

Us and them: inclusion and respect

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How we talk to and about people: from the very bad, to somewhat bad, to positive

- If someone yells slurs at other people, they're likely not listening to this talk anyway
- *However*, people sometimes *do* say pretty horrible shit to others, because they're suffering from the academic disease of ...
- ... *I just find it interesting!*
- Your interest doesn't magically cancel out offensiveness.
- Recent example: Philosopher who wanted to visit Umeå and work with me (a scholar who's published plenty about their psychotic experiences), and wrote about psychotic people as more reptile than human.
- "But I don't mean it in a bad way! I found this very interesting!"



More common: assuming that everyone in here is “normal”.

Example 1: the interdisciplinary conference

- I was invited speaker at an interdisciplinary conference.
- Two doctors/researchers talked about how it's a bit ridiculous when researchers and philosophers try to *define* things like “delusion” and “psychosis”. Seriously! We all know a crazy person when we see one! Besides, it's pointless for clinicians to try to understand patients who are clearly crazy. There's nothing there to understand, you'll only burn yourself out trying.
- Became very embarrassed when I stood up and said “I don't agree at all, because when I was hospitalized for psychosis ...”
- Easy enough for me to tell them off – *much* more difficult for those who don't have a permanent job yet, who are lower down in the academic hierarchy, generally shy, etc.



Example 2: Philosopher who's trans but “passing”

- A colleague of mine was at a conference. During mingle time, two other people begin to discuss how weird trans people are, how weird it is that some people do these medical treatments and change their bodies, etc.
- Colleague: I don't think it's that weird, I'm trans myself and have gone through gender affirming treatment.
- The other two: What? Why didn't you tell us sooner? We'd never discussed trans people like this if we knew that *you* were trans!

We should never assume that “they” can’t be in here, with us – that “they” are only *out there*

- Do I live by this myself? No, I mess up on this front – when it comes to minority groups that I’m not a part of myself, nor anyone close to me.
- But I *try*, we should all *try* – and gracefully accept corrections instead of getting defensive.
- More value-neutral statements about “them” who are presumed to be “out there” somewhere can still be problematic.
- Example from a scholar of religion at the department: School teachers with many Muslim pupils, who actively try to be inclusive, still tend to talk about why “we” celebrate “our” holidays, and then why “the Muslims” celebrate “theirs”.



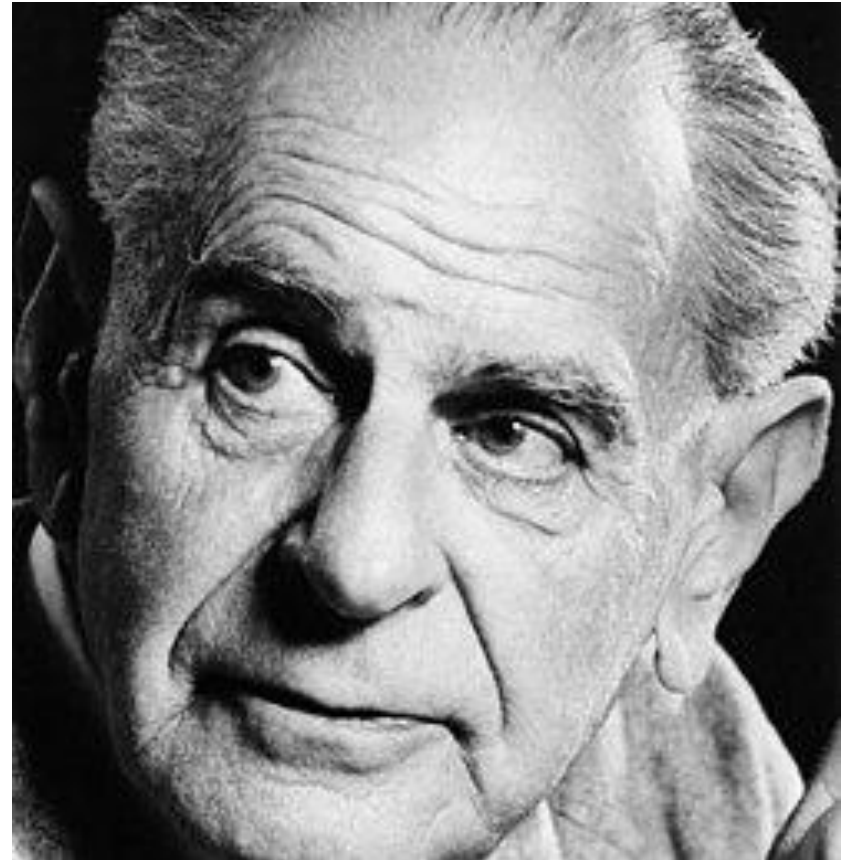
Problems with non-hostile us vs them-talk

- Sends a message about what's *normal* or not, even if there's also an explicit "it's okay to deviate from the default" message
- If I talk about group X under the assumption that no one in here is X, it puts any X-member in the room in an awkward position.
 - Come out as X, here and now? Might feel uncomfortable, and/or risks coming off as overly dramatic, and/or as a distraction.
 - Say nothing, and have everyone assume that you're *not* X? Then, people wonder why on earth you never said anything before, when you *do* come out at some point in the future.



Respectful and inclusive group discussions

- Karl Popper's The Paradox of Tolerance: If we tolerate the intolerant, the intolerant will soon dominate, and tolerance is destroyed.
- Teachers, seminar leaders, chairpersons and moderators must all grapple with this.
- People sometimes think there's an easy solution: lay down a list of rules for tolerant, respectful and inclusive discussions. Warn people who break the rules, ban repeat offenders.
- **In my experience** (teacher, seminar leader, member of writers' groups): **There is no easy list-of-rules-solution.**





Trolls find loopholes; bullies insist they're kicking up

- You can't make a *watertight* list of rules for respectful behaviour, completely devoid of loopholes (goes without saying, really)
- Making the list increasingly long in response to troll behaviour is a frustrating Sisyphus task
- Specifically in politically left-wing/feminist groups: bullies can misuse "intersectionality"
- Real intersectional theory is *not* about counting how many oppressed groups you belong to, to see who's the most oppressed, but people may present it this way
- Bullies can then use creative mathematics combined with misunderstood intersectionality to insist that they're not bullying at all – they're *protesting* and *kicking up*



Rules should be general; specific rules only complementary



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- Example of a specific rule: an online sci-fi group I'm in decided to prohibit the use of laughing emojis to criticize other people's arguments ("hahaha, your argument is laughable"), it's only allowed to show appreciation of jokes.
But such specific rules can only *complement* more general ones, like ...
 - At a pedagogy workshop I attended: a teacher on "hot button topics" said they draw the line according to Swedish anti discrimination legislation.
 - A writers' group I'm in: rules about being friendly and respectful, keeping discussions about current political events in a special politics channel, and practice de-escalation if things get too heated.
 - Such broad, open-to-interpretation and general rules require a teacher/seminar leader/chairperson/moderator brave enough to *judge* when someone crosses the lines and *take responsibility* for their judgment.
 - It requires, sometimes, walking the line in situations with multiple vulnerable and upset parties.



Remember, too: An important difference between a country and smaller groups

- Crimes must be proven beyond all reasonable doubt, which means that guilty people often go unpunished
- Nevertheless, we're not forced to associate with everyone in the country
- A accuses B of assault. B accuses A of libel and perjury. Two court cases, neither proven beyond all reasonable doubt. Both A and B walk free, and go their separate ways.
- If A and B are members of a smaller group, and they accuse each other, it might be impossible for them to remain at odds but stay in the group. It's either reconciliation, or at least one of them leaves.
- A group leader who passively lets A bully B into leaving, is taking A's side in practice.
- The leader must *dare to talk* about uncomfortable situations, and *dare to make judgments* even if it gets uncomfortable.



Positive examples

- I had a student who said, in class, some very derogatory things about “the mentally ill”. The student struggled hard themselves, and seemed to say what they said under the “everyone in here is normal” assumption.
- What do I do as a teacher?
Can’t brutally shut them down the way I did with the doctors at the interdisciplinary conference. Can’t let it slide either; this isn’t just about me, but also about other students in class who might have an undisclosed psychiatric history.
- Had to calmly correct the student and talk about the matter, without humiliating them or leave anyone else humiliated ...
- Walking the line is hard! Stressful! And therefore *tempting* to let things slide instead! Or to create a “perfect” list of rules to hide behind. Still, judging from later student evaluations, I succeeded.
- A writers’ group: Someone posted a meme which was supportive of trans people, but simultaneously contemptuous of psychiatric patients. I got a bit upset by the latter. Moderator stepped in and went sure, well-intentioned, but that bit about psych patients wasn’t great. Poster said sorry about that part, I said it’s alright.
- Don’t play oppression Olympics. Acknowledge actual good intentions and honest mistakes, because we’re only humans. (*Not* the same thing as letting people get away with repeated shitty behaviour because they insist that they meant well.)
- Same here: Nuanced moderating is hard! Hard, but necessary.



- Assume any minority group can be represented in the room, not just “out there” somewhere
- Keep the rules broad and general
- Leaders who use their judgment and take responsibility

Time for questions!