Peace psychology in today's era

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Abstract

Peace psychology seeks to develop theories and practices aimed at the prevention and mitigation of direct and structural violence. Framed positively, peace psychology promotes the nonviolent management of conflict and the pursuit of social justice, what we refer to as peacemaking and peace building, respectively. Peace psychology deals with the patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and groups that are involved in violent episodes as well as the prevention and mitigation of violent episodes. Sustainable peace requires continuing efforts to craft facilitative synergies between nonviolent means and social just ends, that is, the pursuit of negative and positive peace. Peace Psychology aims to encourage psychological research, education, and training on issues concerning peace, nonviolent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the causes, consequences and prevention of war and other forms of destructive conflict. Peace Psychology is the study of mental processes and behavior that lead to violence, prevent violence, and facilitate nonviolence as well as promoting fairness, respect, and dignity for all, for the purpose of making violence a less likely occurrence and helping to heal its psychological effects. It aims to apply the knowledge and the methods of psychology in the advancement of peace, non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the prevention of war and other forms of destructive conflict.

Introduction

"Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without." – Buddha.

Peace is seen as concord, or harmony and tranquility. It is defined as a state of law, justice or goodness, or equilibrium of Powers. Peace is endowed with meaning by being linked to other concepts within a particular perception of reality; and by its relationship to ideas or assumptions about violence, history, divine grace, justice. Peace may be a dichotomy or continuous, passive or active, empirical or abstract, descriptive or normative, positive or negative[1]. Peace is the foundation of social harmony, economic equity and political justice, ruptured by wars and other forms of violent conflict. Spiritual and religious leaders like Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi and Dalai Lama equated peace and love, in the manner in which interact[2]. Psychologists like Freud[3] explored the concept of love and hatred towards self, and to other as eros and aggression, love and hate, are intermingled from birth to burial, understanding and pacifying our conflicted inner worlds. This undertaking must run in tandem with the necessity of comprehending and transforming the conflicts rampant in our interpersonal and political realms of interaction and division.

Peace is dialectical, it should neither be materialized nor rendered slothful[4]. Peace in its progressive or dialectical mode denotes active individual and collective self determination and emancipator empowerment. Peace entails continuous peacekeeping and peacemaking which requires personal and collective transformation, pacifistic rather than pacifying in its means of psychological and political development[5].

Types of peace

Peace is often recognized by its absence. Galtung[6,7,8] has proposed the distinction between two different typed of peace i.e. 'positive' and 'negative'. Positive peace denotes the simultaneous presence of multiple desirable states of mind, like harmony, justice and equity, leading to transformations that rectify structural inequities. Negative peace denotes the absence of war and other forms of violent human conflict. Comprehensively, peace creates an equitable social order (positive peace) and eliminates the overt forms of violence (negative peace)[8,9,10].

Peace Psychology

The emergence of peace psychology has provided a measure of legitimacy in the pursuit of peace and social justice. Peace psychology builds on the concepts of mental processes and behavior of war and peace. It evolved during the second half of the twentieth century, where the relevance of Peace, Conflict, and Violence brought together the key practices that define peace psychology.[11] Despite its roots in Philosophy, it is a combination of multiple disciplines outside of as well as within psychology, emphasizing on the research in clinical psychology, media psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, political psychology, political science, history, sociology, education, international relations, and peace studies etc.

Peace Psychology as an area of interest entertains issues like ethnic conflicts, family violence, hate crimes, militarism, conflict management, social justice, nonviolent approaches to peace, peace education, promotion of relational harmony, equitable human well-being, facilitate nonviolence, promoting fairness, respect, and dignity for all, aimed to reduce the

episodes of violence[12,13]. Peace psychology aims to promote the nonviolent management of conflict, prevention and mitigation of violence, peacemaking and peace building. Christie (2001) suggested a 2×2 matrix of peace psychology, where direct violence is differentiated from the structural and crossed with peace and violence, delineating four areas of interest: direct violence, structural violence, direct peace (peacemaking), and structural peace (peacebuilding)[14,15].

Roots of peace Psychology

'The Moral Equivalent of War' written by William James (1910) was the first effort to set the stage for the sub-discipline of peace psychology, suggesting that the psychologically appealing aspects of war should be replaced by the nonviolent alternatives. William McDougall (1927) traced the psychological as well as the minor causes of war including the weapons manufacturers, business groups and politicians, and humanity's natural pugnacity of war, in his book called 'Janus: The Conquest of War'[16,17].

The diagnostic manuals of the American Psychiatric Association (1994), and the World Health Organization (1992) formally defined the concept of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 1980, based on the observations of "battle fatigue" and "war neurosis". The disorder and its symptoms expanded from veterans to refugees and other direct victims of war and crime victims, referring to any form of trauma, the idea that killing or committing other direct violence can also lead to PTSD symptom[18,19].

Albert Bandura (1996) identified and investigated the cognitive processes behind various forms of violence, as most inhumane behavior comes from psychological processes by which original ideas of moral conduct are disengaged. The cognitive transformation of the reprehensible conduct into good conduct can be done through moral justifications, comparison to worse conduct, making the conduct seem less consequential, the use of euphemisms, dehumanizing or blaming the victim[20,21].

Peace psychology is an area sensitive to political events, where prevention of the undesirable wars was focused on. An eclectic understanding that various schools of thought and differing perspectives all have something to contribute and can be woven together to understand reality, is likely to be especially appealing in a field like peace psychology[22,23].

According to the Asian historical context, the threat of nuclear annihilation drove much of the content of peace psychology in the West during the Cold War, the dominant peace narratives revolved around the colonial vestiges of occupation. The vacuum in political space after the Colonial masters was often filled by authoritarian rulers, shaped by foreign occupations and dictatorships. In the post - Cold War world, reactions against authoritarian rule are manifest in collective narratives that fuel nonviolent democratization movements throughout a large swath of Asia, including East Timor, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. In contrast to the West, the analysis of People Power movements tends to emphasize religious over secular leadership, collectivism over individualism, and shared subjectivities rather than objective approaches In short, the focal concerns, manifestations of peace, and contributions of peace psychologists in Asia are animated by geohistorical context.[24,25]

Conflict

Conflict is a balancing of powers among interests, capabilities, and wills, a mutual adjusting of what people want, can get, and are willing to pursue. Conflict is manifested in particular patterns of behavior, so is peace. A balance of powers and associated agreement are achieved through conflict in specific situations. Conflict interlocks a balance of powers and associated expectations as a gap between expectations and power causes conflict. Conflict and cooperation are alternative phases in a continuous social process underlying human interaction. Conflict and cooperation form a helix[26].

Conflict Management

Peace psychologists consider conflict as omnipresent in relation to the incompatibilities in goals achievement. Conflict can create opportunities for constructive relationship building, as it does not inescapably lead to violent action only. Perception if differentiated from actions can define the bases of conflict to dissociate conflict from violent behavior, so that the conflict can be managed before the violent actions break in.[27,28,29]

Social psychologists have generated theories like, the realistic group conflict theory, relative deprivation theory, and absolute deprivation theory. The Realistic group conflict theory turns out to be one of the earliest social psychological explanations for conflict. It states that hostility is a result of scarcity of resources in relation to group competitions, where efforts to acquire resources by one group are perceived as offensive and aggressive by another group.[30,31] Conflict management refer to prevention of violent episodes by containing differences in opinion, by reaching an agreement (conflict resolution) or finding integrative solutions to satisfy the needs with consensus[33]. Different conflict resolution techniques like negotiation, mediation, arbitration, diplomacy, interactive problem solving, cooperation, and unilateral initiatives etc can be used to reduce tension and conflict[38].

Conflicts can be resolved by using either the Interest based approach by Fisher and Ury or the Needs based approach by Kaleman and Fisher. The interest-based can be applied in domestic and international contexts. This technique gives a deeper understanding of the underlying interests and encourages intergroup

empathy and mutual understanding, separates personalities from the problem, critical analysis of the issue, inventing beneficial options, and objective judgement of whether proposed agreements satisfy everyone's interests[34,35,36,37]. On the other hand, in the Needs-based approach also termed as the Interactive problem solving, the unofficial representatives of groups engage in problem solving, to promote greater mutual understanding between parties, stronger intergroup relationships[34,39,40,41]. Accordingly, peace psychology practitioners who intervene in war-torn societies and deal with trauma and community development are keenly aware of the importance of structural peace building to preventing further cycles of violence[42,43,44].

Aims of peace psychology

Peace Psychology aims to encourage psychological research, education, and training on issues concerning peace, nonviolent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the causes, consequences and prevention of war and other forms of destructive conflict. It works to provide an organization that fosters communication among researchers, teachers, and practitioners who are working on peace issues. It aims to apply the knowledge and the methods of psychology in the advancement of peace, non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the prevention of war and other forms of destructive conflict. As peace psychologists, our vision is the development of sustainable societies through the prevention of destructive conflict and violence, the amelioration of its consequences, the empowerment of individuals, and the building of cultures of peace and global community. Theory, research, and practice related to social conflict and violence, war and peace, structural (indirect) and direct violence and its prevention/amelioration etc are a part of peace psychology.

Approaches to peace

Peace Psychology recognizes that violent episodes have structural and cultural roots, and proposes a multilevel model which is a combination of reactive interventions (negative peace) and proactive interventions (positive peace) at the interpersonal, intergroup, and international units of analysis. At the structural level, domestic violence is rooted in power asymmetry and women's economic dependence on men worldwide, whereas the violence of Al Qaeda, can be viewed as a structural precondition accompanied by a host of cultural narrative[45]. Sustainable peace requires not only the removal of proximal causes of violence but addressing the structural and cultural roots of the problem. Psychology should be at the forefront of efforts to promote a peaceful world because peace and violence involve human behaviors that arise from human emotions, habits, thoughts, and assumptions[46,47].

Challenges for peace psychology

Peace sounds soft, weak, naïve, idealistic, and even dangerous and unpatriotic, particularly when the threat of terrorism is a salient concern[48]. Peace psychologists have contributed to our understanding of the roots of terrorism[8,9,10], in such a charged geopolitical context, the work of peace psychologists may be regarded as suspect, biased, even conciliatory. Another possible reason for a lack of attention to peace psychology is its reliance on qualitative methods. Hence, some might assume that it cannot be methodologically rigorous[49]. Peace psychology was officially organized at the close of the Cold War, some observers might mistakenly identify peace psychology as the study of nuclear issues. Questions about the boundaries of peace psychology still remain in play. Today, peace psychology seeks to more deeply understand the structural and cultural roots of violence and is emerging in many regions of the world with focal concerns nuanced by the geohistorical contexts within which violence occurs[50]. The misconception is that peace psychology has little to offer international relations, a specialty in political science that is well beyond the familiar moorings of mainstream psychology[51]. Accordingly, there is a great need for peace psychologists to resist the intellectual currents of reductionism while pursuing multilevel analyses that link up psychological processes at the micro level with events at the political and cultural levels of analysis, as we have proposed.

Peace psychology for the twenty-first century

Peace building will require increasing rather than decreasing tension, redressing poverty and the large scale project of building culture of peace. Direct violence usually stems from structural violence because structured inequalities are predisposing conditions for outbreaks of violent episodes. Peace psychology should be based on both activism and analysis. Proactive approaches aim at the pursuit of social justice, the mitigation of oppressive and exploitative structures that can be predisposing conditions for episodes of direct violence. Proactive approaches treat peace and social justice as indivisible, and take a long view of peace, committing resources to social changes that embrace the principles of equity and inclusion[8,9,10]. Peace psychology has much to learn from liberatory pedagogies, the central purpose of which is the empowerment of individuals and communities to challenge and change the world rather than adapt to unjust situations[52]. Transforming peace education to address social justice presents challenges. Peace psychologists can provide important leadership, analysis, activism, and support for the crucial task of building sustainable peace. Analyzing the causes of violence, rebuilding war-torn communities, lobbying for social justice and arms control, teaching and practicing nonviolent conflict resolution, sensitizing

ourselves to our own ethnocentrism, consulting with peacekeeping operations, ensuring gender parity, addressing ethnic identities and hostilities, empowering alternative voices, and building environmental security are just a few of the myriad ways peace psychologists can contribute to building a peaceful world[53].

Scope of peace psychology

Peace psychologists distinguish sharply between conflicts and violence. Conflict is defined as the perception of incompatible goals (real or imagined), while violence refers to coercive actions that are intentionally carried out with the intent of harming others. Therefore, in peace psychology, the sources and consequences of conflict are often treated separately from violence[37]. Peace psychologists distinguish two general types of violence: episodic and structural. An episode of violence is a discrete, observable event that is aimed at inflicting physical harm on an individual or group. The episode may occur once or repeatedly. While episodes may be dramatic and deadly, structural violence is insidious and normalized in societies; structural violence is just the way things are. Structural violence kills people just as surely as violent episodes, but structural violence kills slowly and curtails life-spans through the deprivation of human rights and basic human needs. Structural violence is supported and justified by the dominant narratives of a society; put another way, structural violence is supported by cultural violence, the latter of which refers to the symbolic sphere of human existence. In regard to peace, negative peace interventions are designed to prevent and mitigate violent episodes, while positive peace interventions are aimed at the reduction of structural violence[50]. To elaborate: Negative peace interventions can be tailored to various phases of a violent episode: (a) conflict phase that precedes the violent episode, (b) violent episode phase, or (c) postviolence phase. In contrast, structural and cultural violence cannot be prevented because all societies have some degree of ongoing structural and cultural violence. Positive peace interventions involve social and cultural transformations that reduce structural and cultural violence and promote a more equitable social order that meets the basic needs and rights of all people. Peace psychology therefore deals with the patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and groups that are involved in violent episodes as well as the prevention and mitigation of violent episodes. Peace psychology also deals with thoughts, feelings, and actions that (re)produce social injustices as well as socially just arrangements between individuals and groups. Sustainable peace requires continuing efforts to craft facilitative synergies between nonviolent means and social just ends, that is, the pursuit of negative and positive peace[54].

Conclusion

The scope of the threats to human security at the dawn of the 21st century is daunting. Terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear proliferation, failed states, ideological struggles, growing scarcities of natural resources, disparities in wealth and health, globalizing trends, violations of human rights, and the continued use of force to advance state interests are all complex problems with psychological dimensions. During the past 20 years, peace psychology has emerged as a specialty in psychology with its own knowledge base, perspectives, concepts, and methodologies. Peace psychologists are now well positioned to further develop theory that will enable us to more deeply understand the major threats to human security and to engage in practices that promote human well-being and survival. We hope that this introduction to peace psychology issues a warm invitation to psychologists who wish to join a thriving research and practitioner community dedicated to the promotion of peace with social justice in the 21st century[22].

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