6 The Psychological Components of a Sustainable Peace: An Introduction

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Abstract

The purpose of The Psychological Components of a Sustainable Peace, a book edited by Peter Coleman and Morton Deutsch (Coleman & Deutsch, 2012), is to enhance understanding of sustainable peace by supplementing the standard approach of studying the prevention of destructive conflict, violence, war and injustice with the equally important investigation of the promotion of the basic conditions and processes conducive to lasting peace. For in addition to addressing the pervasive realities of oppression, violence and war, peace requires us to understand and envision what alternatives we wish to construct. Recognizing the ultimate need for multidisciplinary frameworks to best comprehend and foster sustainable peace, we hoped to elicit what contemporary psychology might have to contribute to such a framework. This chapter provides a brief historical and conceptual context for the many fine scholarly chapters that follow in The Psychological Components of a Sustainable Peace (Coleman/Deutsch 2012).1

Keywords: Sustainable peace, war prevention, cooperation, conflict resolution, social justice, power, needs and emotions, psychodynamics, creative thinking, reconciliation

6.1 Introduction

William James, the first peace psychologist, was a most distinguished scholar and also an insistent public voice on issues of war and peace. He was deeply opposed to imperialism and the war fever with which it was associated. He was at one time the vice president of the Anti-Imperialist League, and he published articles and letters in newspapers as well as making many speeches against the Monroe Doctrine, the Spanish-American War, the colonization of the Philippines and Cuba, and so forth (Perry 1948).

James was opposed to war but he admired the heroic and courageous actions associated with the military. For James, the appeal of war and the military did not come primarily from people’s negative predispositions, but from their desire to face challenge and adversity and, in so doing, to realize their potentials in such virtues as fidelity, cohesiveness, tenacity, and heroism. In his famous paper, The Moral Equivalent of War (James 1917), he sought to articulate how the manly virtues associated with the military and war could find expression in the midst of a pacific civilization and thus be a moral substitute for war. This chapter takes a different orientation than that of James and much of psychological writings related to issues of war and peace. Their focus has mainly been on what psychological theory and research can contribute to the prevention of war. The Psychological Components of a Sustainable Peace (Coleman/Deutsch 2012) is concerned with what psychological theory and research can contribute to the promotion of a harmonious, sustainable peace.

Underlying this orientation is our belief that promoting the ideas and actions which can lead to a sustainable, harmonious peace can not only contribute to the prevention of war, but will also lead to more positive, constructive relations among people and nations and to a more sustainable planet. This chapter has

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1 This chapter was first published as the introductory chapter by the authors, in: Coleman, Peter T.; Deutsch, Morton (Eds.): Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace. Series: Peace Psychology Book Series (New York: Springer 2012). The permission to include this text was granted by Springer in Heidelberg in 2013. The text has been updated and the most recent scientific literature has been added by the authors.
three brief sections: (1) Psychological contributions to the prevention of war and violent, destructive conflicts; (2) The nature of a sustainable, harmonious peace; and (3) The psychological components of a sustainable, harmonious peace.

6.2 Psychological Contributions to the Prevention of War and Violent, Destructive Conflicts

6.2.1 Debunking the Inevitability of War

One of the earliest and most important contributions of psychologists and other social scientists was to debunk the myth that war was inevitable because of mankind's innate aggressiveness. As early as 1945, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues published a book, Human Nature and Enduring Peace (Murphy 1945), which included a statement endorsed by the leading psychologists of that time, “If man can live in a society which does not block and thwart him, he does not tend to be aggressive; and if a society of men can live in a world order in which the members of the society are not blocked or thwarted by the world arrangements as a whole, they have no intrinsic tendency to be aggressive” (Murphy 1945: 20).

On 16 May 1986 a multinational and multidisciplinary group of scientists, organized by David Adams (a psychologist), issued the Seville Statement on Violence, which was subsequently adopted by UNESCO on 16 November 1989. The statement was designed to refute "the notion that organized human violence is biologically determined". The statement contains five core ideas. These ideas are:

1. It is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors.
2. It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature.
3. It is scientifically incorrect to say that in the course of human evolution there has been a selection for aggressive behaviour more than for other kinds of behaviour.
4. It is scientifically incorrect to say that humans have a 'violent brain'.
5. It is scientifically incorrect to say that war is caused by 'instinct' or any single motivation.

The statement concludes: "Just as 'wars begin in the minds of men', peace also begins in our minds. The same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies with each of us" (Adams/Barnett/Bechtereva et al. 1990).

Another myth that has been debunked is that there are no peaceful societies. Much work by anthropologists has demonstrated the existence of many peaceful societies, large as well as small. Some excellent books about peaceful societies are: Fry (2006), The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Peace, Howell and Willis (1989) Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives, and Kemp and Fry (2004) Keeping the Peace: Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Societies around the World.

6.2.2 Psychology and the Prevention of War

After the end of World War II, stimulated by the development of nuclear weapons, the emergence of the United Nations, and the development of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, a significant number of psychologists began to become active in applying psychology to the prevention of war. Such psychologists as Ed Cairns, Leila Dane, Joseph de Rivera, Morton Deutsch, Daniel Druckman, Ronald Fisher, Susan Fiske, Jerome Frank, Irving Janus, Herbert Kelman, Paul Kimmel, Evelin Lindner, Susan McKay, Susan Opotow, Charles Osgood Dean Pruitt, Ann Sandon, Milton Schwebel, Ervin Staub, Richard Wagner, Michael Wessels, Ralph White, and many others were very active in writing papers, giving talks, and participating in conferences with citizen groups as well as with officials from the US State and Defense Departments. They wrote about: motivations and misperceptions which led to war; such processes as ‘autistic hostility’, ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’, and ‘unwitting commitments’ that perpetuate destructive conflicts; they analysed and criticized the psychological assumptions involved in ‘nuclear deterrence’; they considered processes for reducing tension and hostility such as mediation and GRIT (the graduated reduction in tension); they identified ‘groupthink’ which, in tense situations, limits the alternatives of interpretation and action available to the group; they identified the conditions which give rise to destructive rather than constructive resolution of conflict; they analysed current international hostilities such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War in terms of how psychological factors affected their development and course. Scholars from other disciplines (political science, economics, sociology, law, etc.) often participated with psychologists in multidisciplinary books