A Refresher Guide on Narratives & Violence

December 2023

OVER ZERO

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About Over Zero & This Guide

ABOUT OVER ZERO: Over Zero works to prevent, reduce, and address identity-based and political violence and other forms of group-targeted harm. Our vision is a world free from identity-based violence and other forms of group-targeted harm. Our expertise is in the relationship between communication and conflict, and specifically the ways in which narrative and communication patterns help to incite this type of violence. Our work is primarily focused in the United States, but includes global programs.

THIS GUIDE: This guide focuses on Over Zero's core area of expertise: Unpacking the narrative patterns and underlying psychosocial dynamics that precede and occur throughout identity-based violence and group-targeted harm. These are narratives that drive societies to be increasingly accepting of violence: Narratives that create a threatening, guilty, animalistic or subhuman "them" and a virtuous "us'' in need of protection. We also briefly explore the various psychosocial dynamics that strengthen and reinforce us-them divisions, build social pressures to support violence and extremist policies, and paint voices opposing violence as naive or even traitorous.

We release this guide in the wake of the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and the Israeli government's ongoing assault on Gaza—violence that has collectively killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced millions.

As violence prevention practitioners committed to a world free from identity-based violence and other forms of group-targeted harm, our underlying values and longstanding work teach us that mass violence against civilians is never justified. We also know that neither grief nor love is zero-sum. We grieve for the over 1,200 Israelis killed in Hamas' October 7 attack, the 250,000 displaced, and the 240 taken hostage, 135 still held in Gaza. We grieve for the over 20,000 Palestinians killed in the Israeli government's assault on Gaza, and the millions more missing, displaced, trapped, and facing a deepening humanitarian crisis and siege. We grieve for

the over 275 Palestinians killed and more displaced in the West Bank by Israeli settlers and security forces. And we grieve for the pain and trauma that victims, survivors, and their families and communities now carry. We hold close the Jewish, Arab, and Muslim communities facing spikes in anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab violence and incidents globally, including in the U.S., and note these trends with great concern and alarm.

Words make worlds. **Amid the deep grief, fear, division, and anger that characterize this moment, our words matter more than ever.** It is easy to feel that in moments of intense emotion and high stakes–such as this one–exceptions or justifications can be made. It is in fact just the opposite. In these moments our words can most directly lead to further violence. **These moments mandate that we take the strongest care to use our words responsibly, and to proactively address communication that paves the way for violence.**

As we've supported our partners in better understanding and addressing the dangerous narratives playing out in the U.S. during this time, they have shared that written guidance on the core concepts surrounding communications and violence would be valuable for personal reflection and for their work. **Our hope is that this guide is a very small contribution in supporting partners who are leading their communities in finding a different way forward, toward rejecting identity-based violence and acknowledging, valuing, and celebrating our shared humanity.**

We share this guide with humility and compassion, noting that the violence abroad and here at home affects many of our partners and their communities directly.

Communication & Violence

WHY COMMUNICATION? Communication is a core part of the human experience: It is how we make collective sense of the world around us, form groups, construct "others" and an "us," and attribute blame and responsibility. Only with communication are we able to coordinate and take collective action. *Large-scale, group-targeted, identity-based violence is only possible with the weaponization of communication.*

HOW IS COMMUNICATION WEAPONIZED? There are clear patterns in the narratives and psychosocial dynamics that precede and occur throughout mass violence and atrocities. They construct a distinct, animalistic or subhuman, and existentially threatening "other," and a virtuous "us" in need of protection, no matter the cost. These narratives have helped justify violence targeting civilians in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank in the current conflict. Fields like social and behavioral psychology teach us why and how these narratives can move entire populations to accept and justify previously unthinkable actions.

What do we know about the narratives–the stories and ideas–that precede and occur throughout mass violence?

History reveals narrative patterns that emerge–and sometimes are deliberately invoked–in the leadup to and throughout mass violence. Political scientist Jonathan Leader Maynard divides these into narratives about "them" and narratives about "us."

Narratives about "them" construct a distinct, animalistic, and existentially threatening "other" that shares a common essence. These narratives fall into three overlapping categories:

1. Threat construction: Narratives that cast an entire group as an existential threat to "us."
2. Guilt attribution/collective blame: Narratives that collectively blame an entire group for the actions of a few, portraying an entire group as "guilty" or responsible for harms against our own group (the "in-group").
3. Dehumanization/de-identification: Narratives that portray an entire group of people as less than human or essentially different from "us," often likening communities to wild animals, parasites, or diseases.

Narratives about "us" mobilize group members to participate in or support violence by recasting violence as praiseworthy in order to protect a virtuous and vulnerable "us." These narratives fall into three overlapping categories:

1. Valorization of violence: Narratives that portray violence and its perpetrators as virtuous. These narratives also link violence to ideas about masculinity or being a "good man" through protecting our "women and children."
2. Destruction of alternatives: Narratives that depict violence as the only option or the only solution to the problem.
3. Future orientation: Narratives that assert that a better, more prosperous future is only possible through violence.

These narratives move societies to accept, support, and participate in violence, and silence dissenting voices as weak, naive, or traitorous. They portray violence as not only justified but necessary and heroic.

These narratives also impose a zero-sum framework on society. Beyond creating an "us versus them" competition, they construct an "us OR them" mentality, casting divisions and conflict in existential terms. Rather than two groups' survival being bound up together, these narratives insist that it is our survival OR theirs. In doing so, they allow people to make exceptions that allow them to support large-scale violence targeting entire groups of people while still maintaining their strongly-held morals, values, and taboos against such actions.

Fields including social and behavioral psychology teach us why and how these narratives can move entire populations to accept and justify previously unthinkable actions. As such, throughout the document we also highlight relevant psychosocial dynamics that complement or bolster the resonance of these narratives.

Below, we dive deeper into these dangerous narratives, the language they often invoke, and areas for reflection. We then point to some of the relevant psychosocial dynamics that strengthen their impact. Last, we explore these psychosocial dynamics in more detail, describing how they reinforce "us vs them" divisions, build social pressures to support violence and extremist policies, and paint moderate voices as naive or even traitorous.

Narratives that construct a threatening, guilty, subhuman *"other"* have key components.

These narratives portray the group being targeted with violence ("them") as sharing a common *essence* that is threatening, guilty, and less human than the group being mobilized to accept or participate in violence. Mass violence is thus rendered necessary for self defense, for "our" survival against a subhuman enemy, and to avenge and punish wrongs.

They cast an entire group as a threat to "us" ("threat construction")–to "our" way of life, "our" culture, "our" jobs, "our" women and children–and most dangerously as an existential threat. These narratives not only justify violence, but they construe it as self-defense that is necessary for "our" survival. Threat construction is particularly powerful when members of other groups ("out-groups") are perceived as having the intent and the capacity to harm the in-group.

- **Look for:** Narratives pushing "us or them" framing; narratives that paint entire groups as risks to "our" security, way of life, or survival. Rather than describing specific actions or individuals as threatening, these narratives cast an entire group as the threat.
- **Impact:** These narratives re-frame violence as justifiable self-defense. They push societies from an "us and them" or "us versus them" framework into an "us or them" mentality, casting conflict in existential terms.
- **Reflection:** Do you characterize threats as an entire group of people, or as specific actions? To undermine the "us or them" mentality, consider highlighting all groups' mutual interdependence, that our futures, safety, and security are bound up with one another.
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Social identity, empathy, stereotype content model, meta-perceptions, motive attribution asymmetry.

These narratives collectively blame an entire group for the actions of a few ("guilt attribution"), portraying an entire group as "guilty" or responsible for harms against the in-group, and thus deserving retribution.

- **Look for:** Narratives that paint an entire group of people as guilty of past wrongs or as supportive of violence. Also look for narratives that depict violence as a way to make things right, to avenge wrongs, or as retribution. These narratives, again, portray the targeted group as sharing a common essence–one of guilt–simply due to their group membership, and hold group members, including children and those actively opposing the conflict, as inherently guilty for others' actions, including for things that happened

before they were born. Claims that there are "no civilians" similarly paint entire populations as responsible for and justified targets of violence.

- **Impact:** These narratives justify violence against entire populations as retribution for past wrongs, recent or historical; violence is a way to make things right again. In depicting an entire group of people as guilty or responsible for the actions of a few (even a few who died long ago), these narratives paint the entire group as justifiable targets of violence.
- **Reflection:** When you discuss guilt or responsibility for certain actions, do you reference an entire group of people (religion, nationality, ethnicity), or do you delineate specific actions committed by specific people? Reflect on your own group when someone does something wrong - do you think your whole group deserves to be blamed? [Research](#) shows that highlighting the hypocrisy of collectively blaming out-group members but not in-group members for individual actions reduces support for collective blame against the out-group.
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Moralizing language, stereotype content model, motive attribution asymmetry, motivated reasoning, empathy.

These narratives _dehumanize_: Dehumanizing narratives portray a group as less than human or essentially different from "us," often likening communities to animals, parasites, aliens, or diseases. These narratives also minimize the full human suffering others are experiencing, denying them their grief.

- **Look for:** Terms including "wild beasts, "lice," "vermin," "cancer," "demons," "barbaric," "savage," "inhuman," or "evil." Pay attention to more subtle forms of dehumanization: Phrases like "a swarm of people" or descriptions of a location as a "jungle" dehumanize more subtly by using terms usually reserved to describe animals or animal habitats.
- **Impact:** These narratives portray a group of people as sharing a less than human essence–as fundamentally unlike "us," and less deserving of safety and protection. They portray the targeted group as posing threats of contamination and aggression. Most feel they owe less care to an animal, and certainly to a parasite or disease, than they do to other human beings. As such, these narratives also cast entire groups as something to be "tamed" or "managed," as you would a wild animal or disease outbreak. [Research](#) shows that exposure to dehumanizing rhetoric corresponds with greater support for violent policies targeting the dehumanized group.
- **Reflection:** Are you using language that implies another group is not fully human? Remind yourself of others' humanity and uniqueness. This can come from something as simple and silly as thinking about someone's favorite food or what they hoped to be when they grew up. Remind yourself that there are individual human lives at stake-individuals with hopes, dreams, worries, loved ones. Challenge the idea that a group has a different essence just because of their identity (for instance, their religion or birthplace).
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Metaphors, stereotype content model, meta-dehumanization, empathy, motivated reasoning.

> **Narratives justifying identity-based violence also construct a virtuous "us" in need of protection.**

Narratives that mobilize groups for violence go beyond creating a dangerous, dehumanized, guilty "*other*." They also construct an "us" and build social pressures for supporting or participating in previously condemnable, even unthinkable actions in the name of being a "good group member" or protecting "our women and children."

These narratives *valorize* violence, painting it as necessary, even praiseworthy, to protect the in-group, particularly the vulnerable—invoking empathy solely for other group members. They often urge group members to protect "our women and children," linking violence to ideas about masculinity and being a "good man," "patriotic," "heroic," and so on.

- **Look for:** Narratives that recast violence as heroic or patriotic, and that particularly invoke protecting the vulnerable or "women and children" as justifications.
- **Impact:** These narratives depict violence as admirable or praiseworthy. They help build social pressure to participate in or support violence through painting violence as emblematic of being a "good group member" or a "real man." These narratives portray voices advocating for peace as weak, naive, or even traitorous, silencing or discrediting those advocating for a different way forward.
- **Reflection:** Consider whether you are characterizing violence against civilians or those perpetrating it as "heroic," "virtuous," or "patriotic." Are you justifying violence in the name of protecting the vulnerable or "our women and children"? Consider alternative values that you can promote instead—for instance, peace or cooperation.
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Social norms, silencing in-group moderates, competitive victimhood, motive attribution asymmetry.

They depict violence as the *only* option or the only solution to the problem ("destruction of alternatives"). These narratives characterize social and political solutions, including ceasefires and peace processes (and their proponents), as misguided and naive. They insist that *only through mass violence can there be safety, security, or peace.*

- **Look for:** Efforts to paint mass violence, however regrettable, as the only viable option to ensure peace, as well as those casting proponents of alternative, political solutions as naive, misinformed, or traitorous.
- **Impact:** These narratives undermine moral agency: If violence is the *only* way to protect one's group or realize security objectives, we cannot be held responsible and can avoid grappling with the moral tradeoffs that supporting violence typically requires. They often discredit alternatives to violence—and those advocating for them—as insufficient or naive, sometimes even punishing those calling for peace through social exclusion, or physical or economic harm. This silences upstander or moderate voices from speaking out.

- **Reflection:** Destruction of alternatives is a particularly powerful narrative, and an easy one to buy into because it presents violence as the *only* way forward.Consider how to reintroduce a sense of moral agency. How can you broaden the conversation to show that there are other paths forward–peace, compromise, cooperation–to discredit that only mass violence will bring peace? Can you call on people's values and show that they remain inconsistent with large scale violence?
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Social norms, moralizing language, and silencing in-group moderates.

They invoke hope and aspiration to paint a beautiful, peaceful, prosperous future as only possible through violence ("future orientation").
- **Look for:** Narratives justifying violence or dangerous policies in the name of a prosperous future, "our children," or the "next generation."
- **Impact:** We often think of divisive or dangerous rhetoric as dark or gory, but these narratives invoke hope and optimism to justify violence. Everyone wants a better, safer future for their children, and these messages say that violence and other discriminatory policies can help us get there. This idealized future is one that excludes-and may even be in spite of-the targeted group.
- **Reflection:** Guard against narratives that remove one group from the picture as a way to create safety, security, or prosperity. Do narratives about the future depict only one group as surviving or prospering, such that this future is only possible in the absence of another group? Are there ways of describing alternative futures, where both groups' safety and security are bound up together?
- **Relevant psychosocial dynamics:** Motivated reasoning, zero-sum dynamics.

In depicting violence as virtuous or existentially necessary, these narratives solidify zero-sum thinking, moving divided societies away from "us and them" or even an "us versus them" framework, to instead an "*us OR them*" mentality.

This allows groups to justify abandoning commonly-held, even sacrosanct values–for instance, peace and cooperation, protecting civilian life, seeing humanity in others–in the name of their survival. **There are longstanding consequences to abandoning our deepest held values,** even when the circumstances may seem to warrant exceptions. In signaling that the once impermissible can now be permitted, we are allowing that our most deeply-held beliefs are not based on principle but on cost-benefit calculations. And when this happens, it is just a matter of [determining the reasonable cost](). Narratives that cast groups as dangerous animals or as existentially threatening to "our survival" make the cost seem justified. Once previously impermissible actions are permitted–even if only in exceptional circumstances–we've normalized the abnormal in a way that is incredibly difficult to reverse.

Consider, for instance, U.S. torture policies during the "War on Terror."

Notwithstanding the U.S.' deeply-rooted moral and legal intolerance for torture, following September 11, 2001, dubious legal arguments and ticking time bomb scenarios–hypotheticals in which interrogators raced against a ticking bomb to stop an imminent terrorist attack–painted torture as the only way to prevent countless more deaths. Government lawyers authored, reviewed, and endorsed a series of memos that legitimized previously illegitimate forms of interrogation, including waterboarding. Torture was rebranded as "enhanced interrogation," and now operating within the bounds of the law. By one senior government official's words, "There was before 9/11 and after 9/11. After 9/11, the gloves came off." As the public learned the details of these policies, narratives sanitizing and justifying torture were broadcast across cable news, op-eds, and public statements. By 2008, over half of Americans had accepted torture as part of the United States' efforts in defeating terrorism. By 2016—amid Donald Trump's rhetoric that he would revive "a hell of a lot worse" than waterboarding–nearly two-thirds of Americans said torture could sometimes or often be justified against suspected terrorists. Even after extensive investigations revealed that torture is ineffective, only 15% of Americans believed that torture should never be used.

> **Below, we review some of the many psychosocial dynamics that underpin these narratives and shift entire populations to accept and justify previously unthinkable actions.**

Social identity: We all have multiple identities–we are siblings, parents, sports fans, movie buffs, and so on. But some of our identities are more fixed or "sticky": our race, religion, ethnicity, for instance. Notwithstanding our multiple identities, the ones that matter most to us or that we cling to most tightly are those that we feel are under threat, often those stickier identities that come into play amid conflict. Importantly, this threat may be real or perceived–for instance, an event may legitimately pose a threat to our identity or, alternatively, inflammatory rhetoric may construct an otherwise imagined threat that we now perceive as posing harm to us. We can internalize both as threats and act accordingly.

Social norms: Perceived norms are what people think other group members are doing or thinking. They powerfully shape our behavior, even if they violate our personal code of conduct or privately-held beliefs. If we see other group members posting in support of violence or other harmful actions, we are more likely to do the same for fear of being perceived as going against our group or as a "bad" group member. Perceived norms are especially powerful in uncertain or high-threat situations, including conflict. It's tempting to think that norms endorsing violence will only impact extreme segments of society, but research demonstrates that even mere online exposure to extreme rhetoric can change the perception of norms and lead to those exposed themselves sharing such speech.

- When we lose our many crosscutting identities (daughter, parent, artist) in favor of very singular and rigid identities-as often occurs during conflict- we feel increased social pressure to conform with how we perceive our group is acting. If this is our most important identity, we want to make absolutely certain that we maintain that group membership. This can lead to us acting in ways that violate our personal code of conduct just to fit in.

Silencing in-group moderates: Group leaders opposing violence or "in-group moderates" are often the first to be targeted as conflict escalates. Other group members may label them as traitors and try to silence them, an attempt to undermine the credibility and influence of those calling for another way forward. This has a chilling effect on other leaders speaking out, since they've now seen the cost of doing so, and permits more extreme voices to continue dominating the conversation. Ultimately, this allows extreme positions and support for violence to appear as the norm. Preventing this chilling effect is critical.

Motivated reasoning: Our social identities strongly influence how we process information. It is well known that we tend to accept information that confirms our worldview and reject information that challenges it, particularly information that challenges beliefs and ideas that are central to our identity and sense of self. Motivated reasoning can lead us to reject information about others' suffering if it threatens our identity in some way (for instance, our identity as a victim or as morally good). We process such information as a threat and work hard to reject it, including by attempting to discredit or discount those sharing it as not having our best interests in mind or as trying to manipulate us.

Empathy: We often think of empathy as a cure-all for undermining division, discrimination, and support for violence. Empathy, however, often fails when we need it most. Amid conflict or violence, we can close off to empathy across dividing lines, particularly when it causes us to grapple with the discomfort of wanting to act in ways that are inconsistent with our beliefs ("cognitive dissonance")-for instance, to help a group portrayed as a threat. Empathy can also be weaponized for our in-group, generated in support of dangerous policies in the name of protecting "our group" or "our women and children." Research shows that when it comes to violence, empathy "gaps" matter: those most likely to condone or participate in violence aren't necessarily people who don't feel empathy but rather people who feel far more empathy for their group than the group that's being othered.
  - Empathy can also lose out to other, more powerful emotions. For instance, a sense of fear or threat can override empathy as the brain calculates chances of survival. In these instances, while we may feel empathy for a targeted -group, we may not act on it because doing so comes with anticipated costs – whether social costs (for instance, being painted as naive, traitorous, or otherwise cast out) or threats to our physical safety. We may also, whether consciously or subconsciously, close ourselves down to experiencing empathy for those we see as "other." One way to navigate these dynamics is to pay particular attention to how we distribute our own empathy. We can also try to increase empathy across lines of division by modeling empathy toward a targeted group–and showing others doing the same–to make it a norm.

Moralizing language: Research shows that people are more likely to refute compromises and support violence in defense of an issue that's been moralized, or depicted in right versus wrong terms. Be wary of narratives that use moralizing language, such as those that depict violence as a fight of "good versus evil" or "light defeating darkness."

Metaphors: Metaphors make things that are complex and difficult to convey easy to understand by comparing them to things that we're familiar with. "Love is a battlefield" suggests a very different kind of relationship than "love is a roller coaster" or "love is a two-way street." In conflict, metaphors can shift our perceptions of scenarios and make violent actions seem more appropriate or reasonable. People will rarely, explicitly, call for harm against whole groups of people, but they may suggest that "pests must be eradicated" or that "mad dogs must be put down." Be particularly mindful of:

- **War metaphors**, which shift perceptions of groups from those who we disagree with to those who are enemies. These metaphors exacerbate zero-sum thinking and make it appear that only one side can "win."
- **Dehumanizing metaphors**, which shift audiences toward seeing members of the targeted group as exempt from the societal contract or as undeserving of moral consideration (e.g., they're preying on us, their ways are alien, they are unfeeling and robotic).
- **Natural disaster metaphors**, which suggest that a condition, event, or policy is inevitable or unalterable and can lead to feelings of powerlessness and a loss of agency (e.g., violence erupted, a tsunami of hate, the oncoming storm, spreading like wildfire).

Meta-perceptions: What we think other groups think about "us" is incredibly powerful for how we feel about "them." It is no accident that those stoking violence frequently invoke "they hate us" as a way to escalate tensions and violence. With dehumanization specifically, if we believe that another group dehumanizes our own group ("meta-dehumanization"), we are more likely to dehumanize that group in turn, and to support harmful policies and violence targeting them. We must be careful of narratives that suggest that "they" (as a whole group) dehumanize "us," and look for chances to correct it. We can cut off this feedback loop by showcasing how groups humanize one another across conflict lines.

Stereotype content model: Research finds that people tend to stereotype others based on two dimensions: warmth (caring for others) and competence (exhibiting responsibility and complex emotions). This characterization also predicts the emotions we likely feel toward those groups, and even related actions we may endorse. We tend to feel disgust toward those depicted as low warmth, low competence, and may even support attacking or fighting them. We are also likely to feel pity toward those perceived as high warmth, low competence, and may endorse excluding or demeaning them. In sharing stories of those targeted with violence, showcasing both warmth and competence can help humanize.

Competitive victimhood: This is the notion that one's in-group has suffered more than the out-group and is the "ultimate victim." Competitive victimhood can allow group members to avoid feelings of guilt or responsibility for violence, interfere with prospects of intergroup forgiveness

and reconciliation, and fuel acts of revenge, creating cycles of violence that last for generations.

Motive attribution asymmetry: In conflict, people tend to see their group as acting out of love while assuming that the other group is acting out of hate or with malicious intent–even when two groups undertake the exact same actions. Through motive attribution asymmetry, we are able to simultaneously see our group's violence against "them" as perpetrated in the name of protecting us, while violence directed at us is undertaken purely to harm us. We fail to consider that the out-group might be acting out of the same desire to protect their group or in-group love/empathy that we see as motivating us.

> ## When we understand these narratives and psychosocial dynamics, we are better positioned to prevent and address them.

Recognizing these narratives and psychosocial dynamics can help us reflect, analyze, and understand what we see in our communities, and directly address some of the factors that help move societies towards large-scale identity-based violence.

In addition to the prompts we've included above, our earlier resources outline approaches to addressing dangerous narratives (see here, here, here, and here), as well as case studies showcasing how leaders have guided their communities in rejecting "us vs them" divisions and working toward peace. As we wrote in our guide on navigating dangerous narratives around covid-19, "the actions of leaders–be they formal, informal, longstanding, or emerging leaders– will shape how we as a society respond to the challenges of this moment." Below, we outline some particularly relevant approaches from this earlier work.

Re-framing us versus them: Those advocating for violence are betting on their communities accepting their framing of a righteous or virtuous "us" endorsing violence against an inherently guilty and threatening "them." This framing only heightens each group's sense of existential threat.
- Instead, re-frame the conflict and create a third side advocating for peace. Bolster identities that cut across dividing lines ("cross-cutting identities") that advocate for this third side through building on existing identities that bring people together. These identities can be local community identities, shared interests (sports), common experiences (motherhood), a new movement advocating for a different way forward, and so on.
- When there aren't unifying identities, develop new ones that don't require your audience to lose their existing ones: It is much easier to build a new identity than it is to abandon an existing one (for instance, "Boston Strong" following the Boston Marathon bombing).
- Cross-cutting identities also make speaking out feel safer. While acting alone is very

hard, it becomes easier as part of a group that also provides belonging, recognition, and a sense of pride. An identity that meets our social needs in this way will matter more to us.

Build and maintain strong social norms against dangerous rhetoric and violence: Show that most people within your group or community disapprove of violence and division and want a different path forward. Showcase and celebrate helping actions or different groups working together under this banner to grieve losses, reject violence, and work for peace.

- Stories and images are powerful in part because they act as "social proof," or evidence, and help to establish or reinforce positive norms. These stories can model the larger "we" and can undermine negative perceptions between groups.

Address othering: We can also change perceptions of groups being targeted with violence. Some ways to undermine harmful ideas of "them" include:
- Avoid dehumanizing, including with our own language and metaphors.
- Never frame an entire group of people as a threat.
- Undermine notions of collective blame, that an entire group is responsible and must be punished for the actions of a few.
- Challenge meta-perceptions, and particularly meta-dehumanization. When we feel "they" dehumanize us, we are more likely to dehumanize them in turn. Find opportunities to showcase your group humanizing an out-group to undermine meta-perceptions created by loud voices stoking division and conflict.
- Showcase targeted groups' *warmth* (compassion, caring for others) and competence (complex emotions, responsibility). Someone who is competent but not warm may not care about you, or could want to hurt you; someone who is warm but not competent might be perceived as inconsequential or less valuable to society. One way to bolster a perception of a group being "warm" is to showcase members' positive intentions or helpful, altruistic, and care-taking actions towards the larger community. You can bolster "competence" perceptions by showcasing people solving problems.
- Undermine ideas about groups sharing an essence or being all the same ("essentialism" and "entitativity"). While we tend to perceive groups we are part of as diverse and heterogeneous–for instance, some people are outgoing, some people are calm, some people are rude, and so on–we often see other groups as being all the same, or sharing a common essence. Many of the dangerous narratives described above rest on this idea of group essentialism. Showing diversity within a group that's being othered can help undermine essentialism.

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