

## Our Shared Humanity: Bridging the Great Divide of Different Religions

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**Abstract :** Background: Connection is a primal need established during infancy and reiterated in many forms of social interaction. When we make connections with others we experience growth, continuity, and gain an understanding of the other's sense of the world. Feeling socially connected to another individual or community has been shown to increase self-esteem, happiness, and meaning. However, feeling connected to another individual or a specific community may also decrease the motivation to seek connection with more distant individuals or communities. Furthermore, we allow ourselves to interact with those in other communities as apart from us, and in some cases, to dehumanize their existence. Objective: The aim of this project is to bridge the gap between different communities, specifically religious communities and foster feelings of connection as one with all members through the medium of art, specifically photography. Method: Members of all major faiths including Agnosticism, Atheism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Ismaili, Jewish, Ja'far Shia, Sunni will be interviewed. Participants will be asked to partake in a brief interview of two parts: A. Answering two questions: 1. What are you most looking forward to in the future, and why? 2. What does religion mean to you? B. Having their picture taken. Our questions aim to elicit individual stories that together, show that we have more in common, than differences, despite our faiths. With the completion of the interviews, the responses will be compiled together and major themes will be identified. Impact: The resulting stories and corresponding individual pictures provide an excellent opportunity to encourage and inspire people to get to know those of other beliefs and values, participate in each other's communities and develop a sense of oneness within our shared humanity. Knowledge translation: The personal stories, and the common themes they illustrate, will be shared with various audiences, including the general public, academia and targeted groups such as students. This will be done through displaying the photographs and responses at art galleries, conferences, in print and online.

**Keywords :** social justice, religion, connection, understanding, community

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