

## Some Contributions of Psychology to Policies Promoting Cultures of Peace

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Psychologists have a long history of contributing to the development, implementation, advocacy, and evaluation of public policies, but not always in the interest of peace and social justice. This article advances 9 psychologically based principles to guide policy development and activism in the interest of peace and social justice. The principles include: debunking biological determinism as a cause of violence, war, and other problems that have substantial cultural and structural roots; reducing the wealth gap as a means of promoting human well-being; distinguishing conflict from violence and attaching inevitability only to the former; delegitimizing the use of violence at all levels of society; promoting nonviolent social action to redress injustices; stepping-up communication in the face of enmity; putting the struggle for social justice at the center of psychology; promoting equality between men and women; and emphasizing the prevention of violence over intervention.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly (1998) used the term *Culture of Peace* very broadly, referring to a set of “values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on principles” (p.1) that promote nonviolence and social justice. A total of eight “keys” that comprise a Culture of Peace have been delineated by the United Nations Culture of Peace Programme: nonviolence, human rights, tolerance and solidarity, equality of women and men, sustainable development, democracy, free flow of information, and peace education.

Discussions of ways in which psychologists can contribute to a Culture of Peace have been ongoing for a number of years. In 1994, UNESCO commissioned a background paper by the Committee for the Psychological Study of Peace (1994) of the International Union of Psychological Science. The paper highlights some of the contributions of psychology to peace and social justice. In addition, Psychologists for or Social Responsibility (PsySR), a United States-based nonprofit association of psychologists, has been focusing its attention on the building of cultures of peace. In 1999, the symposium in Costa Rica provided an opportunity for one of the authors (Anne Anderson) to pull together examples of what U.S. psychologists are doing to build cultures of peace. In the ensuing months, we have continued to think through the connections between psychologically driven principles and the eight keys advanced by the Programme of Action.

There are numerous ways psychologists can contribute to a Culture of Peace, many of which have been delineated by Wessells, Schwebel, and Anderson (2001). These include (a) consulting in the design, training, and evaluation of programs for UN agencies and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs); (b) developing organizations that contribute to peace and social justice within and outside psychology; (c) sensitizing the public to the psychological substrates of peace and social justice issues; and (d) informing and influencing public policy. In this article, we focus on psychologically informed principles that promote peace and social justice and we cite selected policies that are consistent with these principles. These principles do not neatly conform to the broad goals of the Programme and, indeed, often cut across several. Accordingly, in this article, we delineate principles that are derived from sound psychological research and, whenever appropriate, allude to the keys of the Culture of Peace Programme.

Throughout, we use the term *policy* to refer to principles that guide action. Policy may prescribe certain practices, such as training in cultural sensitivity and the co-construction of problem frames. Policy also may proscribe other actions, such as cultural imperialism, the use of psychological principles to violate human rights, and desensitizing individuals in the face of threats to their well-being.

Although psychologists can play important roles in policy development, implementation, advocacy, and evaluation, we should note at the outset that some psychologists are skeptical about the use of psychological principles to inform policy and argue that policy issues are beyond the scope of the science of psychology (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1992). The crux of the argument is that taking positions on controversial issues can damage the credibility of psychology as a science. Our view is that psychologists have been largely reactive, finding themselves attending to human needs as a result of policies that promote direct and structural forms of violence. Indeed, psychologists are increasingly being called on to engage in societal reconstruction, to assist victims of violence around the world (United Nations [UN], 1997), and to deal with the structural violence of unfettered market driving policies that produce an ever widening gap in material well-being (Pilisuk, 2001).

Secondly, psychology is not value-neutral. For instance, psychological methods have been used to promote the hegemony of the United States in a number of ways. In the military sphere, psychologists have used their skills to desensitize soldiers' fear of atomic exercises, treat posttraumatic stress disorders, develop placement tests for military personnel, create propaganda to demoralize the enemy, and apply human factors research in the design of weaponry (Christie, Wagner, & Winter, 2001; Morawski & Goldstein, 1985). One further point is that psychologists have been unusually timid in publicly taking positions on policy matters. As Miller (1972) noted: "Economists, politicians, physicists, editorialists, munitions manufacturers and 'philosophers' have not hesitated to advise society on problems of social motivation, the inevitability of war as 'inherent in human nature' and the like" (p. 221). Silence is often perceived as complicity and inaction can be a form of action, so there is really no escape from the responsibility of deciding how and when to use psychological principles to build more peaceful societies.

It would be folly not to recognize the significance of human psychology in problems of security, fear, destructive ideologies, enemy images, and a host of other concerns that bear on human well-being and survival. Accordingly, we offer an explicit set of psychologically based principles that can be used to guide activism in the interest of peace and social justice. The list of principles is not meant to be exhaustive, but invites continuing discussion of the capacity of psychology to build cultures of peace. The principles are numbered only for sake of organization, not to rank them in order. We also appreciate that our colleagues living in different cultures and circumstances have much to offer in the growth of our collective understanding of ways in which these principles, and others, are mediated by culture.

### PRINCIPLE 1: BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM CAN PROMOTE VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL INJUSTICES

The Preamble of UNESCO's (1949) constitution sets the context for a psychocultural analysis, declaring that "wars begin in the minds of men." In its contemporary version, peace requires more than political and economic arrangements, "it must be constructed in the minds of men and women" (UNESCO, 1997, p. 5). The notion that the minds of men and women might be predisposed to violence was critically examined and debunked by representatives of the scientific community from around the world who gathered in Seville, Spain in the 1980s. The Seville Statement on Violence (cf. Adams, Barnett, Bechtereva, & Carter, 1990) made it clear that although humans have the *potential* to make war, it is not biologically determined. Hence war making is not an immutable part of human nature, nor are wars *inevitable*. Humans have invented war and are likewise capable of inventing peace.

Biological determinism underplays the contribution of structural and cultural factors in a range of issues that bear on violence and social justice including war making, gender differences, mental illness, the distribution of intelligence, and “us versus them” thinking, all of which cut across the UN’s keys for a culture of peace. There is growing concern among some psychologists that professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association, will continue a trend toward conceptualizing mental disorders and other socially produced problems as genetically caused disturbances (G. W. Albee, D. Miller, E. Tobach, and B. Zahm, personal communication, August 4, 2000), thereby promoting medical interventions and leaving social conditions conveniently unaddressed. Clearly, we support policies that question biological determinism as the cause of war, mental disorders, and other problems that are vested in the preservation of structure-based inequalities.

## PRINCIPLE 2: REDUCING THE WEALTH GAP PROMOTES HUMAN WELL-BEING

As an agenda for the future, socially responsible psychologists could not only challenge explanations based on biological determinism but also insist that adequate attention is paid to cultural and social dimensions of violence and social injustices. While serving as President of Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR), Albee (1999) offered an example of a policy recommendation consistent with reducing the wealth gap. Based on the principle that mental health is more strongly affected by social circumstances than biological influences, Albee made the case for doubling the U.S. minimum wage. He argued that such a policy is supported by empirical evidence demonstrating that nations with smaller gaps between the average incomes of the rich and poor have better health, greater longevity, less violence and mental disorder, and more social cohesion (Wilkinson, 1996). Albee also argued for a “trickle up” policy to counterbalance the ideological argument for concentrating wealth among the already wealthy.

Psychologists can also play a role in advocating social policies that have been developed by psychological organizations. For instance, the American Psychological Association’s (APA) recent Resolution on Poverty and Socioeconomic Status (American Psychological Association, 2000) is based on research evidence indicating that “poverty is detrimental to psychological well-being” (p. 1). The resolution commits the organization, among other items, to “support public policy that provides early interventions and prevention for vulnerable children and their families that are strengths-based, community-based, flexible, sensitive to culture and ethnic values of the family and that have a long-lasting impact” (p. 4). This principle is relevant to human rights, especially those rights that deal with economic well-being for all.

### PRINCIPLE 3: VIOLENCE CAN BE PREVENTED BY SUPPORTING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND CONSTRUCTIVE USES OF CONFLICT

Research and practice in conflict management sharply distinguish between thought and action, thereby decoupling the causal relation between conflict and violence. Conflict, a phenomenon that arises in the context of perceived or real incompatible goals between individuals or groups, does not inevitably lead to violence. Hence, although conflict is regarded as inevitable or ubiquitous in the West, violent behavior, whether interpersonal and intergroup, is not inevitable. What matters most is whether or not the parties in a conflict use the situation as an opportunity for creative problem solving that can benefit both, or alternatively, mismanage the conflict in ways that damage the relationship (cf. Rubin & Levinger, 1995).

An application of this distinction can be found in “constructive political controversy,” a prescribed set of attitudes and procedures that encourages constructive dialogue and engagement with issues that matter to people ([www.cooplearn.org/pages/contro-pol](http://www.cooplearn.org/pages/contro-pol)). The approach was originally developed by Australian colleagues to address their desire to move their government toward a “problem-solving model” (D. Bretherton, personal communication, August, 1998). A PsySR position paper offers the following summary:

As social scientists we have found that dialogue and constructive controversy encourages participants to speak to and listen to each other rather than to debate, and to express uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs. Most important, new information has the opportunity to surface, as the complexities of the issues are discussed. There is a sense of working together, and ideally a resolution, rather than one side retiring a victor and taking all, one a loser seething with resentment. (Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 1999, p. 2)

The UN keys of democracy, free flow of information, and tolerance and solidarity could all benefit from the application of constructive political controversy.

### PRINCIPLE 4: DELEGITIMIZING THE USE OF VIOLENCE AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY CAN REDUCE EPISODES OF VIOLENCE

A wide range of existing cultural narratives supports a culture of violence. Some of these narratives are nested in religions, most of which have provisions for the twin concepts of good versus evil, and chosen versus not-chosen people (Galtung, 1996). These concepts, when combined with the belief in “just wars,” are poten-

tially volatile, setting the stage for episodes of violence. The “Just War Tradition” provides the philosophical underpinnings of a secularized version found in international law that provides guidelines for conditions under which nations may resort to organized violence (Christopher, 1999).

Cultural narratives also support the systemic roots of organized violence that can be traced to global militarism. The dominant narrative in schools of international relations continues to be based on the “realist” tradition of interstate relations that provides a tidy script for practitioners who aspire to act in the name of the state. Practitioners are guided by the assumption that the interstate system is anarchical, and human nature is selfish, opportunistic, and power maximizing. Given these assumptions, leaders are expected to advance the interests of the state by consolidating power, increasing power, and demonstrating power (Morgenthau, 1973).

Realist assumptions give rise to a collectively shared narrative of “peace through strength” which, together with many other dynamics, fuels arms races and global militarization, as peace is pursued through the development and deployment of weapons. At one level, military preparedness is equated with human security, but at a deeper level, militarism is rooted in jobs, contracts, masculinity, and politics (Winter, Pilisuk, Houck, & Lee, 2001), a mix that provides inertia for the defense establishment, which ultimately seeks to defend national interests and investments. The dominant cultural narrative is an ancient one: “*Si vis pacem para bellum!*” (If you want peace, prepare for war!).

In contrast to violent cultural narratives and realist ideologies, peaceful cultural narratives scrutinize and delegitimize the full range of policies that support the use of coercion and force at all levels, from interpersonal to international. Accordingly, psychologists could promote a full range of policies that embrace peaceful narratives, including those that delegitimize the use of (a) corporal punishment in schools and families as a means of controlling behavior, (b) capital punishment as a means of deterring crime or providing restitution for those aggrieved, and (c) war as an institution to advance politics. Moreover, among others, the most challenging threats to a cooperative worldview and to human survival are in the nuclear arena. The policy of deterrence, including National Missile Defense, could be scrutinized and replaced by a “no first use” policy, en route to a “no second use” policy.

Among the better ways of delegitimizing violence is to work at humanizing enemies through peace education. At the height of the Cold War, PsySR (1986) sought to address the cognitive distortions that fueled exaggerated enemy images by developing an education manual that was used by psychologists in many areas of the United States. Once again, it would be timely to promote nonviolence through peace education efforts aimed at redressing exaggerated enemy images.

### PRINCIPLE 5: NONVIOLENT ACTION IS A POWERFUL MEANS OF PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

At present, the research literature on nonviolent approaches to social change is thin in psychology, but there are some beginning efforts to elucidate the psychological underpinnings of Gandhian approaches (Mayton, 2001; Steger, 2001) and to delineate general psychological principles that apply to nonviolent political activism (Montiel, 2001). What is most impressive is the power of nonviolence as a means of promoting social justice. Steger (2001), for example, presents what some might regard as a crucial test of the efficacy of nonviolence, a case in which the Nazis, during World War II, scrapped plans to send a group of Jewish men to death camps in the face of nonviolent resistance by the men's Christian wives. Although the power of nonviolent social change has been amply documented (cf. Sharp, 1973, 1993), the psycho-cultural narratives associated with these heroic actions have yet to be elucidated. The UN keys of nonviolence, as well as human rights, would benefit from work done in this field.

### PRINCIPLE 6: IN THE FACE OF ENMITY, STEP UP THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION

More than ever before, prejudice and divisions between people are not neatly following the contours of the sovereign state system (Klare, 1998), as new fault lines emerge within and between sovereign states. Moreover, the macro forces of globalization and democratization are leaving in their wake new divisions or preconditions for prejudice and violence (Christie & Dawes, this issue).

In many cases, prejudice is fueled by perceptions that members of one group are losing ground to members of another group in matters of voice or material well-being. These perceptions of growing "relative deprivation," whether real or imagined, have a powerful influence on the development of intergroup enmity. The problem of enmity is an important one for the prevention and mitigation of both direct and structural violence. As noted by UNESCO (1997): "There has never been a war without an enemy, and to abolish war, we must replace enemy images with understanding, tolerance and solidarity among all people and cultures" (p. 13).

Small-scale social psychological efforts to promote intergroup dependence and cooperation toward common goals have successfully reduced levels of prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998); however, these interventions typically reach only small groups under controlled conditions, and are poorly suited for the macro forces of major structural changes. The general principle of encouraging dialogue, particularly under conditions that ordinarily divide people, seems very worthwhile, but difficult to apply. When intergroup tension and intolerance begin to escalate, all too often

diplomatic relations, whether formal or informal, are cut off, rather than stepped up. Accordingly, policies that encourage a vigorous exploration of common ground and differences seem particularly worthwhile under conditions in which intolerance and enemy-image making are taking place. Examples of action based on such principles include interactive problem-solving workshops developed by Kelman (1999) that have been applied in such protracted conflicts as Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and the Israeli–Palestinian situation. Another example is the Michigan PsySR presenters’ manual, *US & THEM: The Challenge of Diversity* (Fabick, 1995), a community education, audience-participation workshop that helps groups explore common ground and differences, and offers groups the opportunity to work together to improve their situation. Clearly, the UN keys of tolerance, solidarity, and peace education would be relevant here.

#### PRINCIPLE 7: LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY IS WELL-SUITED FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The focus on the individual in Western psychology has given rise to the concept of empowerment, which is based on the assumption that the capacity of people to improve their lives is determined by their ability to develop control over their environment (Zimmerman, 1995). The locus of intervention for empowerment shifts from a victim-blaming focus of service delivery to system change as professionals play the role of collaborators as opposed to authoritative experts (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Opportunities are created for community members to develop skills that foster interdependence as opposed to dependence on the professionals. As partners, community members are involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.

Western psychologists to date have had little to offer large-scale empowerment movements in that the aim is to build participatory and inclusive structures that give voice to those who are oppressed. Martin-Baro (1994) championed *liberation psychology*, an indigenous approach in Latin America that places the struggle for social justice at the center of the problem of promoting human well-being. Similarly, in South Africa, a form of liberation psychology has emerged that is critical of the failure of contemporary social sciences to address problems of exploitation and oppression (Dawes, 2001). Fundamentally, what these movements have in common is a challenge to the dominant narrative that the system within which one resides is not only the best, but the only system possible (Prilleltensky, 1997).

An example of putting psychology into practice in the promotion of human rights is provided by Bernbaum’s (1999) study of a human rights education program in Peru ([http://www.human-rights.net/IPEDEHP/study\\_english/](http://www.human-rights.net/IPEDEHP/study_english/)). The study documents educational practices that led to empowering people from all walks of life in safeguarding their human rights. Central to the program was an action eval-

uation model to identify some of the psychological benefits that people experienced by taking part in the program.

### PRINCIPLE 8: PROMOTING EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IS GOOD FOR EVERYONE

At present, there is no society in the world where women enjoy the same level of material well-being or opportunities to make decisions in matters that affect their well-being as men. The problem of patriarchy is pervasive and supported by essentialist narratives that fail to recognize that gender differences are often due to power differences. As a starting point to redress the problem of inequality, the Beijing Platform of Action (United Nations, 1996) masterfully outlines courses of action that can increase women's representation and voice worldwide.

There is no place on the planet where women enjoy equality with men, despite evidence that the well-being of women, particularly their educational attainment, serves the interests of children and society as a whole. Literacy also matters because, like education, higher levels of maternal literacy are associated with lower infant mortality and fertility rates; maternal literacy levels are also associated with better family nutrition and lower overall population growth (Bunch & Carillo, 1998).

Psychologists have been involved in promoting the UN key on equality between women and men. PsySR and Division 48 of the American Psychological Association sent a joint team to Beijing to participate in the nongovernmental forum held in conjunction with the Beijing Women's Conference, and have been monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action, especially regarding women's roles in fostering a culture of peace. They delivered a joint statement to the Beijing +5 Conference held by the UN in June 2000, recommending that the governments at all levels, from local to international, build "a new dialogue on the assumption that the prevention of violent conflict can only be achieved with women as effective participants in all discussions at every level of social organization" (Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 2000, p. 2).

### PRINCIPLE 9: PREVENTION IS DESIRABLE OVER INTERVENTION

Preventive approaches are important because psychological tools are woefully inadequate in postwar situations. Even if all psychologists were trained in postwar intervention and if treatment regimens were culturally grounded and highly effective, there would not be enough practitioners to deal with the problem of 42 million people who are displaced because of wars and other forms of violence.

Moreover, as Albee and Gullotta (1997) pointed out, "no mass disorder afflicting humankind has ever been eliminated or brought under control by attempts at treating the affected individual" (p. 19–20). Psychologists today concerned with the disastrous effects of both outbreaks of violent conflict and the more subtle but equally lethal structural violence that people experience are in a position analogous to physicians who were asked to develop a plan for medical intervention in the event of a nuclear war. The only sensible conclusion for these physicians who later formed Physicians for Social Responsibility was that the prevention of nuclear war was essential. Psychologists can play an important role in establishing prevention as the treatment of choice. But prevention is difficult to achieve without a thorough understanding of the situation and connections with the communities and cultures. The field of psychology in its prototypical Western form is indigenous, and its generalizability is highly limited despite enjoying global hegemony. Psychology's dominant narrative is decontextualized and emphasizes objectivity, mechanism, and individualism (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996), characteristics that are ill-suited for social transformation and non-Western cosmologies. Not surprisingly, psychological interventions are most often aimed at improving an individual's adjustment to her or his environment, without regard for structure-based injustices that constrain individual choices and affect human well-being. One of the ways that PsySR and APA Division 48 have begun to address this problem is by developing an International Peace Practitioners' Network. With an ongoing, long-term process of communication and discussion of our concerns, across international boundaries and cultures, we seek to build understandings, develop joint projects, support colleagues in difficult situations, and reduce the isolation that is so endemic to tense and violent situations. Our aim is to learn much from colleagues in different cultures and help correct ways that Western psychology has assumed its generalizability, often to the detriment of the people it seeks to help. Among the UN keys supported by the network are the free flow of information, nonviolence, and sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The nine principles we have advanced are consistent with a peace psychology that aspires to build cultures of peace by preventing and mitigating both direct and structural violence. In place of direct violence, the principles encourage a preventive approach that sharply distinguishes conflict from violence, links dialogue with the former, and delegitimizes the latter.

We have treated structural violence as a problem in and of itself because structural violence also kills people, albeit slowly, by depriving them of basic need satisfaction. To mitigate structural violence, we have advanced principles

that would place liberation psychology at the center of peace psychology, thereby empowering people to use nonviolent action in pursuit of equality within and between societies. Framed positively, from a psychological perspective, cultures of peace would promote indigenous and universal cultural narratives that support both an ethic of nonviolence and socially just ends, where ends refer to the equitable, inclusive, and sustainable satisfaction of human needs.

We eagerly look forward to a continuing multilogue, across cultures and disciplines, as we pursue a clearer understanding of psychologically based principles that can guide our actions in pursuit of peace with social justice.

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*"Most civilized nations," [Barbara] Ehrenreich writes, "compensate for the inadequacy of wages by providing relatively generous public services such as health insurance, free or subsidized child care, subsidized housing and effective public transportation." So what should we think about the fact that in America we are sending the poor out to make it on their own on little more than a quarter of a living wage? Shame, Ehrenreich suggests, might be an appropriate response.*

*Dorothy Gallagher in a review of Barbara Ehrenreich's  
Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, New  
York Times Book Review, May 13, 2001*

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