



Strategies to Help Overcome Polarization

*Please note: As some literature contains information pertinent to both the causes of polarization and strategies to help overcome it, entries in this document may be repeated in the **Polarization and its Causes** annotated bibliography. These entries are noted with an asterisk (*). With entries listed in both annotated bibliographies, we have endeavoured to describe the parts of the source document that pertain to causes of polarization in the first bibliography and the parts pertaining to strategies for overcoming it in the second.*

Anand, N. (2020, February). *The radical act of choosing common ground* [Video].

TEDxBerkeley.

https://www.ted.com/talks/nisha_anand_the_radical_act_of_choosing_common_ground_mar_2020

Nisha Anand speaks very hopefully about the power of bridge-building as she experienced it in her work across party lines to achieve criminal justice reform in 2015. Says, “If we want large-scale change, we need large movements, and that means working across the aisle”. Once the National Director for the War Resisters League, she eventually found her way to working cooperatively with the Department of Defense. Anand urges us as listeners to think about an issue we care deeply about: What would it look like to solve that problem? Could we get there with just our circle of friends? How can we expand that circle a little more? Can we think of any unlikely allies, strange partners? Who’s stopping us from finding that common ground, and is there room for them in that circle? Anand says we need to love those people who might not love us back. “Step into your courage!” “Who’s your Newt [Gingrich]? Who’s your Koch?” Our goal should be to find our shared humanity, our ability to be there together with each other in shared space - physical and civic and political – and to steward the commons: those resources we inherit and create together.

Bail, C.A., Argyle, L., Brown, T., Bumpus, J.P., Chen, H., Hunzaker, M.B.F., Lee, J., Mann, M., Merhout, F. & Volfovsky, A., (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115>

United States citizens identifying as Democrats and Republicans were offered financial compensation (albeit very minimal) to follow internet bots that exposed them to opposing political views in an effort to see if this would moderate them. The effect after one month was that Republicans came to express substantially *more* conservative views while Democrats' attitudes became "slightly more liberal" (but not to the level of statistical significance). Findings suggest that exposure to opposing political views will tend to *increase* polarization rather than reducing it, at least among Twitter users in the USA, who are, admittedly, a minority but one with "outsized influence". Researchers were unable to determine the mechanism that would explain the paradoxical effect. However, they suggested that increasing exposure to opposing political views on social media may be counter-productive, and that messages delivered by non-elites in offline settings might be more effective.

Berman, T. (2016). Listen to learn: We need to stop choosing sides and start choosing progress. *Alternatives Journal*, 42(4),74.

Writing at the unprecedented time of an NDP government in Alberta, veteran environmental activist Tzeporah Berman offers a personal take on the need for complex thinking and inclusive climate activism that involves listening to all Canadians. We need the ability, she says, to talk to "engineers and boiler makers in the oilsands...[we need] energy incumbents, big oil, gas and coal executives turning their formidable minds to driving investment capital...to low-carbon infrastructure." Sadly, we are choosing sides before the conversation has even begun. Instead, we need to widen our world and read from diverse sources, so it is "harder to stay in our land with blinders on." Berman reminds us that there are "good people everywhere – good people who sometimes make bad decisions." To make better decisions, we need to give each other a little credit. And that starts with listening.

Born, P. (2012). *Community conversations: Mobilizing the ideas, skills, and passion of community organizations, governments, businesses, and people*. BPS Books.

This book resulted out of the recognition of "the growing complexity of our societies' needs and the elementary nature of the tools available to fix them" (p. 1). The first part of the book is theoretical and uses anecdotes and examples of community conversations. Born explores the four building blocks of great community conversations: conversing, engaging, collaborating, and casting a vision. For example, in the section on "conversing," Born discusses the nature of dialogue and the need to suspend our assumptions. In the second part of the book, ten stories

of community conversations illustrate the techniques involved in community conversations. Examples of techniques employed are Conversation Cafes, Open Space conversations, Peer to Peer Conversations, and Appreciative Inquiries. Born does a great job of balancing theory with examples of practical techniques.

* Brubaker, D. R., Brubaker, E. N., Yoder, C. E., & Haase, T. J. (2019). *When the center does not hold: Leading in an age of polarization*. Fortress Press.

Chapter 2: Leadership and Polarization – David R. Brubaker provides capacity suggestions from leaders who have successfully navigated polarized environments, including: engaging conflict as it emerges, learning how to manage polarities instead of resolving conflict, acting as a role model for positive behaviour, speaking your truth (as informed by one's core values), and protecting people within your organization (pp. 42-44). Opposite to the toxic behaviours that fuel polarization, three positive behaviours to act upon and emulate are "engagement, openness, and respect." (p. 43).

Chapter 3: Communicating Across the Divide – by David Brubaker and his son, Everett Brubaker. This chapter focuses on communication and the polarizing limits of everyday language. The authors suggest an exercise: write down a word and its antonym. The task is then to find a word in-between. Trying to find the parts in between takes more thinking and intentionality.

Chapter 4: Trauma, Polarization, and Connection – by Carolyn Yoder. She urges people to look at trauma, encouraging the examination of polarization through a trauma-informed lens, as unaddressed trauma may lie at the root of many of our polarized social systems. The author advises people to respond to trauma in ways that require reflection, rather than responding instinctually in the form of a trauma response. She states that overcoming polarization begins with an individual commitment to thinking and acting in new ways.

Chapter 6: Weathering Polarization with Resilience – by Teresa J. Haase. This chapter examines the tools needed to combat polarization. The author lists the twelve key tools we can use to properly implement a resilience framework in our lives and in our discourse: increasing stress tolerance, accepting ambiguity (rejecting false binaries), self-awareness, ingenuity, vulnerability, making meaning (co-creating and reimagining meaning), safety and security, weathering the storm (preparing for possible precariousness), embracing the unknown (trusts and faith), self-care, accepting reality, and maintaining resilience.

Chapter 6: Transforming Polarization – This chapter discusses how polarization operates at multiple levels: the intrapersonal (inside of us), the interpersonal (between us as individuals), and the organizational or congregational level. The text details the qualities that are necessary

for one to combat polarization on each level. On the intrapersonal level, Brubaker advises that we must: 1) refuse contempt (anger mixed with disgust) for others, 2) honour dignity (believing that dignity is an inherent property of all humans) and 3) broaden binaries (extend beyond 'either/or' and limited binary language). On the interpersonal level he advises that people must 1) seek understanding, 2) invite disagreement, and 3) stay connected (notwithstanding abuse). When addressing organizations or congregations, Brubaker claims that it is not the item of polarization that is the 'issue', it is (instead) the history, attitudes, and processes (dynamics) we engage in. Polarized conflict appears when pre-existing tensions have the chance to use a point of conflict as a scapegoat (so the true issues are never addressed). Accepting the true issue allows for transparency and empowers people to decide the appropriate movement forward. Brubaker also suggest that steps must also be taken in the political realm, claiming we must: 1) restructure binary politics, 2) change religious culture (create a broader understanding of spiritual compassion) and 3) rebuild civil society (improving local communities).

Bruneau, E. G., & Saxe, R. (2012). The power of being heard: The benefits of 'perspective giving' in the context of intergroup conflict. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(4), 855-866.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.02.017>

This study aimed to determine the impacts perspective-giving and -taking had on attitudes toward the out group. Members of opposing sides work in dyads with video and text: one plays Sender (perspective giver) and one plays Responder (perspective taker). The Sender explains their problems, and the Responder summarizes in their own words. It showed significant (if short-term) impact on attitudes when perspective giving as a minority or oppressed group, and perspective taking as a dominant group.

Cloke, K. (2018). *Politics, dialogue and the evolution of democracy: How to discuss race, abortion, immigration, gun control, climate change, same sex marriage and other hot topics*. Goodmedia Press.

Kenneth Cloke is a leading expert in dispute resolution and mediation and the founder of Mediators Beyond Borders. In this book - just one of a great many he has authored or co-authored - Cloke outlines the various attitudes, behaviours, skills, capacities, processes, and relationships we need to cultivate in order to discuss political ideas and beliefs while avoiding or minimizing bias, diatribes, and dangerously adversarial ways of relating across political divides. Given the vast and profound changes that are necessary, Cloke calls for nothing short of a "conflict revolution." Chapters cover such topics as the nature, neurophysiology, and morality of political conflict; designing, organizing, and facilitating political dialogues; and imagining interest-based solutions to global conflicts. A surprisingly prescient chapter (Ch 8), given the date of publication, speaks to global pandemics, national borders and political problem-solving. Of particular note is Cloke's insistence on keeping dissent, diversity, and debate alive and on

facing conflict, not avoiding it. He writes that “condemning both sides as equally responsible for political conflicts, or trying to appear neutral when neutrality has ceased to exist, are common forms of conflict avoidance. The middle ground in politics, as in life, is usually overly simplistic and sometimes cowardly, like advocating a middle ground between equality and slavery, honesty and lying, diversity and genocides, fairness and bigotry” (p. 62). Cloke warns that in designing political conversations we must not lose sight of power differences (i.e., not see aggressor and oppressed groups as equally aggrieved) nor see dialogue as a substitute for action.

Commons, M. L., & Goodheart, E. A. (2008). Cultural progress is the result of developmental level of support. *World Futures*, 64(5-7), 406-415. <https://10.1080/02604020802301360>

The authors present an argument for ‘scaffolding’ – the deliberate creation of levels of support to help individuals move to higher levels of competence in dealing with complexity. They suggest that scaffolding will enable social, cultural, and scientific progress in individual and collective behaviours as well as social institutions. Drawing on decades of work in adult development, the authors define various levels of support that can be offered to learners. These range from walking individuals through a new task, to giving direct instruction with prompts and cues, to delayed imitation or observational learning. At the mid-range of a competency scale, an individual is capable of unaided problem-solving. From there, they progress to being able to generate examples of narrowly defined issues, to being able to identify a problem that is representative of a given phenomenon, to an instance in which to solve that problem, to being able to recognize phenomena. The relevance to overcoming polarization is implicit.

Very few thinkers in a society will ever progress to the final stages of development, but through “downward assimilation” a problem that is “of too high a stage to perform is made easier through the provision of support” (p. 412). Downward assimilation happens through language – e.g., “rhymes, poetry, songs, writing, manuscripts, libraries, books, printing, news media, broad access to education, higher education, computers, and the Internet” (412). Codifying and institutionalizing new norms through international documents and agreements (e.g., in the arena of human rights) also helps speed cultural progress. New patterns of behaviour are the cultural equivalent of genes; these were first termed ‘memes’ by Dawkins in 1982. It is the quality of our education, training and communication that will determine whether there will be downward transmission of progressive memes. Again, we must imagine the application of these ideas to the task of overcoming polarization.

Dhar, J. (2018, October). *How to disagree productively and find common ground* [Video]. TED@BCG Toronto.

https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_dhar_how_to_disagree_productively_and_find_common_ground#t723531

Julia Dhar laments the fact that “contempt has replaced conversation” and suggests that we must separate ideas from identity and re-learn the art of respectful face-to-face debate. Having once thought that people who are most successful at persuading others must have “a magical ability to make the polarizing palatable”, Dhar changed her mind upon observing them closely. She found that “people who disagree the most productively start by finding common ground, no matter how narrow it is. They identify the thing that we can all agree on and go from there.” By creating a shared reality, they provide a platform to talk about conflict, and an antidote to “alternative facts”. Dhar points to research that shows that the sound of the human voice is literally humanizing. Consequently, we need to step away from our keyboards and brave the face-to-face encounter with “the other”. She suggests imagining yourself stepping into someone else’s shoes; soon, the suspicions you hold about people who hold those beliefs will start to evaporate. We also need to guard against attaching to our ideas such that we own them and they own us. We have to open ourselves to the possibility we might be wrong, embracing the humility of uncertainty. What uncertainty are you humble about?

* Dutton, W. (2017, May 5). Fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles: Under-researched and overhyped. *The Conversation* (Canadian edition). <https://theconversation.com/fake-news-echo-chambers-and-filter-bubbles-underresearched-and-overhyped-76688>

Reports on a study carried out in seven nations (United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain) in January 2017, which surveyed 14,000 internet users. It found that internet users who are the least skilled and least politically interested may be susceptible to fake news and filter bubbles. The authors acknowledged that this population could benefit from digital literacy training and support.

Featherstone, L. (2022, January 27). We’re all crazy in someone else’s eyes. *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/165167/were-crazy-someone-elses-eyes>

Writing for the progressive magazine, *The New Republic*, Liza Featherstone is an author, journalist and professor who suggests that we’re “always crazy to somebody.” Our choices can seem reckless or overcautious, depending on the observer. Featherstone encourages us to be self-reflective and consider that “Sometimes I am that guy”. She suggests that expanding both our empathy and sympathy can reduce self-righteous behaviour that pits us against others in an “us-versus-them” manner. We can “[look] at disagreements on a continuum, and [place] ourselves on that continuum along with others... It helps us to argue more agreeably, protecting

our relationships in a polarized and polarizing society.” After providing examples of current polarized issues (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, politics), Featherstone “points back to the desperate need for radical empathy, despite our very human frustration with our neighbours.” She suggests that radical empathy should be used for “political persuasion that leads people to vote or show up to protests”, or for emphasizing “the urgency of climate change.”

* French D. (2020). *Divided we fall: America's secession threat and how to restore our nation*. Macmillan.

The author suggests that divisions in social discourse and the cultural changes that are feeding polarization can be solved with a re-boot of the idea of pluralism, both to prevent oppressive factions from seizing control, and to restore a culture of kindness, decency, tolerance, and grace.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Vintage.

Haidt argues that we are righteous beings by nature; we use reason to argue and persuade, not to find truth. Morality is formed through our group associations, and influenced by our genetic predispositions and our experiences. Haidt organizes our morality into six ‘tastes’ which he believes are founded in evolution: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression. Through numerous studies he shows that American liberals favour the care/harm and fairness/cheating dimensions, while conservatives show a more even balance across the six.

Our reward centre activates when given information that supports our own position and thus “extreme partisanship may be literally addictive” (p. 103). Intelligence only improves our ability to argue our own position, but Haidt believes that diversity of perspective, under conditions which allow for respectful collaboration, is the path toward true truth-finding. Rather than using rationality to bridge moral divide, Haidt recommends finding opportunities for positive interactions and cultivating empathy, trying to understand the underlying moral dimensions behind a conflict, and implementing measures of accountability.

* Harwood, R. C. (2022). *Civic virus: why polarization is a misdiagnosis*. The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. <https://theharwoodinstitute.org/civic-virus-report>

The Harwood Institute is a research organization in the United States that “equips people, organizations, communities, and networks with the tools to bridge divides, build capacity, and tackle shared challenges.” They have been analyzing American perceptions on “the state of the nation, their lives, and hopes and concerns” since 1990 (p. 7).

The author suggests there are opportunities to bridge societal divides and bring people together. Change starts in our local communities, through community action (e.g., post-natural disaster or as a result of the pandemic). It is “essential to create more spaces within communities for people to come together across real and perceived differences. These spaces must be safe, where people feel able to express themselves, especially views that may not be fully formed” (p. 58). We need to amplify “listening and empathy, where people seek to understand one another’s perspectives and lived experiences. These conversations should begin with people focusing on their *shared aspirations*” (p. 58). The author also urges societal interventions such as: more common efforts (people in shared actions); developing courageous/humble/community-minded leaders; investing/supporting local journalism and media; creating more boundary-spanning organizations and groups; and generating a new “can-do” counternarrative (pp. 57-60).

Hayhoe, K. (2021). *Saving us: A climate scientist’s case for hope and healing in a divided world*. One Signal Publishers.

Hayhoe is an evangelical Christian climate scientist who has been learning and practicing how to talk to diverse audiences about climate change – one of the most politicized and divisive issues of our time. She indicates that data, facts, and science add to polarization because they engage defense mechanisms and self-justification. Having conversations about climate change is challenging because of a combination of tribalism, complacency, and fear that surrounds the topic. Hayhoe argues that when you begin a conversation with something that unites, such as starting with something you have in common, the conversation starts at a place of respect, agreement and understanding. This leads to positive conversations that bridge divides.

Throughout the book she gives tools and examples on how to have these positive conversations. This includes understanding basic climate science and taking inventory of who you are and what you might have in common with others. If you don’t know what matters to others, ask them. Sharing our lived experiences is more important than sharing facts. When you find out what people care about, you can connect climate impacts to those values. Hayhoe summarizes the various research on cognitive psychology as it pertains to how we think about climate change and suggests methods to overcome barriers, such as the depolarizing power of sharing local climate impacts. Talking matters because conversations that connect over shared values reach into our hearts and move past the barriers of “us” and “them”. The simple act of having a conversation triggers a positive feedback effect that can lead to action on climate change.

- * Hoggan, J. (2019.) *I'm right and you're an idiot: the toxic state of public discourse and how to clean it up*. New Society Publishers.

This book by James Hoggan, Canadian public relations specialist, summarizes interviews with public figures to examine what causes the degradation of public discourse and present solutions. Hoggan suggests that we can release ourselves from psychological cycles of inaction and denial by finding common ground, suspending judgement, centring ourselves in empathy, listening deeply, behaving with humility, and increasing our respect for one another. How we frame an issue can contribute to hateful, divisive messages, or help people to create new opinions and beliefs. It all depends on the emotions and values our frame emphasizes. Interventions for polarized public discourse include acknowledging our “blind spots”, acknowledging the validity of others’ viewpoints, bringing in pluralistic narrative resources, communicating using the language of values, and staying within your own desired frame.

- Inglis, J. (2011). "Holistic democracy" and citizen motivation to use a more holistic approach to public decision-making. *Integral Review*, 7(2), 4-46. https://www.integral-review.org/issues/vol_7_no_2_inglis_holistic_democracy_and_citizen_motivation.pdf

Author Jan Inglis is an educator and researcher with expertise in public engagement processes. Inglis writes about the need for public engagement processes that can avoid polarization by addressing the complexity of public issues without simplifying them. Such processes must be carefully designed to facilitate critical reflection and the emergence of multiple possible solutions based on a shared understanding and agreed-upon definition of the social problem at hand. They must also support the contributions of diverse interested parties and motivate their continued participation. Carefully designed deliberative processes can help participants consider “their tone and intentions in their own politics or ways of relating to each other” (p. 30) as well as the impacts of any possible course of action on relationships within the community (p. 38).

- Inglis, J. (2015). *Matching public interaction skills with desired outcomes*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242747814_Matching_Public_Interaction_Skills_wit
h_Desired_Outcomes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242747814_Matching_Public_Interaction_Skills_with_Desired_Outcomes)

In this article, Jan Inglis provides the theory behind public participation/interaction and how we must first identify our desired outcomes to then inform how we engage our stakeholders. Described is Inglis’ “Scale of Public Interaction” (SPI), which approaches public interaction as a progression of tasks, each requiring different skill sets and producing different outcomes (p. 7). It offers five different types of public interactions and their respective benefits and negatives: casual talk, opinion talk, strategic talk, facilitated dialogue, and developmental processes for comprehensive social change (p. 7).

Inglis, J., & Steele, M. (2005). Complexity intelligence and cultural coaching: Navigating the gap between our societal challenges and our capacities. *Integral Review*, 1. https://integral-review.org/issues/issue_1_inglis_and_steele_complexity_intelligence_and_cultural_coaching.pdf

This article identifies capacities that ideally develop within adults as we progress through life, encountering and rising to the complex, interconnected, and unpredictable challenges it presents. The term 'complexity intelligence' is used to refer to a combination of reasoning ability, emotional capacity, and social cognition (i.e., reasoning in a social context). It is the gap between what we can currently do and what we need to be able to do that can stimulate the development of complexity intelligence, but many of us fail to bridge that gap. Furthermore, this capacity is one that can be developed not only in individuals but collectively, as society. However, the authors contend that it will require "a new form of social change agent – a *cultural coach*, to midwife its emergence" (p. 36). Public processes can also be designed to support the emergence of this capacity, but these should not explicitly try to teach concepts so much as offer opportunities for experiential learning through their application. It is also important not to treat gaps (where capacity to meet challenges is not yet present) as either signs of moral failing or "permanent incompetencies" (p. 38) but rather, to recognize that adult development can and should be ongoing.

As the locus of social change is not in the individual, but in individuals' interaction with culture, we need a sufficient proportion of the population to develop these capacities so we can "reason and reflect together and commit to a process of public deliberation or generative dialogue out of which adaptive responses to problems [can] emerge... without 'numbing out' or splitting into reactive camps" (p. 39). To develop these cognitive and emotional capacities, we need the right combination of challenge and support. We also need carefully designed processes that create appropriate containers for dialogue and deliberation, surface diversity and differences, spur creativity, and lead to transformative exchanges. We need to develop the ability to give fair consideration of others' perspectives, engage in critical self-reflection about our own positions and social conventions, and generate novel solutions to social problems.

* Itten, A.V. (2018). *Overcoming social division: Conflict resolution in times of polarisation and democratic disconnection*. Routledge.

Itten advocates for public conflict resolution, civic fusion, and mediative decision-making to help us re-learn how to find common ground on controversial issues. The book includes strategies and conditions that are important for mediative interventions to be successful in overcoming social divisions.

Kahane, A. (2017). *Collaborating with the enemy: how to work with people you don't agree with or like or trust*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

In an increasingly complex world, more than ever we need to collaborate on our trickiest problems. Conventional collaboration, which assumes agreement on the problem and the solution, and requires a controlled execution of the plan, has become obsolete. To collaborate with people that we don't agree with or like or trust, Kahane advocates for "stretch collaboration", where we must abandon ideals of consensus and control, and embrace the mess of diverse truths (p. 3). Stretch collaboration requires us to accept and appreciate the connection and the discord amongst the group; to experimentally test possibilities together ("it is more important to act than to agree" (p. 76)); and to abandon ideas of how others must change and instead invest ourselves fully, with an openness to be changed. As we are "crossing the river by feeling for stones," participants must be able to "act freely and creatively," testing small steps and framing mistakes as learning experiences (p. 76).

Kahane, A. (2021). *Facilitating breakthrough: how to remove obstacles, bridge differences, and move forward together*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Kahane is a facilitation expert who has supported conflict transformation in polarized situations across the globe. He is humble, acknowledging his privileged life and noting when he made mistakes and what he learned from them. He argues that transformative facilitation, a framework for successful communication, is what is needed to move forward together. This unconventional approach describes 10 outer moves (that a facilitator employs to support their group/participants) and 5 inner shifts (that a facilitator brings attention to within themselves). The pairs of moves are inherently polarized. This approach may be suitably applied to the coordination of a social laboratory (or other change management process).

Transformative facilitation is a dance between vertical facilitation (organized hierarchically, relying on expertise and authority) and horizontal facilitation (organized equally, relying on autonomy and variety). Kahane suggests there are five questions that all collaborations must address in order to move forward together: 1) How do we see our situation? 2) How do we define success? 3) How do we get from here to there? 4) How do we decide who does what? 5) How do we understand our role? By paying attention to the needs of the group while answering these questions, the facilitator cycles back and forth between five pairs of outer moves. Coinciding with each of the collaborative questions, the outer moves are: inquiring/advocating, advancing/concluding, discovering/mapping, accompanying/directing, and standing inside the group/standing outside the group. The facilitator simultaneously makes internal shifts: opening up, discerning, adapting, serving, and partnering. This helps the collaborative group move forward together while navigating barriers and polarization. It also removes the obstacles to love, power, and justice. "Love is the drive towards unity that in a collaboration manifests as

connection among the participants and between them and their situation. Power is the drive towards self-realization that manifests as the *contributions* that participants make to their collaborative work and to their situation. Justice is the structure that enables and directs love and power and that manifests as *equity* within the group and, through their work in the situation” (p. 144).

* Kenyon, T. (2014). False polarization: Debiasing as applied social epistemology. *Synthese*, 191, 2529–2547. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-014-0438-x>

The author defines “false polarization (FP)” as an “interpersonal bias on judgement, the effect of which is to lead people in contexts of disagreement to overestimate the differences between their respective views.” (p. 2529).

Kenyon proposes *debiasing* as a strategy for avoiding or minimizing FP (p. 2532). Current evidence has several conclusions about mitigating biases: teaching people about biases doesn’t reliably lead to debiasing, experimental debiasing strategies are complicated/ artificial/ unintuitive, and it is difficult to implement them individually in informal circumstances. (p. 2533). Kenyon suggests that debiasing can be successful by emphasizing “the *judgement*, rather than the *agent*.” (p. 2534). They propose that the most plausible approach to debiasing is to create “social infrastructure that supports debiasing... [such as] institutionally and socially positioning facilitators” (p. 2545). For example, “judges who instruct jurors on the unbiased interpretation of evidence” (p. 2545).

Kieboom, M. (2014). Lab matters: Challenging the practice of social innovation laboratories. Kennisland. <https://www.kl.nl/en/publications/lab-matters-challenging-the-practice-of-social-innovation-laborat/>

This is a critical report on social innovation laboratories (labs) as vehicles for systems change. Written as a summary report following a gathering of 40 social lab practitioners in Amsterdam, it is a refreshingly honest, insider look at what social labs could do better. It includes an overview of different types of social labs and how they work, and a discussion of four critiques of social labs that the author feels explain the lag between the hype and tangible results to date. These are: 1) a tendency to “solutionism” (a default to incremental improvements that are built on existing ways of doing things and do not take into account how complex systems adapt and move) (p. 24); 2) a failure to account for power, inequality, and politics, both *within labs* (which are not value-neutral or providing equal benefits to all) and *within society* where other actors, including social movements, can bring about or impeded transformations; 3) a need to focus more on scaling up ideas; and 4) a failure to account for the messiness of human interactions and social dynamics. The author argues that instead of incrementalism, systemic change calls for

discontinuous change: “change that displaces an established structural order for something new” (p. 13).

Kraybill, R., & Wright, E. (2007). *Little book of cool tools for hot topics: Group tools to facilitate meetings when things are hot*. Good Books.

This gem of a book will excite those looking for quick-to-learn structured processes – tools – that facilitators can use to manage conflict, check in with a group, energize participants, gather information, hold dialogues, build understanding, manage polarities, use stories to explore contentious issues, find our common humanity, see the world through others’ eyes, evaluate group processes and bring closure after conflict. Each tool is briefly summarized and the exact procedures for using it laid out. Strengths, sequencing, and special concerns are noted. The book’s 85 pages outline almost 30 tools and include recommendations of further resources to explore. Quick and easy to read, this book is excellent value for both time and money.

Manji, I. (2011). *Allah, liberty & love*. Random House Canada.

Irshad Manji is a self-described faithful Muslim who advocates for secularism as the only form of society in which diversity of belief can thrive. She advocates critical thinking about Muslim practices and has been recognized for daring to step beyond the narrow confines of disciplined adherence to dogma. Taking her book *Faith Without Fear* on the road, she encountered many people who told her that they were struggling with the cultures, traditions and power structures that were fencing in their own religious experiences (p. 13). Manji calls for the application of moral courage so we may “learn how to transform high defences about “the Other” and low expectations of ourselves into the opposite—higher expectations of ourselves and lower defences about “the Other”” (p. 17). She also says that we need gutsy thinking: “Muslims and non-Muslims who live in democracies have to develop the spine to expand individual liberty, not stunt it, because without the freedom to think and express there can be no integrity—of the self or society” (p. 15). Manji advocates for pluralism that does not devolve into relativism – falling for anything because we stand for nothing. She says that Muslims must not give in to fearfully thinking that “questions only make matters worse, especially in an already polarized environment” (p. 199). Muslims must instead break with conformity and become more open about expressing the diverse “palette of views” they already hold.

Manji, I. (2022). *Diversity without division: Introducing the moral courage method of communicating across divides* [Online course].

<https://diversitywithoutdivision.thinkific.com/courses/diversitywithoutdivision>

Irshad Manji's online course is framed as "the no-shaming alternative to mainstream inclusion training," and aims to broaden the definition of diversity to include diversity of thought. The

course trains the learner to conduct "Moral Courage" workshops which focus on "constructive conflict" strategies through collaborative roleplay and reflection.

Montibeller, G., & Von Winterfeldt, D. (2015). Cognitive and motivational biases in decision and risk analysis. *Risk Analysis*, 35(7), 1230-1251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.12360>

This article discusses biases that are specific to decision-making and risk analysis, and contains some discussion of biases and debiasing techniques that are relevant to group polarization. Specifically, the authors define *affect-influenced bias* ("an emotional predisposition for, or against, a specific outcome or option that taints judgements"); *confirmation bias* ("a desire to confirm one's belief, leading to unconscious selectivity in the acquisition of and use of evidence"); *optimism bias* (occurring when "the desirability of an outcome leads to an increase in the extent to which it is expected to occur"); and its opposite, which we may think of as a *pessimism bias* (occurring when there is "a desire to be cautious, prudent, or conservative in estimates that may be related to harmful consequences"). In each of these cases, de-biasing strategies involve referring to multiple experts with alternative points of view. Confirmation bias can also be countered by "challeng[ing] probability assessments with counterfactuals" and "prob[ing] for evidence of alternative hypotheses." Affect-influenced bias can be countered by avoiding "loaded descriptions of consequences" (p.1235).

Pearlman, E. (2019). *Building journalism-supported conversations between people on opposing sides of divisive issues*. [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talk/eve_pearlman_how_to_lead_a_conversation_between_people_who_disagree

Pearlman reports on a project in which journalists brought together people on opposite sides of deep social-political divides - 25 liberals from California and 25 conservatives from Alabama - to talk about contentious issues in a closed Facebook group for one month. The journalists started by asking participants what they thought the other side thought of them; participants began to see the simplistic and often mean-spirited images others held of them. People came to the conversations with anger but in the end were glad, and relieved, at the chance to put down their arms, and were grateful for the opportunity. Pearlman reports that it was "difficult and challenging work" to "listen around and through our own habits of minds and biases". Qualities and practices that helped were restraint, self-awareness, curiosity, and an emphasis on discussion, not debate. About two-thirds of the people went on after the end of the month to establish their own Facebook groups.

* Pinker, S., & Wood, J. Jr. (Host). (2021, June 2). *Cancel culture, communication, & the quest for humanism*. [Podcast episode]. Braver Angels. https://youtu.be/QxkU_Rsgn8c

John Wood Jr. (Braver Angels) interviews Steven Pinker, who claims that the nature of the news causes us to feel our institutions are failing and that everything is getting worse, even when there is data showing progress. Pinker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the value of all ideas, as this acknowledgement and openness can bring us closer to good ideas (e.g., anti-cancel culture). He advocates for a centring on the facts/data, developing a position of “active open-mindedness” or “epistemic humility” (i.e., the awareness of our own fallibility to help us maintain openness), and finding a common goal.

Porter, T., & Schumann, K. (2018). Intellectual humility and openness to the opposing view. *Self and Identity*, 17(2), 139-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2017.1361861>

This article sets out to conceptualize intellectual humility (IH) – defined as “a willingness to recognize the limits of one’s knowledge and appreciate others’ intellectual strengths” (p.140) – and to relate it to openness to contrary viewpoints, particularly in socio-politically charged discussions. Beginning with the idea that IH could be enhanced by reducing people’s motivation to be “right” or intellectually superior to others, the researchers designed a study to test several propositions about IH, including the possibility that promoting a growth mindset as a path to higher intelligence could motivate people to inquire and interact with greater humility. Results showed that making a growth mindset salient (and desirable) resulted in higher IH scores, more respectful attributions (reasoning about why others might disagree), and more openness to opposing ideas, at least temporarily. Researchers ruled out possible competing explanations like IH being inversely related to the strength of opinions held by the participants, or to their self-esteem or confidence in their own intelligence. Results suggest a possible lever for long-term change in terms of enhanced intellectual humility, and openness to listening across seemingly intractable conflicts. The authors call for more research on other possible antecedents to higher IH.

Ross, L. (2021, July). *Don’t call people out – call them in* [Video]. TEDMonterey. https://www.ted.com/talks/loretta_j_ross_don_t_call_people_out_call_them_in

This TEDtalk is delivered by Professor Loretta J. Ross, a radical black feminist who has been working for human rights for over four decades. In this presentation, Ross describes the difference between calling out and calling in, and also identifies the characteristics and limits of “call-out culture”. Calling out refers to the act of publicly shaming another person for their behavior. Call-out culture has been at the forefront of two recent social movements: #MeToo (against sexual abuse and sexual harassment) and global protests against police violence. As a result, employees called out their bosses, consumers called out corporations, students called

out peers, and victims called out abusers. Conversely, calling *in* occurs privately and respectfully, rather like an act of love. Calling in involves three components: conversation, compassion, and context. It does not condone or ignore the harm, slight or damage caused by calling out but sees opportunities for growth and leverages the power of respectful, caring relationships to bring about change.

Resnick, B. (2020, January 29). How to talk someone out of bigotry. Vox.

<https://www.vox.com/2020/1/29/21065620/broockman-kalla-deep-canvassing>

Brian Resnick reports on research on the relatively novel technique of “deep canvassing”. Developed by LGBTQ rights organizer, Dave Fleischer, deep canvassing is a door-to-door technique to help transform prejudices. It involves first asking residents for their opinions on a subject like transgender rights or irregular immigration, and then really listening to their answers. Canvassers then ask residents to recall a time when they were discriminated against, or when someone showed them compassion when they really needed it. Canvassers help residents connect the dots between their existing values and the positions that canvassers hope they will support. Political scientists David Broockman and Josh Kalla have studied deep canvassing extensively and found it to be more effective than conventional means of persuasion – e.g., traditional canvassing, TV ads, phone calls – which aren’t really effective at all. They suggest that the reason deep canvassing works is because the process of exchanging narratives and having a truly non-judgmental, two-way conversation helps participants feel safe and understood, while giving space for them to come to their own conclusions. Says Broockman, “Twitter is obviously full of the notion that what we should do is condemn those who disagree with us. What we can now say experimentally, the key to the success of these conversations is doing the exact opposite of that.”

Scharmer, O., & Kaufer, K. (2013). *Leading from the emerging future: From ego-system to eco-system economics*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

This is a book that applies Theory U to transform business, society and self. Theory U is a collection of concepts and tools to help lead to the emerging future. This includes presencing (sensing and presence), levels of listening, critical process steps for holding spaces, awareness based collective action, principles and practices for our individual journeys and stakeholder interviews. While Theory U comes from the field of leadership and change management, some of the concepts and tools can be applied with the lens of overcoming polarization.

Schirch, L., & Campt, D. (2015). *The little book of dialogue for difficult subjects: A practical, hands-on guide*. Good Books.

Schirch and Campt believe that dialogue is the essence of democracy. It generates deeper insights and better thinking than any of us can do alone. The authors define dialogue as “a process for talking about tension-filled topics” (p. 5) and helpfully explain how it is different from conversation, discussion, training, education, or debate. The kinds of dialogue Schirch and Campt outline are based on respectful listening, openness to learning, and an emphasis on sharing the experiences that have shaped our beliefs, rather than just the beliefs themselves (p. 8). Effective dialogues are intentionally and carefully designed to engage intellect, emotions, and spirit. They help participants discover similarities they didn’t know existed and engage in collective analysis of a problem and commit to collaborative action. The authors identify important pre-conditions for dialogue to be effective; types of dialogue; recruiting and inviting participants to a dialogue; designing dialogue processes; facilitating dialogues; and moving from dialogue to action.

Shnabel, N., Nadler, A., Ullrich, J., Dovidio, J. F., & Carmi, D. (2009). Promoting reconciliation through the satisfaction of the emotional needs of victimized and perpetrating group members: The needs-based model of reconciliation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35(8), 1021-1030.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0146167209336610>

The Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation proposes that “successful reconciliation requires that the different emotional needs of victims and perpetrators both be satisfied”; victims share a sense of powerlessness and "loss of status and honor" whereas perpetrators suffer from a fear of “moral inferiority” (p. 1022). In this study, Shnabel et al. test the *Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation*, previously only studied in the context of interpersonal conflict, on intergroup conflict. Participants on either side of a historical victim-perpetrator dynamic are given messages (of either empowerment, or acceptance) and rated on their willingness to reconcile. Victims receiving messages of empowerment, and perpetrators receiving messages of acceptance were more likely to show willingness to reconcile.

* Silan, M.A.A. (2017, December). *Debiasing in the political context or proceeding with political polarization or surviving and creating change in this political climate*. [Unpublished paper]. University of the Philippines Diliman.

Noting Lilienfeld and colleagues’ (2009) observation that cognitive distortions lead to attitudinal polarization, Silan argues that debiasing can be a crucial tool in tackling ideological extremism and inter- and intragroup conflict. Following Montibeller & von Winterfeldt (2015), Silan defines de-biasing as “attempts to eliminate or reduce cognitive and/or motivational biases” (p. 2).

Silan suggests trying to reframe issues by appealing to the moral foundations and values of the listener (opponent). “That is to say, we change behaviors by changing perceptions of what is normatively and politically acceptable” (p. 17). Moreover, he says, it is possible to change behaviors without necessarily changing attitudes, morality or identity. He calls for humanization and dialogue that seeks human connection without any goal of persuasion. He cites Broockman and Kalla’s (2016) research on *deep canvassing*: “a mixture of deliberate and effortful processing...and perspective-taking or imagining another person’s point of view” (p. 12). Finally, Silan cites empirically validated contact theory that shows how intergroup exposure and contact can facilitate the reduction of prejudice (p. 13). (See Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; and Paluck, Green S., & Green D., 2017 for a nuanced discussion).

* Stanley, M. L., Sinclair, A. H., & Seli, P. (2020). Intellectual humility and perceptions of political opponents. *Journal of personality*, 88(6), 1196–1216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12566>

Matthew Stanley, Alyssa Sinclair and Paul Seli suggest that we need to recognize that social and political disagreement can be useful and fruitful in “generating creative solutions to significant problems and growing intellectually” (p. 34).

This requires “the willingness of opposing sides to try to understand opposing positions (de Wied, Branje, & Meeus, 2007; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010).” Such willingness to understand requires *intellectual humility* (IH) – defined as “the recognition that personal beliefs might be wrong” (p.2). IH is accompanied by “a willingness to consider the limitations in the evidentiary basis of one’s own personal beliefs, as well as awareness of one’s limitations in obtaining and evaluating information that can inform one’s beliefs (Leary et al., 2017)” (p. 3). The authors describe high IH manifesting as even-handed, extensive deliberation over the strength of evidence for factual claims (Deffler, Leary, & Hoyle, 2016; Leary et al., 2017), along with an interest in listening to the reasons and arguments that favor opponent views (Porter & Schumann, 2018)” (pp. 3-4).

Experimentally, the authors explored the effects of informing participants that people who hold opposing positions do not differ in IH, and found that “participants were less likely to derogate opponents and somewhat more willing to befriend them” (p. 2). They conclude by saying that “promoting intellectual humility as an epistemic virtue worth cultivating and informing the public about research on IH has the potential to reduce social extremism, polarization, and the frequency of unresolvable disagreements over time” (p. 34).

* Sunstein, C.R. (1999). *The law of group polarization*. University of Chicago Law School, John M. Olin Law & Economics Working Paper No. 91. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.199668>

The focus of this article is on group polarization as it relates to the activity of deliberation as found in juries, legislative bodies, political organizations, regulatory commissions, multimember courts, faculties, student organizations, religious sects, and Internet discussion groups. It suggests that the largest lesson provided by group polarization involves the need to structure processes of deliberation to ensure that people are exposed, not to softer or louder echoes of their own voices, but to a range of reasonable alternatives.

Timmermans, J., Blok, V., Braun, R., Wesselink, R., & Nielsen, R. (2020). Social labs as an inclusive methodology to implement and study social change: the case of responsible research and innovation. *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, 7(30), 410-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2020.1787751>

This article suggests that emergent social change can be addressed using social laboratories (labs) and proposes a “scientifically grounded method” for taking a social lab approach to research. The proposed methodology is a combination of novel social-lab characteristics such as “agility and real-world focus” (p. 410), with action research and experiential learning, which are more established methods. By incorporating experiential learning, we can systemically draw upon and integrate ideas (abstract) and experiences (actual) (p. 412). Social labs have been utilized to address sustainability, poverty alleviation, and municipal social cohesion (p. 414).

For a social lab to be effective, it is imperative to recruit and include a diverse group of “social actors” and to develop an iterative and “flexible team process.” (p. 416). Central to social labs is a “holistic view on capital”, wherein “actors in the lab require different forms of capital in order to change social systems, for example, cultural, human, physical, and financial” (p. 414). Some social labs have required participants to hold “essential capacities”, such as “epistemic humility, creative confidence, and open-minded advocacy” (p. 416). Thereby, the authors suggest that the selection of lab participants be representative and include “stakeholder mapping to the specific field of the social challenge at hand” (p. 417).

The authors present the work of Kolb (2009) as a technique for developing an effective social lab, where a four-phased approach is used: “concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation” (p. 418). Participants cyclically and iteratively “analyze and conceptualize a challenge from their concrete experiences, learn from these experiences, and... plan actions from what they learned” (p. 418). To disseminate the results of the lab and facilitate knowledge-sharing, lab participants then engage in dialogue and interact with stakeholders from the “broader social context of the addressed social challenge” (p. 418).

Tuller, H. M., Bryan, C. J., Heyman, G. D., & Christenfeld, N. J. (2015). Seeing the other side: Perspective taking and the moderation of extremity. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 59, 18-23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.02.003>

In this study, two participants were asked to engage in a 'fast friends' protocol and were then separated. They were polled on their position on a polarizing issue (weight discrimination; legalized abortion). They were told their partner had the opposite perspective, on the extreme end. Participants were asked to write from their partner's perspective on the issue. De-polarization was measured on a short-term scale and was found to be significant when the participants met their partners and had accountability to them (they were led to believe they'd meet them again, and that their partner would read what they'd wrote). Perspective taking alone was not effective - no results in attitude moderation were shown when their work was going to be evaluated by a panel of experts, for example.

* Ury, W., in Davidson, S. (2021). *How to talk to an anti-vaxer*. <https://www.saradavidson.com/blog/2021/11/how-to-talk-to-an-anti-vaxer>

Author Sara Davidson interviewed conflict-resolution expert William Ury. According to Ury, society is experiencing *intractable conflicts* – those that are hard to control and/or deal with because they are not amenable to compromise. Ury suggests that negotiation could be a capacity needed for navigating this type of polarization and details it as a three-step process. It begins by pausing and consciously "observing, not participating." By slowing down and putting aside our own "moral certainty and judgement", we are less likely to push someone away. Ury calls the second step "building a golden bridge". This step is about being patient: listening with intention and creating space for vulnerability. Ury suggests this can occur when we "speak about [our] own experience and ... put [ourselves] in [others'] shoes." The last step is to activate our wider community. This occurs "by reaching out to someone [we] disagree with... someone who disagrees with [us] on fundamental things" (e.g., extended family, work colleagues, social friends). Once we put ourselves in their shoes, Ury says we must "listen with curiosity, openness, and compassion".

Ury uses several examples of international conflict to emphasize his point, specifically the Cold War, South African apartheid, and the Egyptian/Israeli conflict. According to Ury, "... in all three impossible cases, the conflict did not end, but it was transformed... it's not about outcome, it's about process... If we focus on outcome, we'll be disappointed. But if we focus on process, we see how impossible situations can shift." Regarding apartheid in South Africa, Ury explains that by activating the whole society, an environment was created that transformed the conflict from destructive to constructive. It took time, patience and using all techniques available, but resolution was eventually found. Ury describes an intervention technique for conflict

transformation: facilitated dialogue. Participants are asked "to tell a story about themselves, to talk about what activated them to come into the public square."