

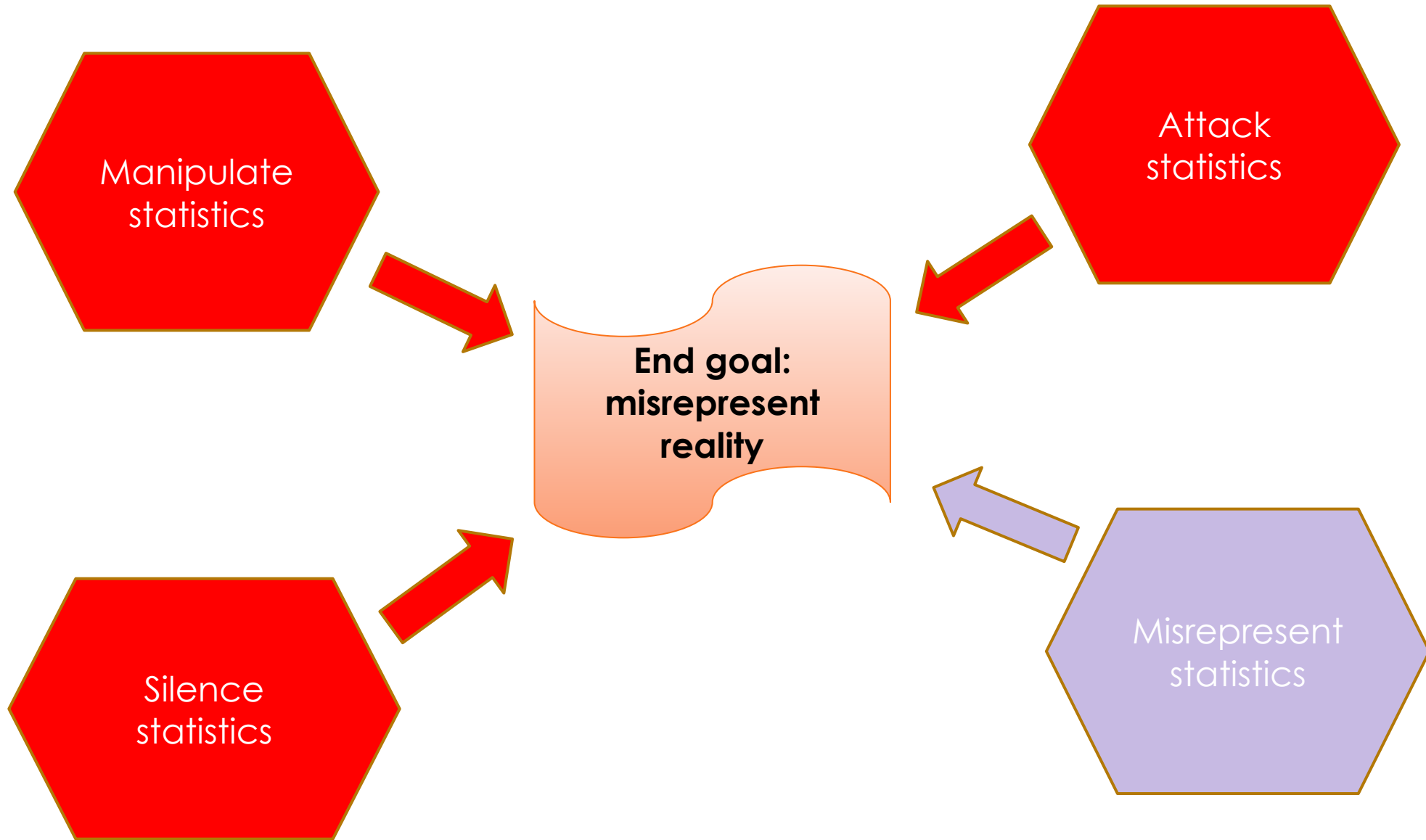


'Nothing is true and anything can be true'

Misuse of statistics – time to speak up

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Misuse of statistics: Why?

- ▶ The misuse of official statistics has as a goal to misrepresent reality
- ▶ Misuse takes various forms:
 - ▶ change or undermine the statistics to bias them and misrepresent reality
 - ▶ suppress the statistics for alternative narratives to be offered
 - ▶ attack the statistics to discredit them and 'alternative facts' to be preferred
 - ▶ misrepresent the meaning of the statistics
- ▶ Forms of misuse can coexist or be practiced sequentially
- ▶ The result is often a belief by the public that '*Nothing is true and anything can be true*', which can actually be desirable by those who misuse statistics

Misuse of statistics: targets

1. Statistical product

- ▶ Attack
- ▶ Suppress
- ▶ Misinterpret

2. Statistical production and communication process

- ▶ Manipulate
- ▶ Attack

3. Official statisticians and statistical agencies

- ▶ Press to manipulate/suppress statistics
- ▶ Create incentives for self censorship
- ▶ Attack

Misuse of statistics: what is the statistical community to do?

- ▶ Stand by official statisticians who have done their work well (which needs to be validated) when they are attacked
- ▶ Stand by and defend validated official statistics when these statistics are attacked
- ▶ Yet, must not suppress criticism of official statistics, even if it may (appear to) be unwarranted or ill intentioned
- ▶ Call out and protest suppression of official statistics

Misuse of statistics: what is the statistical community to do?

- ▶ Call out official statisticians who do not follow statistical principles and who succumb to external pressure or self-censorship – do not have a ‘guild mentality’
- ▶ Call out and protest situations and persons that pressure directly or indirectly official statisticians to not follow statistical principles

Misuse of statistics: what is the statistical community to do?

- ▶ Encourage/practice 'anticipatory' communication of official statistics by statistical agencies to help prevent misuse - without taking sides in policy debates
- ▶ Encourage/practice avoidance of analysis and policy discussions when releasing or discussing official statistics