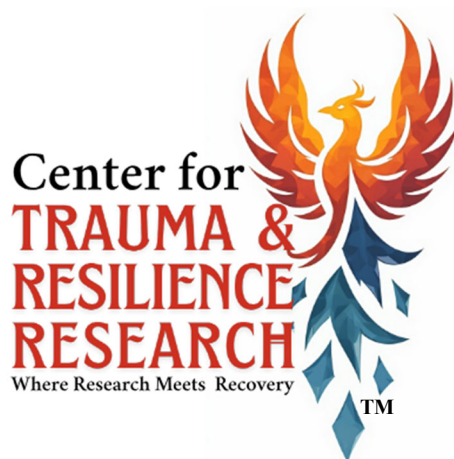**Contemporary Issues of Peace:**

**Emotional, Embodied, Relational, Cultural, and Clinical Challenges**

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**Abstract**

Contemporary discussions of peace frequently emphasize the reduction of violence, conflict, and insecurity, yet emerging scholarship increasingly frames peace as an affective and relational reality shaped by bodies, relationships, institutions, and cultural ideals. This essay reviews contemporary issues of peace through an interdisciplinary lens, highlighting how emotional climates, threat-based polarization, gendered discourses, mediated intimacy, and the commodification of wellness reshape what peace means and who can access it. Research on emotional climate and cultures of peace suggests that collective affective patterns influence trust, human security, and the perceived plausibility of peaceful coexistence (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, 2007). At the interpersonal and political levels, emotions and emotion regulation—particularly fear, anger, humiliation, and identity threat—can become barriers to peace even when peace is cognitively endorsed (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). At the intrapersonal level, contemporary clinical frameworks increasingly connect peace to embodied regulation, low-arousal positive affect, and felt safety, supported by mindfulness and compassion practices (Gilbert et al., 2008; Khoury et al., 2017; McManus et al., 2024; Porges, 2006). Across these domains, peace is not merely a political end-state but an ongoing, contested practice involving emotion, power, meaning, and relational repair. Implications are discussed for peace education, trauma-informed care, and culturally responsive peacebuilding.

*Keywords*: peace; emotional climate; emotion regulation; felt safety; embodiment; trauma; mindfulness; reconciliation; cultural context

**Contemporary Issues of Peace:**

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**Contemporary Issues of Peace**

*Peace Beyond "No War": From Negative Peace to Lived Emotional Reality*

A major contemporary issue in peace scholarship is the persistent tendency to equate peace with the absence of direct violence or overt conflict, while under-attending to lived emotional realities such as fear, mistrust, humiliation, and dysregulated threat responses. Research on cultures of peace and emotional climate highlights that peace is sustained (or undermined) by shared affective patterns—public moods of safety, hope, resentment, or despair—that shape social cooperation and perceived human security (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; De Rivera et al., 2007). The social sharing of emotion further links individual experience to collective processes, as communities narrate, amplify, and stabilize shared feelings that become "normal" for a society (Rimé, 2007). Thus, peace is increasingly understood as a multidimensional social-emotional achievement rather than a purely geopolitical arrangement.

This shift also aligns with broader emotion science: emotions are not only private feelings but coordinated systems involving appraisal, physiological regulation, action tendencies, and meaning-making (Gross, 1998; Posner et al., 2005; Russell, 1980). Contemporary peace concerns therefore include how individuals and groups interpret threat, regulate affect, and sustain relational openness within complex sociopolitical environments (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Luterbacher, 2017).

*Emotional Polarization, Threat, and the Regulation Problem in Intractable Conflict*

In contemporary conflicts, peace is often blocked less by a lack of information and more by emotion-linked identity dynamics. Emotional barriers to peace include fear, anger, hatred, and moral outrage—affects that can function as "psychological infrastructure" sustaining polarization and resistance to compromise (Halperin, 2011). In intractable conflict, emotion regulation becomes a public and political issue: when threat is chronically activated, people may endorse peace as an ideal while simultaneously rejecting concrete peace processes perceived as unsafe or identity-threatening (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). This makes the contemporary problem of peace partly a problem of regulation—how individuals and societies downshift from defensive reactivity into conditions where negotiation, empathy, and coexistence become emotionally plausible.

Reconciliation and coexistence efforts also increasingly attend to the emotional and narrative conditions that enable transformation. Victims' narratives can influence attitudes, empathy, and openness to peaceful coexistence, suggesting that storytelling and meaning-making are not peripheral but central to peace processes (Castro-Abril et al., 2025). At the same time, emotional legacies of war can persist as embodied vigilance, distrust, and moral injury long after formal conflict ends, complicating reintegration and social repair (Nussio, 2012; Long & Brecke, 2002). These dynamics point to a contemporary challenge: peacebuilding must address not only structures and agreements but also emotional legacies and identity-linked appraisals.

*Peace as Embodied Regulation: Nervous Systems Under Threat*

Another contemporary issue is the growing recognition that peace is embodied. Chronic stress, trauma exposure, and social insecurity shape peace at the level of physiology and interoception—how people experience internal states and interpret safety. Trauma and

dysregulation can reduce access to internal cues and disrupt the capacity to sustain calm presence, relational openness, and coherent meaning (Liberman et al., 2023; Tedeschi, 1995). In this view, peace is not simply a belief; it is a psychophysiological state supported by regulatory capacity.

Neuroscience and affective models further underscore that low-arousal positive affect (e.g., calm contentment) is distinct and can be psychologically protective, yet it is often culturally shaped and socially distributed unevenly (McManus et al., 2024; Tsai, 2007). Felt safety has been conceptualized as a specific affect regulation system linked to depression, anxiety, and self-criticism, suggesting that cultivating safety and contentment may be clinically relevant to peace (Gilbert et al., 2008). Physiological perspectives (e.g., polyvagal theory and neurovisceral integration) similarly emphasize autonomic regulation as foundational to social engagement and flexible coping (Porges, 2006; Thayer & Lane, 2000).

Consequently, contemporary peace work increasingly intersects with embodied and mindfulness-based approaches. Mindfulness interventions are theorized to operate via attentional, emotional, and neural mechanisms that strengthen regulation and reduce reactivity (Hölzel et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Tang et al., 2015). Embodied mindfulness frameworks stress that practice is not only cognitive but enacted through posture, breath, movement, and ethical orientation (Grossman, 2015; Khoury et al., 2017; Khoury et al., 2025). Applied studies also link mindfulness training to inner peace and emotion regulation in diverse populations (Gong et al., 2025). A contemporary issue, therefore, is translating embodied regulation into scalable, culturally responsive supports without reducing peace to an individual self-management task.

**The Commodification and Cultural Politics of Peace and Wellness**

A pressing contemporary issue is the cultural and economic shaping of "peace" as a desirable state—often marketed through wellness industries and therapeutic cultures. Critiques of "mindfulness inc." highlight how practices aimed at liberation or compassion can become commodified, individualized, and detached from structural determinants of suffering (Nisbet, 2019). Therapeutic culture can also reframe peace as inner healing and personal growth while underemphasizing relational, political, or economic contexts (Althouse, 2023; Phillips & Jakes Roberts, 2023). This creates a tension: while self-regulation practices can be genuinely helpful, they can also be socially deployed in ways that implicitly blame individuals for distress produced by unjust conditions.

This tension intersects with power and governance. Historical and sociological perspectives on "governing passions" point to how emotional norms are cultivated for social order and legitimacy (Andrade, 2020; Ventsel & Selg, 2025). Emotional labor research also shows how institutions shape the expression of positivity, calmness, and friendliness—sometimes masking distress or injustice and producing burnout (Cossette & Hess, 2015). Contemporary peace, then, involves contested emotional expectations: who is expected to be calm, forgiving, or "neutral," and whose anger is deemed illegitimate?

**Gendered Discourses, Neutrality, and the Emotional Politics of Peace**

Contemporary peace is also shaped by gendered representations and the politics of neutrality. Neutrality can be framed as weak, immoral, or naïve, especially when peace advocacy is coded as insufficiently "serious" about security threats (Agius, 2024). Such discourses do not merely reflect beliefs; they shape the emotional permission structures of public life—who is allowed to advocate for de-escalation, what emotions are considered credible, and what forms of peace are stigmatized. Gender and emotion scholarship further demonstrates that emotional

norms are historically and culturally patterned, influencing authority, belonging, and moral legitimacy (Broomhall, 2015; Hunt, 2011). A contemporary issue is that peace work can be undermined when it is framed as sentimental or feminine, rather than as a disciplined social practice requiring courage, skill, and strategic realism.

**Technology, Mediated Intimacy, and Emerging "Affective Infrastructures"**

Digital environments increasingly structure emotional climates by shaping what is seen, shared, and amplified. Mediated intimacy research shows that technology can sustain care across distance, but also reorganizes emotional expectations, obligations, and vulnerability (Alinejad, 2021). Emerging work on AI and participatory technologies highlights that embodied and relational experiences remain central even in technologically mediated contexts, raising questions about how "peaceful" interaction and trust are designed into systems (Graves, 2023; Hess, 2020). In educational contexts, AI-generated feedback may influence motivation and "peace of mind," suggesting that emotional experience is increasingly co-produced by human–machine interaction (Mohammed & Khalid, 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).

A contemporary issue is therefore the governance of affective infrastructures: algorithms, platforms, and AI systems that shape collective mood, attention, and interpersonal trust. Peace becomes not only a social or political aspiration but also a design challenge—how to support dignity, safety, and constructive emotion regulation within mediated public spheres.

**Peace Education and Leadership in an Age of Dysregulation**

In schools and communities, contemporary peace concerns include aggression, exclusion, trauma exposure, and disciplinary inequities. Peace education increasingly integrates emotional intelligence, skill-based conflict navigation, and prosocial climate building (Bardol & Connor, 2013; Trujillo, 2019). Leadership studies likewise emphasize emotional intelligence as

foundational for peace leadership, suggesting that contemporary peace requires cultivated capacities: self-awareness, empathy, regulation, and repair (Haber-Curran, 2024). Programs targeting children's emotional intelligence have shown promise for reducing aggression and improving relational climates (Wong & Power, 2024). "Peace spaces" in schools reflect an applied turn toward environmental and behavioral supports that make regulation possible in everyday life (Liang et al., 2024; Djabrayan Hannigan & Hannigan, 2020).

At the same time, peace education must grapple with traumatic conflict and historical harm. Educational scholarship argues that healing and peace require addressing traumatic memories, structures of feeling, and the "mood work" demanded of students and teachers in politicized contexts (Zembylas, 2015, 2021). This is a contemporary issue of equity: peace skills cannot be taught as neutral techniques detached from lived histories, cultural meanings, and structural vulnerabilities.

**Peace in Healthcare: Meaning, Spiritual Support, and Quality of Life**

Another contemporary issue is the increasing clinical recognition of peace as a measurable outcome related to suffering, quality of life, and existential integration. In serious illness, unmet spiritual care needs can significantly impact emotional and spiritual well-being, suggesting that peace is relational and meaning-centered, not merely intrapsychic (Pearce et al., 2012). Interventions addressing emotional and existential needs in palliative care contexts demonstrate that peace, equanimity, and acceptance can be supported through structured communication and meaning-centered care (Steinhauser et al., 2017; Strada, 2013).

Measurement work also supports peace as a construct connected to mental health and well-being (Sauer et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2013; Kreitzer et al., 2009). A scoping review of "peace of mind" after mastectomy further illustrates how peace becomes a salient patient-centered

outcome in high-stakes medical decisions (Hamid et al., 2024), while shared decision-making research highlights the cognitive and emotional skills required to support meaningful choices under uncertainty (Stalnikowicz & Brezis, 2020).

In culturally diverse contexts, peace is also shaped by acculturation, cultural meaning systems, and spiritual traditions (García-Jimenez et al., 2014; Moodley et al., 2018; Misra & Misra, 2024). This points to a contemporary issue: healthcare systems may assess symptoms while neglecting the culturally situated conditions for peace—belonging, meaning, spiritual support, and relational safety.

**Individual Differences, Culture, and Measurement: Who Gets to Feel Peace?**

Contemporary peace research increasingly examines individual differences and cultural specificity. Personality traits show associations with peace attitudes, suggesting that dispositional factors interact with social contexts (Cavarra et al., 2021; McMartin, 2016). Yet culture shapes ideal affect—what emotional states are valued and pursued—meaning that "peace" may not be uniformly defined across societies (Tsai, 2007; Misra & Misra, 2024). Research on peace of mind as a construct suggests it is measurable and linked to well-being, but its meaning and pathways may vary culturally (Lee et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2024). Individual differences in peace of mind may reflect adaptive emotion regulation styles (Sikka et al., 2023), and gratitude and positive reappraisal may predict well-being in relation to peace of mind (Du & Liu, 2025).

Thus, a contemporary issue is measurement with humility: assessing peace without imposing a culturally narrow emotional ideal. Peace may manifest as calm contentment, relational openness, moral clarity, acceptance, or spiritual trust—each shaped by context and tradition (Kalmykova, 2021; Watts, 2013; Sleight et al., 2021).

**Everyday Peace, Mobility, and Postcolonial Contexts**

Peace is increasingly studied as an everyday practice in contexts where violence and insecurity persist. Work on embodied everyday peace argues that peace is enacted through daily routines, relationships, and micro-practices of survival and dignity, even amid ongoing violence (Berents, 2015). Peacebuilding scholarship also highlights mobility—displacement, migration, and transnational flows—as a contemporary condition shaping conflict and coexistence (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2019). Postcolonial contexts underscore that justice, healing, and peace often unfold through local modes of repair that may not align with external institutional models (Marongwe et al., 2019). These perspectives challenge simplistic narratives that peace is "installed" via treaties, emphasizing instead the lived, embodied, and culturally situated labor of peace.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary issues of peace extend beyond the cessation of violence to the emotional, embodied, relational, cultural, and institutional conditions that make peaceful life possible. Emotional climates shape trust and human security (Basabe & Valencia, 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007), while threat, identity dynamics, and emotion regulation can block peace even in the presence of political will (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). Embodied regulation and felt safety are increasingly recognized as foundations for peace, connecting trauma-informed care and peacebuilding to nervous system functioning (Gilbert et al., 2008; Porges, 2006). Meanwhile, gendered discourses, mediated affect, and wellness commodification shape which forms of peace are legitimized and accessible (Agius, 2024; Alinejad, 2021; Nisbet, 2019). The emerging interdisciplinary picture suggests peace is both an outcome and a practice—cultivated

through embodied regulation, relational repair, cultural responsiveness, and meaning-centered care across education, healthcare, and civic life.

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