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Stopping Racism Through Art

Courtney Cowsill

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A Pell Honors Thesis Completed to Fulfill the Requirements of the

Pell Thesis Honors Program

Racism is defined as the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability, and that a particular

race is superior to others. Bigoted behavior is a display of discriminatory or abusive behavior towards members of another race because of these beliefs, and is an omnipresent force still around today.

Racist sentiments can be personified in numerous ways, but the most common is hate crimes. Hate crimes are crimes committed against an individual or group for no reason except disdain towards what that person represents. They occur because of religion, sexual orientation, gender, disabilities, and race. The latter, however, is the most common form of hate crime that exists. Sixty percent of all reported hate crimes today are a result of racial bias. Sixty-two percent of those crimes target African Americans, and have not changed much in their execution since the early 19th century; churches are bombed or otherwise vandalized, crosses are burned on the lawns of homes, and most tragically people are murdered. Twenty-five percent of hate crimes target Caucasians, seven percent Asian Pacific Americans, less than five percent multiracial groups, and one percent Native American and Alaskan Natives. Although these are all not as constant compared to the targeting of African Americans, they are all equally repugnant.¹

The reasons for such violent acts vary. Most common is resentment towards minorities. This is a result of fear. Fear that the minorities will "steal jobs" from the people born in the

¹ American Psychological Association © 1998; *Hate Crimes Today: An Age-old Foe in Modern Dress*

country, or simply just a fear of what is different. Another factor that leads to hate crimes is generalizing. For example, Middle Easterners were the targets of many hate crimes after the September 11th terrorist attacks because people associated all Middle Easterners with the terrorists themselves.

Many people believe that the citizens committing these acts all belong to radical supremacist groups such as Neo-Nazis or "skin-heads". This, however, is a misconception. In a study done by Dr. Edward Dunbar, a clinical psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, fewer than five percent of hate crime offenders were members of organized hate groups.² Generally, the person responsible is an otherwise law-abiding individual who never sees any wrong in what he or she did because prejudice like this is rooted in an environment that disdains someone who is "different", and therefore it is a learned response.³

Hate crimes vary in degree of harm done. However, whether it is derogatory words painted across a house, or the physical act of being beaten, emotional pain is always present.

Intense feelings of vulnerability, anger, depression, physical ailments, learning problems, and difficult interpersonal relations are all symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and can be brought on by a hate crime. Dr. Gregory M. Herek and his

² American Psychological Association © 1998; *Hate Crimes Today: An Age-old Foe in Modern Dress*

³ American Psychological Association © 1998; *Hate Crimes Today: An Age-old Foe in Modern Dress*

colleagues in Davis, California found that some hate crime victims have needed as much as 5 years to overcome their ordeal. By contrast, victims of non-biased crimes experienced a decrease in crime-related psychological problems within 2 years of the crime. With especially heinous crimes the community as a whole can be left with emotional damage.⁴

Very extreme hate crimes tend to be committed by people with a known history of antisocial behavior such as convicted criminals. One example of this occurred in 1998 in Jasper, Texas.

Three men with jail records offered a ride to an African American man named James Byrd, Jr. They brutally beat him and then tied him to the back of their pick-up truck. He was still alive when they dropped his pants down to his ankles, dragged him 2.5 miles over payment going 90 miles per hour "...leaving his skin, blood, arms, head, genitalia, and other parts of his body strewn along the highway" until what was left of his remains were dumped in front of a black cemetery.⁵

The horror of situations like this must be stopped. It is believed that hate crimes are not random, uncontrollable, or inevitable. Because of these facts society can intervene and help reduce or hopefully prevent these forms of violence, especially among young people. To do this programs must be created that convey anti-racist, anti-discriminatory messages

⁴ www.walkproud.org

⁵ San Antonio Express; "Jasper Trial Defendant says Byrd's throat was Cut" by Roy Bragg

successfully and universally to members of every culture across the world. Only when there is a universal understanding and appreciation of diversity can equality truly exist.

It is essential that we learn to respect one another and to feel empathy and compassion for one another - even those who, on the surface, might seem very different from us in race, ethnicity, interests, athleticism, appearance, style of dress, and so on.⁶

The Pell Honors program is a fuel for this sense of civic responsibility. It significantly strengthens the desire to help people see that different colored skin does nothing but make the world more beautiful. Raising social awareness on this injustice will help make a difference globally. People are generally good at heart, and making them aware of racist sentiments, even those that exist in themselves, is an important part of changing their mentality. My thesis explores how art and music can elicit empathy and compassion while functioning as universal languages that can be used to reinforce verbal messages and dissipate the persisting problem of discrimination.

Art has been used to convey a message since the first time a cave painting was made 30,000 years ago.⁶ It is found in every culture and in every country. It is a universal tool for communication. The same is true for music.

⁶ Nobody Left to Hate by Elliot Aronson

⁶ Arts and Activities: "Come to Our Cave" by Joan Cassidy

Music is a non-verbal communicator that elicits an emotional response from the listener. A study was done at Cornell University to see if emotional reaction to a song was the same regardless of a students' background. They were asked to listen to music and judge it as happy, sad, or fearful while their vital signs were monitored. Researchers found similar physiological reactions in students. "Happy music" had the largest changes in respiration, "sad music" the largest changes in heart rate, and "fearful music" the largest changes in blood flow rate, consistently. Music therefore produces genuine emotions from the listener. So, for example, music composed for a scary movie would have the same effect on the listener emotionally regardless as to whether or not they were viewing scary images.⁷

Music and art, respectively, function as universal languages. General opinion is that language must be a written or spoken word. But the actual definition is quite different. The dictionary defines language as communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. This makes the meaning more open-ended and allows music and art to fit within the guidelines. These two forms of expression are what can produce a universal understanding and appreciation of diversity.

A verbal message on its own lacks a powerful impact. It is more successful if "...it is reinforced in a persuasive and memorable manner" such as with an art form of some kind. The

⁷Hand to Hand: "Music and the Brain" by Roy Mueller

reason for this is because only seven percent of the impact of a message is based on the words. Ninety-three percent comes from gestures, facial expressions, and other forms of non-verbal communication.⁸

Messages about anti-racism need to have as powerful an impact as the hate crimes that portray the antithesis. This impact is possible when art and music are coupled with the spoken word. Programs in place now, however, do not do this.

"Not in our town" is a national movement that encourages community response to hate crimes. The project combines PBS broadcasts, educational outreach, and online activities to help communities battling hate talk to, and learn from, each other. Started in 1995, it is PBS's approach to battling hate crimes.⁹

An endless series of websites exist such as "Partners against Hate" that convey information about hate crimes, publications that have spoken against it, and ways to prevent it.¹⁰ But once again, these are just words. This is the seven percent, where is the other ninety-three? What happens if someone who speaks German goes on this site? They will not understand the message. Art and music are the keys because they are universal languages.

If art and music were incorporated into existing programs, or even used in the advent of new ones, anti-hate messages would be more widely understood and listened to, especially by today's

⁸ "Listen with Your Eyes" by Susan M. Heathfield

⁹ www.pbs.org.niot

¹⁰ www.partnersagainsthate.org

youth. It is most important to be able to grab their attention because they are the future. Music and art will appeal to their interests and hold their attention. Success is imminent if 100% of communication is harnessed. Some organizations have recognized this power and are already using it to make a difference

The New England Biolabs Foundation is an independent and private organization that was started in 1982 to support grassroots organizations working with the environments, social change, the arts, elementary education, and science. The foundation learned that there were some women in a village in Guatemala that refused to take small bottles filled with chlorine to prevent the spread of cholera, and that 80% of the people in a village in Nigeria do not take free medicine to treat and prevent river blindness.¹¹

As a response to these problems, New England Biolabs Foundation developed "ArtCorps" in 1999 as a pilot project. This project uses volunteer artists to fill the communication gap between non-governmental organizations and their constituencies, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their messages. Artists who volunteer are encouraged to communicate any message on health, protection of the environment, sustainable agriculture, etc. by using skits, mimes, puppet shows, paintings, mask making, singing, and any other artistic media. This program was developed and is run on the belief that art can transcend

¹¹ "The Birth of ArtCorps" by Martine Kellet

language barriers and cultural differences. It is very successful and continues to expand throughout Central America.¹²

Language barriers do not only exist between people of different cultures, they are also present between children and adults. Children rarely have the language or the cognitive development to process and convey their experiences solely through words, and therefore social workers need to supplement modes of communication and engagement when working directly with children. Michelle Lefevre is a social worker, psychotherapist, and musician who believes music therapy is a strong tool for this problem.

Children, generally, formulate and communicate much of their experience, thoughts and feelings at a symbolic level. This is especially true for children who have been neglected or abused, further incapacitating their ability to express themselves verbally. When a piano or keyboard is introduced to therapy sessions, the child can communicate how certain situations make him or her feel without having to verbalize it. If the child chooses to bang violently on the keys while playing low notes vs. lightly tapping the keys while playing high notes, for example, much more is being communicated than one would think.¹³

For example, Julie, aged 11, struggled with expressing emotions and linking feelings to specific events and experiences. In

¹² "The Birth of ArtCorps" by Martine Kellet

¹³ "Playing with Sound" by Michelle Lefevre

therapeutic work following her neglect and reception into foster care, [Lefevre] encouraged her to play the same tune using different tones, supporting her to find words and experiences which expressed or corresponded to the mood created. This expanded Julie's emotional vocabulary, enabling her to begin to recognize and name internal experiences rather than resorting to behaviors such as self-hurting, compulsive eating and aggression.¹⁴

Music can further contribute directly to the process of engagement between child and client. When a child has been abused it is hard to get them to open up and trust another adult, no matter what is actually said to them. But in her study, Lefevre found that she could communicate this message using music by listening to compositions the child composed and then musically mirroring, reflecting and supporting them. This allows children to experience being met, accepted, and understood.

James' (13) musical play at the start of a period of therapeutically oriented work together was reflective of his general interaction with [Lefevre] - attempting to keep [Lefevre] at a distance, to unsettle, even intimidate [her]. (This mirrored his

¹⁴ "Playing with Sound" by Michelle Lefevre

relationships with other key figures, such as his foster carers and social worker.) He chose to improvise alone, using percussion along-side music from an audio tape which he had brought to the sessions. He played the tape at its fullest volume and struck the percussion instruments extremely loudly, very fast and frantically, using the microphone very close to the instruments to magnify its sound. Listening to a recording of these improvisations several times, he started being able to hear that he was far louder than the music and that there was an imbalance between the music and his rhythmic improvisation. He began to listen as he played to try to modify the balance. In later sessions he gradually invited [Lefevre] in to his play, at first commanding [her] to hold the triangle or tambourine as he hit it and eventually asking [her] to join in. Just as his behavior changed in the session, James began to modify some of his more uncontrolled, unthinking and non-relating behaviors within the foster placement, supporting the views of Kaser (1991) and Wilson (1990) who suggest that the discipline

of learning to modify the musical behavior in session (e.g. playing in tempo, matching speed and dynamics to the other's playing) will impact on the client's general mechanisms for self-control, increasing self-awareness and empathy.¹⁵

In addition to harnessing music to overcome language barriers, it is also a tool that can elicit emotions from the listener. An everyday example of this is music used in advertising.

Studies of music in advertising have been constructed by the theory of music as an emotionally manipulative stimulus that appears as a sensual backdrop and operates without cognitive intervention to achieve affective attachment. The tones themselves are thought to work independently and affectively, almost as mood-altering drugs.¹⁶

During a 1982 experiment, pictures of pens were coupled with varying music samples. Using the music as a tool that can directly manipulate mood without direct cognitive involvement, students were asked to respond to the music and then say which pen they were most likely to purchase. There was a direct correlation between music the students "liked" that left them with positive feelings, and the incentive to purchase the pen. This is regarded as the positive affect theory, where pleasant

¹⁵ "Playing with Sound" by Michelle Lefevre

¹⁶ "Understanding Jingles and Needledrops" by Linda Scott

background music results in positive association with the object, and a subconscious desire to purchase it.¹⁷

With something as simple as convincing someone which pen to buy, all one needs is a 30 second time slot. But to reverse something like racism, much more time is necessary if long-term results are sought. Cultural Awareness education is something that recognizes this fact and tries to capitalize on it.

In 1996, after the first week of Kindergarten, children at an elementary school in Los Angeles seemed to only be playing with other children who physically looked the most like them. Rea Kirk and Maggie Anicich then developed a kindergarten curriculum for cultural awareness. They started the program right away and the total duration was about 2 months.

Lessons involved daily journal writing (drawing), directed play, picture books from different cultures, ethnic songs, arts and crafts, and subject-related books. As a part of the first lesson a book called "Tim and Trisha" was read. It is a story about an ugly looking troll who becomes friend with a little girl. This was used as a demonstration that they should not choose who to play with based on what someone looks like, but what kind of person they are. The students were then challenged to make friends with classmates that did not look like them, just like the girl and the troll. For one day the children were asked to play with someone new, and then tell the class about it. When they returned from lunch one boy, Jorge, excitedly exclaimed "I

¹⁷ "Understanding Jingles and Needledrops" by Linda Scott

didn't know black kids liked to swing like me". The barriers started to fall.¹⁸

Charts were made that separated hair, skin, and eye color to show that two children may like the same thing even though one is black and the other white, while two other children may like different things even though that are both Asian.¹⁹

Many different countries of origin were discussed so that the children could develop an appreciation of their differences. Parents even began to help out with the classroom activities when they saw how excited their children were about what they discovered each day.²⁰

If programs like this were added to everyday curriculum in schools, along with music and art to help convey the message, racism really could be filtrated out of society. Even though it would be best to have long-term programs that start in elementary school, using the aspects of the aforementioned studies I developed my own pilot study to see if I could change the views of my peers, if even for a short period of time, and increase their compassion towards people who are different from them.

Method

Participants

Two classes with 49 students total were my participants.

¹⁸ "Dropping the Barriers in Kindergarten" by Maggie Anicich and Rea Kirk

¹⁹ "Dropping the Barriers in Kindergarten" by Maggie Anicich and Rea Kirk

²⁰ "Dropping the Barriers in Kindergarten" by Maggie Anicich and Rea Kirk

However, due to absences only 27 students completed all three parts of the study. Of those 27 students, nine were male and eighteen were female. Their participation was completely voluntary and they signed an informed consent (appendix A), which also made them aware that at any time they could pull themselves from the study and their participation, or lack there of, would have zero impact on their grade in the class. Approval was sought, and received, from the Salve Regina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this pilot study.

Materials

My materials included an online test developed at Harvard University known as the Race Implicit Association Test. This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin and indicates that most Americans have a preference of "white" over "black". The duration is about 10 minutes and can only be viewed online at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.jsp>. Upon completion, the subjects will be told if they have little to no preference, slight preference, moderate preference, or strong preference for one race over the other (appendix B). This online test was to be used as a rough gauge to see if each student is coming into the study with any racial bias, whether it is one they are aware of or not. However, due to the small size of participants not enough information was obtained to draw any definitive conclusions or correlations between the score on the IAT and compassion. More research would need to be done on this

using a larger sample size.

Procedure

Students were introduced briefly to the study by being informed that upon choosing to participate they would be viewing images and listening to statements, then rating each, respectively. They were given the informed consent and asked to think about their participation and then two days later, if they chose to participate, they were asked to hand in the informed consent. Students completed the on-line Race Implicit Association Test first.

Each class was then spilt in half by random designation of 1's and 2's. One week half the class was read a series of ten statements only (appendix E), while the other half of the class was read the same statements while watching a video montage of racial hate crimes accompanied by "sad" music. Two weeks later this was reversed. After each activity the students were asked to fill out a survey to score their overall feelings of compassion and empathy towards what they saw and heard (appendix C,D). The students were designated individual numbers before the tests started so that anonymity could be achieved.

Results

An independent t -test was calculated to assess any possible differences for order effects between students' responses to either the statements first or music first. The mean scores for statements $t(27) = 1.6518$, NS, (Mean Statements First = 5.8667, Mean Statements Second = 5.0000) and for music $t(27) = 0.9527$, NS

(Mean Music first = 6.5333, Mean Music Second = 6.2301) showed no order effects for compassion ratings.

There was no difference between the level of sadness evoked by the song as compared to the sadness evoked by the statements alone as indicated by a dependent t- test; $t(27) = 0.9100$, NS. (Mean Scores; Music = 5.5357, Statements = 5.1785)

The compassion rating (item 6 on the scale) was analyzed using a correlated groups t -test; $t(27) = 18.9014$, $p < .001$. The students rated compassion higher when exposed to the music / video montage with statements (Mean rating = 6.3928) as compared to the statements alone (Mean rating = 5.4643). The strength of this relationship as indicated by $\eta^2 = 0.9297$.

The ratings for questions (2-5) were combined as a measure of empathy. The empathy rating was analyzed using a correlated groups t -test; $t(27) = 4.318232$, $p < .001$. The students reported higher empathy when exposed to the music / video montage (Mean Music / Video = 25.1428) with statements as compared to the statements alone (Statements Mean = 23.25). The strength of this relationship as indicated by $\eta^2 = 0.4085$.

Discussion

The degree of sadness evoked by the students was equivalent based on their ratings, and showed no significant differences between the statements and music. Empathy approached significance and perhaps a larger sample size would demonstrate

the effects of how music/video can evoke stronger feelings of empathy.

There was support for the hypothesis that art in the form of music and images would evoke stronger feelings of compassion as shown by the significant difference between the scores on the compassion question, with music/video showing a higher compassionate rating. Based on Aronson's work on how compassion is an important factor in breaking down prejudice and discrimination, this is an important finding. If the use of art can evoke a stronger response of compassion, then that might be the first step in unlearning and changing prejudice and discrimination. More research however needs to be done in this area as well. Based on this pilot study and on the previous research done demonstrating the effectiveness of art as a communication form, I would recommend changing programs that combat prejudice and discrimination to include art forms as a part of their messages.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

This study is collecting student responses to some questions, music, and pictures. You will be asked to read some statements, then respond to them. In addition you will be asked to look at some pictures that contain some scenes of violence and may be upsetting to some people. After viewing some pictures you will be asked to respond to statements about those pictures. All responses will be confidential and anonymous to be summarized in group data for my Pell Thesis. All participation is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. You are invited to a debriefing of the study to be presented at my Pell Thesis defense on April 21st at 4:30pm in the Young Building. If you agree to participate please sign below, and thank you for your cooperation. **

Print Name:_____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

** If any of this material is of concern to you or raises any issue now or in the future, please contact the counseling department at 401-341-2919 or Dr. Paula J. Martasian of the Psychology Department at 401-341-3187

Appendix B

Your Number _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

For this online test go to
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.jsp>

Scroll down and click "Race IAT". The online test will begin and you will be prompted on what to do. It should take you less than 10 minutes total. Upon completion you will be asked to fill out a survey. This is unnecessary and you can just scroll down to the bottom and click "proceed". Please circle the results of your test and return to Dr. Martasian.

Little to No Preference

Strong Preference for Black over White

Moderate Preference for Black over White

Strong Preference for White over Black

Moderate Preference for White over Black

Other

Appendix C

Your Number _____

Circle the appropriate number: 7 being strongly agree; 1 strongly disagree

1. The statements read evoked from me feelings of sadness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. The statements I just heard made me sad.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I feel bad for the people in the statements.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I believe some people should be treated as the statements indicated.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I don't care about the people in the statements.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I feel compassionate towards the people in the statements.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Compassionate: Feeling deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it.

Appendix D

Your Number _____

Circle the appropriate number: 7 being strongly agree; 1 strongly disagree

1. The song evoked from me feelings of sadness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. The images I just saw made me sad.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I feel bad for the people in the images.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I believe some people should be treated as they were in those images.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I don't care about the people in the images.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I feel compassionate towards the people in the images.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Compassionate: Feeling deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it.

Appendix E

Fact Sheet

- African American children aged 12 and older are the most victimized group of people in America
- 62% of all hate crimes are geared towards African Americans in general
- Since September 11, 2001 it has gotten worse for people of Islamic decent as well, with hate crimes increasing by 70% since 2002
- Overall, 32 million Americans have been subjected to hate crimes since 9-11 ... that number is roughly equivalent to the entire population of Canada
- There also has been a significant and troubling growth of white supremacist activity in the past year alone, with reported crimes from all 50 states
- Members of these groups are now at roughly 50,000 people nation-wide
- Of all hate crimes committed annually, more than half are because of racial bias
- Almost 2/3 of reported attacks are committed by individuals who are under the age of 24
- No one, however, is born hating people who are different from them ... it is a learned response from parents, peers, and society in general. It can, and should be, reversed.