

Preface

This volume emerges from the recognition that for many within psychology as a profession and a science, dedicated to the promotion of health and well-being, there exists a yearning, and a sense of calling, to envision a new level of systemic response to the complex, interdependent, and increasingly daunting web of economic, political, social, technical, spiritual, and environmental challenges facing humanity in our current global context. Since the turn of the century, there have been growing efforts to rethink psychology in a global era (Fowler 1996; Kim et al. 2006; Leong et al. 2012; Marsella 1998, 2000; Mays et al. 1996; Pawlik and d'Ydewalle 2006; Ratner 2013; Sexton and Hogan 1992; Stevens and Wedding 2004). These important, and often groundbreaking, publications have made it clear how big the needed shift ahead is, and how vast is the challenge of *systemically* re-constituting psychology to meet the needs of a global age.

Globalization is now recognized as a “total social fact,” which “affects the entire social fabric and all spheres of human existence (e.g., economic, cultural, political, and symbolic),” and “makes all sectoral and partial viewpoints obsolete” (Pulcini 2013, p. 1). Yet, partial and sectoral viewpoints and interests continue to dominate governance and decision-making on every level worldwide, creating a deep tension between our actual choices and the possibility for a sustainable future. This uncharted territory is further complicated by the new forms that power and dominance have taken in our age of radically changing neurological, technological, and informational capabilities, especially within the context of growing worldwide militarism, and corporate and government corruption. This is the daunting fabric of our times, in which all our choices are embedded in ways we are just beginning to understand. In this context, every choice is a moral choice, as it influences the entire global fabric of which we are a part.

This volume joins Pickren et al. (2012) in the conviction that

... psychology is at a critical choice point in developing its vision, identity, and mission as a science and profession in a global era... If psychology ignores or intentionally avoids its responsibility in this arena by continuing its current course, there is little reason to believe it will survive as a major intellectual and moral force for advancing the human condition (Pickren et al. 2012, p. 312).

This volume begins to articulate a template and guiding principles for a *systemic* approach to the paradigmatic re-thinking of what would constitute a socially responsible psychology in a global era. It addresses the role of psychology in its two manifestations—as a science, profession, art, and discipline; and as the actual internal processes through which understanding, attractions, and choices interact in the hearts and minds of each of the seven billion people on this planet, and particularly of decision-makers on every level of local, national, and global governance. Viewed this way, psychology has a major role and responsibility in this age, which by far exceeds its current self-definitions and range of impact. This volume explores some central dimensions along which we believe a systematic re-thinking of the role of psychology needs to occur.

We understand social responsibility to mean acting from a compelling and defining awareness of the moral impact and reverberations of every choice throughout an interconnected globalized world. Hence, we seek to envision what socially responsible psychology as a science, profession, and discipline may look like, and how it may approach systemically central issues of guiding values, research, teaching, and clinical practice, as well as the realities of global poverty, violence, and unsustainability. We also ask how socially responsible psychology may engage decision-makers on all levels, as well as communities that have developed their own approaches to addressing issues of social justice. Among such communities, we recognize the central role of religious and spiritual communities worldwide, which not only influence deeply the minds and hearts of billions of people, but have their dominant constructions and methods of working toward social justice. In a number of chapters, we include examples of psychologists and religious communities already engaging the particular social issues in question. In our closing chapter, we look at ways in which socially responsible psychology can work with both the problems of social justice created by dominant global religious constructions and with the strengths and possibilities that these social entities offer.

Ultimately, this volume seeks to point psychology toward unifying its work on a systemic level, with that of socially responsible efforts worldwide, as well as toward assuming a leadership role in working with decision makers with varying degrees of commitment to social responsibility. We believe that socially responsible psychology for a global era cannot simply study, and then try to remediate after-the-fact phenomena. Nor is it sufficient to engage in piecemeal preventive efforts. In these critical times, socially responsible psychology needs to articulate a clear systemic position on where it stands in relation to the forces creating and shaping our currently unsustainable and unjust social world.

Toward this purpose, this volume takes up a systematic examination of what we consider the central issues currently facing our discipline. The volume consists of two parts. Part I examines what we believe to be the central general dimensions along which socially responsible psychology for a global era needs to constitute itself. Part II takes up the most pressing global issues facing humanity at this time, and examines how socially responsible psychology can become a key voice and agent in addressing those issues. Throughout the chapters, we raise questions of

how the discipline can interact with worldwide actors for change, including diverse ethnic, religious, and spiritual communities.

Chapter 1 begins where Leong et al. (2012) end their volume—with a recommendation that all psychology departments adopt the Declaration of Human Rights as a foundational document for a global age (United Nations 1948). The chapter opens with the premise that in a global age, the most appropriate place for psychology to begin to re-constitute itself toward social responsibility is by focusing on the global agenda, and action framework articulated in key global documents, endorsed by the widest representation of the world community. In this volume, we treat the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly 1948) (henceforth UDHR) and the Earth Charter (The Earth Charter Initiative 2000) as providing the ethical underpinnings and guiding moral vision for socially responsible psychology.

Chapter 2 examines prevalent psychological values and assumptions currently underlying global decision-making and affecting everyday life in an unsustainable world. It looks at how these unconsidered values and automatic assumptions about human behavior are rooted in Western culture, oblivious to the realities of the majority of cultures worldwide; and how they limit the study and practice of contemporary psychology, and the life of psychologists in Western contexts. It then focuses on articulating a global-action agenda for psychology based on a more examined approach to its values and assumptions.

Chapter 3 focuses on a methodological analysis of how psychological work can be guided by its goals in contrast to the current reality in which the goals of a substantial portion of psychological research are defined by prevalent methods. It offers a critique of prevalent methodologies and examines how research methods must expand to accommodate the varying means of acquiring knowledge in differing cultural contexts for the purpose of accurately capturing and meaningfully studying psychological concerns in the contemporary global context.

Chapter 4 evaluates the implications for clinical psychological practice of its reliance on the Western, individualistic “medical model”, as an example of how psychology unwittingly maintains and reinforces systemic social problems. The chapter seeks to identify ways in which clinical training and practice can redefine itself in the direction of holistic and socially responsible care for the global community.

Chapter 5 takes on the central challenge of this volume with regard to psychology as a discipline. It seeks to articulate a clear systemic understanding of social health. It proposes that without a clear vision of what constitutes a healthy society, psychology as a discipline cannot lead the way to overcoming the forces creating our currently unhealthy, unsustainable and unjust social world. The chapter explores the *emergent dynamic properties* of social health from the point of view of complex systems associated with psycho-social and socio-political human diversity.

Chapter 6, the closing chapter of Part I, takes on the central challenge of the volume with regard to psychology as an internal phenomenon governing the experience of the estimated seven billion people on this planet. It focuses on an

integrated understanding of empowered, socially and morally responsible, and globally competent human consciousness. It posits that the cultivation of such a consciousness is essential for individual and collective healing and wellbeing in the context of the global realities of the twenty-first century.

Part II begins with [Chap. 7](#) focusing on the possibility of non-violence as a psychological response to a troubled and violent world. This chapter examines the mental shift and historical factors involved in choices between violence and non-violence, as well as how current conditions of international wars, poverty, and crime provide opportunities to develop innovative and more restorative approaches to justice.

[Chapter 8](#) zooms in on the complexities of racism and unintentional racial bias, focusing particularly on crime and law enforcement in the U.S., where such bias is too often most visible. After summarizing some of the key research findings, the second half of the chapter uses a recent race-related shooting in the U.S. and the community's response to the shooting, as a case-example of the "restorative approach" described in [Chap. 7](#).

[Chapter 9](#) focuses on the disturbingly pervasive reality of global oppression, discrimination, and violence against women. It examines current cultural narratives and practices of psychological 'silencing,' as well as specific ways in which a socially responsible psychology, within a diverse world of inequalities, can foster movement toward core human rights as global values and priorities.

[Chapter 10](#) continues the exploration of social health begun in [Chap. 5](#) by examining the systemic links between poverty and unsustainability in current global economic governance, as well as the psychological processes that keep this reality in place. It offers specific recommendations for psychological training, research, and practice to address the psychosocial, behavioral, and structural factors underlying the life-destroying intersection of climate change and other environmental destruction with poverty and inequality. It points clearly to a psychology of economic justice and global sustainability.

[Chapter 11](#), the closing chapter, brings together all the threads of this volume through a focus on the dialectical integration of the full range of ontologies, epistemologies, and praxiologies that represent the secular and religious diversity of our planet for the purpose of creating a sustainable foundation for a morally responsible global governance. The chapter examines the possibilities for dialectical praxis in different social contexts, and explores the role of religion and spirituality in global consciousness and in the articulation of a global ethic. It considers how both secular and spiritual perspectives can become more of a uniting global influence rather than a divisive one, and highlights psychological factors and processes that can help tip the balance in the direction of a sustainable future.

This volume began in 2011, a year that will be remembered for the massive awakening of the Arab peoples in North Africa to their desire to end dictatorships, and to seek a democratic transformation of their societies. As one of the foremost peace workers of our times, long-time director of Amnesty International, James O'Dea writes, the "Arab Spring is part of a planetary springtime" which is seeing "the first emergence of a planetary culture of peace" (O'Dea 2012, pp. xii-xiv).

Two years later, as this volume is being prepared for publication, we are witnessing the planetary springtime spreading to countries in Latin America, the Balkans, and the Middle East.

The contributors to this volume join the rapidly growing community of scientists, scholars, practitioners, and citizens throughout the world in recognizing that at this critical historical juncture, we are called to envision a deeply engaged socially responsible psychology for a global era. We experience an undeniable need for the field of psychology to articulate *coherently*, and to *impact directly and positively*, the complex and urgent global challenges we face—including climate change, widening economic inequality, political instability, deepening religious and ethnic conflicts, rapidly proliferating weapons of mass destruction and control, and pervasive social disintegration. We envision the discipline of psychology developing as an effective intellectual and moral resource at this critical time for addressing the interdependent nature of biological, psychological, social, spiritual, and planetary health and wellbeing in our global era.

This volume constitutes an invitation to all researchers, teachers, students, and practitioners in the field of psychology and related disciplines, as well as to concerned citizens at large, to embrace that vision, and to reach that goal. If you recognize the need for a new and more comprehensive center of collective focus within the discipline of psychology—one that encompasses, and directly addresses, the most pressing contemporary global challenges—we hope you will join in exploring how a socially responsible psychology for a global era might constitute itself. We invite you to consider the recommendations in this volume on reconstituting the field of psychology, and rendering the knowledge of its many sub-disciplines more effective and impactful in the constructive resolution of the critical challenges toward advancing the human condition in our global era.

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