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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Rachel M. MacNair. *The Psychology of Peace: An Introduction.* Westport: Praeger, 2003. x + 239 pp. $78.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-97855-6; $31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-275-97856-3.

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Published on H-Peace (May, 2004)

Peace Psychology: An Integrative Discipline That Is Difficult to Introduce

Peace psychology has a long and rich history that can be traced back to the early writings of pioneer American psychologist William James. From the end of World War II to the present, research has burgeoned as psychologists have sought to understand the psychosocial roots and nature of conflict and violence at all levels from interpersonal to international. In recent years, peace psychology as a distinct field of research and study has come into its own with the development of distinct professional organizations, journals, and training programs.[1] While individual books have been written and edited covering a broad range of peace psychology topics, no single-authored introductory peace psychology text has been undertaken. Rachel MacNair, with her text *The Psychology of Peace: An Introduction*, attempts to fill this gap. Unfortunately, while the text is much needed, it attempts to do too much in too little space and thus falls short in its mission.

As conflict occurs in all human arenas, the field of peace psychology is quite broad. Significant research has been conducted examining interpersonal violence in a variety of contexts from domestic violence to school shootings; structural forms of violence, including institutionalized forms of bias and systematic human rights violations; and mass violence, including ethno-political conflict, genocide, and war. Conversely, peace psychologists have worked to develop and assess programs aimed at teaching concepts and strategies of peace, effective conflict resolution skills, as well as reconciliation and reconstruction following conflict. Such programs have been implemented around the globe with such disparate populations as young school-age children in the United States to survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Additionally, peace psychology is not a stand-alone discipline. Rather it draws on research from other disciplines outside of as well as within psychology, including but not limited to clinical psychology, social psychology, political psychology, media psychology, developmental psychology, political science, history, education, sociology, international relations, and peace studies.

Considering the breadth of the discipline, it is not surprising that it would be difficult to condense the field into a concise introductory textbook. MacNair makes a good first effort but perhaps the text would have been better served by a move towards expansion rather than brevity. Much important material relevant to an introduction to the study of peace psychology is omitted from the text and organizationally, brevity does not equate with clarity. MacNair divides the text into eight short chapters: "Psychological Causes of Violence," "Psychological Effects of Violence," "Psychological Causes of Nonviolence," "Psychological Effects of Nonviolence," "Conflict Resolution," "Nonviolent Struggle and Social Movements," "Public Policy Issues of Violence," and "Gentle Lives and Culture." At first glance, this organizational structure appears to be a straightforward and logically coherent manner with which to present the material. However, due to the breadth of the discipline, this organizational structure may lead to more confusion than coherence for the reader, particularly someone new to the field.

This structural difficulty is most apparent in the first four chapters, as seemingly disparate areas of research are presented that fail to gel into a logical picture concerning the causes and effects of violence and nonviolence. For example, the first chapter on the psychological causes of violence draws upon a number of theories that have been tied to various forms of aggression at various levels. Thus it includes theories examining topics such as groupthink, obedience to authority, moral disengagement, personality variables, belief systems, and technology. Unfortunately, these concepts are not tied together to provide a comprehensive theory, connection, or accounting for individual or mass acts of violence. Moreover, each topic is usually anecdotally illustrated by only one instance of violence in relation to its inclusion. Thus,

for example, groupthink is discussed in relation to the Kennedy administration's decision concerning the Bay of Pigs, while Stanley Milgram's study of obedience to authority is introduced with a sentence about the Holocaust.[2] A more systematic analysis of all of the discussed concepts elucidated by multiple examples of various forms of violence and aggression would have been useful.

Another problem throughout the book relates to research and referencing. Throughout the text, information is presented as fact without the presentation or citation of adequate evidence. It may be that MacNair is simply presenting hypotheses that have not been tested or examined, but which represent common beliefs about particular topics. For example, in the chapter concerning the psychological effects of nonviolence, she states: "Not only is casting off fear one of the prerequisites for nonviolent action, it is also an effect of that action" (p. 95). Thus, according to MacNair, involvement in nonviolent action will result in greater fearlessness. Unfortunately, no reference is provided to research on this topic, nor is even anecdotal, albeit problematic, evidence provided. MacNair would have better served the study of peace psychology had she clearly identified those hypotheses that need testing and provided clear references for those areas for which research exists. It is also important to mention that MacNair does not always draw on the most recent research in the field, but unfortunately relies on early research for many topics.

More worrisome are the occasions when MacNair presents information as fact that can be easily and persuasively questioned. For example, MacNair introduces her discussion of the relationship of technology to violence by stating, "the technologies of violence–weapons and the bureaucracy that mobilizes people–increase its impact. Though many throughout history had ideologies and genocidal intent similar to the Nazis, the twentieth-century technology of the Nazis enabled them to kill in greater numbers" (p. 15). This statement fails to consider a broad range of democidal actions of the pre-twentieth century at the hands of various Chinese leaders, Mongols, slavers, and colonizers bent on destruction of indigenous populations that resulted in the death of between 133 and 625 million people. The Mongol Khans are estimated to have killed an estimated 30 million people, with the army of the Mongol Tului alone responsible for the massacre of 700,000 to 1,747,000 people in 1221.[3] Perhaps MacNair is not familiar with pre-twentieth-century history related to genocide and mass violence. However, her statement fails to take into account even more recent events that highlight the rapidity with which genocide or mass violence can occur using limited technology (e.g., the Rwandan genocide). In another chapter, MacNair argues that "there are actions individuals can take in their personal lives that would have the effect of lowering the amount of violence in the world" and uses as an example "boycotts of those who exploit workers in poverty." Unfortunately, while on the surface such boycotts seem appropriate, they ultimately may cause more harm than good as these laborers' only other alternative may be work within the sex trade. Thus, the promotion of peace requires more comprehensive actions aimed at issues and problems of company practices, poverty, global human rights, development, and globalization. These are just two examples of problematic statements within the text. Unfortunately, errors such as these call into question the premises of individual chapter sections and raise questions about the accuracy of the entire text.

Throughout the text, MacNair argues against the consideration or use of violence. For example, she argues against a "just war" hypothesis and also discusses alternatives to violence in situations of imminent harm from others. While she makes many excellent points, in actuality, she does not fully grapple with the idea of peace by forceful means. For example, she provides anecdotes concerning individuals facing threats–the possibility of rape, car-jacking, and a belligerent man on a bus–to illustrate the nonviolent methods of connection and changing the script aimed at the reduction of violent confrontation. However, she fails to take it to the next, necessary step to examine the question of what one does if these methods fail. Ultimately, any text that attempts to grapple with the issue of nonviolence must be willing to examine all the possible consequences of such actions both positive and negative.

MacNair does an excellent job discussing the topic of, as well as the limited research related to, trauma experienced by perpetrators of violence. Unfortunately, this has been a topic largely ignored by most of the literature concerning the impact of violence on individuals. Most researchers discuss the impact of violent action on the victim but fail to address the short- and long-term effects on those who engage in violent actions. Whether the individual engaging violently is a perpetrator of domestic violence or a soldier engaging in a "just war," the violent action changes the individual. In the former, society may not care about the perpetrator and in the latter, society may not want to face the destructive impact of violence on the soldier. MacNair well argues and documents that the impact must be studied, as otherwise peace for both the individual and society will remain elusive.

Most individuals who engage in the writing of a textbook in a particular discipline have a blueprint or guide based on those who have written such texts previously. However, no such blueprint existed for MacNair. As such, her efforts are to be applauded. Unfortunately, readers are not likely to walk away from a reading of *The Psychology of Peace* with a broad and substantial introduction to the discipline. On a positive note, they may be left with more questions than answers and thus be motivated to read more about the field. Towards such ends, MacNair provides good recommended reading lists at the end of each chapter. Ultimately, if used in the classroom, the text would need to be augmented by a fair amount of supplemental reading, research, and exercises, particularly those aimed at critical evaluation of the material.

Notes

[1]. For more information about programs and resources related to peace psychology, go to http://www.webster.edu/peacepsychology/.

[2]. Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18 (1965): pp. 57-76; and *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[3]. Rudolph J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996).

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Citation: Linda M. Woolf. Review of MacNair, Rachel M., *The Psychology of Peace: An Introduction.* H-Peace, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9297

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