

My cause is better than your cause

By [Cindy Wang Brandt](#)

October 28, 2014

A while back, [a blog post speaking into the pain of miscarriage](#) was making its rounds on the Internet. Having never miscarried (that I know of), or grieved the death of any child, I asked [my friend who lost her two-month-old son](#) whether she felt highlighting the pain of miscarriage diminishes the story of her own tragedy. She replied, "It is not very helpful to compare pain."

But how often do we do just that? There is a phenomenon of what I call First-World-Problem-Shaming, where we make people feel bad about their anxieties because somewhere in the world children are starving. I don't know about you, but in general, I feel WORSE after being reminded of greater problems in the world in response to my petty issues, not better.

We compare our pains, assigning degrees of severity attached to the problem, deem one pain more worthy of compassion than the other, and manage one another's grief as if it can be contained by our metrics. Yet everything we know about grief is that it defies our expectations, bowling us over unsuspectingly or releasing us with surprising turns. Everyone grieves in their own way.

This dynamic carries over to the way we do justice. Many of us are drawn into advocating for justice because of a personal pain or because a particular cause grips our heart, compelling us to do something about it. Then we are a bit (or a lot) taken aback when not everyone else seems to burn with passion the way our own hearts are lit on fire. We point our fingers at other organizations: "Why should they get funding for neutering puppies when human beings are trafficked for sex?" My pain is greater than your pain.

The now infamous ALS ice bucket challenge drew its share of criticism. Why should this rather obscure disease receive the ridiculous amount of donations that it did? Someone even went ahead and made an [infographic](#) visually depicting how much funding each disease deserves. Imagine showing that chart to a family stricken with ALS.

Consider this headline: [“Ebola is a greater clear and present threat to America than any terror group—so why is Obama spending billions bombing ISIS but only millions blitzing the virus?”](#) Heaven forbid we stand united to weather more than one crisis together, no, we would much rather elevate one over the other and shame the other side.

Look, it is important to think critically regarding distribution of funds, focusing on specific causes, taking care to donate in a way that helps without perpetuating the problem. But we must not be held back by a scarcity mindset, that there is only limited resources to face our challenges.

I’m afraid if we believe there is only room enough for one kind of pain, then we declare there is room enough for only one kind of solution. We forget the most powerful resource we have to combat injustice is humanity’s ever expanding potential to be creative, to labor with tenacity, and to love.

There is and will always be enough love to embrace our friends who lose a child in utero or at two months old or as a teenager. There is and will always be enough space to hold all of their grief. Invalidating one person’s grief robs us from finding wholeness together.

Similarly, there is enough room for justice workers to combat the causes we are drawn to. When other organizations host a successful campaign, instead of envy, let’s rejoice that together we took one more stride toward a better world. When people seem indifferent to your cause, don’t shame and diminish their pains, listen to their story and invite them to hear yours. [Walter Brueggemann says,](#)

We can’t expect everybody to be in the same place of radicality but we can expect the people to be engaged as they are able. We need to grow and deepen our understanding. There is a lot of head work to be done but there is also a lot of dialogic interaction that is instructive for us.

When we talk to each other we grow more room for more solutions and more justice. This is the opposite of the scarcity mindset; it is the resolute belief that collaboration multiplies resources available to meet the challenges of our modern days.

Scarcity economic models help inform our financial policies. But it fails to take into account our immense capacity to empower one another toward greater good.

We need hope to drive our policies, not the other way around.

*Originally posted at [Brandt's blog](#)*