The Art of Advocacy: Psychology at the United Nations and Beyond

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Psychologists have engaged in advocacy, which has influenced programming and policy locally, nationally, and globally (Garrison, DeLeon, & Smedley, 2017). One of the pathways for the dissemination of psychological science globally is the United Nations (Rosenzweig, 1988). The first author served in the first group of American Psychological Association representatives to the United Nations nearly twenty years ago (Bryant-Davis, Okorodudu, & Holliday, 2010). There are multiple non-governmental mental health organizations working to bring awareness of psychological lens to the United Nations. The role of psychologists at the United Nations is three-fold: education, advocacy, and monitoring.

While conventions hosted through the United Nations highlight the interdisciplinary nature of policy-making, stakeholders would benefit from greater knowledge of psychological considerations. Education takes place through dissemination of briefs, oral presentations, as well as individual meetings with decision-makers. The United Nations, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations host programs and conventions to raise awareness about major issues and to develop interdisciplinary, multinational solutions. The issues addressed at the United Nations which benefit most from a psychological lens include: sustainable development, climate, racism, war, women’s rights and safety, and global health conditions such as HIV/AIDS and now COVID-19.

Psychologists engage in knowledge translation to inform policy makers of the relevant psychological scholarship for policy development and policy reform (Cohen, Lee, & McIlraith, 2012). Psychological advocacy should provide policy makers the information necessary to make psychologically informed policy decisions. Those who stand to gain the most from psychological advocacy are vulnerable populations, though this lens will benefit society writ-large.

As the first author learned through her experiences at the United Nations, the pillars of advocacy are collaboration, extended engagement, and succinct language. The United Nations employed a search committee in order to include psychologists with a diverse set of interests to broaden the frame of reference for their work. Despite the broad scope of psychological expertise, the psychologists chosen consulted with other health and mental health professionals including those oper-
Preventing Students for Psychological Advocacy

Psychological advocacy offers an opportunity to address social issues; additionally, the education and preparation of psychology students for engagement in advocacy may be necessary to ensure the vitality of the field (Fox, 2008). Some psychologists do not support engagement in advocacy as they argue it is only our job to conduct the research and it is the responsibility of others to apply that research (Cohen, Lee, & McIlraith, 2006). Additional obstacles for psychological advocacy include fear of professional consequences, disinterest, unawareness, and lack of knowledge (Heinowitz et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2019). However, there has been a growing acknowledgement that global contemporary issues are multi-faceted and benefit from the collaboration and knowledge of experts in multiple disciplines (Bryant-Davis, Okorodudu, & Holliday, 2010). In order to best prepare psychology students, assignments should integrate theory with contemporary societal challenges. Psychology professors should ensure that students are capable of weighing policy implications when developing research papers, writing briefs and developing presentations. Educa-

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Psychological advocacy must attend to culture, disparities in access, and the need for more diversity in the field (Fox, 2008). Social inequities create and exacerbate societal problems in housing, health, safety, education, development, employment, and poverty (Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). Psychologists who commit to social justice advocacy apply psychological research to the advancement of equitable rights, access, and services. Engagement on a global scale requires attending to our identity, history, and context as psychologists and an active commitment to resisting colonial framework. As we bring information based on our study of psychology, we need to have the cultural humility required to learn and value the indigenizing of psychology that will disrupt our assumptions. This awareness brings to light another key collaboration between psychologists from the Global North (or the minority of the world) with psychologists and community leaders from the majority of the world, who reside primarily in the Global South (Bhatia, 2019). Psychologists need to attend to the intersection of psychological and cultural influences, as well as individual and societal challenges. Culturally congruent, decolonized psychological advocacy emerges from an appreciation of indigenous psychology (Bhatia, 2019). There is a need for the amplification of diverse global voices so we do not assume to speak for others but instead, advocate for a larger table of decision makers where we pursue collective, collaborative, equitable solutions.