

# The Spiral of Injustice – When Humanity Devolves

## Table of Contents

Introduction: **“The Spiral of Injustice”**  
 Tammy Seley Elliott ..... 1

**Language:** “The Foundation of Injustice or The Path to Safety”  
 Dr. Sara Fry and Beau Seegmiller ..... 3

**Avoidance:** “An Algerian-American Exchange”  
 Liza Prendergast ..... 8

**Discrimination:** “Normalizing Intolerance”  
 Jason Taylor ..... 12

**Violence:** “We are all part of a solution.”  
 Phil Price ..... 17

**Elimination:** “When Cruelty is Left Unchecked”  
 Mark Iverson ..... 21

Conclusion: **“Interrupt the Spiral of Injustice”**  
 Dr. Dan Prinzing ..... 26



The **Spiral of Injustice** was designed and developed by the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights in Boise, Idaho. The Center is the builder and home of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial.

Anne Frank and downtown Boise may seem an unlikely pairing, but the legacy Anne left for human dignity strongly resonates in Idaho.

In 1995, a traveling exhibit on Anne Frank drew in tens of thousands of visitors from across Idaho. This overwhelming interest sparked the idea for a more permanent tribute. Over the course of the next several years, a group of community leaders, human rights stalwarts, and citizens throughout the state and country worked tirelessly to bring the Memorial to life.

In 2002, their long-held vision was realized, and the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial opened to the public. Both the triumphs and tragedies of the human story are on display, but in every quote and every idea, lies the profound power of a single voice or bold action to overcome great odds and alter the course of history.

We see how “upstanders” can interrupt the **Spiral of Injustice**.

## *Introduction*

### **The Spiral of Injustice**

Tammy Seley Elliott

*Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph. - Haile Selassie*

Most people mean well. Most people don't realize they've played a role in the propagation of injustice or could "make it possible for evil to triumph." Most people have felt the sting of injustice through language, avoidance or some other form of direct discrimination. But for "the other," it can be a lifetime burden, a barrier to access or opportunity, an avenue to violence, or at the worst, elimination. This is the reality of "the other" -- those who have been marginalized, perceived by the group as not belonging or as being different in some fundamental way because of association with a group based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference.

**The Spiral of Injustice** examines the devolution of humanity when "the other" is seen as apart from the norm and, therefore, not equal. If the perception of difference exists, actions to demean will exist. The downward spiral from language to avoidance, discrimination, violence, and elimination illustrates the destruction of a core value -- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

**Language** is one of the most common and unwitting enablers of injustice. It is both taught and learned. My dad used racially and sexually disparaging terms when I was growing up; it was what I knew. Fortunately, as I matured, I realized the words he chose were wrong. Unfortunately, not all will challenge what has been taught. Words can be weapons, hurting and even destroying their targets. Every form of name-calling, degrading and judgmental word choices or jokes that stereotype have targets. Words are easy to say but difficult to ignore. The choice is not to be politically correct -- it is a choice to be morally correct.

**Avoidance** can be even easier than language. Avoidance can occur unconsciously just by crossing the street or looking away to avoid "the other." Sometimes, even intentional actions do not seem offensive to us; maybe we just don't include "the other" in activities or services that he or she might desire or need. Avoidance is not as passive as it may seem; it is one more card in the deck stacked against "the other."

**Discrimination** takes more effort and is usually intentional. Like language, it can be learned behavior which to some makes it justifiable. Unlike language, that can be vague, discrimination

is typically direct and specific behavior. Justification for discrimination is based on *the difference* -- whatever it is -- that which sets “the other” apart. These are the factors that can and do stand like dividers in our communities; they create perceptual hurdles that become actual barriers. When we discriminate against others, we devolve as humans.

**Violence** is defined as intimidation or harming “the other” through physical acts (threats, assault, desecration, stalking, harassment, arson, murder, terrorism). Daily, it’s on the news and in our communities. It can also lead to encampment and maltreatment of entire populations because they were deemed to be less than human. History has shown a pattern in many countries, including our own.

The full devolution of humanity is **elimination** -- genocide. It has happened and it is happening. Elimination can take place culturally to entire groups of people by forbidding or discouraging customs and traditions, language, music, art, history and the right to participate. When we isolate, relocate, resettle or remove, we have also eliminated. When we segregate a group from our society, we, in effect, eliminate them from our society.

The battle is not with or against “the other”; the battle lies within each of us to move from the sidelines of observation as a bystander and stand up and step in as upstander -- one who is willing to interrupt the **Spiral of Injustice**.

Doing or saying nothing sends a message that injustice is acceptable. It isn’t.

-----

Tammy Seley Elliott, a 30-year veteran of the United States Air Force, is a novelist living in Boise, Idaho.