EXERCISE
MORAL FOUNDATIONS

Moral arguments are essential to many stories in activism. But according to the social and cultural psychologists at Moral Foundations, a global study showed that there are certain similarities and themes cutting across cultures. Specifically, they found five foundational moral values that are evoked around the world.

Here are the five foundations in their own words:

1 Care/Harm
This foundation is related to our long evolution as mammals with attachment systems and an ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.

2 Fairness/Cheating
This foundation is related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. It generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.

3 Loyalty/Betrayal
This foundation is related to our long history as tribal creatures able to form shifting coalitions. It underlies virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group. It is active anytime people feel that it's "one for all, and all for one."

4 Authority/Subversion
This foundation was shaped by our long primate history of hierarchical social interactions. It underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions.

5 Sanctity/Degradation
This foundation was shaped by the psychology of disgust and contamination. It underlies religious notions of striving to live in an elevated, less carnal, more noble way. It underlies the widespread idea that the body is a temple which can be desecrated by immoral activities and contaminants (an idea not unique to religious traditions).

NOTE: Interestingly, while liberal or progressive people tend to appeal to the first two moral frames (Care/Harm and Fairness/Cheating), conservative people tend to use all five.

If you're on this website, you're probably interested in speaking to more people, maybe even across the political divide? So here's a simple exercise we learned from C4AA (*c4aa.org*):

1 Take an issue or campaign you're working on. Let's say it's immigration in the US. You might already be well-versed in making the case through the first and second frames (which are often used by liberal or progressive people). But let's say, you're interested in helping center or right (conservative) people see that immigration is a moral issue for all Americans.

2 Now let's try reframing immigration in the three moral frames that conservatives appeal to. How would you talk about immigration as a matter of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation?

For example: Loyalty/Betrayal appeals to patriotism and self-sacrifice. So you might tell a story about how immigrants love America just as much as those who are born in that country. Or how immigrants sacrifice their lives to contribute to the welfare of the nation as a whole.