

Vision: Through the emphasis of universal human commonalities, the Foundation for Global Collaboration and Peace provides a basis for on-going dialogue between communities worldwide, in order to better collaborate on a global scale to achieve and maintain peace holistically

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN COMMONALITIES IN THE GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT

WRITTEN BY: AMANDA SCHERKER

WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.GLOBAL-CNP.ORG](http://www.global-cnp.org)

TOC

Synopsis..... 1

The Problem..... 1

 Categorization..... 1

 Fear and Mistrust 2

 Persistence of Divisions..... 2

 Aversive Racism 3

 In-group Bias 4

 Fatal Consequences..... 5

Potential Solutions..... 5

 The Pervasiveness of Human Commonalities 5

 The Emphasis of Commonalities 5

 Foster Empathy 6

 Minimize Racism and Stereotyping..... 6

 Basis for Inter-group Communication and Understanding..... 7

 Conflict Resolution 8

 Examples of Commonalities among All Human Beings 8

Foundation’s Approach 10

 Introduction..... 10

 Participatory Peace Building..... 11

 Our Programs 13

 Conclusion 15

SYNOPSIS

This paper examines the uniquely human tendency to make prejudgments based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other categorical divisions. It then will consider the ways such primitive instincts manifest themselves in prejudice and violence, which impedes peace building efforts on community, national, and international levels. The paper will then discuss research in behavioral studies and negotiation, and conflict resolution tactics and will endeavor to identify potential solutions to this seemingly intractable perpetuation of hatred, degradation, and marginalization. Finally, it outlines the approach adopted by the Foundation for Global Collaboration and Peace¹, specifically our emphasis on raising awareness of basic, fundamental, and overarching human commonalities that transcend structural and biological differences amongst members of the human race.

THE PROBLEM

Categorization

Social scientists have long recognized that within less than a second of observation, the human mind systematically catalogues a new acquaintance by race, ethnicity, gender, and age. This vestige of man's primitive ancestry originally served as a defense mechanism, and a means of identifying potentially predatory outsiders. Such instinctual distrust has largely remained constant through the ages, even as civilization has rendered these impulses all but obsolete. Over time, such reactions have become engrained in our very nature, as "people tend rather automatically to categorize others along three major dimensions: race, sex, and age."² Indeed, all forms of prejudice have their roots in such innate judgment or protective xenophobia.

The brain's method of categorizing other human beings is purely organizational. Rather than creating judgments of individuals based upon more extensive interactions, our

¹ The Foundation for Global Collaboration and Peace is a New York State registered non-profit that aims to inform, engage and connect the global community by disseminating scientifically proven information about what all human beings have in common, in order to promote equality, inter-community communication, cross-cultural collaboration, peaceful conflict resolution and global peace building. We are a member of Genocide Watch's International Campaign to End Genocide and the Peace Innovation Project at Stanford University. (<http://www.global-cnp.org>)

² Nelson, Todd D. "Introduction." *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. ix. Print.

ancestors found it most efficient and risk adverse to base initial impressions upon quick, easy stereotypes. As influential scholar Gordon Allport explained in his volume, *The Nature of Prejudice*, “The human mind must think with the aid of categories. Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it.”³ Such categorizations carry with them consequences that affect every social setting, from business meetings to elementary-school classrooms to international-diplomatic summits.

Fear and Mistrust

Our primitive instinct to mistrust the unfamiliar affects social behavior, and has, across centuries, created subcategories within the human species. These categories can be defined by anything from race to ethnicity, from religion to shared dialect. Such categorizations serve only to reinforce and emphasize differences. As Robert Kurzban, John Tooby, and Leda Cosmides explain, “The simple act of categorizing individuals into two social groups predisposes humans to discriminate in favor of their in-group and against the out-group in both allocation of resources and evaluation of conduct.”⁴ Categorizations across cultural or individual divides create an “us”/“them” dichotomy that fosters mistrust of, and skepticism towards, other groups throughout cross-sections of the human race.

Persistence of Divisions

One of the primary reasons for ongoing divisions among groups, particularly races, ethnicities, and even nations, is what Baumeister described as a “magnitude gap.”

A difference in perception of harm exists between victims and perpetrators. Victims perceive the extent of the harm as greater than the perpetrator and view all actions on the part of the perpetrator, including those resulting in accidental outcomes, as being intentional. In addition,

³ Allport, Gordon. *The Nature of Prejudice*. N.P.: Basic Books, 1979. Print.

⁴ Kurzban, Robert, John Tooby, and Leda Cosmides. "Can Race be Erased? Coalitional Computation and Social Categorization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2001): 15387. Print.

victims also feel the reverberations of the harm extending over a much longer period of time and occasionally intergenerationally. (121)⁵

When cultivated over time and through generations, such divisions result in prejudice that can often be actualized in steely hate, horrific violence, and everything in between. Prejudice inevitably leads to forced or consensual segregation, limited inter-group interactions, and, in most extreme cases, apartheid or genocide. As Ohio State professor Marilynn Brewer cogently explains:

It is in a sense universally true that 'we' are more peaceful, trustworthy, friendly, and honest than 'they.' This is reinforced by a general preference for the familiar over the unfamiliar. As in-groups become larger and more depersonalized, the institutions, rules, and customs that maintain group loyalty and cooperation take on the character of moral authority. To the extents that out-groups do not subscribe to the same moral rules, indifference is replaced by denigration and contempt. Peace is maintained through segregation and mutual avoidance.⁶

The psychological implications of automatically "sorting" human beings are often realized in mistrust of those we deem different from ourselves.

Aversive Racism

In many modern societies, prejudice is manifested subtly, the result not of malicious intent, but lack of awareness of one's unconscious mistrust. When such prejudice is racially based, it is referred to as "aversive racism." This phenomenon has proven to be as great an obstacle towards a peaceful society as more vocalized racism. "The influence of aversive racism is pervasive, and it persists because it remains largely unrecognized and thus unaddressed. The challenge of aversive racism is that it represents a fundamental discrepancy between mind and action. In mind, aversive racists truly believe that they are non-prejudiced, but in action they discriminate in subtle but consequential ways."⁷ Aversive racism impairs friendly, productive, inter-group

⁵ Baumeister, R.F. *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*. New York City: W.H. Freeman, 1997. Print. Cited by: Woolf, Linda M., and Michael R. Hulsizer. "Psychosocial Roots of Genocide: Risk, Prevention, and Intervention." *Journal of Genocide Research* 7 (2005): 121. Print.

⁶ Brewer, Marilynn B. "The Psychology of Prejudice: In-Group Love and Out-Group Hate?" *Journal of Social Issues* (2002): 435. Print.

⁷ Pearson, Adam, John Dovidio, and Samuel L Gaertner. "The Nature of Contemporary Prejudice: Insights from Aversive Racism." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3 (2009): 19. Print.

collaboration. Tensions occur because of the stunning incongruence between the perpetrators' perception of their actions and the victims' interpretation of those actions.⁸

In-group Bias

We are programmed to insist upon our in-group's uniqueness, and consequent superiority. In order to maintain feelings of special status, we are apt to deem our perceived "cultural particulars" as necessarily better than those of the out-group's. Indeed, "it is important to us to belong to groups that are held in high esteem so that our social identity is seen in a positive light. One potential consequence of trying to achieve and maintain a high social identity is out-group-directed prejudice, discrimination, and in some cases, violence."⁹

Such divisions amongst in-groups and out-groups, whether determined by ethnicity, race, gender, age, economic status, language, or any other audio/visual difference, result in less empathy and concern for the out-group's well-being. As Susan Fiske, Professor of Psychology at Princeton University explains:

People must appreciate another mind in order to empathize. People first categorize the other as human, assuming a mind, and then differentiate among social categories according to universal dimensions of perceived traits: warmth and competence. The least warm and competent groups [i.e., economically disadvantaged] may even be denied humanity and a meaningful mind.¹⁰

The depth of societal disregard for these individuals is visible in "participants' behavioral indicators of dehumanized perception: failure to use intent verbs in describing the target's typical day, self-reported failure to attribute a mind to them, and self-reported

⁸ Aversive racism is manifested through a variety of physical and social cues, and is generally only obvious to the victim. For Instance, Dovidio (1997b) found that Whites' negative implicit attitudes predict nonverbal cues of discomfort (increased rate of blinking) and aversion (decreased eye contact) toward Blacks whereas Whites self-reported...liking of Blacks. Aversive racists, who have favorable conscious views of Blacks but harbor unconscious negative attitudes or associations convey mixed-messages in interracial interactions" Ibid.

⁹ Woolf, Linda M., and Michael R. Hulsizer. "Psychosocial Roots of Genocide: Risk, Prevention, and Intervention." *Journal of Genocide Research* 7 (2005): 108. Print.

¹⁰ Fiske, Susan T. "From Dehumanization and Objectification to Rehumanization: Neuroimaging Studies on the Building Blocks of Empathy." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1167. Values, Empathy, and Fairness across Social Barriers (2009): 31. Print.

unlikelihood of interacting together.”¹¹ Blatant dehumanization renders empathy impossible, and results in generally accepted neglect or even violence towards these out-groups.

Fatal Consequences

The fear and paranoia fostered by intergroup preference is at the heart of ethnic conflict worldwide. Indeed, the “importance of fear in the etiology of ethnic violence” must not be overlooked. “One common strand linking the Nazi murder of Jews, Serbian murder of Muslims, and Hutu murder of Tutsi, is the apparently widespread belief that the two parties in each conflict were locked in mortal combat that could end only in the expulsion or elimination of one side.” (524)¹²

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

The Pervasiveness of Human Commonalities

One inevitable result of our tendency for in-group preference is that people often remain ignorant as to how extensive universal commonalities really are. Indeed, as Donald Brown articulates in his article “Human Universals and Their Implications,” “Universals are frequently misidentified as cultural particulars....The mistake is often manifest in statements that begin ‘in our society.’ with the implication that the matter in question is peculiar to one society or to some relatively small proportion of societies.”¹³ The reality is, much of what we take for granted as unique to our own culture, race, or identity, can often be a characteristic not of our own in-group, but of the wider human race.

The Emphasis of Commonalities

Emphasizing our shared traits is critical to overcoming hostile boundaries among groups. Establishing overarching commonalities among human beings can take away the psychological threat presented by the dramatization of out-group’s differences, replacing hatred and animosity with appreciation. In the process, the basic humanity and individuality of out-group members is underscored. Indeed, “tactics such as

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Green, Donald P., and Rachel L. Seher. “What Role Does Prejudice Play in Ethnic Conflict?” *Annual Reviews* (2003): 524. Print.

¹³ Brown, Donald. “Human Universals and Their Implications.” *Being Humans: Anthropological Universality and Particularity in Transdisciplinary Perspectives*. Berlin: Neil Roughley, 2000. 170.



increasing personalization and introducing stereotype-disconfirming evidence can enhance inter- group relations.”¹⁴

Foster Empathy

Scientific research has shown that the resulting empathy is critical in transcending prejudice. “Princeton University psychologist Susan Fiske simultaneously presented test subjects with pictures of African Americans and vegetables. When asked what the person in the picture liked to eat, activity in the amygdala—a brain region that modulates fear—subsided. ‘Amygdala activation goes away as soon as you start to think of people as individuals,’ said Fiske.”¹⁵ Once people realize the depth of similarities between themselves and their perceived foe, empathy overtakes fear and mistrust. As mentioned above, “People must appreciate another mind in order to empathize.”¹⁶ Thus, negative “patterns can reverse when perceivers must consider the other's preferences, that is, appreciate the other's mind.”¹⁷

Minimize Racism and Stereotyping

Scientists have also proven optimistic about the real potential in minimizing racism: As explained by Robert Kurzban, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania:

What is most striking about our results is just how easy it was to diminish the importance of race by manipulating coalition—especially given the repeated failure over decades to find other means to influence racial encoding. The sensitivity of race to coalitional manipulation lends credence to the hypothesis that, to the human mind, race is simply one historically contingent subtype of coalition. Our subjects had experienced a lifetime in which ethnicity (including race) was an ecologically valid predictor of people’s social alliances and coalitional affiliations. Yet less than 4 min of exposure to an alternative social world in which race was

¹⁴ Hewstone, M. *Contact and CAtegorization: Social Psychological Interventions to Change Intergroup Relations*. Cited By: Woolf, Linda M., and Michael R. Hulsizer. "Psychosocial Roots of Genocide: Risk, Prevention, and Intervention." *Journal of Genocide Research* 7 (2005): 117. Print.

¹⁵ Keim, Brandon. "Researchers Try to Cure Racism." Editorial. *Wired Science*. N.p., 2010. Web. 8 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2009/01/racetra>

¹⁶ Fiske, Susan T. "From Dehumanization and Objectification to Rehumanization: Neuroimaging Studies on the Building Blocks of Empathy ." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1167. Values, Empathy, and Fairness across Social Barriers (2009): 31. Print.

¹⁷ Ibid.

irrelevant to the prevailing system of alliance caused a dramatic decrease in the extent to which they categorized others by race.”¹⁸

This laboratory experiment created a social climate where race was legitimately a non-issue, suggesting that human beings can overcome their propensity for discrimination.

Exposing commonalities force human beings to see individuals as individuals who are capable of experiencing pain. Underscoring the basic humanity of another person or group has been proven to be the best way to limit unconscious bias.

After being trained to distinguish between similar black male faces, Caucasian test subjects showed greater racial tolerance on a test designed to measure unconscious bias. The findings add to a growing body of research suggesting that science can battle racism. ‘Any time you can get people to treat people as individuals, you reduce the effect of stereotypes,’ said Brown University cognitive scientist Michael Tarr.¹⁹

Indeed, minimizing the effects of stereotyping is critical to conflict resolution on an international level. “Since the end of the Cold War, many scholars have argued that most conflicts are driven from clashes of communal identity, based on race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation.”²⁰ Resolving these conflicts requires the establishment of common ground.

Basis for Inter-group Communication and Understanding

Universals are an important basis for cross-cultural communication, which is critical to easing ethnic tensions. According to Donald Brown, “Intercultural communication depends upon or is facilitated by universals in at least three ways.” The first of these is “Universals of communication itself—languages, gestures, body language, and facial expression.” The second is empathy, “those cognitive and emotional facilities that allow humans to devise what another person is thinking and feeling.” The third is

¹⁸ Kurzban, Robert, et. al. 15391.

¹⁹ Keim, Brandon

²⁰ Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. "Conflict Resolution, Culture and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding." *Journal of Peace Research* 38.6 (2001): 685. Print.

“Experiences,” which “give humans shared experiences and interests that in turn give them something to talk about.”²¹

By confronting the stunning truth, that the gulf between our cultural traditions and values is not so great as we might think—as when we discover that many particulars are, in fact, universal—we are more likely to respect the cultures of others. If our painstakingly constructed “social identity” has a great deal of overlap with that of the out-group we demean, our basis for such degradation dissipates.

Conflict Resolution

Emphasizing commonalities is also a useful tactic in conflict resolution on a community level. Communities act as “ground-level generators and preservers of values and ethical systems. The ideals of justice and compassion are nurtured in communities.”²² Peaceful communities are incubators for more tolerant human beings who can reach out across physical, geographic, and social boundaries to build peace on a transnational basis. And “a healthy community deals forthrightly with dissension and ‘we- they’ polarities, accepting diversity and dissent but using all the various mediating, coalition-building, and conflict resolution procedures to find common ground.”²³ Thus, using commonalities as a basis for common ground will ease tensions on a community level, with the potential to extend to the national and global arena.

Examples of Commonalities among All Human Beings

The list of Universal Human Commonalities spans the entire realm of scientific studies, from the psychological to the anthropological. Particularly startling is the breadth of our genetic similarities. According to genetics researcher Craig Venter, in his lecture “A DNA Driven World,” “One of the more exciting findings from our study is that any two humans differ from each other by about 1-2%.”²⁴ While this by no means belittles the

²¹ Brown, Donald. 168-169.

²² Gardner, J.W. “Building Community.” *Kettering Review* (1989): n. pag. Print.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Venter, Craig. “A DNA-Driven World.” Richard Dimpleby Lecture. 4 Dec. 2007. *BBC News*. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/12december/0712december05/dimpleby.shtml>>.



wonderful diversity that constitutes human kind, it suggests that we are inextricably united through an overarching similitude.

We also share many of the same psychological instincts and behaviors. We are apt to cling to our beliefs: “we carefully edit our reality, searching for evidence that confirms what we already believe.”²⁵ While this offers an interesting explanation for the perpetuation of prejudice, it also identifies yet another overarching consistency in the way all humans perceive their world.

Basic human emotions also extend beyond boundaries of human societies. A University of London study conducted by Professor Sophie Scott “compared people from Britain and Namibia. Findings suggest basic emotions such as amusement; anger, fear and sadness are shared by all humans. We all share other attributes, too, such as having complex systems of communication to convey our thoughts, feelings and the intentions of those around us, and we are all able to express a wide range of emotions through language, sounds, facial expressions and posture.”²⁶ As empathy can only exist where the capacity for fear and anguish is recognized, shared emotions unveil the humanity in all of us.

Further proof of the largely constant display of human emotions is inscribed upon scrolls created by ancient Indian scholars, which are dated to the tenth century or earlier. These scholars’ analysis of human emotions culminated in a list of “eight fundamental feelings,” identified as most “common” to humans. These eight fundamental feelings are nearly identical to the widespread, modern psychological system of categorizing emotions.²⁷ That the modern Western psychological classifications of mankind’s anger, happiness, and frustrations are so startlingly similar to those of such a distant society suggests that all human beings have the basic emotional foundations to relate to one another, despite separations of space and time. These findings also suggest that

²⁵ Lehrer, Jonah. "Accept Defeat, the Neuroscience of Screwing Up." *Wired Magazine* 21 Dec. 2009: n. pag. Web. 13 Aug. 2010. <http://www.wired.com/magazine/2009/12/fail_accept_defeat>

²⁶ Nauert, Rick, and John M Grohol. "Are Emotions Universal?" *Psych Central News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2010. <<http://psychcentral.com/news/2010/01/27/are-emotions-universal/10999.html>>

²⁷ Brown, Donald. 171.



tendencies to belittle the pain and suffering of those on the other side of the globe, or, indeed, the other side of the city, stem from ignorance of our shared humanity and emotional detachment, whether subconscious or voluntary.

Love, or “the syndrome of cognitive and emotional traits comprising romantic love,” has also been found to be a universal feeling.²⁸ “Kin terms” based on relations of procreation are, likewise, universal across languages, suggesting that all human beings appreciate the innate bonds of family. Though these traits might at first seem obvious, recognizing the ability of others to love and care for their families is a critical step in recognizing their humanity.

Cultural traditions are often considered one of the greatest variables when comparing people of different countries, religions, or ethnicities. Thus, it is particularly meaningful that many of these traditions have also been deemed universal. One commonality is the cultural phenomena of music. Despite appearing more “heterogeneous and differentiated in function from culture to culture than does language,” music actually “possesses common attributes across cultures: it exploits the human capacity to entrain to external stimuli....Music exploits the human capacity for entertainment, increasing the likelihood that participants will experience a sense of 'shared intentionality.' It is likely to have played a significant role in the evolution of the human capacity for complex social interaction.”²⁹ These traditions conjure feelings of safety, and their ubiquitous presence suggests that all humans need community and constancy to feel safe and protected.

FOUNDATION'S APPROACH

Introduction

The Foundation for Global Collaboration and Peace believes that using commonalities as a basis for creating peace will discourage prejudice, while fostering tolerance. It is with this understanding that the Foundation broaches its mission of peace building and improving human rights worldwide. We base our work on raising awareness of universal

²⁸ Brown, Donald. 164.

²⁹ Cross, Ian. "Musicality and the Human Capacity for Culture." *Musicae Scientiae* Special Issue: Narrative in Music and Interaction (2008): 158. Print.

human commonalities, in order to counter people's tendency to mistrust and prejudge the unfamiliar, and dehumanize based on differences. As these are some of the greatest obstacles to peaceful coexistence, on community, national, and international levels, the Foundation's approach to peacemaking raises awareness of and encourages reflection upon these conscious and unconscious judgments that undermine the peaceful coexistence of all human beings.

Through this approach, the Foundation roots its mission in the fervent belief that the qualities that unite each and every human being must be highlighted and understood in order to soothe tensions across community lines. In keeping with this credo, we have compiled a list of scientifically proven "Universal Human Commonalities," a list that is updated with the participation of our audience and the scientific community.

It is the Foundation's goal to disseminate the list of Universal Human Commonalities across the globe in order to raise consciousness about the pervasiveness of the traits that unite us. By doing so, we hope to break down, in the first instance, the psychological barrier that stands in the way of comprehensive inter-group communication and collaboration, while enlarging in-group identification in order to foster empathy for those who are currently defined as the "other." Through the publication and circulation of that list, we articulate our shared qualities, ranging from our genetics to the ways in which we interact. The Foundation uses this list to foster discourse about our common qualities, both locally and across the globe, as a basis for the promotion of interpersonal cooperation, cross-cultural collaboration, and global peace building.

Participatory Peace Building

The Foundation believes that peace comes from individuals being more mindful of their actions, more understanding of their peers, and less divisive in their views of each other. Our grassroots movement focuses on what each individual can contribute. After all, wide-scale, or state-sponsored, violence and discrimination are the manifestation of individuals' prejudice, bolstered and strengthened by their collectivization. Such



violence is the actualization of a society's hatred, the result of aggregated individual intolerance. The Foundation seeks to target the problem where it first takes hold, in individuals and their ignorance of, and resistance to, those who seem different from them. For it is only in a world in which people individually decide to eschew prejudice and hate for tolerance and love that true peace will come.

As best seen by our active audience participation, from 86 nations across the globe, the Foundation believes in the bottom-up approach to peace building. Participatory Peace Building means that everyone is capable of making an impact. Too often, peace making is considered a task suited only to political figures or international agencies. Such a mindset underestimates the potential impact of individuals in concert and discourages them from contributing their part to the peace process. As a result, the full force of a mass movement that would require minimal contribution from each individual cannot be realized. The general society, crippled by inertia, awaits the work of a few elite to bring about world peace. Such expectations are unrealistic and their failure inevitable. If we are to learn anything from the atrocities of organized violence, in the form of genocides and war, it is that their subsistence depends on mass participation. "Total war required the mobilization of entire societies in the enterprise of violence...Genocides are deadly to the victims; they are also events whose corrupting character travels deep into the population."³⁰ Just as organized violence requires the cooperation of millions, long-lasting peace will be effectively achieved only through cumulative individual commitment and action.

It is with this in mind that the Foundation is now taking advantage of the nexus between our greater scientific understanding and the ubiquity of modern telecommunications technology, such as the internet and mobile telephony, to rally the mass participation of individuals all over the globe in building peace.

³⁰ Weitz, Eric D. *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.P.252.



Our Programs

In order to foster tolerance amongst individuals, which translate into more peaceful actions, the Foundation has created a free online database of scientific information regarding human commonalities. By assembling a wealth of information critical to understanding the depth and breadth of human commonalities, we provide a tool for peacemakers and educators throughout the world.

Also in our vision is the creation of a media center showing people's everyday lives throughout the world, at once a lesson in diversity and commonality. These clips would demonstrate the underlying principle of the Foundation's work: while geographic, historical, and cultural roots may render human life stunningly and beautifully diverse, common threads of tradition, behavior, and emotions inextricably unite us. By illustrating this fact in an engaging, multimedia way, we hope to garner interest, appeal to viewers' basic humanity, and engender feelings of empathy.

Geographic divides can augment and reinforce differences, an "out of sight, out of mind" psychology makes painful events that are perpetually occurring across the globe the sole responsibility of others while we turn a blind eye. We will bridge that divide in this most basic and fundamental way. While broad statistics do little to stimulate people's empathy, visualizing the experience of a single person can create a basic emotional relation. Indeed, "Empathy is typically felt for individuals as individuals, not for groups or abstract classes of people."³¹ We believe our live forums, in conjunction with our media center, will help clarify often vague notions of the lives of individuals in distant lands. They allow our site visitors from across the world to converse with one another in the context of peace and collaboration. In doing so, these dialogues will promote the empathy and understanding needed to overcome the depersonalization of those we deem "different" than ourselves.

³¹ Batson, C.D., et al. "Empathic Joy and the Empathy Altruism Hypothesis." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61 (1991) : 413-426. Print. Cited by: Batson, C.D., et al. "Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings Toward the Group?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72.1 (1997): 106. Print.



More immediately, the Foundation is focusing its energies on peace education, particularly amongst junior high and high school students. By encouraging students to challenge racism, sexism, and other forms of hate existent in our society, we hope to stifle prejudice in its infancy. As Woolf and Hulsizer articulate in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, “Children who develop prejudicial attitudes and biases are more likely to become adults with these same belief systems.” (122)³² In order to build future generations in which tolerance precedes judgment, we must ensure that our classrooms are not rife with prejudice.

In that vein, we are currently planning to collaborate with junior high and high school classes, where we will exhibit their special brand of “peace art” in a virtual gallery on our website. Our rationale for focusing on this age group is two-fold. First, we believe that, in order for students to best appreciate the intricacies of the biological and genetic truisms listed on our Universal Human Commonality list, they should have a basic scientific understanding of the human body and psyche (i.e., having at least a middle school science education). Secondly, empirical research suggests that this age group is most at risk for translating idle prejudice into outward aggression and violence, often the first stage of a lifetime of degradation and hate. As Woolf and Hulsizer explain, “It is important to note that teens and young adults are particularly susceptible for recruitment into organizations of hate and violence.”³³ By replacing such organizations’ messages of aggression and malevolence with visions of peace and cooperation, we can lessen the psychological appeal of violent groups.

Using the Universal Human Commonality list as a basis for peace education in the classroom will help students recognize both conscious and unconscious prejudice. And increasing awareness is the first step to eliminating these impulses. Our art project will ask each child to illustrate a commonality of his or her choosing, which we will then exhibit on our website. This project will have a particular impact given the current global

³² Woolf, Linda M., and Michael R. Hulsizer. “Psychosocial Roots of Genocide: Risk, Prevention, and Intervention.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 7 (2005): 122. Print.

³³ Ibid

emphasis on math and science education, which has resulted in millions of dollars in budget cuts from art classes and programs for at-risk youth. Through this interdisciplinary project that combines scientific facts with gender and racial studies, culminating in artistic expression, we can help students better learn and digest scientific facts. In that process, we will foster the imagination and curiosity necessary for them to apply this knowledge innovatively in their personal and professional lives.

Through this project, students will discover the overwhelming quantity of commonalities they share with people across cultures and throughout the world. They will learn that having pride in ones' own heritage does not justify disrespect for that of other children. According to Woolf and Hulsizer, "As a component of peace education, children and indeed communities need to become more familiar with and develop a value for fundamental human rights and the extension of these rights to all peoples."³⁴ We believe that identifying commonalities is an appropriate basis for realizing the fundamental importance of upholding human rights. If human rights are to be maintained, we must view every individual as equally worthy of respect and dignity, and knowing our commonalities provides the groundwork for such mindset.

Conclusion

The Foundation seeks to shift society's focus from divisions to the qualities that unite all human beings. By engaging individuals, we hope to build tolerance and understanding, which are prerequisites for any peaceful society. We believe that the vast breadth and depth of our shared commonalities render every human being equally deserving of tolerance and responsible for furthering justice, peace, and understanding. Let us continue to celebrate the human race's beautiful diversity, but let us never ignore our most fundamental commonalities. As Mother Teresa avowed, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

³⁴ ibid