

Risky Tactics



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Introduction

- Not all tactics for fighting oppression are equally good
- This chapter discusses some tactics that are used sometimes but are risky

1. Putting role models on pedestals

Putting role models on pedestals

- It is important for an oppressed group to have positive role models to counteract negative stereotypes
- However, there is a danger:
 - Role models tend to be placed on pedestals and idolised
 - Idolised role models tend to be hated if fans discover their feet of clay
- Relevant quote:
 - “A pedestal is as much a prison as any small, confined place”
— Gloria Steinem
- The “feet of clay” does not even have to be a character flaw
 - It can be any way in which the role model does not meet the unrealistic and confining expectation of others

Example: Tom Robinson

- Tom Robinson was a popular and openly gay singer in the late 1970s England
- Later on, much to his surprise, he fell in love with a woman
 - Many gay people felt betrayed by this

- Tom Robinson answered his critics in a song:

For 21 years now I've fought for the right
For people to love just whoever they like
But the right-on and righteous are out for my blood
Now I live with my kid and a woman I love

Well if gay liberation means freedom for all
A label is no liberation at all
I'm here and I'm queer and I do what I do
And I'm not gonna wear... a straitjacket for you

Example: Ani diFranco

- The singer Ani diFranco was frustrated at being put on a feminist pedestal

- She responded to her critics in a song:

People talk about my image
Like I come in two dimensions
Like lipstick is a sign of my declining mind
Like what I happen to be wearing
The day that someone takes a picture
Is my new statement for all of womankind

...

I wish they could see us now
In leather bras and rubber shorts
Like some ridiculous new team uniform
For some ridiculous new sport
Quick someone call the girl police
And file a report

Examples: Bob Geldof and Gandhi

- After organising Band Aid to raise money for famine relief:
 - The UK media gave Bob Geldof the nickname “Saint Bob”
 - Much to his disgust, some people wanted to touch him because they thought he was holy
- Bob Geldof wrote about this in his autobiography:
 - He called it the *God syndrome*
 - He quoted a fictional character from a short story at the start of his autobiography

“‘I don’t mind being revered, greeted and honoured,’ said Vespaluus, ‘I don’t even mind being sainted in moderation, as long as I’m not expected to be saintly as well.’”

— *The Story of St. Vespaluus*, by Saki
- Gandhi was horrified whenever people treated him as a god

The moral

- Be proud of people who make great achievements
- But resist putting them on a pedestal:
 - The confinement frustrates them
 - And you will feel hurt when they do not live up to your unrealistic expectations

2. Using feelings of superiority to
combat feelings of inferiority

Eradicating a sense of inferiority

- Let's use numbers to indicate levels of self-esteem
 - Negative numbers → Low self-esteem ("I am inferior")
 - Zero → Healthy level of self-esteem
 - Positive numbers → Overly high self-esteem ("I am superior")
- Oppression can cause oppressed people to have low self-esteem, let's say -5
 - What is a good way to get their self esteem back up to zero?
- One way is to reclaim history, culture and role models to say "We are just as good as other people"
 - Ideally, your self esteem will rise back to zero
- Drawback:
 - Continued oppression might keep dragging your self-esteem back below zero

An alternative tactic

- An alternative tactic is as follows:

- Reclaim history, culture and role models to say “We are *better* than other people”
- The aim is to bring self-esteem to a *positive* number, for example, +5
- This will cancel out the negative self-esteem created by oppression to leave your overall self-esteem at zero

- This tactic may seem appealing, but it can be dangerous:

- Perhaps you will overcompensate and end up with a self-esteem of, for example, +2
- Even if the tactic works perfectly, external supporters might be alienated if they hear the “we are better than other people” message

3. Demonising your oppressor

The temptation to demonise your oppressor

- Typical scenario:
 - X people are oppressed by *some* non-X people
 - *Most other* non-X people (who are not oppressors) do nothing to stop the oppression
- X people are upset and frustrated:
 - With the oppressors
 - With the non-oppressors who do nothing to stop the oppression
- It is tempting for an X-rights activist to demonise non-X people:
 - Doing this taps into the frustrations and anger of X people
 - It can be an effective way to build up support among X people

The danger of demonising your oppressor

- Demonising non-X people is likely to scare non-X people.

Examples:

- If you are white, how would you feel hearing the Nation of Islam's claim that white people are devils
- If you are well off, how would you feel about lots of poorer people shouting "Capitalist bastard" at you?

- Likely results:

- The oppressors will feel more justified in their oppression
- Some of the non-oppressors may, as a form of self-defence, become oppressors

- If non-X people outnumber X people then riots or attempts at an "non-X versus X war" will probably fail

An alternative tactic

- Satyagraha tactics can be more effective:
 - See *The Bell Curve of Intolerance* part of this training course
 - Satyagraha does *not* demonise an oppressor
- A brief recap:
 - Widespread news coverage of extremist oppressors hurting peaceful protestors wins sympathy of the non-oppressors (the apathetic majority)
 - The no-longer-apathectic majority will then put peer pressure on the oppressive extremists to end the oppression

4. Summary

Summary

- This chapter has briefly discussed some dangerous tactics...
- Role models are important but resist the urge to put them on pedestals
- Do not use “we are superior to our oppressors” as a tactic to combat feelings of inferiority
- Do not demonise your oppressors