The Ku Klux Klan is made up of many chapters that promote a movement towards “racial segregation and white supremacy,” according to the Anti-Defamation League. The KKK has the largest number of organized hate groups in America; it is considered to have around 5,000 members nation-wide (ADL, 2008). Originally, the KKK focused on being anti-African American, but that has changed to include aggressive hatred towards homosexuals, select Christians, immigrants, and Jews, as well.2

The Southern Poverty Law Center states that the number of hate groups that are believed to be operating in America has risen by 48% since 2000 (SPLC, 2007). The internet is often looked at for playing a big part in the rise of people joining hate groups and how easy it is to access these hate group websites via the internet in the privacy of our own homes. For example, Hateforum.com is a website for hate group members of all kinds to exchange ideas and experiences.

The Ku Klux Klan uses the internet to recruit new members through websites that display symbols, colors and music that potential members find alluring.

...white supremacists and others in the hate movement use symbols like swastikas, ‘SS’ thunderbolts, runes and group logos to intimidate individuals and communities. Hate symbols are more than just ‘signs’ demonstrating racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Christian attitudes and beliefs—these symbols are meant to instill a sense of fear and insecurity...These symbols give haters a sense of power and belonging, and a quick way of identifying with others who share their ideology (ADL).

The symbolism used by the hate groups extends to a representation of their message, as well. “14 (words)” symbolizes the KKK’s main slogan, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” This slogan...
is 14 words long, so the number "14" is not only a symbol, but it is also an accelerated and "catchy" way to get the message into potential members' heads, as well as ensuring greater ease in which to pass the message on to others.

The KKK gets little financial support; much of it comes from the sale of paraphernalia and membership fees (ADL). So, the ability for members to get their message out is imperative for recruitment. This is done through free "advertising" by its members, such as tattoos, music, and goods, that promote KKK slogans and symbols (ADL). "Klan jams" are often used to unite members of Klan groups and promote their message as well. The KKK gets their message out through both meetings amongst themselves or by joining with other racist, skin-head or neo-Nazi groups that share a similar message (ADL). The ADL writes, "Many Ku Klux Klan groups have attempted to take advantage of that fear and uncertainty, using anti-immigration sentiments for recruitment and propaganda purposes, and to attract publicity."

In order for the KKK to get their message out and recruit, they need to appeal to values such as belonging and control. Symbols, slogans, rhymes, and other affective connotations provide a quick way to feel a part of a group. Slanting techniques, such as repetitiveness and associations used with words, are also alluring to people looking for a group that will approve of misplaced anger and even "like" that side of them that they may have been led to believe is unacceptable by their parents, schools, and/or communities. In the film, *Faces of the Enemy* (Jersey & Friedman, 1987), we see how it's the idea, not the gun, that is the most powerful weapon. This underlies the concept that our language and thinking really do determine who and what we become. *Faces of the Enemy* also shows how people who are feeling threatened or who feel like their life is crumbling are more likely to look to hate groups for a sense of belonging and control.

Aside from the increasing danger that bombs, guns, and other violent instruments create for innocent bystanders, the two-valued orientation of members of hate groups feeds on fear, insecurity, and the idea that there is "not enough for all of us." These are the beliefs and values that they would instill in children and invest in for our future. However, if we can convince people to become open to different viewpoints and see life from a more multi-valued position, there are some solutions.

In *Faces of the Enemy*, the notion of what a person believes is at the heart of enemy-making. So, what we believe in would be a good point to begin. Understanding that could lead to developing ourselves into stronger and more ethical human beings. By establishing what we value and understanding
where that value comes from, we can change our perception of something and gain an appreciation for differences in ourselves. If we do this, eventually our understanding, appreciation, and acceptance for the differences in others will follow. This holds true for parents and children; if parents develop themselves and model that image, the children will see their external actions and be accepting (instead of judging) of that change also. This could be a hopeful place to begin an action plan that can be used to reverse the effects unjustly done to others by groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

From the viewpoint of general semantics, the idea of a “faulty” belief system is described by Hayakawa as a “disbelief system.” He says:

...if you are chronically insecure or anxious or frightened, you cling desperately to your belief system, and you are too busy defending yourself against real or imagined threats to take in information about the disbelief system. That is, if “communism” and “socialism” are both part of your disbelief system, the more frightened you are, the less you are able to distinguish between them (Hayakawa, 1992, p.148).

In order to “de-frighten” ourselves, we need an environment where we can feel safe. Feeling safe is often found among groups that offer a sense of belonging. Learning the practice of meditation is another way of bringing a sense of calm and peace of mind to life. Once we feel a sense of safety and security, we can change our two-valued thinking into multi-valued thinking, work our way down the ladder of abstraction and see that the world is not all black and white. This could be a starting point towards changing our beliefs and negative mind-sets.

As we become aware of how much hate really is around us every day, we should look at ourselves and evaluate whether we contribute to hate in society, or ignore it in our everyday lives, or actually do what we can towards changing it in our lives. I believe that we can create a positive world if every individual begins by looking at themselves first. By changing how we perceive things, we can have a positive impact on the direction of our world.

References
