



Depolarizing Ourselves Introductory Workshop

Part 1: Recognizing My Inner Polarizer

You can use the following questions to think about your inner polarizer. Don't worry: most of us think and feel some of these things.

1. How often do I find myself thinking about "those people" on the other political side without much regard for the variation among them? (Usually we're aware of great variation within our own group.)

Often

Sometimes

Never

2. How often do I find myself assigning mainly self-serving or negative motives to the other group—and mainly positive motives to my group?

Often

Sometimes

Never

3. How often do I find myself focusing on the most extreme or outrageous ideas and people on the other side, thereby making it hard to see how a reasonable person could remain in that group?

Often

Sometimes

Never

4. How often do I find myself comparing the worst people on the other side with the best people on my side?

Often

Sometimes

Never

5. How often do I feel a "rush" of pleasure with friends when we ridicule those crazies on the other political side?

Often

Sometimes

Never

6. Which of the following is closest to my overall emotional attitude towards the majority of people who support the other side?

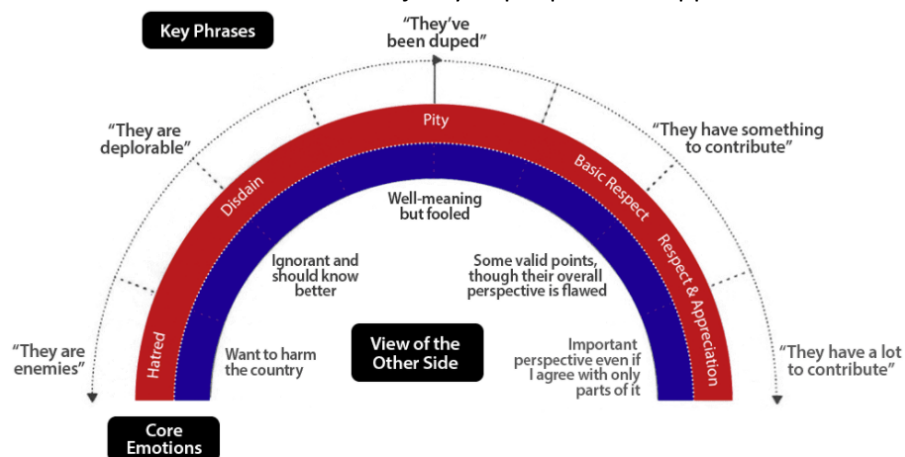
Hate. They are enemies out to destroy the country

Disdain. They are ignorant and should know better.

Pity. They are well meaning but duped.

Basic respect. They make contributions even if they are mostly off base.

Respect and appreciation. They make unique and necessary contributions.



The Emotional and Intellectual Transformation of De-Polarization

Part 2: Strategies to Counteract My Inner Polarizer

We become agents of polarization when we use any of the **Four Horsemen of Polarization: Stereotyping, Dismissing, Ridiculing, and Contempt**. The following are ways to offset polarizing thoughts and feelings when you notice them arising in you. These are ways to “edit the story” you tell yourself about people on the other political side. You may also have other strategies that work for you.

Challenge your stereotypes

Stereotypes are how outsiders over-simplify, dismiss, lump together, and disparage the “Other.” Based on Braver Angels red/blue workshops where we ask each side to identify the most common stereotypes they run into about their own side, these are the most common stereotypes:

Reds think that Blues tend to believe	Reds are racist, anti-immigrant, uncaring about those in need, homophobic, anti-woman, anti-science, bible thumpers.
Blues think that Reds tend to believe	Blues are arrogant/elitist, favor big government for its own sake, and are fiscally irresponsible, unpatriotic, anti-religious, against free speech if it’s not politically correct, and hypersensitive “snowflakes.”

Ways to counter stereotypes in your own thinking:

- Tell yourself that the other side is more varied than the stereotype.
- Acknowledge that their political views and motivations are no doubt more complicated than the rhetoric you’ve been hearing.
- Read and listen to thought leaders on the other side who present complex arguments.
- Recognize that the life experiences informing their views are likely different from your own.
- Develop relationships with a variety of people who differ with you politically. Relationships tend to undermine stereotypes.
- If you want to go all out, you can work to develop an understanding of the history and current strands of thought on the other side.

Make depolarizing distinctions

Distinguish between <u>positions</u> and <u>people</u>	You can believe that a viewpoint is completely wrong without believing that everyone who holds it is stupid or ill motivated.
Distinguish between <u>policies</u> and <u>core values</u>	Policies are means to ends, ways to support or enact values, not the values themselves. People can differ sharply on policies and have similar ultimate goals for the country and its people.
Distinguish between <u>inconsistency</u> and <u>hypocrisy</u>	Resist the pull towards assuming that inconsistencies on the other side always reveal hypocrisy. Inconsistencies between stated values and actual behavior can also come from blind spots and from the inevitable tensions between competing values. Be reluctant to assign the label of hypocrite to large numbers of fellow citizens who disagree with you, even when their positions seem contradictory to you. (You seem inconsistent to them.)

Part 3: How to Talk about the Other Side in a Non-polarizing Way

Avoid:

- Using pejorative labels: (“wingnuts,” “bible thumpers,” “libtards,” “snowflakes”)
- Using the phrase “they all” or its equivalent “The Democrats/Republicans.” These are the classic stereotyping phrases.
- Painting all supporters of a politician with the same brush you use for the politician. If you go on a rant about a particular politician, make it clear that you are not putting all supporters into the same box. (“I’m talking about (so and so) right, and not everyone who voted for him/her.”)

Criticize the idea or the policy, not the motives of everyone who holds it.

	Say This	Not This
Blue Example	“Climate change denial is the riskiest idea I’ve seen in my lifetime because we’re running out of time to prevent lasting damage to the planet.”	“Climate change deniers care more about the fossil fuel industry than about the planet.”
Red Example	“Climate science is uncertain enough that I don’t think we should start overhauling our way of life”	“Climate change supporters have a liberal agenda to over-regulate the economy and tax us to death.”

Criticize your own side too.

- “We are losing that group because we haven’t listened to them very well.”
- “Sometimes our leaders talk as if they have the final answer to (a complex problem), and I don’t think they do.”

Say something positive about the other side.

- “I read a liberal/conservative commentator who said something interesting about this.....”
- “I think their criticism has some validity even if I don’t agree with their solution.”

Try this “eavesdropper” thought experiment

Ask yourself, “How would a rational and well-intentioned member of the other group feel when listening to you describe their side?”

- Respected (even if strongly disagreed with) or disrespected
- Understood (at least partly) or grossly misrepresented

Appendix

The Braver Angels Way

We state our views freely and fully, without fear.

We treat people who disagree with us with honesty, dignity and respect.

We welcome opportunities to engage those with whom we disagree.

We believe all of us have blind spots and none of us are not worth talking to.

We seek to disagree accurately, avoiding exaggeration and stereotypes.

We look for common ground where it exists and, if possible, find ways to work together.

We believe that, in disagreements, both sides share and learn.

In Braver Angels, neither side is teaching the other or giving feedback on how to think or say things differently.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Books:

- Jonathan Haidt, [The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion](#). New York: Vintage, 2008. Psychologist looking at the moral intuitions of liberals and conservatives.
- Thomas Sowell. [Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles](#). Basic Books, 2007.
- David Blankenhorn. [In Search of Braver Angels](#). Braver Angels, 2022. A collection of essays by the founder of BA.
- Mónica Guzmán, [I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearless Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times](#). BenBella Books, Inc, 2022.
- Updated list on [Braver Angels Library: Bridging Divides](#)

News Sources

- [Allsides](#) assesses the political bias of prominent media outlets, and presents different versions of similar news stories from sources of the political spectrum in a mission to show readers news outside their filter bubble.
- [Ground News](#) Top stories from around you and around the world. Compare headlines across the political spectrum using media bias ratings driven by data.
- [1440](#) a comprehensive daily newsletter, edited to be unbiased as humanly possible.
- [Theflipside.io](#) Sends a daily email of curated news articles from left, center, and right that have been vetted for newsworthiness to "burst your media bubble."
- [Tangle](#) an independent, non-partisan politics newsletter that summarizes the best arguments from across the political spectrum on the news of the day.

UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER SIDE

LIBERALISM

Books:

- Helena Rosenblatt, [The Lost History of Liberalism](#). Princeton Press, 2018.

Magazines:

- [The New Republic](#)
- [Nation](#)
- [The Atlantic](#)

Voices:

- [Heather Cox Richardson](#)

• New York Times:

- [Ezra Klein](#)
- [Nicholas Kristof](#)
- [Thomas Friedman](#)
- [Jane Coaston: The Argument](#)

• Washington Post:

- [Richard Cohen](#)
- [Eugene Robinson](#)

Party Platform:

- [Democratic Party](#)
- [Democratic Socialist Party](#)
- [Green Party](#)

CONSERVATISM

Books:

- Arthur C. Brooks, [The Conservative Heart: How to Build a Fairer, Happier, and More Prosperous America.](#)
Broadside Books, 2017.

Magazines:

- [The National Review](#)
- [The Federalist](#)
- [Reason](#)

Voices:

- [Glenn Loury](#)

- New York Times:
 - [David Brooks](#)
 - [Bret Stephens](#)
 - [Ross Douthat](#)
- Washington Post:
 - [Ramesh Ponnuru](#)
 - [Megan McArdle](#)
 - [George Will](#)

Party Platform:

- [Republican Party](#)
- [Conservative Party](#)
- [Libertarian Party](#)



Debates. Please consider attending a national or local debate. Braver Angels debates use a special parliamentary format that encourages everyone to participate by speaking or asking questions. We tackle challenging topics that matter. Debate participants gain a deeper understanding of other points of view, a better sense of common ground, and a renewed confidence that we actually can talk about controversial topics respectfully. For a list of upcoming debates, visit: <https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/debates>

Workshops. There are also many other workshops in the Braver Angels catalog. Each workshop extends your skills in depolarization. We encourage you to experience the full set. Take another workshop - <https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/#workshops>



Podcasts. Finally, there is an extensive amount of Braver Angels material in video and audio/podcast form - including a YouTube channel and podcasts on Apple, Spotify and other major streaming platforms. Check it out - we are sure that you will find an interesting topic for exploration.
Braver Angels videos and podcasts - <https://braverangels.org/media/>

Become a member!

If you are not already a member of Braver Angels, please join us today. Dues are only \$12 per year, although many give more.

Join Braver Angels today - <https://braverangels.org/support-us>

