

The Genesis Therapy Center

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Embracing Your Inner Racist

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With racial tensions running high in many parts of the nation and world, the title of this article may seem like the last thing anyone ought to do. However, in such times, there is an opportunity to take stock of the inner racist in us all. That we all have an inner racist is a big statement, and I make it based on the psychological concept of the “cognitive schema.” A cognitive schema is a shortcut our brains take every day in order to be able to process the amount of information we take in at any given moment. We don’t have to ponder if our coffee mug will be sturdy enough to hold coffee because we already have an idea, a schema, of what a coffee cup is like. As an example, chances are, the image you have in your head right now is of a white coffee mug. It is no different when we encounter people; our brains take the shortcuts based on past experience to give us an idea of what a person may be like before we even meet them. For many people being racist is an abhorrent idea, and stereotypes are avoided, yet studies have shown that despite that conscious effort to avoid pigeonholing people, subconsciously we still do. The effects of “implicit bias,” as it is called, have been studied over the past twenty years. For more information on implicit bias and to test your own biases see: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

Ok, so we all have a tendency to take shortcuts and those shortcuts can lead us to make judgments based on race - what to do about it if it is largely subconscious? The first step is to be aware that we may all have this tendency. With this awareness, we can actively seek to understand when such shortcuts are useful and when they are harmful. Exposure to alternate options can shape and change an existing cognitive schema so the more we consider our automatic reactions, the more we can count on having the reactions we’d like to have.

Reference: “Unlearning” automatic biases: The malleability of implicit prejudice and stereotypes. Rudman, Laurie A.; Ashmore, Richard D.; Gary, Melvin L.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 81(5), Nov 2001, 856-868. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.5.856>

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela

The Genesis Therapy
Center’s

12th Annual

KidPower Benefit

Sunday October 25, 2015

2 to 6pm at Gaelic Park in

Oak Forest

The Reality of Race

Charmaine Jake-Matthews, D.Min., LCPC

When you hear the word “race”, what comes to mind? With what race do you identify? When you meet a person, do you make an effort to identify his race? If so, what clues do you use? Skin color? Hair texture? Thickness of the lips?

Racial identity is a significant part of human relations in the United States of America. This significance is apparent in entertainment, advertising, media and social interactions. Even a job application reminds us that we are of different races and that this difference is significant.

Given the emphasis on race in our country, it seems reasonable to ask the question, “What is race and how is it defined?” The answer may surprise you. Many assume that race is a biological fact. That is, we assume that people of a given race share genetic commonalities that distinguish them from people of other races. Interestingly, the scientific evidence simply does not support this idea. The reality is that there is more genetic variability within a single race than there is between races (Marks, 2010). In other words, as a Black person, it is quite possible that I share more genetic material with one of my White colleagues than with one of my Black colleagues. Thus, the genetic evidence makes it clear that there is one race, the human race (Fuentes, 2012).

What then is race? If it is not a biological fact, what is it? It is a sociological construct. In other words, racial groups are defined by our interpretations of observable differences in physical appearance combined with cultural and geographical differences.

The result is a set of ‘racial categories’ with unclear and ever changing boundaries (Fuentes, 2012).

Given this knowledge, two things are apparent. First, our cultural and ethnic identities, which to some degree are related to our racial identities, are very important to us. My knowledge that race is a sociological construct does not change my understanding of and appreciation for the history of African-Americans and how it has influenced my development as a Black woman in America. I am still proud of and intimately connected to this history. As you read this article, I am sure that you feel the same way about your ethnic, cultural and/or racial identity.

Second, this knowledge has the potential to free us from the racial division that has long dominated the thinking of most people in this country. The knowledge that there is no fundamental biological difference between myself and a person of another race, allows me to interact with that person more genuinely. I do not approach her with preconceived notions about the way “they are”. Instead, I approach her as a member of the human race. I take the time to get to know her based on the merit of her character and decide how I will relate to her using that information. I am sure that you find liberty in knowing that you can approach your fellow human beings in the same manner.

Fuentes, A. (2012). Race is real, but not in the way many people think: Busting the myth of biological race. *Psychology Today*.

Marks, Jonathan (2010). Ten facts about human variation. In M.P. Muehlenbein (Ed.), *Human evolutionary biology* (pp. 265-276). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

We offer ongoing support groups for parents and ongoing social skills groups for children.

Please call 708-535-7320 for more information, locations and times.

The Genesis Therapy Center

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