# It Starts With You: Promoting Peace and Civil Discourse in Our Lives

By Valerie R. Dalrymple (Faculty Mentor: Dr. Carol Robinson)

## Purpose

Over the past few years, we’ve seen a great deal of hatred and vitriol. People are trying to destroy one another and deny both the other and themselves the opportunity for productive, intellectual discourse. According to a 2020 survey by the CATO Institute, 62% of Americans of all races, income levels, education levels, and political leanings are afraid to express their true views. 32% worry that their opinions can negatively impact their employment.

**Is this what we want, for people to be afraid to express their views?**

It’s time to end the fear and hate, and start building a dialogue with one another based in mutual respect, mutual compassion, and mutual understanding.

---

## Gathering Information

Information was gathered using academic articles, periodicals, as well as polls to get the public’s current feelings as well as methods for getting people to come together and have constructive dialogues as opposed to harmful ones.

---

## Some Points of Discussion

- **Groupthink**, which may include self-censorship and adoption of negative views about perceived adversaries, comes about when certain views are impeded in favor of the views of dominant members of a group. To combat this, we should instead encourage debate and reflection.
- The **Spiral of Silence theory** discusses how people may refuse to express their views when they believe that their opinions are unpopular. Public opinion tends to be a factor of pressure. If we work toward creating a dialogue instead of an echo-chamber, the SOS may be diminished.
- **Megan Phelps-Roper**, granddaughter of Fred Phelps, the founder of the Westboro Baptist Church, met people who “calmly pressed her with questions, pointed out the logical inconsistencies in her positions, and presented opposing points of view. These few, she recalls, ‘didn’t abandon their beliefs or their principles, only their scorn.’” (Hersey 83)
- **Elise Boulding**, peace activist, actively encouraged a rhetoric of invitation instead of persuasion: one that seeks to “empower rather than power over.” (Cavin 396)
- **Niels Bohr**, Nobel laureate, once stated that openness is vital to cooperation. However, the depletion of mental resources may cause less openness to dissent.

---

## The Inspiration

This event was inspired by the many displays of hate and anger we’ve seen, from online threats of violence, to vicious attacks in the real world, and even the insurrection on January 6th. These things do not occur out of the blue; they are preceded by a hostile rhetoric that seeks to dehumanize the other, be it a party, a race, or any other group. In order to prevent further violence in the future, we should strive to replace hostile rhetoric with peaceful rhetoric where the other is humanized, not villainized, and each side is able to intellectually discuss and debate without fear of enmity and of being attacked verbally and physically.

---

## Sources