA or UK as if they are murders motivated by white racism against black people. This has created powerful feelings of rage among its supporters, hatred of police officers and white people, violent riots, and murders. It has also undermined the legitimacy of their protests and created resentment among blameless people unfairly accused.

Do not attribute reasoned criticism to group conflict. It can be very frustrating to people to have legitimate criticism denigrated as bigotry. If you receive criticisms from many people, some reasonable and some clearly bigotry, do not treat all the criticism as bigotry. Clearly distinguish the two types and respond properly to the reasoned criticism.

E.g. Suppose a TV celebrity promoting a book on how to cook lamb says something inflammatory against vegetarians and then receives thousands of angry emails and social media postings in response. These will almost certainly include some unhinged abuse from ultra-extreme vegans and some angry but reasoned analysis and criticism of the inflammatory comment by others. The wrong way for the TV celebrity to react is to read out some of the death threats on breakfast TV and continue as if all the critical messages have been similar items from crazy, abusive,

horrible people. Many of those who made thoughtful criticisms will be angered.

Do not attribute poor outcomes of one group entirely to bad treatment by another group when that is not justified. Again, it is inciting group conflict to encourage one group to think that problems of their own making are caused by someone else, and to blame innocent people. It also does nothing to promote efforts to improve outcomes.

E.g. Suppose a politician gives a speech in which he says that unemployed people should blame the government and people in authority generally because schools and colleges failed to give them skills. It is true and widely recognized that schools and colleges spend a lot of time teaching things that are not useful. They could do much better. However, this does not stop most people who want a job from getting one. Also, many people who are unemployed now have been employed in the past. Education has not been a significant factor for them for years. There are also a few people who are unemployed because they are uncooperative, disruptive, lazy, selfish, and make no effort to help themselves. The causes of unemployment are more complicated than ineffective education and it is unfair to lay the blame just on schools and colleges. The politician's statement antagonizes educators and gives some unemployed an excuse for their situation and a reason to sit back and let someone else sort it out.

The true causes of an outcome are often uncertain. Take care to express that uncertainty and acknowledge all reasonable possibilities.

Do not comment on the history of a demographic set, leaving vague whether you mean the group is

similar today. This might involve attacking the past actions of a race or nation, or building up a finer history of a race or nation.

E.g. Mary Beard's book, *Women & Power: A Manifesto*, tells of historic situations where men have been more powerful than women and, in some cases, have exploited women using this power. Is this a criticism of men today? It is not clear but many people, male and female, will have taken it as being a criticism of men today, to some extent.

E.g. The National Trust's (2020) *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* was a long document with multiple authors. Care was taken to make it factually accurate and to use precise, moderate language. It had some coverage of slavery before the trans-Atlantic slave trade and covered abolition of slavery in the UK. However, this coverage was dwarfed by the material that was systematically negative about the UK. Crucially, the fact that British attitudes and behaviours are fundamentally different now was not given the prominence it required. The reaction from many was anger and disappointment, with criticism particularly focusing on the paragraphs about Sir Winston Churchill. The Trust's intention was to produce more of this kind of material and use it in their properties. Doing this would risk inciting visitors to seethe with anger and resentment, either at white British people for being racists or at the Trust for implying that white British people are all racists.

Care is needed because improvements implemented recently often have effects that feed through over many years.

E.g. An improvement in education that produces better school results for a particular group, previously disadvantaged, will later produce better results in higher education, and subsequently in work. For this to feed through fully takes decades. It is a mistake to continue complaining about differences as if nothing has been done to close them.

Do not describe a bad situation in another country but leave vague whether you think it is similar in your own country. Again, this can leave people taking the implication that things really are as bad.

E.g. If an English person were to talk about gun culture using examples from the USA without clarifying the extent to which these were relevant to the UK then it would imply for many people that the two countries were being taken as similar. They are not similar on this particular issue.

Do not use extreme words inaccurately. Extreme words should be fully justified if they are used. Often they are used without proper justification.

E.g. Saying that meat is murder, abortion is murder, and immigration is genocide are all claims that use extreme words. In many jurisdictions where these claims have been made they are not legally correct.

Even if an extreme word is fully justified it may be better to avoid using it, or to use it in a different way, because other people do not yet see it as fully justified. You will need to explain the arguments for its use and be patient.

E.g. If you think that abortion should be legally considered 'murder' then do

not say 'abortion is murder'. Instead you might say 'I would like to discuss the circumstances in which termination of a pregnancy should be legally considered murder.' Then make your case in careful language.

When considering reasons

Do not discuss the motives behind a bad behaviour. Motivation can be very difficult to establish with certainty and, even when everyone in a set of people is doing a bad behaviour, they may not be doing it for the same reasons.

If you say you understand the behaviour is just an innocent mistake then you weaken your position if that is not the real reason and you have to move towards using power. If you say the motivation is something evil (e.g. selfishness, racism) then you will deeply offend anyone who did not have an evil motive.

Do not say that perpetrators are bad, stupid, irrational, or crazy. Even if they are they probably do not think they are. More often they are no worse than most people. Either way, there is nothing to gain from such claims. Focus on the consequences of behaviour for everyone affected and on proposals for different behaviour.

Do not use the phobia words. Do not say someone is homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, or phobic in any other way. These words have now been so over-used that they have lost any credible meaning and just trigger anger and resentment.

To say someone is phobic is to say that they have an irrational and overwhelming fear of something. In most cases where the phobia words have been used this is not strictly true.

It is worst of all to respond to reasonable points put in a precise and polite manner by declaring them phobic.

Do not attribute behaviour to hate. At the talking phase this again is counterproductive. Hatred is a strong emotion and irrational. In too many cases where 'hate' has been alleged the feelings involved fall short of hatred and have some rational basis, even if it is not a sufficient rational basis. This has devalued the allegation of hate and made it a trigger for resentment.

It is better to discuss behavioural change than motives.

Do not take sensitivity to criticism as evidence of guilt. Guilty people do not like to be identified, but people are also unhappy about being falsely accused or unfairly smeared. It is not just because this is insulting. False accusations and smears can affect the reputation of an individual or a set of people, making life harder for them. People unfairly criticized have a legitimate interest in putting an end to the unfair criticism.

Do not take awareness of differences as proof of evil intentions. If a person is aware of differences between people or sets of people then that alone is not evidence that they want some to be mistreated. The theory that links these two is that a person who recognizes a difference will see one type of person as superior and that superiority will be taken as evidence that the superior type should dominate and exploit the others. This is a theory with two unjustified and unreasonable inferences in it.

First, people can recognize a difference without necessarily seeing that one is superior to the other. They might not even consider relative merit. They might think that one is superior in some situations but inferior in others (e.g. as when species are adapted to particular environments).

Second, people can perceive overall superiority without wanting to dominate

and exploit. They might have no thoughts as to actions. They might think that the difference is unimportant overall or useless in practice. They might think the superior should offer help to the inferior.

> E.g. In biology, race is an informal taxonomic level lying below sub-species but above strain. Different races of fungi are recognized, for example, not just humans. If a person uses the concept of race and can recognize the main human races from their appearance (which most people can do quite well despite extensive racial mixing) then that does not imply that they think any particular race is superior to another or that, if they were, then domination and exploitation would be justified.

> Human races differ in a number of visible ways and there are differences in susceptibility to particular diseases and ability to process certain foods. Recognizing races helps with identifying ethnicity and so promotes cultural sensitivity.

> Taking recognition of human races as a sign of supremacism is a serious false allegation against the many people who recognize human races without being supremacists.

Do not take perception of superiority of one type of person over another as proof of evil intentions. If a person perceives one person, or type of person, to be superior in some way to another then that does not imply that they think the superior should dominate or exploit the others. They might think no consequences arise, or that the superior people should do more to help others.

Do not take preference for one type of person over another as proof of evil intentions. A person might prefer to be with others for a number of reasons without having any intention of harming

or disadvantaging those they do not prefer.

> E.g. Members of the UK's National Trust (NT) visit buildings and gardens that have been given to the NT to be enjoyed by anyone who wants to visit. NT members tend to be people who do not drop litter, do not vandalize property, do not eat unhealthy takeaway food, and are polite. Visiting one of the Trust's properties is an opportunity to spend time with these people and do the things they enjoy. It does not involve doing anything to harm or disadvantage people who do not visit NT properties. Most NT visitors would be horrified by the idea.

Do not take a desire for good things for your own group as proof of evil intentions towards other groups. A person who identifies strongly with a group and wishes good things for that group could still have no intention of harming people in other groups.

> E.g. A person can have strong positive feelings about their own nation – wishing it will prosper and progress – without wishing anything bad for other nations. More likely, the idea is to trade with other nations and cooperate with them in other ways too, while expecting the citizens of those nations to live in their own ways. Attacking other nations to take their land and assets would be an unusual plan today. It is wrong to attack a person as a 'nationalist' who wants to fight with or exploit other nations just because they are positive about the traditions of their own nation and feel invested in its future.

Do not take desire to defend as proof of an intention to attack or harm others. If people want to defend themselves from harm or their land or possessions from being occupied or taken

by others then that is not evidence of a desire to harm those others. The intention to mistreat is coming from others.

The moral difference between attack and defence is clear and widely recognized. Without it, people who behave morally would simply allow the immoral to do what they want without resistance. They would be easy prey. Peaceful cooperation would cease and societies would collapse into chaos.

However, in practice what can be very hard to establish is whether a course of action is attack or defence.

> E.g. Suppose an ambitious dictator wants his army to conquer a neighbouring country. A naked land grab might spark resistance in his own country as well as an internationally organized attempt to prevent him. To limit this resistance he might look back in history and try to find a time when the neighbouring land was one country with his, or try to provoke the intended victim into doing something that looks like an act of war, or simply pretend that they have.

> E.g. When people from one country migrate to another as individuals and small family groups, does this ever constitute an invasion? Does it matter if they have done so legally or illegally? Does the rate of migration matter? What about the extent to which they switch to the culture of the country they have entered? Or the extent to which they stick together politically? What if they were invited by the government at some point? What if they pay for their new homes? What if they produce children at a higher or lower rate than others in their adopted country?

When advocating courses of action

Do not suggest action against people who are not doing the bad behaviour that you are concerned with. This is the same issue raised earlier of attacking innocent people. It includes not suggesting punishment for individuals who are not personally to blame for actions by others (e.g. their ancestors, others in the same demographic set).

It is very important to consider each person individually if that is practical, and more effort should be made to do so if the consequences of action against them are serious.

Do not suggest action against perpetrators that leaves some out on the basis of irrelevant characteristics. This again is the error of picking out just some perpetrators and letting off others.

Do not claim that differences between people justify mistreatment. If two people, or two sets of people, are different in some way then that alone is, obviously, not a reason for mistreating anyone.

Do not claim that superiority of one person or group over another justifies mistreatment. If one type of person is worse than another in a particular situation (e.g. runs slower in a running race) then this is not, in itself, a justification for treating them badly. It might be that treating them the same as anyone else, or treating them better to help them, is a better course of action. When filling a role (e.g. a job, a place on a sports team) it is important to consider merit but selecting someone on merit is not mistreating the others.

This is true even if the inferiority is over such a wide range of situations that it seems to be an overall inferiority.

When talking about large sets of people the idea of inferiority is even less helpful because variation within sets of people is usually much larger than differences between the averages of sets.

Do not claim that a preference for one type of person over another justifies mistreatment. A person might prefer to be with others of a particular type because:

• They are similar, and consistency itself is helpful (e.g. driving on the same side of the road, speaking the same language, using the same units for measurement).

• They face similar problems and may be able to suggest solutions.

• They really are superior and better to be with (though variations between people in almost any group make this an unusual situation).

These reasons do not imply that anything should be done to harm or disadvantage other people. On the contrary, cooperation is usually better than conflict and exploitation.

Being with one set of people in preference to another is not in itself mistreating those others.

Do not claim that a desire for good things for your own group justifies mistreating others. This is blatantly inciting group conflict but also is usually wrong. People today usually prosper more from cooperation (usually in the form of trade).

Do not argue that defence justifies attack. Most people would agree that groups are entitled to defend themselves against attack, including having their land and possessions taken from them. However, most people would also agree that it is not acceptable to attack others or take their land and possessions.

Situations where attack is the best defence are extremely rare. Do not argue for this unless facing one of those extreme situations and the other side is preparing to attack first or has done so.

Do not present violent or disruptive action by civilians as likely to be effective or as morally desirable. The difference between a committed campaigner and a terrorist is often that the terrorist thinks terror tactics will work. Presenting physical, disruptive actions as the way forward in campaigns encourages a lot of bad behaviour, is a step towards this dangerous belief, and is likely to be false; physical, disruptive action is much more likely to hinder progress towards your objectives.

E.g. In 2020, the UK organization, Extinction Rebellion, focused on demonstrations that were disruptive to the lives of ordinary people. For example, they blocked roads and, on at least one occasion, delayed a train during a busy time. It was not long before many people became angry with them for this disruption, which made the lives of ordinary people harder. Extinction Rebellion got the level of attention they wanted and this attracted supporters, but it also stimulated resistance and ill feeling. Worse still, they associated environmental concern with inconsiderate disruption in the minds of millions, hindering the progress of good initiatives that needed public support.

There are many things they could have done that would have gained equal attention and been positive. For example, their many young supporters could have been asked to suggest a list of practical lifestyle changes to their friends and families, give presentations at their schools and to local councils

with practical suggestions, or help with important research to develop new lifestyle innovations.

E.g. Similarly, the organization Black Lives Matter in the USA and UK in 2020 organized large scale marches that, on occasions, turned into violent riots. Lives were lost and property was damaged or stolen. They associated promotion of the interests of black people with angry rioting and crime. They reinforced the impression created by statistics on black participation in crime, especially violent crime. Overall, this will not have helped.

Again, there are many things they could have done to reduce deaths in contact with the police (regardless of race), such as promoting improvements to police training, promoting use of non-lethal weapons, and combating gang culture through personal contact and good examples. All these would have gained strong, positive publicity.

At any time

Do not use red mist words. In addition to the words mentioned throughout this publication that have become triggers for anger for particular reasons, there are words that have been used as pejoratives so often that they have lost any specific meaning they might once have had. Now they are just insults.

In the political sphere these include:

- By the left: facist, Nazi, far right, white supremacist.

- By the right: libtard, liberal elite, loony lefty, soyboy, radical.

Using these words stimulates conflict.

Do not use fighting body language. This includes gathering together in a group, shouting loudly, raising fists, waving fists, and spitting. All these go beyond merely being emotional and begin to signal an urge to fight physically.

Do not say that others cannot understand because of their demographic characteristics. This tactic has been over-used and will just create bad feeling and resistance. It is also very rarely justified.

Having more experiences in common with someone can promote better understanding but this is a weak and unreliable effect. There are always significant differences between people. An important part of being a good person is the ability to understand situations you have never personally experienced and understand things about others who are not exactly the same as you.

To say that someone cannot understand because they are the wrong sex, race, or religion is to say that they lack this important ability to understand others. It is quite a serious insult.

The tactic has also been used in situations where it is irrelevant. Here are illustrations of two of them.

Consider the situation where one person has a problem and is given advice by someone who has never had that problem because they have always used a tactic that avoids it. Imagine that the advice has just been offered and the sufferer reacts angrily saying 'You don't know what it's like! It's hard!' In this situation the ideal, most credible advice-giver would be someone who has experienced the problem but then learned to avoid it. Failing that, experience of successfully avoiding the problem is more useful than experience of failing to avoid it.

Another situation is where a person thinks they have been unfairly discriminated against on the basis of some demographic characteristic. They know they have been discriminated against but do not know for

sure why because the reasons were not made explicit and may have been legitimate, making it fair discrimination. Maybe it was their own poor behaviour that was the reason, but they feel sure it was unfair discrimination based on something irrelevant. A third person, demographically similar to the alleged unfair discriminator, questions the idea that unfair discrimination occurred. The victim says 'You don't know what it's like. How could you, with all your privilege?'

The idea here is that it is only the victim who knows what it is like to be unfairly discriminated against and therefore is the only one qualified to judge if unfair discrimination has taken place. However, the uncertain aspect of the situation is the true motive for the discrimination and perhaps it is a person similar to the alleged unfair discriminator who is best placed to have an opinion on that. Either way, everyone who has some understanding of people can contribute and it is wrong to say they cannot, just on demographic grounds.

If someone does not understand something and has shown that, perhaps repeatedly, then just explain what it is that they do not understand and how you know.

Do not say that others are not good representatives because of their demographic characteristics. Again, this has been over-used so often that it just antagonizes people and is counterproductive.

We expect people in powerful positions to make decisions that consider the legitimate interests of all stakeholders, not just themselves or people who are demographically similar to them[4]. The

---

[4] For example, in the UK, members of parliament are expected to represent (i.e. consider and promote the interests of) everyone in their constituencies, even if they did not get their vote.

ability to do this is one good reason for them having those positions of power.

Decision makers will usually be significantly different from almost all the stakeholders they have to consider, on some basis or other. For example, their life experiences will have been shaped by (usually) being significantly more intelligent and productive than most people. We would not try to appoint less intelligent, less productive people just for the sake of representation.

To say that someone is not 'representative' for demographic reasons is to accuse them of not considering the legitimate interests of people who are different from themselves. It is usually a harsh insult. To say that they are not representative because of their race, for example, is to say that they only look out for people of their own race, which is to say that they are racist. This is a very severe allegation.

It also suggests that, perhaps, the critic thinks that people in positions of power are there to serve the interests of people demographically similar to themselves (which is almost never appropriate) and that this is how they would act if they had power. This is not likely to increase their chances of getting a responsible role in society.

If someone has incorrectly ignored the interests of some people, perhaps repeatedly, then just explain when and how.

Do not spread illogical, unfair arguments made by others without critical comment. If you pass on dodgy arguments without critique or filtering you are tacitly endorsing them. If you present them in a way that discourages critique by others then you are making the situation worse. This will undermine your credibility and generate resentment and resistance.

E.g. Imagine that a think tank associated with a genuinely white supremacist group makes a video that features interviews with young people. In those interviews the young people make a variety of factually incorrect claims, draw unjustified conclusions, and advocate courses of action that are plainly dangerous and unhelpful. The think tank puts the video out, describing it as 'conversations with young people about their lived experiences'. At no point does the think tank explicitly endorse any of the statements, but neither does it filter them out, add commentary that corrects misconceptions, or challenge the speakers during the interviews. This is tacit endorsement.

E.g. Another way to incite social conflict without yourself explicitly calling for it is to launch a consultation, then produce a report summarizing themes arising from responses and quoting contributions, without challenge. No matter how baseless and illogical the consultation responses the report writer can simply quote them without personally advancing misleading or incorrect evidence or arguments. This should never be done.

Do not generalize from the most extreme opponents. In social conflicts there are usually some people on each side who are particularly extreme, and often they are illogical and/or have psychiatric problems. Do not highlight the statements of your most extreme opponents and then suggest that their statements are typical of their side.

E.g. YouTube channels with a political theme often pick out extreme stories or statements from the opposing side then say something like 'This is so typical of the left' or 'This is so typical of the far right.'

Tackling genuine group mistreatment

If there is really a group that intends (more) mistreatment of others then this should be talked about and tackled. However, this should be done without singling out that group unless they really are the only ones intending that particular type of mistreatment (making it impossible to identify them without identifying only them).

* Always be objective, use and explain evidence, and acknowledge your uncertainties.

* Be specific about the mistreatment, as far as possible.

* Be specific about who is intending (more) mistreatment, as far as you can, and do not exclude anyone on irrelevant grounds.

* Be specific about the nature of any collusion.

* Propose only actions that will neutralize the threat or defend against it.

In real situations it is rare that everyone in a large, demographically defined group, intends mistreatment of others. More often there are some small, committed groups within a set of people and others in the set have somewhat supportive attitudes, to varying extents. The committed groups exploit the supportive attitudes of the others to gain political strength. The less committed people might be shocked if they knew the real plans of the committed groups.

In this situation, be careful to distinguish between the different levels of commitment and intention. It may be possible to encourage less committed people to stop supporting the more committed.

It is also rare that only people in a particular group intend a particular type of mistreatment. For example, if the initial concern is religiously motivated beatings by people of a particular religion then it is best to speak up against religiously motivated beatings generally, not just those by one religion. If most such beatings are motivated by one religion then, naturally, that one religion will get most attention as the mistreatment is tackled.

Focus on proposing actions that tackle the mistreatment and that will reduce the level of group conflict.

One thing groups often do is to incite group conflict, so that should also be tackled.

Tackling incitement of group conflict

Incitement of group conflict is itself a bad behaviour that needs to be tackled and reduced. The risk of this turning into yet more group conflict is, obviously, high so care is needed.

Some general guidelines

The guidelines for addressing incitement directly as a bad behaviour should by now be familiar:

- Identify the perpetrator(s) by name or using the incitement in question. The incitement might itself be a complaint about someone else's incitement.

- Be specific about the incitement behaviour and try to be objective, factual, and fair when describing its prevalence and importance. Do not exaggerate.

- Try to be objective, factual, and fair when describing the extent to which perpetrators have colluded to incite social conflict. Do not exaggerate.

- Suggest stopping the incitement and, if the incitement was intended to serve a good cause, suggest better alternative methods.

Also, bear in mind that most incitement today is by insinuation, so you have to take the time to explain, very carefully, how context turns literally innocent words into inflammatory messages.

Countering incitement

Another way to tackle incitement of group conflict is to counter it.

> E.g. If someone is arguing that young people are inconsiderate because they drop litter you might point out that not all young people drop litter and some older people drop litter too. You could suggest that people who drop litter are the inconsiderate ones.

This publication has provided many counter-arguments that can be used, particularly in the section on specific mistakes to avoid.

To use these counter-arguments effectively you need to avoid being drawn into a bitter argument. There is a simple pattern for doing so: neutralise the worst insult or insinuation that has been thrown at you, usually by simply contradicting it, then go on to give more of your reasoning and information.

> E.g. If you have just pointed out that not everyone who is rich got that way by exploiting people then the response you get might be something like 'You must be an idiot if you think that people like Bill Gates got that rich by doing people a good turn.' You didn't mention Bill Gates and you are not an idiot. Getting drawn into a long argument about either of these would be a mistake. Reply with 'I am not an idiot.' to neutralise the main insult or attack, then follow up with 'What I am

saying is that not everyone who is rich got that way by exploiting people. Another way to get rich is to do useful things for people that they are willing to pay for, then spend only what you need from that income instead of using it all to get services and goods from others. When you give more value than you take, the difference builds up as money wealth.'

Resilient group conflict theories

The best known and longest running group conflict theories (e.g. men versus women, black versus white, rich versus poor) have well developed rhetoric. Their promoters include some highly skilled writers, speakers, and debaters who can respond confidently to any counter-argument imaginable. It can seem that, whatever the evidence, they will claim it supports their assertion of widespread, serious harm by a Harming Group against a Victim Group.

Their first step is to find some ways that the outcomes of their Victim Group are, on average at least, below those of their Harming Group. Outcomes that go the other way are excluded from consideration.

The second step is to blame all the differences on the alleged Harming Group, regardless of the evidence. This can be uncomfortable to argue against when the difference is partly or wholly the result of the behaviour of members of the alleged Victim Group. If this is pointed out then the claim will be attacked as cruel, unfair, and another example of Harming Group behaviour.

Some familiar arguments have been developed that insulate the inciter from otherwise damaging evidence (e.g. evidence that unfair treatment is very rare). Some key arguments are as follows:

- Choices that harm the alleged Victim Group are made by members of the alleged Harming Group because they share a mode of thought so pervasive that they are not aware of its existence or influence.

- The behaviour of the alleged Victim Group is extremely sensitive to the expectations expressed by the alleged Harming Group, so even seemingly tiny behaviours by Harming Group members can have devastating consequences for the Victim Group.

- If the alleged Victim Group acts poorly then this is because they have internalised the negative view of them promoted by the alleged Harming Group.

- Harm is done by the mere existence of a majority and a minority. The majority creates a set of norms that disadvantage the minority.

- Harm is done by the mere existence of a power difference. The more powerful create a set of norms that disadvantage the less powerful.

- Members of the alleged Harming Group do wrong by affirming the value of hard work, planning, punctuality, clear communication, knowledge and skill, trustworthiness, faithfulness in relationships, and avoidance of addictions. These qualities are disparaged as arbitrary standards that discriminate against those who do not exhibit them.

- Members of the alleged Harming Group enjoy privileges that are not given to members of the alleged Victim Group, so the victims are relatively disadvantaged even if no specific harm is done to them.

- The harm continues due to being embedded within the laws, rules, norms, procedures, and structures of

society, even if no member of the Harming Group is aware of doing harm.

- Harm done in the past is perpetuated through generations almost without limit, so that current generations of the Harming Group are viewed as evil even if those individuals have done nothing wrong.

- If the alleged Harming Group tries to do something to help the alleged Victim group then this is disparaged as motivated by self-interest, said to be patronising (a kindly form of insult), and a counter-productive act that perpetuates the harm. Trying to help is just another form of harming.

- Objective information is disparaged and subjective interpretations are given higher status, so that claims of harm and its effects can be exaggerated and counter arguments can be ignored.

Most if not all of these arguments have been expounded at length by professional academics with impressive titles in journals and books. Some of the claims have also been supported by work by psychologists that seems to show the power of expectations and the existence of hidden prejudices[5]. This makes them credible in the eyes of some.

These arguments amount to a conspiracy theory. Under pressure they say that facts are just lies produced by a powerful conspiracy, that their opponents are motivated by hate or bias, and that it is unconscious so unrecognized.

---

[5] Problems with the supposed measures of prejudice are explained by Leitch (2020) and a huge and rigorous review of studies by Jussim (2012) has revealed that the overwhelming bulk of evidence debunks claims of powerful expectation effects and self-fulfilling prophesies.

Fortunately, your objective in talking about this kind of incitement is not to get the perpetrators to change their ways, but to get others who might be influenced by them to withdraw their support and attention.

It is usually enough to simply contradict these arguments directly without giving reasons because they are unreasonable and not supported by evidence. Then go on to give more information and reasoning. This could include:

- Explaining ways that exaggerated perceptions of group conflict are harmful to the supposed victim group.

- Pointing out where ordinary, innocent people are being unfairly insulted or smeared by exaggerated claims or insinuations of bad behaviour.

- Setting out a variety of ways in which the outcomes of the groups differ, including some that suggest advantage for the alleged Victim Group.

- Pointing out when there are several possible explanations for a difference between two sets of people, and that it could be that nobody today is to blame.

- Pointing out when variation within a demographic set is larger than variation between their averages, so there must by other factors at work.

- Pointing out that lack of specific evidence of widespread mistreatment is most consistent with there being very little mistreatment.

- Pointing out that thinking you are not unfairly biased against a set of people is most consistent with not being unfairly biased against them.

- Pointing out when current members of the alleged Harming Group are not personally responsible for historic harms.

- Suggesting courses of action that will help everyone facing a particular hardship, regardless of their demographic set.

E.g. Imagine that a campaigner for pure mathematicians is arguing that they get paid less than applied mathematicians (on average) because of unfair treatment by applied mathematicians. To be more specific, it is the assumptions made by applied mathematicians institutionalised into processes and power structures, that have led to this difference. Applied mathematicians need to acknowledge their privilege and guilt, step aside, and pay money to pure mathematicians in reparations.

Points to counter this might include: (1) There are more journals for pure mathematicians than applied and the average working hours are different. (2) There are many things that influence pay for mathematicians, including their own career and educational choices, and factors that mathematicians do not fully control, such as the economic significance of the work done. (3) There are some very well paid pure mathematicians and poorly paid applied mathematicians. (4) No applied mathematicians you have talked to can remember ever having discriminated unfairly against a pure mathematician and they rarely come into contact, which is most consistent with there being little or no unfair discrimination. (5) Actions could include improved career counselling for all undergraduate and postgraduate mathematicians and encouraging all mathematicians to seek work that will benefit society, since it is fair to pay more for such contributions.

Illustrations

This publication has argued that it is best to tackle bad behaviour without inciting social conflict and that promoting false group conflict theories is damaging to society. To illustrate these ideas, here are three imaginary situations where a person nearly incites social conflict, but turns away at the last moment.

A conversation with a friend

Imagine that Ben's friend Pete is spoiling the lunch break by getting political again. Pete says 'It is always the same. The rich screw everyone else. Rich bastards, bankers, politicians, consultants – they're all in it together. Did you know that inequality in this country has been rising since this government took over? I'm telling you, the rich are screwing us over big time.'

Ben's brother is a banking consultant who works on projects to improve regulation in banking and Ben is pretty sure that his brother is not a perpetrator of whatever it is that Pete is so upset about. Pete's generalization is inaccurate in that one case and probably others. What about local councillors? What about the people who work behind the counter in bank branches? What about scientific consultants who work on environmental issues?

Ben is annoyed by Pete's position and thinks about saying something like 'Pete, come on mate, if people don't work hard and make their own luck they deserve what they get. The rich are guilty of nothing but working hard and being smart.'

Fortunately, he stops himself. If he said that he would challenge Pete's claim that the rich have more than the poor because of unfair tactics, but he would tacitly endorse Pete's theory of a rich-versus-poor conflict. This is a group conflict

theory where the rich form a group that is distinct from everyone else (a bimodal distribution of wealth) and are colluding on a massive scale. There must be plenty of examples of rich people who have cheated and exploited others and of corrupt politicians, but that is not the same as all of them being in on it.

So, Ben tries to avoid inaccurate generalizations and clichés. He says 'Not all bankers, politicians, and consultants surely? My brother is a consultant on projects to improve regulation of banks. He's a good guy.'

Pete looks a bit apologetic and concedes that perhaps Ben's brother is an exception. Ben continues with 'Did you know that during the 20th century the huge expansion of university education and increased use of academic criteria for getting into top courses and jobs has made this country much more of a meritocracy than it was 100 years ago? I'm not saying people always get what they deserve or that everyone who is rich got that way fairly, but things are much better than they used to be. Inequality is up but so too are the living standards of the poorest in our country, mostly because of technology improvements.'

Pete looks slightly stunned and says 'Yeah, well, they're still bastards' before refocusing on his lunch.

A social media posting

Imagine that Sam is surfing a social media site and sees a posting about a news story. The story tells how some scientists have been caught faking data about the melting of Antarctic glaciers. They had claimed a high rate of melting due to global warming.

Under the story are several comments from readers about global warming and the scientists. They range from comments by people who think global warming

means inevitable destruction of the human race to people who think it is a hoax. Sam is more sympathetic to the latter view and thinks this latest revelation is more evidence of fake data.

He starts by typing the following comment:

'This is just more evidence of how scientists have been faking data to hype their scaremongering agenda. When are they going to come clean and tell us the truth? Never, they are just after research funding and don't care if they destroy the world economy while they do it.'

But, before hitting the enter key, Sam has second thoughts. His comment is attacking all scientists, not just these scientists or scientists who fake data. Not all scientists are faking data, even climate scientists. And is it really credible that they are all somehow colluding to do it, as his first draft seems to suggest?

He also realizes that he does not know for sure the motive for the faked data. Perhaps they just made a mistake, lost the real data, and hoped to get away with it by faking some plausible numbers. If he posts this comment he might get harsh reactions from people pointing these things out.

He deletes the first words and tries again, this time writing:

'Nobody should fake data on something as important as climate, least of all climate scientists funded to discover the truth. There must be a better way to regulate climate research, perhaps learning lessons from the way other branches of science are tightening up. The potential economic cost of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions means that we really should be more confident in the data that underpin these massive decisions.'

Sam feels happier with this approach. It is more credible, less based on hunches, less

inflammatory, and contains something that points towards action.

After he has posted this someone responds by challenging Sam's assumption that the economic impacts will be negative. If Sam had posted something more inflammatory the discussion might have got stuck in a row over whether climate scientists are colluding in a hoax.

A report on an environmental problem by a charity

Imagine that Laura works for a wildlife conservation charity and spends a lot of time patrolling a nearby forest, making scientific observations and generally keeping an eye on things.

One evening she sees a woman who appears to be picking wild fungi. Laura watches the woman from a distance for over half an hour as she continues foraging. This is suspicious behaviour and Laura thinks the woman may be harvesting wild fungi to sell to restaurants in a nearby city. This is against the law in that forest because of the problem of over-harvesting of fungi. Later she telephones Forest Rangers to pass on her observations.

The next week the Rangers tell her that the woman was arrested and charged by the police. She was part of a gang of Romanian immigrants selling large quantities of fungi to restaurants. The woman was caught with three carrier bags full in her backpack.

Laura raises the matter with her boss at the charity and the charity decides to write and publish a report about the problem. Laura volunteers to write it.

Her first idea for a title is: 'Illegal harvesting of fungi by Romanian crime gangs.' She quickly drops this idea because she realizes there could be other people doing the same thing, not just this

Romanian gang. She would be restricting her report to people from just one country for no good reason.

Her second idea for a title is: 'The scandal of foraging for fungi in our historic forest.' That sounds better until she remembers that the laws of the forest allow small scale foraging for personal consumption. The objective is to avoid over-harvesting. If she goes after everyone she may get a backlash from people who forage on a very small scale, some of whom are her friends.

Her final title is: 'Large scale harvesting of fungi is unsustainable.'

A better society

This publication has been about how we, as individuals, can talk about problems with the behaviour of others without inciting social conflict. But consider, for a moment, what society might be like if many people took this advice most of the time. If people learned to behave this way as children, perhaps at school. If the problem of incitement by insinuation was clearly understood by most people and they were able to explain particular instances of it. If politicians and journalists carefully avoided all the mistakes listed above.

What would society be like? Surely much pleasanter and more successful. In a word: harmonious.

Conclusions

There are many situations where we want to talk about someone's behaviour because it is a problem. There is much that can be said about how to do this but in this publication the focus is on doing it without creating social conflict.

It is good to be accurate, logical, and fair. What makes this harder is that UK society

is awash with situations where people are promoting or acting on group conflict theories. That is, theories about groups of people being in conflict. Many of these are false.

There are many ways to go wrong when talking about bad behaviour and, in most cases, this causes conflict but no progress. Instead, it generates bad feeling, resentment, intransigence, and distraction.

References

Beard, M. (2017). *Women & power: a manifesto*. Profile Books.

HESA (no date). *What do HE students study?* Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study

Hitler, A., & Murphy, J. V. (1939). *Mein Kampf* (Ford translation). Available at: http://der-fuehrer.org/meinkampf/english/Mein%20Kampf%20(Ford%20Translation).pdf

Jussim, L. (2012). *Social perception and social reality: Why accuracy dominates bias and self-fulfilling prophecy*. OUP USA.

Kneen, H. (2017). An exploratory estimate of the economic cost of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic net over-representation in the Criminal Justice System in 2015. *Analytical Summary 2017*. Ministry of Justice. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642551/david-lammy-economic-paper-short-summary.pdf

Leitch, M. (2019). *Making statements about demographic groups*. Available at: http://www.workinginuncertainty.co.uk/groups.pdf

Leitch, M. (2020). *Finding unfairly biased assessments of people*. Available at: http://www.workinginuncertainty.co.uk/findingbias.pdf

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf

Ministry of Justice (2017). *Lammy review of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation in the Criminal Justice System: Call for Evidence Analysis*. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642910/lammy-review-call-for-evidence-analysis.pdf

National Trust (2020). *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery*. Available at: https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colionialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf

Pew Research Center (2018). *When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?* Available at: https://www.pewforum.org/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/

Prime Minister's Office (2016). *Review of racial bias and BAME representation in criminal justice system announced.* Press release. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/review-of-racial-bias-and-bame-representation-in-criminal-justice-system-announced