WHAT PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES CAN OFFER TO SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

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In Canada and many other countries, voices from across the political spectrum are using the metaphor of "war" to describe contentious debates on a diverse range of topics. While the so-called culture wars are poorly defined, there is certainly evidence of increasing affective polarization (strong negative feelings toward out-group members). Many conflicts prominently feature destructive approaches based on ineffective theories of change. Even social change movements fighting for goals that are closely aligned with those of peace workers—achieving more egalitarian societies that respect the dignity and human rights of all and overcome systemic discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity characteristics—appear to urgently need the knowledge that exists in fields like peace and conflict studies. The reasons for this, and the particular insights that peace and conflict experts have to offer to those seeking to achieve positive interpersonal and intergroup peace (i.e. peace grounded in justice), will be explored.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores several of the drivers behind the poorly defined phenomena metaphorically referred to as "culture wars," offering examples of the dynamics at play in destructive and affectively polarized conflicts.

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Issues of truth and victimhood are both explored as particularly important dimensions of the culture wars. The article shares lessons that experts in fields studying human behaviour, peace, and conflict can offer to social justice activism to potentially strengthen the theories of change that activists use. Finally, a short description of four types of power found in successful nonviolent direct-action campaigns for social change is offered, with a recommendation that peace education bring some of these points to a broader audience. This article draws on the best data that I am aware of, much of which comes from the United States but is also relevant to Canada. It needs to be kept in mind, though, that points made may not apply equally in other contexts.

About Culture Wars

"Veganism and its associated furores are not really about food; they are a culture war being fought on a tablecloth," writes journalist Zoe Williams.[1] "I'm fighting this as a battle of ideas," states Emeritus University of Toronto professor Jordan Peterson.[2] (Peterson is referring here to his belief that changes to Canadian laws to protect gender identity or expression have implications that are so far-reaching as to fundamentally transform Canadian society into a situation of Marxist tyranny.) Disagreements have always existed and always will. But why do so many people imagine that whatever is happening in this moment is the very last straw? Why do they feel as if they are on the frontlines of a war?

For decades the metaphor of war has been used by those seeking to describe contentious debates on issues like abortion. Something as poorly defined as a "war" at the heart of a culture is very hard to prove or disprove. To give a sense of just how vague claims about the culture wars are, in 2017 alone three books came out each asserting that the US culture wars were over, but for different reasons.[3] Similarly nebulous culture wars have been talked about in Canada[4] and other countries. What can be said, then, is that the metaphor of war resonates for many people, is being widely used, and may influence how individuals choose to engage with out-groups.

Many feel that disagreements are not over the issues themselves but over the very survival of an in-group, often understood along religious, political party, racial, ethnic, or other relatively hard and fast identity lines. The actions of the other side may thus be experienced as hostile personal attacks, while engaging in dialogue or changing one's ideas or behaviours are seen as

losing the war. Entire identities and lifestyles are portrayed as at risk in this winner-takes-all battle for supremacy. A war framing also powerfully seeks to draw everyone into the fray, forcing more neutral actors to pick sides.

The *Atlantic* published an article about student efforts to boycott an introduction to humanities course at Reed College in Oregon over finding the course offensive and problematic.[5] The logic behind the boycott is open to reasonable disagreement. On Facebook, comments from one student trying to force others to join the boycott exemplified the culture war approach. The student wrote: "[If] you ain't with me, then I will accept that you are against me," accusing any white students who did not take part in the boycott of being "a laughin at a lynchin kinda white."[6] This displays the war-like mentality: either you're with us or you're against us, and if you're against us, there's no possible reason for that except that you are the most morally reprehensible type of person.

The approaches adopted by Peterson and the Reed College student-activists are part of a broader pattern of destructive conflict where individuals take the positions of whatever camp they happen to feel a part of as not just better informed or more useful, but *sacred*. Much evidence shows that the more that people align their identities with being part of a group (as happens when at war to protect sacred values), the more willing they are to defend the group and to minimize moral concerns about its behaviours.[7] Ironically, then, it is when people are the most certain that they are fighting for what is morally right that they may behave in the most harmful ways, ways that outside observers would consider particularly *immoral*. Researchers call this "the dark side of moral conviction."[8]

Types of Polarization and Their Results

Polarization occurs when, for any number of reasons, people divide into strongly opposing camps. Not all polarization is a problem. People may deeply disagree on some issues but still find ways to respect each other as human beings and to coexist relatively peacefully.

People can readily work with out-groups they disagree with—even actively distrust—so long as effective processes are in place to facilitate this work.[9] An example comes from Wikipedia. The site effectively facilitates the shared work of volunteers from all over the world who hold widely divergent views, and who do not know or trust each other. They come together to edit articles, even on highly contentious political issues. How? Through very

strong community guidelines that can be used to arbitrate in disputes.

A study of Wikipedia articles found that "polarized teams consisting of a balanced set of ideologically diverse editors produce articles of a higher quality than homogeneous teams." An article with just one editor will only have one viewpoint, which obviously may be biased or unaware of important information. Adding a second editor with similar views won't necessarily address this. But polarized teams can. Not only are team members aware of a wider range of information, they also spend more time having serious discussions about the article they are editing, making frequent reference to Wikipedia's policies. This process helps guide them toward a more valuable article.[10]

Thus, it is important that discussions of polarization not turn into calls to all just agree with one another or to give up our passions for certain issues or causes. In fact, a review of "decades of research from organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists and demographers" found that diversity in groups, while not necessarily making those groups more pleasant for group members, does increases creativity and regularly leads to better decision-making.[11] Diversity creates friction and challenges as different beliefs bump up against each other, but that friction need not be destructive. If handled well, it can be a key ingredient in innovation. Diversity (of expertise and viewpoints, not just of identity characteristics) helps groups reach more effective solutions to problems.

Again, this is because group members with differing expertise are aware of a wider range of information and bring diverse ways of looking at problems. They therefore propose more possible answers and—like the Wikipedia groups do—are forced to put in more thought to reach a conclusion that everyone can accept. "Simply interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints, and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort."[12]

All of this is lost, however, if people self-segregate and interact only with an in-group that thinks as they do. There are many pressing societal problems that need complex solutions, ones likely to come not from one pole or the other but from diverse groups interacting. The loss of creativity, then, is a major downside to situations where polarized camps stop engaging in shared dialogue and problem solving.

What is more disturbing still is when in-groups come not just to disagree

with out-group members but to feel negatively about them *as people*. This is affective polarization, a subset of polarization that is particularly concerning. Signs of affective polarization include framings of out-groups as threatening the purity or the very survival of the in-group, and dehumanization ("people have the capacity to treat other people as if they were not in fact people, suspending moral rules and social norms" against cruelty and violence).[13]

A study asked respondents in the United States, "Do you ever think we'd be better off as a country if large numbers of [opposing party] in the public today just died?" Twenty percent of Democrats and 15 percent of Republicans said "yes."[14] This seems consistent with other research from the United States, suggesting that affective polarization between Republicans and Democrats nearly doubled between the 1980s and 2016.[15] This increase in polarization was faster in the United States than in Canada; however, overall levels of affective polarization are comparable across many rich industrialized countries.[16]

The causes of increased affective polarization are many. They include polarizing messages from elites such as politicians looking to deliberately create "wedge issues,"[17] and mainstream media fuelling negative views about the other side.[18] Social media exacerbates existing information bubbles and echo chambers, boosts content that is negative toward out-groups, and highlights differences (rather than similarities) between in-group and out-group members.[19] Importantly, actual political views—even on contentious issues such as policing—aren't nearly as far apart as people imagine them to be.[20] Not just in the United States but in twenty-five other countries studied, people expect those on the other side to be more extreme than they really are.[21] This "perception gap" is another driver of polarization.[22]

Some experts looking at history consider current levels of affective polarization in the United States to be dangerous and difficult to come back from.[23] Importantly, though, many people in highly polarized societies like the United States are *not* affectively polarized and do *not* see themselves as needing to take sides in the midst of a bitter culture war. And most people want the wars to stop. One recent US poll found that 93 percent of respondents want a way out of dysfunctional polarization.[24]

Truth

Lies and propaganda have been features of large-scale conflicts for thousands of years.[25] However, given the current context where at least eighty-one

countries are running coordinated social media campaigns to manipulate public opinion,[26] and there is evidence of social media driving large numbers of people toward more extreme and hateful ideologies,[27] a word is in order about truth.

In the culture wars, different camps have come to believe vastly different truths and to mock the viewpoints of those who think otherwise. Interestingly, the metaphor of waking up, as if developing sudden clarity of insight in an almost mystical way, seems to be popular among various opposing groups. Thus, we now hear about being "woke," a term used loosely to mean holding some constellation of beliefs alert to systemic injustices, and also "red pilling," a metaphor originally used by men's rights activists (taken from the movie *The Matrix*) for waking up to what are claimed to be feminist lies promoted by mainstream media and culture.

Peacebuilders know the importance of joint fact-finding missions and other methods of building shared trust in information. These only work if parties continue to accept that facts do indeed exist. Many contentious issues (e.g., euthanasia) are complex and have largely subjective dimensions that leave them open for disagreement. Not all questions are like this. For instance, the QAnon conspiracy theory is simply baseless.[28] Claims about targets like Hillary Clinton being secret pedophiles appear consistent with patterns of dehumanization seen across many bitter conflicts, where opponents are falsely said to be monsters who harm the most innocent in the cruellest ways possible.

Unfortunately, voices on the right and left are, in different ways, suggesting that there are no universal truths and thus no straightforward facts. This claim has dangerous and far-reaching implications.

Believing in the existence of facts is necessary to avoid the trap of what is sometimes called "bothsidesism"—the position that two polarized sides are equally wrong in their views or equally to blame for a conflict. Bothsidesism not only ignores the fact that some beliefs are truer than others, but equally ignores the specifics of context and of power imbalances. Peacebuilding efforts fail, and may cause serious harms, when they do not adequately address the realities of specific contexts and of power differentials among actors.[29]

Victimhood

Large groups can come to hold shared victim identities based on what psychiatrist and mediator Vamik Volkan calls "chosen traumas."[30] These

competing victimhood narratives are prominent on all sides in culture wars.

Victimhood is a challenging subject. Many claims are wholly or somewhat accurate, and there exists a damaging tendency to blame victims for the harms that they experience. One theory—backed up by experimental evidence[31]—is that most people like to believe that the world is fair. As such, when hearing that something bad has happened to someone, a common response is to imagine that that person must have deserved it. In responding to claims of victimhood, it is vital not to blame people for experiencing harms.

There is also at least one potential benefit for the victim to feel like a victim: evidence shows that it makes them feel more moral.[32] What complicates this issue is that victimhood is just one possible framing of any given situation, and it has serious drawbacks. Research has demonstrated that feeling as if one has control in situations (even when that is objectively false) is important to well-being.[33] Therefore, seeing oneself as a victim, especially a helpless one, can in some cases reduce well-being, and may be within one's power to change.

Feeling like a victim has also been associated through experiments with dwelling on negative feelings for longer periods; feeling more self-absorbed and less open to other people's experiences; being less ready to assume responsibility for harms caused; and being more eager to seek revenge. Psychologist Robert Horwitz, an expert in this area, says that ideas about victimhood vary greatly across cultures. Being harmed is inherent in life, but how people respond to harms is learned.[34]

There is evidence that concepts like abuse, bullying, and trauma over time "extend outward to capture qualitatively new phenomena and downward to capture quantitatively less extreme phenomena".[35] This "concept creep" may benefit some people by identifying and helping to address harms that formerly went unnamed and thus were not dealt with. It might also "pathologize normal experiences, generate over-diagnosis and over-treatment, and engender a sense of diminished agency".[36] Increasingly broad definitions of harms may help explain why it is so easy for so many people to see themselves as morally superior victims who are justified in harming out-groups.

Another thorny issue in navigating claims of victimhood is that such claims can result in hasty responses. This trend must be resisted with the recognition that what will genuinely benefit victims of abuse or oppression must be

proven, so as not to unwittingly make matters worse.

There is now evidence that trigger warnings on disturbing content either have no effect or harm survivors of trauma by making that trauma feel more central to their identities.[37] Researchers found that certain programs designed to reduce bullying by bringing high school bullies and their targets together for mediation or other trainings actually *increased* bullying.[38] A study that asked liberals to think about white privilege found that it did not make them more sympathetic to a poor Black person they later read about, as had been expected, but it did make them *less* sympathetic to a poor white person. "They seemed to think that if a person is poor despite all the privileges of being white, there must really be something wrong with them," states researcher Erin Cooley.[39] Well-meaning interventions to improve the situations of victims of abuse or oppression sometimes achieve little or even increase harms. Therefore, it is important that real-world impacts of interventions continue to be studied and discussed openly.

CRUCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

Having observed several aspects of the dynamics of affective polarization and culture wars, let us now turn to what peace and conflict studies as a discipline may be able to contribute to the situation. Innumerable experts on peace and conflict, and on social change activism, have all recognized that peace and justice are intertwined. Political scientist Maria Stephan reminds us, "[Martin Luther] King called for a nonviolent revolt against the kind of negative peace that prioritizes calm and tranquility over justice and human dignity, laying out a vision of a 'positive peace' grounded in respect for the basic rights, freedoms and dignity of all people."[40]

This goal—positive peace—is one that can unite countless peacebuilders and social justice advocates alike. It is disturbing, then, to see those working toward it using tactics and theories of change that evidence has already shown to be unlikely to succeed.

How does such a situation happen? In part, academic silos may be contributing to it. Social justice activism in recent years has drawn on several theories developed in academia—perhaps most significantly, intersectionality—to understand problems and work for solutions. These theories have a great many insights to offer. In particular, they excel at teasing out patterns

of difference between groups based on certain identity characteristics, and in identifying systemic inequalities and injustices. They are also ideal for moving lived experiences of oppression to the foreground. This is extremely valuable. At the same time, these theories do have limitations (as do all theories) —a point made by many experts, such as law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality.[41]

Those working to advance positive peace are ultimately seeking to influence the behaviours of particular targets (whether governments, corporations, or individuals). They seek to change human behaviours. Therefore, their theories of change could benefit from being informed by experts on human behaviour, neuroscience, peace and conflict, and many other areas of study. As touched on above, better quality solutions to complex problems are arrived at by making space to include people with a diversity of backgrounds, views, and expertise. Different fields of study need to come into more fulsome dialogue with the disciplines currently most influencing social justice activism. This could enhance that activism's positive impacts on interpersonal and intergroup peace. Here are just some of the insights from these fields that are currently too often overlooked in work ostensibly aimed toward positive peace.

The Centrality of Treating Everyone with Dignity and Respect

Treating everyone with dignity and respect is central. An essential element of the work for positive peace across times and cultures is that when it succeeds, it does so in large part by shifting *hearts*. Techniques such as deep canvassing,[42] nonviolent communication,[43] and so many others are centred on respect for the other party's essential humanity. This does *not* mean respecting their *actions*. From the guiding principle of mutuality and respect for the dignity of all people, nonviolent techniques that seek to change a person's actions strategically choose ways to draw out their "best self."[44]

Regardless of who the other side is, evidence suggests that they need to be listened to and to feel understood before they will be open to changing.[45] There are countless impressive examples of massive transformations, even in apparently unreachable individuals. Musician Daryl Davis connects so deeply with people in hate groups that he has succeeded in getting more than 200 to leave the Ku Klux Klan.[46] These changes of heart do not happen overnight. They require slow, meaningful processes of relationship building,[47] something at which Davis is masterful. In 2019, he was scheduled to speak

about, in his words, "ways to de-escalate racism," when the conference organizers were threatened with violence by activists. The activists said, among other things, that Davis—a Black man who has dedicated much of his life to countering hate—was "a white supremacist."[48]

(Alleged) concern for positive social changes such as ending systemic racism too easily winds up attacking an amorphous perceived enemy (so poorly defined that it can even include Daryl Davis) and attempting to close down spaces in which hearts might actually begin to change.

Too many people seem to take up social justice theories as invitations to punish opponents. Neuroscientist Molly Crockett explains some of the appeal of this aggressive retributive justice: "We know that punishing engages the brain's motivational circuitry and there's an immediately gratifying aspect to punishment."[49] Perhaps a critical mass of activists and academics placing more emphasis on the points described in this list could help to reduce the generally ineffective strategy of trying to make opponents suffer.

Being shamed *can* sometimes motivate people to change their behaviours,[50] but this is more likely when it is coming from a high-status, in-group member.[51] When shamed by an out-group member, or when people feel that they are being forced to comply with new rules that they do not accept, they are more likely to push back or seek revenge,[52] leading the conflict to become more destructive and entrenched.

When people feel anxious or threatened, neuroscience confirms common sense—they are more likely to hold fast to the protection of what they already believe and less likely to change their minds.[53] As many activists know, then, humiliating someone can actually *prevent* them from being accountable.[54]

The Power of Expectations

Many research findings show that what one believes and expects about the other side in a conflict can shift how that party behaves.[55] Similarly, what people believe about themselves can shift their own behaviours, as when people encouraged in experiments to feel good about their integrity were subsequently more likely to take opposing views seriously and to make concessions in negotiations.[56] Rather than expecting (and creating the conditions to encourage) people to be caring, some social justice advocates seem to assume the worst, even attaching these assumptions to relatively immutable identity characteristics like religion, gender, or race. This is an approach known to entrench conflicts, but one that could readily be

changed, with potentially transformative results.[57]

Superordinate Identities, Identity Complexity, and Common Ground

A wealth of research highlights how identities shift based on many factors, including current goals and self-image.[58] Therefore, work toward positive peace needs to take care to not overemphasize competition between relatively immutable identities (e.g., men versus women). Emphasis needs to be placed on transient identities (e.g., people at the same sports event), shared identities (e.g., people who care about their families), and points of commonality across identities. This can positively shift behaviours by highlighting the extent to which challenges are shared by different groups, some agreement and common ground exists,[59] and social identities are varied and complex.[60]

The Value of Individuating Information and Recognition of Diversity within Groups

Issues are sometimes framed as if identities like political party affiliation, ethnicity, or religion divide people into monolithic groups. Examples of this incorrect framing include proposals implying that members of less socially powerful communities all have similar experiences and thus agree about what their needs are or that they require particular treatment. Actual polling data and common sense shows that this is far from true.[61]

Conflict experts point out that thinking of people as unique individuals rather than merely representatives of their group significantly reduces both implicit and explicit biases.[62] Individuating information is thus of great importance and needs to continually be raised up while highlighting broad statistical trends that show systemic injustices to urgently address.

The Power of Curiosity in the Face of Persistent Uncertainty

Confidence is wonderful, but extreme confidence reduces curiosity and openness to others' views, and evidence suggests that this leads to more prejudice and confirmation bias and to various detrimental decision-making outcomes.[63] Yet the amount of persistent uncertainty present in complex social problems (e.g., what should be done about prisons?[64]) frequently goes unacknowledged, as over-simplified slogans and single-variable explanations are employed. There is strong evidence that overcoming the urge toward simplistic thinking is important for more rewarding conflicts.[65] This does not mean avoiding naming serious problems, but it does mean maintaining a richer emotional and intellectual experience while doing so. Broadly speaking, nuanced and complex thinking and feeling improves conflicts,[66]

whereas simple judgements about people, in particular moralistic ones (e.g., either you're good or you're evil), are more likely to result in destructive conflicts, in addition to missing valuable information about the problem at hand.[67]

Tying together several of the contributions named so far, consider for example immigration policy in a country like Canada. The issue could be framed as being about white people versus people of colour, or progressives versus conservatives. But these framings are needlessly simplistic and polarizing. The points of tension around immigration policy could instead be framed as "some right-wing business owners against others, some left-wing unions against more progressive activists, established immigrants against newer arrivals, and so on."[68] The framing could be made even more complex and individuating than this. In addition to being more factually accurate, more complex framings like this can decrease affective polarization and enhance dialogue and problem solving.

The Importance and Limitations of Lived Experience

Stories arising from lived experience of oppression are too often marginalized, not given the space and influence they deserve. These stories and proposals for change need to be raised up and taken seriously. Doing so does not mean taking them to always be fully accurate or the only perspective needed to understand a problem. Thinking this would be adopting naive realism[69] toward the experiences of marginalized individuals only, and inexplicably holding that they cannot display common human biases. A wealth of research into cognition, perception, memory, and other domains shows just how inaccurate and fallible we *all* are.[70] We also all have lived experience of this fallibility, such as misremembering things or experiencing optical or auditory illusions. Therefore, it is important to respect lived experiences, and it is important to seek out other sources of data and knowledge too.

Alternate Possible Interpretations of Ambiguous Data

Some approaches to seeking positive peace rely on heavily stigmatizing or penalizing those who do not agree with a preferred interpretation of what may in truth be a complex or ambiguous situation. Claiming an interpretation or approach as authoritative and beyond questioning makes it quasi-religious, establishing a taboo against alternate ways of looking at and seeking to address problems.[71] Those on the farthest right and the farthest left of the political spectrum report feeling the most pressure to conform to

the beliefs and norms of their groups.[72] When this happens, it opens groups up to dangerous groupthink, confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and pareidolia (i.e., false positives, imagining meaningful patterns where there is only noise).[73] These failures are due in part to not attempting to *dis*prove preferred theories.[74]

The Benefits of Moving toward a Positive Vision

Being critical can be highly useful, but too much critical thinking quickly establishes its own limitations on how activists and peace workers see the world and what can be achieved.[75] Having a positive vision is essential for social change movements. It helps them maintain their momentum, keeping people engaged in healthy conflicts about how to move toward that vision.[76] Some popular theories taken up by those seeking social justice explicitly reject the possibility of solutions to the large-scale problems they identify, even casting the desire for solutions as another part of the problem of denial and seeking comfort.[77] Activists need to continue to question the usefulness and accuracy of any theory that does not propose specific changes based on an inclusive whole-of-society vision of what positive peace would look like.

The Power of Embodied Conflict Transformation

In focusing heavily on analyzing basic social interactions, some popular approaches to seeking social justice may unwittingly de-energize people and encourage too much time self-censoring or ruminating.[78] Many cultures do not focus on dissecting and analyzing conflicts. Instead they engage in shared rituals, storytelling, dancing, singing, and other embodied ways of transforming conflicts and addressing injustices.[79] These powerful techniques are worth incorporating more consciously into the work for positive peace.

UNDERSTANDING ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

Having laid out several important findings about human biases, motivations, and group dynamics, and how these may be used for more constructive work toward positive peace, it is worth touching on another area that must be understood in this work: active nonviolence.

When Jordan Peterson was just starting to engage in the conflict about gender pronouns, he threatened to go on hunger strike.[80] The student-activist at Reed College quoted above tried to employ the powerful technique of a boycott, in part through heavy-handed coercion to force others to join. These

are instances of a common occurrence: an apparent lack of understanding of what active nonviolence is and how to use it. This gap in knowledge may drive people to more extreme tactics such as aggression toward their opponents that, as discussed, predictably backfire more often than they succeed in producing shifts in the direction of positive peace.[81]

The lack of understanding of active nonviolence is hardly surprising. Accounts of aggression and violence are repeated ad nauseam in the news and popular culture, and the few portrayals of nonviolent activism tend to focus only on attention-grabbing actions and not on all of the research, strategizing, and organizing that went on behind the scenes. That is, most coverage ignores the overwhelming majority of what active nonviolence actually is and why it is so effective.

Social change movements, whatever the context, tap into and support people's power. Movements are at their best when they agree on a vision—something big enough to be daring but that is still achievable rather than aiming for impossible perfection[82]— and then responsively employ at least the following four ways to make use of their power.

Rights-Based Work

Rights-based work involves appealing to standards that are independent of the conflict, for instance insisting that laws be applied or that recognized rights be respected. In South Africa in the 1980s, the unjust laws of apartheid were not useful, but it was useful to appeal to international law to explain how apartheid was a violation of rights.[83] This highlights the need for careful research and strategizing about which rights to focus on and make a moral and legal case for.

Interest-Based Work

Interest-based work involves various forms of dialogue and demands a great deal of active listening. This work brings parties to the conflict to understand their interests (which are usually different from their stated positions), and eventually negotiate how these may be served constructively. Successful movements are often able to expand their networks and draw in unlikely allies by finding points of convergent interest, as the campaign for the international Arms Trade Treaty (2014) did. It overcame strong opposition in part through winning the public endorsement of several arms contractors

who saw themselves as the "responsible" end of the industry.[84]

Power-Based Work

Power-based work uses nonviolent force and coercion to oppose and to push for changes. It rests on the idea that authority is given by people and that people can withdraw their cooperation when they feel the need to.[85] Power-based tactics are often symbolic ways to get attention (e.g., throwing fake blood on the office of a corporation with a poor human rights record), which is one reason that they will achieve little without the other three elements.

Political scientist Gene Sharp famously developed theories that are primarily about power-based ways of deliberately escalating tensions. Frequently these involve noncooperation and obstruction of current systems to (hopefully) hasten change. Which techniques work best in which situations is a subject of ongoing study.[86] Stephanie Van Hook, Executive Director of the Metta Center for Nonviolence, explains the general strategy—finding new and surprising tactics in an ongoing creative escalation: "It would be wrong to reach for an extreme method like fasting too early or carry on with introductory level methods like letter writing past the point where it [*sic*] can be effective".[87] At its best, power-based work gains sympathy rather than causing alienation, although Sharp notes that fully converting opponents is the least likely outcome and is not necessary for a campaign to succeed.[88]

Compassion-Based Work

Compassion-based work may be the least understood and easiest to overlook. Compassion demands bravery but is ultimately *essential* for positive peace. Resilient and courageous people around the world continue to express compassion, whatever the situation. While this can be mistaken for weakness, it does not mean conceding anything in a conflict. Compassion can produce profound transformations (as exemplified by the work of Daryl Davis, mentioned above) through touching the lives of those imprisoned in the negativity that the conflict has stirred up. Compassion is about moving hearts and loosening entrenched divisions while working for accountability and change.[89]

Being aware of the existence and value of these four different types of work, and using them creatively together, can increase the effectiveness of social change efforts. If more activists were aware of these various techniques, it would help to reduce simplistic zero-sum thinking—the conviction that

one's own side is in an all-out culture war and must use only the most aggressive power-based tactics to fully defeat the other side, or at least to make them suffer. Jumping right to fasting, boycotts, or otherwise emphasizing the most divisive power-based techniques in isolation from the other three types of work is not an effective use of active nonviolence. Especially when done without an inclusive positive vision to move toward, this is less likely to lead to the desired change and more likely to lead to affective polarization and some form of conflict stalemate.[90]

CONCLUSION

The situation of bitterly entrenched conflict and affective polarization often vaguely referred to as "culture wars" might be improved if actors working for positive peace were more thoroughly aware of and strategically using multiple elements of active nonviolence (rights, interests, power, and compassion). The situation might further be improved if actors employed evidence-based theories of change. Such theories could include and expand on some of the issues and actions touched on in this article. First, make treating everyone with dignity and respect (respect for people, not necessarily for their ideologies or actions) central. Second, recognize the power of curiosity and remain open to new interpretations and approaches to seeking change. Third, engage people with a diversity of expertise, views, and characteristics in defining a vision of positive peace and moving toward it. Fourth, seek to draw out the "best self" of opponents through listening; maintaining positive expectations that change is possible; highlighting unique individuality, shared identities, and common ground; keeping experiences and reactions complex; not becoming overly analytical, critical, or hopeless; and employing rituals, song, dance, and other embodied techniques.

ENDNOTES

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