

## On the Bright Side: Why I Support Peace Day Philly

*Why should we look into the potential of the systems thinking and positive peace? Looking at the bright side of the world does not mean ignoring the dark side, but accepting the ambiguity, suspension of immediate rewards, and holistic understanding of the systems that sustain our attitudes.*

*By Mariko Siegert*

If we meditate on the idea of 'peace', we may think of something utopian and/or harmonious - without starving children, people packed on a boat in the middle of the ocean, airstrikes, bullet holes in the wall of schools, sounds of gunfire, physical and sexual exploitation, and so forth.

Yet precisely because of those these harmonious images of an ideal world, some people may have given up on peacebuilding. When we look around, the world looks far different.

"Is world peace attainable?" "Do you really think it is possible?" "I think you are wasting your time."

I do not know how many times people I was just getting to know have questioned my passion for global peacebuilding efforts. It is true there has not been a single day in my life (at least as far as I can recall) that I did not hear of someone suffering. Human suffering is too ubiquitous.

Norwegian peace researcher Dr. Johan Galtung stated in his *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* (1969) that the idea of peace should begin with the following three principles:

- 1) The term peace shall be used for social goals at least verbally agreed to by many, if not necessarily by most.
- 2) These social goals may be complex and difficult, but not impossible, to attain.
- 3) The statement peace is absence of violence shall be retained as valid.

What does this mean? Dr. Galtung holds the belief that violence, even on the individual or interpersonal level, is embedded in the social system; thus it is more appropriate to consider peacebuilding as a social goal, without placing the responsibility solely on individuals. Violence researchers (note: *NOT* peace researchers) have increasingly been paying attention to the role of the systems in violence prevention and promotion of human welfare (Chan, Hollingsworth, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2016; Howell et al., 2016; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016; Shaw, McLean, Taylor, Swartout, & Querna, 2016). Galtung also stresses the importance of staying realistic and focused on problem-solving of today's political, intellectual, and scientific agenda (Galtung, 1969).

We can break this down to say, that peace is a shared goal of today's society that requires systemic problem-solving and social change. Dr. Galtung is the one that proposed the concept of structural violence--*any avoidable human suffering is a form of violence*. For example, deaths from tuberculosis in most of the high-income countries today is a form of structural violence but it was not in the 1930s.

When we say we want peace, we are not necessarily being delusional or envisioning a utopia. We may mean that we do not want to witness human suffering, or we may also mean that we want to see more happiness. The point here is that we probably do not think of peace in an 'all-or-none' fashion, but rather, our desire is to move closer to the state of positive peace (i.e., "the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies"; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015, p. 7).

*So, is the world peace attainable?*

I would say yes -- it is attainable, but may take generations or even centuries. It may even have to be built upon shared compromises. This means that we may not ever achieve the perfect form of positive peace. This certainly sounds rather passive and not ideal. If we try to build the system that sustains peaceful societies, however, the realistic and attainable, and *widely agreed-upon*, image of peace is not a utopia. Peace is built on the respect for others' rights. By creating a culture, or systems, that respect others' rights and encourage us to be patient and cognitively flexible, I imagine it would become more difficult to focus on the negatives in our lives and the world and become easier to focus on problem-solving.

This is definitely one of the many reasons why I support Peace Day Philly. It is a local initiative dependent on collaborations among groups, organizations, and participants with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and orientations. This is a grassroots effort to create a culture of peace.

#### References

- Chan, W. Y., Hollingsworth, M. A., Espelage, D. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2016). Preventing violence in context: The importance of culture for implementing systemic change. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(1), 22-26. doi=10.1037/vio0000021
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Howell, K. H., Coffey, J. K., Fosco, G. M., Kracke, K., Nelson, S. K., Rothman, E. S., & Gruch, J. H. (2016). Seven reasons to invest in well-being. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(1), 8-14. doi=10.1037/vio0000019
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2015). *Positive peace report 2015*. New York, NY: Author.
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2016). *Global peace index 2016*. New York, NY: Author.
- Shaw, J., McLean, K. C., Taylor, B., Swartout, K., & Querna, K. (2016). Beyond resilience: Why we need to look at systems too. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(1), 34-41. doi=10.1037/vio0000020