

Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

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By Samuel Mahaffy



Social Constructionists as Provocateurs for Peace - Creating Inclusive Dialogues for Local and Global Peace Making

How might we, who seek to live-into relational practices, be *provocateurs for peace*?" The lyrics of the great spiritual [Down by the Riverside](#) proclaim: "I ain't gonna study war no more." How might we make a difference in a world that is entranced and captivated with the notion of war and violent response to acts of terrorism and violence?

The social and linguistic co-construction of "The Enemy" as the projected *antagonistic other*, plays a central role in violent conflicts engulfing our world. It also dominates the collective response to these events. This predominant narrative grows from and enhances a division of our world into absolute oppositional categories of *friends vs. enemies, good vs. evil, and us vs. them*. The bifurcation of our world through the *friend/enemy* distinction in many ways defines the spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*) in which we live. World leaders and the major media coalesce around the dominant narrative of *the enemy* that is currently identified as ISIS. Our response to violent conflict keeps us trapped in *cause and effect* relationships and preempts our ability to find pathways out of cycles of perpetual violence and violent responses to violence. Alternative discourses about recent acts of violence are marginalized because any critique of the dominant discourse are frequently interpreted as a disruption to the global response to terrorism. But, even the discourse about peacemaking starts with the *a-priori* presumption of this ontological and epistemological duality of the *friend/enemy*.

If the co-construction of the dominant narrative about *the enemy* is dooming us to a perpetual state of violent conflict, where might we discover alternative and life-giving narratives? Is it precisely in disrupting the predominant narrative of *the enemy* that we open the possibility to escape from a cycle of perpetual violence?

I suggest that, as social constructionists and relational practitioners, we have a vital perspective to bring forward in a world that perpetually stumbles in its journey to seek peace and peaceful resolution of violent conflicts. We are in a unique place to be agents for peacemaking by both deconstructing the predominant discourse about war and retribution, while at the same time supporting the co-construction of new metaphors, new ways of speaking, new rituals and discourses of peace-making.

Dialogue, Disruption, and Inclusion: Stream 1: Topics of Study. Abstract of Presentation Proposal from Samuel Mahaffy, PhD.

I find compelling the notion of *relational presence* as a researched and lived approach to an alternative and inclusive discourse. The construct of *relational presence* allows us to move beyond *cause* and *effect* to a multi-voiced transformative dialogue. At the core of this approach, which grows from social constructionist ideas, decision-making science and linguistic analysis, is the notion that we must begin with the *relationship* instead of with the *agenda*, if we are to move beyond cycles of perpetual violence. We can be relational leaders in re-configuring the inquiry about conflict transformation and peacemaking. But how do we make peacemaking a lived practice in our homes, communities and globally rather than an abstract construct? It is the emerging frontier of my journey with the Taos Institute community to seek ways to integrate research, reflective practices and rituals that promote peace.

The African proverb--*When We Eat from a Common Dish, We Have No Enemies* --becomes a salient metaphor for not only promoting *dialogue* but also *just sharing* of the world's resources. This is the wisdom that the world is never clearly black or white. There may be *the friend* ontologically nestled and residing within our construct of *the enemy*. In the *presence* of the enemy is the *potential* for the friend with whom we can break bread. The notion of *hosting* or breaking bread together has historically served to disrupt the construct of *the enemy*. The one we share a meal with cannot remain faceless.

In *eating from the common dish* of shared ideas and co-discovered meanings, we might yet find together new and life-giving ways of responding purposefully and positively to the violence erupting in our world. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama writes: "The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds." As relational constructionists, might we be these peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds?

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[Researchers as Provocateurs for Peace](#). Presentation at the 5th International Qualitative Research in Management and Organization Conference. Dialogue, Disruption and Inclusion Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

Samuel Mahaffy's essay "[The Co-Construction of 'The Enemy': ISIS, Hegemony, and Self-Identity](#)" was first published on the Peace and Collaborative Development Network and on his website at www.samuelmahaffy.com

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