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Inspiring Psychologists to Respond to Global Issues

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Global life-changing events such as the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the applicability of psychology's accumulated knowledge about human behaviour to problems in which cultural sensitivity, social justice, and advocacy are paramount (Zalaquett et al., 2019). Yet many psychologists do not seem to realize how relevant our discipline is to the resolution of global issues, missing opportunities for sizeable contributions. Here, we reflect on what is needed from psychology as a discipline and as a profession to respond more effectively to issues of global consequence:

- **Redefine what it means to be a “psychologist.”** Psychologists need to see and develop themselves as learning leaders who help others learn, grow and change at all levels of human organization (Shullman, 2018). We have to see ourselves as more than academics, clinical care providers, or consultants -- we need to ask ourselves about the meaningfulness of our work in relation to global issues. This requires a shift in mindset within training programs and funding bodies so that past models are not perpetuated. Having said this, it is never too late to become a psychologist or psychological scientist who addresses global issues. Many trainees and professionals ‘learn the ropes’ by joining advocacy committees, special interest groups or task forces in regional, national and international associations.
- **Broaden the unit of analysis.** Psychologists and psychology across the globe would benefit from adopting a population health or community psychology model. This would enable us to reach the broadest possible number of people, starting in their communities and groups, and creating appropriate strategies to prevent or to mitigate problems, and to maintain the desired end state. To accomplish this, psychologists and psychology must adopt a systems perspective to underpin community contexts and their impact on behaviors. This requires psychology to go *beyond* an individual focus, to a focus on families, groups, teams, organizations, institutions and nations as basic units of human organization and activity.
- **Consider other epistemologies.** To adopt a broader contextual perspective, psychology as a field needs to broaden its epistemological foundation, which largely resides in Western world views. In this vein, we observe efforts to decolonize and indigenize psychology already taking place. Tackling global issues requires an understanding of local contexts and cultures so that the solutions that arise from psychological research and initiatives are relevant and useful to those regions. What might be considered a very important issue in the West might be viewed as unimportant within the local context. What might be considered the ‘gold standard’ in intervention in the West might turn out to be totally ineffective in another part of the world.

Understanding the local contexts or other epistemologies does not mean abandoning efforts to uncover similarities among societies; the most effective way for different groups to come together is through common paths. While we increase our recognition and understanding of differences, we also must learn what links us together. We need to develop a sufficiently common view to come together to

address global issues.

- Increase access to knowledge and uptake of Open Science approaches.** Increasing global reciprocal access to research and information resources is critically important. Psychology and psychologists have led the way in advocating, promoting and adopting Open Science principles and practices in recent years. However, there is much to do to increase uptake of these new and important approaches. Open Science – by which we mean the sharing of data as well as the dissemination of results -- is a valuable tool for developing solutions to international challenges such as a global pandemic or climate change. Adopting these principles and approaches will undoubtedly improve the quality and robustness of the research findings and dramatically increase access to the latest research and available evidence base. Therefore, in order to help further improve quality, openness and rigour, we urge psychological scientists to endeavour to preregister their research hypotheses and analysis plans (e.g., <https://aspredicted.org/>; see <http://dx.doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.4584>; Bosnjak et al., in press) or to use registered reports (e.g., <https://osf.io/rr/>) and make their data FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) recognizing the principle of ‘as open as possible; as closed as necessary’ (BPS, 2020, O’Connor, 2021).
- Learn to communicate the nature and value of our work in a way that is comprehensible to the public, decision-makers, and professionals in other disciplines.** If nobody can understand us, nobody will want what we have to offer. This means avoiding technical and scientific jargon when we explain what we know, what we do, and what it means for tangible acts that benefit the world community. Creativity in translating our research and knowledge will enable us to reach a broad audience. Many psychologists are learning how to engage with audiences and stakeholder groups through social media platforms, podcasts, webinars, live streams and recorded talks, and others communicate directly to policy-makers or serve on committees to write application standards. These skills should be taught and cultivated starting at the earliest stages of training, and career progression criteria would benefit from including such outreach in addition to traditional publications, teaching and service.

Psychologists from around the world work together to advance the application of psychology to global issues through the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA), which is a collective of over 60 psychology associations, including our five affiliations. To learn more, visit:

<https://www.apa.org/international/networks/global-psychology-alliance>.

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