

Series Editor Preface

As series editor, I am delighted to see this fine book added to the Peace Psychology Book Series. The book editors, Maritza Montero and Christopher Sonn, have done a masterful job, making liberation psychology accessible to a wide audience while maintaining a scholarly focus throughout.

It is fitting that liberation psychology is center stage in the Peace Psychology Book Series because peace psychologists recognize that the sustainability of peaceful discourses and actions rests upon the continuous crafting of structures and institutions that are responsive to people's desire for voice and representation in matters that affect their well-being. Hence, the social justice agenda of liberation psychology is at the core of peace psychology.

The pursuit of social justice has not always been central to peace psychology. North American psychologists began to organize and identify themselves as "peace psychologists" in the 1980s during the Cold War. The Cold War featured a global power struggle and nuclear arms race between the United States and Soviet Union. A culture of fear pervaded and the problem of social justice was given short shrift in light of what seemed to be the preeminent concern of peace psychologists, namely, the prevention of nuclear war and the promotion of conflict management.

With the decline of the Cold War and the perceived diminution of the nuclear threat, security concerns were no longer organized around the US–Soviet relationship. Instead, Western peace psychologists turned their attention to ethno-political conflicts and, more broadly, the problem of intergroup conflict worldwide. Unlike the Cold War conflict, which invited analyses at the level of elite rhetoric and actions, the complexity of ethno-political conflicts required geohistorical considerations that embedded violent episodes in structural and cultural conditions. Clearly, a history of structural violence, marked by oppression and exploitation, was seen as a precondition for violent episodes in many parts of the world.

Besides having a concern about the roots of violent episodes, peace psychologists and liberation psychologists share the view that structural violence in itself is problematic not least because it kills people just as surely as direct episodes of violence. What differs is the means, with structural violence representing a pernicious form of violence that results in slow death through human need deprivation, oppression, and exploitation; a kind of violence that is normalized, impersonal, and built into the structures and institutions of the society.

Between the covers of this book, we are reminded that Latin America has been the engine for liberation movements that seek to redress the problem of structural violence. Rumblings of the movement in psychology can be found in the contributions of Latin American scholars such as Ignacio Martín-Baró, a social psychologist and Jesuit priest from El Salvador, whose ideas were central to the liberation psychology movement that swept across Latin America in the 1980s. These ideas continue to spawn emancipatory agendas all over the world, as illustrated by the chapters in this book, which look at Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Perú, and Venezuela, and also Australia, England, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, and Spain.

In addition to demonstrating the global reach of liberation psychology and its varied manifestations, this book has theoretical and practical implications for the dominant voices in psychology, most of which originate in North America and Western Europe. Not surprisingly, the liberation approach does not always sit comfortably with mainstream psychology because the tenets of liberation psychology challenge the dominant Western psychological perspective, which embraces an individualistic, decontextualized, and objective view of the Other. In contrast, liberation psychology is committed to praxis which frames problems within the context of oppressors and oppressed and pursues theory and practices that benefit the oppressed. From the perspective of liberation psychologists, change happens on the personal and political levels and everyone is affected by the liberation process, even the oppressor who benefits by becoming emancipated from a sense of alienation.

Liberation psychology also challenges theory and practice in peace psychology, much of which is comfortably organized around a corpus of literature on conflict management and resolution, approaches to human relations that can be powerful tools of the status quo, at times reducing tension in conflictual relationships, while conveniently leaving the social order uncontested. Since the Cold War, it has become increasingly apparent in the peace psychology literature that sustainable forms of peace require not only the absence of violence (negative peace) but also the ongoing pursuit of social justice (positive peace) through nonviolent means that transform relationships and structures. Clearly, liberation psychology nudges peace psychology to shift emphasis from tension reduction to tension induction and from a reliance on the power of top-down approaches to bottom-up movements for social change.

Interest in the psychology of peace is often traced back to William James' publication more than 100 years ago on the "moral equivalent of war," a treatise that argued for the importance of providing constructive alternatives to war that would be capable of satisfying the kinds of needs that war fulfills. Montero and Sonn have given us a roadmap for such a "moral equivalent." Scholars and practitioners who adopt this roadmap will find their work advancing toward a major goal linked to the mission of psychology as a profession: the promotion of human well-being for all.

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Psychology of Liberation

Theory and Applications

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