

# **Teaching Peace Psychology Courses: Rationale and Suggestions**

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## **Why Are There So Few Peace Psychology Courses Taught? What Can We Do To Change This?**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Although we have no exact figures on the number of courses in peace psychology that are taught in undergraduate and graduate psychology departments the United States, it seems to me on the basis of available materials that there it is at best a limited number. One leading figure in the field I consulted suggested there may be 30-40 courses in peace psychology currently being taught. However, even this person was unsure, and he concluded the number is negligible. To be sure, courses in social psychology are taught in most psychology training programs, and these courses often include material on group conflict, conflict resolution, and related peace-psychology topics; but, in reality, this constitutes minimal coverage when we consider that local, national, and global peace problems are the most pressing challenges of our times.

A decade ago, Woolf & Hulsizer (2003) noted that psychology has long had an interest in peace and conflict topics, but little efforts has been made to formalize this at curriculum levels. They write:

From the very beginning, psychology in the United States has concerned itself with issues of peace and conflict. For example, the early writings of William James included essays on peace and war. Following World War II, research on the nature of interpersonal and intergroup violence burgeoned. Much of this research was immediately incorporated into psychology courses. Indeed, all the major social psychology textbooks and many introductory psychology books contain extensive writings devoted to the antecedents of aggression. However, following World War II there was also a simultaneous increase in research devoted to the study of peace and conflict resolution. Indeed, much has been learned about the antecedents of peace and effective conflict resolution across a variety of domains. Unfortunately, much of this research has not found its way into traditional psychology textbooks and courses. For example, while all social psychology textbooks include a section on aggression, only 40% devote a chapter much space to peace and conflict resolution (it should be noted

that some of these chapters on conflict are in fact mini chapters included in the appendices) (Woolf & Hulsizer, 2003, p. 1).

Further testimony to the limited interest of psychology in the topic of peace is notable from the American Psychological Association's seven volume *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (Kazdin, 2000), arguably the definitive presentation of psychology's knowledge and status by the beginning of the 21st Century, which offers a single page to the topic of peace, and some minimal citations for conflict resolution and war.

The fact of the matter appears to be that until recent years, psychology has shown little interest in addressing the major global challenges of our times, including such challenges as poverty, overpopulation, environmental desecration, human rights, war, and, of course, peace. Today, there is a visible shift in concern for these challenges and more psychologists are becoming involved in peace studies as evidenced by the publication of *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology* edited by Christie (2012), and some others listed in the reference section of this article. Peace psychology courses, however, remain relatively few in number.

In the remainder of this article, I will offer the reader (1) speculations on why peace psychology courses are few in number, (2) a prototypical peace psychology course – 18 lectures outlined, (3) course purposes and course outcomes, (4) course assignments, (5) peace psychology journals, (6) notable peace psychology people, (7) some good starting points in the literature. All of these sections are open to the creative contributions of the reader and teacher.

## **I. SOME SPECULATIONS ON WHY SO FEW PEACE PSYCHOLOGY COURSES ARE TAUGHT**

Why are so few peace psychology courses taught? In a world filled with violence, conflicts, and wars, why is so little attention given to developing, teaching, and even requiring, a course in peace psychology as part of the requirements for a degree in psychology at all levels? Here are some speculations:

### **1. We have no one to teach the course familiar with the topic.**

**Answer:** The course could be team taught, and could make use of faculty from other departments and the community.

### **2. We barely have enough time to teach the courses that are required for a degree (e.g., intro, statistics, experimental, developmental, social, etc.).**

**Answer:** The addition of another course could easily fit into the electives slots, and if necessary, peace psychology could be taught across the psychology curriculum by introducing relevant material in each psychology course offering.

- 3. There is the problem of enrollment. Few students may be interested in a course in peace psychology. Would we be able to cover costs?**

**Answer:** I cannot give you exact enrollment figures from other schools, but I think the course would draw hundreds of students. Students are concerned with peace issues. The topic is appealing and relevant.

- 4. The process of getting a new course on the books is too time consuming and difficult. The process involves departmental approval, curriculum committee approval, and university administration approval for starters.**

**Answer:** Yes, the administrative bureaucracy is a problem, and this does limit creative and timely changes because it compels request answer detailed questions regarding faculty, costs, enrollment, and needs. But, by first offering the course on an experimental basis via a senior level seminar, answers to critical questions can be provided.

- 5. A course in peace psychology could prove too controversial to some because it would address highly politicized topics like war, violence, intergroup conflict, corruption, and related opinion topics.**

**Answer:** Yes, but these topics constitute some of the most critical challenges of our times and they dwarf in significance many of the topics that are addressed in current courses.

- 6. A course in peace psychology could provoke student activism and we already have too many complaints from students. Next thing you know, they will be asking for mediation of department problems.**

**Answer:** Yes, hopefully it will provoke student activism, and in doing so awaken faculty and student minds to the challenges we face and offer them a forum for discussion and debate. Is this not the purpose of education? Further, other departments offer courses related to peace issues and concerns (e.g., Political Science, Law).

- 7. A course in peace psychology would inevitably introduce the universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) into our department and university cultures and this could prove problematic given existing policy and practice limitations in this area. All of sudden you would have faculty and students citing the different articles of the UDHR as justification for ethical or moral issues.**

**Answer:** Yes, and wouldn't that be exciting. And wouldn't that compel training programs to consider the UDHR as the foundation for their programs.

**8. There isn't much "evidence-based research" on the topic, and we are committed to a scientific psychology training model.**

**Answer:** Laughter! Ha, ha, ha! That term is abused by so many. If this were to be the basis of psychology . . . .

**9. Is there a substantive body of organized knowledge to warrant a course in peace psychology?**

**Answer:** Yes, there are journals, books, encyclopedias, and numerous organizations related to peace psychology. There is even a United States Institute of Peace, although it does not have equal status in influence, funding, and personnel to the Department of Defense.

**10. There is some question regarding whether peace psychology is a credible specialty area in Psychology, and whether or not it is part of our cognate discipline.**

**Answer:** Peace psychology draws upon many different specialty areas within Psychology and across other disciplines. Its concern is with those aspects of human behavior and experience related to peace, including such associated areas such as conflict, violence, anger, human relations, health and well being and even topics as the psychology of religion. It is obviously a topic that integrates knowledge from many areas, and in doing so, serves a useful function.

**11. Okay, Okay. Why do we need a course in peace psychology?**

The answer is quite simple, yet profound in its implications. The world is at war. There are scores of low intensity and high intensity conflicts occurring across the globe. Nationally, we are faced with violence in our homes, workplaces, and schools. Crime is endemic! While so many of these problems are structural in nature -- that is related to institutional inequities in income, opportunity, and hope -- ultimately the challenges come down to altering human and changing human psyches to understand the roots of violence, to prize and value peace, and to know how to promote prevent the first, and to promote the latter. That is what peace psychology is all about.

**12. Okay, okay, give me an idea what a course in peace psychology would look like in terms of different topics covered and education materials.**

**Answer:** Okay, okay, the following are examples of some lectures that could be included in a peace psychology course. You can pick and choose from these fifteen examples. Typically, a graduate course involves 36 hours divided into 12 three hour lecture meetings.

## **II. PROTOTYPICAL PEACE PSYCHOLOGY COURSE LECTURES**

A course in peace psychology can emphasize many different topical concerns and educational formats (e.g., lecture, seminar, applied, distance, etc.) The following course prototype is simply one example of what might be taught. You can adjust the course to faculty's and student interests and skills.

### **1. Course Purpose:**

This course offers students a comprehensive overview of peace psychology, which is a specialty area within the discipline of psychology concerned with the nature, cause, intervention, and prevention of the determinants of peace and related topics (e.g., social justice, social activism, non-violence).

### **2. Examples of Course Outcomes:**

- Students will learn basic foundations (i.e., assumptions, concepts, terms, and ideas) in peace psychology;
- Students will learn major challenges to national and global peace;
- Students will learn important historical events and personnel associated with the development and evolution of peace psychology;
- Students will learn the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and related ethical, legal, and humanitarian codes;
- Students will learn basic research skills in peace psychology;
- Students alternative sources, interventions, and resolutions for national and international conflicts;
- Students will learn about the causes of war and related forms of violence (e.g., holocaust, torture, terrorism);
- Students will learn about special high-risk populations that are generated and sustained by war and violence (e.g., refugees, PTSD victims, perpetrators)
- Students will learn about important figures in peace and peace psychology

**Lecture 1: Introduction:**

- A. Statement of Purpose and Learning Outcomes
- B. Review of Course Outline
- C. Assignments
- D. What is Peace Psychology? Definitions
- E. Terms of Reference
- F. Contemporary Peace Issues and Concerns (e.g., civil wars, international conflicts, domestic violence)
- G. Facts and Figures
- H. Global Peace Index

**Lecture 2: History of Peace Psychology and Peace Studies:**

- A. Evolution of Specialty Area
- B. Key Events
- C. Key Psychologists and Others
- D. Current Status of Field
- E. Research Methods:
  - 1. Biographies
  - 2. Narrative and Testimony Compilations
  - 3. Surveys
  - 4. Lab Studies
  - 5. Historical Essays

**Lecture 3: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:**

- A. History
- B. Articles
- C. Current Status
- D. International and National Obligations and Legalities
- E. Issues of Torture, Poverty, Food

**Lecture 4: The Psychology of Conflict**

- A. What is conflict?
- B. Domestic, National, and International Conflicts
- C. Sources of Conflict
- D. War as Conflict
- E. Intractable Conflicts (e.g., Palestine-Israel, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka)

**Lecture 5: Conflict Resolution**

- A. What is Conflict Resolution
- B. Types of Conflict Resolution
- C. Non-Violence
- D. Alternative Protest Forms
- E. Non-Killing
- F. Diplomacy
- G. Truth and Reconciliation
- H. Ethno-Cultural Considerations

**Lecture 6: The Psychology of War**

- A. History of War
- B. Causes of War
- C. Consequences of War
- D. Statistics
- E. The Afghanistan War: An Example

**Lecture 7: Psychologies of Terrorism**

- A. What is Terrorism
- B. History of Terrorism
- C. Types of Terrorism
- D. Terrorist Organizations
- E. Counterterrorism

**Lecture 8: Genocide and Mass Killing**

- A. Definitions
- B. Historical Examples
- C. Reasons
- D. Current Examples
- E. Preventive Actions

**Lecture 9: Some Special Topics:**

- A. Globalization and Psychology
- B. Climate Change
- C. Torture
- D. Empire and Imperialism

**Lecture 10: Refugees and IDPs**

- A. Definitions
- B. Statistics
- C. Refugee Cycle
- D. Mental Health Issues
- E. Treatment and Care

### **Lecture 11: Role of Religions in World Peace:**

- A. Nature of Religions
- B. Role of Beliefs
- C. Need for Certainty
- D. Violence in Religions
- F. Non-Violent Religions
- G. Cults
- H. Spirituality versus Dogma/Ritual

### **Lecture 12: Cultures of War**

- A. Etc.

### **Lecture 13: Cultures of Peace**

- A. Definitions
- B. Characteristics
- C. Special Issues
  1. Teaching Peace in Schools
  2. Sustainability
  3. Social Interest

### **Lecture 14: Social Justice and Social Activism**

- A. What is Social Justice?
- B. Historical Foundations
- C. Philosophical and Ethical Issues
- D. Social Activism
- E. Historical Foundations
- F. Social and Political Issues
- G. Social Responsibilities and Duties

### **Lecture 15: Psychology and National Security**

- A. The Issue of National Security
- B. The United States National Security Organization



- C. Agencies and Offices
- D. Psychology and Ethics
- E. Roles for Psychology
- F. Legal, Moral, and Ethical Issues

## **Lecture 16: Some Biographical Studies of Peace Makers**

- A. The Nobel Peace Prize
  - 1. History
  - 2. Purpose
  - 3. Consequence
  
- B. Major Peace Figures: Historical and Contemporary
  - 1. Historical**
    - a. Mohandas Gandhi
    - b. Martin Luther King
    - c. Abraham Lincoln
    - d. Robert W. White
    - e. Buddha
    - f. William Penn
    - g. Thomas Merton
    - h. Ignacio Martin-Baro
    - h. Paulo Freire
  
  - 2. Contemporary**
    - a. Nelson Mandela
    - b. Howard Zinn
    - c. Aung san suu kyi
    - d. Arundhat Roy
    - e. Mairead McGuire
    - f. Johan Galtung
    - f. Glenn Paige
    - g. Noam Chomsky
    - h. Chris Hedges

- C. Inner and Outer Peace

## **Lecture 17: Some Closing Thoughts:**

- A. Is Peace possible?
- B. What can Psychology contribute to peace?

- C. Rethinking Psychology
- D. Where do we go from here?

## **2. APPLIED PEACE PSYCHOLOGY LECTURES (These lectures can be inserted amidst the others or taught as a separate applied section, course, or practicum)**

**Lecture 18: School Violence**

**Lecture 19: Domestic and Home Violence**

**Lecture 20: International Conflicts**

**Lecture 21: Developing Peace Programs for Children and Youth**

**Lecture 22: Using the Media for Social Change**

**Lecture 23: Organizing Peace and Social Justice Groups for Action**

**Lecture 24: Identifying Peace and Social Justice Issues for Action**

**Lecture 25: Countering Hate Groups**

**Lecture 26: Acquiring Inner Peace: Methods and Practices**

**Lecture 27: Learning Non-Defensive Communication**

A course in peace psychology (the psychology of peace, peace studies) constitutes a meaningful and useful topic of study that should be offered in psychology department training programs. It introduces students to critical important areas of inquiry that psychology has often failed to address and it increases the possibility of research in these areas and thus expands psychology's knowledge base. Further, it introduces the possibility of developing intervention and prevention methods based on psychology's broad repertoire of skills developed in clinical, organizational, and community areas.

### **III. SOME POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSE EVALUATION OPTIONS**

- Typical essay or multiple choice examination ;-(
- Conduct interviews with students and others about attitudes toward peace using existing measures

- Write a biography of an individual you know that is committed to peace and social activism
- Write a biography on a notable peace psychologist
- Develop a photographic essay that communicates the need for peace
- Participate in a local peace and social activism project
- Create a power point presentation on a peace topic (e.g., refugees, war, torture)
- Research our peace organizations and provide abstracts of their purposes and background
- Provide an evaluation of whether and how the course has changed you personally in values and specific behaviors
- Etc.

#### **IV. SOME PEACE PSYCHOLOGY ORGANIZATIONS**

- Counselors for Social Justice (**Counselors for Social Justice <COUNSELORS-SOCJUST-L@LISTS.UFL.EDU>**)
- Psychologists for Social Responsibility (**www.psysr.org**)
- Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence Psychology Division 48, American Psychological Association (**www.peacepsych.org**).
- Transcend (**www.transcend.org**)
- Center for Global Nonkilling (**www.cgnk.org**)

#### **V. SOME PEACE PSYCHOLOGY JOURNALS:**

- *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*
- *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*
- *Journal of Asymmetric Conflict*
- *Journal of Genocide Research*
- *Journal of Peace Research*
- *Journal of Social Issues*
- *Mediation Quarterly*

- *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*
- *Peace and Conflict Studies (Electronic)*
- *Political Psychology*
- *Social Justice Research*
- *Journal of Social Justice Research*

## **VI. SOME NOTABLE CONTEMPORARY PEACE PSYCHOLOGISTS**

- David Adams
- Jean Marie Arrigo
- Daniel Bar Tal
- Dorothy Ciarlo
- Daniel Christie
- Michael D'Andrea
- Joseph DeRivera
- Morton Deutsch
- Donald Dutton
- Roy Eidelson
- Mauro Gallucio
- Tom Greening
- Ian Hansen
- Ani Kalajian
- Herbert Kelman
- Paul Kimmel
- Michael Knox
- Dan Landis
- Evelin Lindner
- Robert J. Lifton, M.D.
- Brinton Lykes
- Kathleen Malley-Morrison
- Daniel Mayton
- Cristina Montiel
- Clark McCauley
- Rachel McNair
- Fathali Moghaddam
- Michael Nagler
- Linden Nelson
- Paul Pedersen
- Marc Pilisuk
- Michael Roe
- Floyd Rudmin
- Louisa Saffioti
- Milton Schwebel
- M. Brewster Smith

- Tod Sloan
- Ervin Staub
- Christopher Stout
- Nora Sveaass
- Ethel Tobach
- Richard Wagner
- Michael Wessells
- Linda Woolf
- Etc. (It is impossible to list everyone. Please be patient. Add your name if I missed including it on this list. I am getting old).

## **IX. Some Useful Starting References**

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**Now, there is no longer an excuse for not teaching undergraduate and/or graduate peace psychology courses. You have a start! Make it happen!**

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