Great Lakes 2014 Proposal Submission

Overall Symposium:

Title: Dismantling Ideology: Structural Violence and the Role of Counseling Psychology

Abstract: Forms of oppression and their impact on physical and mental health have been well documented in study. While the scope of psychology has traditionally been conceptualized as intervention at the individual level, the movements toward multicultural, cross-cultural, and critical views of psychology have expanded psychologists' conceptualization of mental health practice and research. While social justice has gained greater attention, the translation of this perspective with traditional psychology has proved difficult. The proposed presentation offers the framework of structural violence as an organizing theory for exploration of violence (e.g. physical violence, oppression, discrimination, & injustice) within psychology. First introduced by sociologist Johan Galtung (1969) and echoed in the work of social medicine (Farmer, 2006) and the psychopathology of colonization (Bulhan, 1985), structural violence directly explores oppressive forces and their relationship to justice. The purpose of this presentation is to introduce the usefulness of structural violence as a construct in psychology and then demonstrate two contemporary applications of this construct to the work of counseling psychologists. First, this presentation uses the framework of structural violence as it operates in global and national labor markets. Focusing specifically on recent examples in labor practices that can be understood as structural violence and offering suggestions for research, advocacy, and policy for vocational psychology. Second, this presentation will explore counseling psychologists ethical role in the prediction and prevention of violence and make an argument for expanding current definitions of this role to include structural violence. This argument is made through the context of psychologists' prediction and prevention of mass shootings, which call for practitioners to use societal-level risk factors (i.e. oppression, structural violence) in prediction strategies and engage in culturally-transformative prevention efforts. Overall, this symposium will present implications of structural violence for the work of clinicians, researchers and advocates.

Presentation 1:

Title: Structural Violence in the World of Work

Abstract: Research promoting nonviolence often acts at a level of visible and ostensible conflict. Of equal importance are explorations of the larger picture of antagonistic systems, both political and cultural, that perpetuate injustice. Milton Schwebel (1997) writing in the late 90's proposed viewing global job insecurity as a form of structural violence. In the nearly 20 years since his clarion calls for reform (e.g. full employment, living wage initiatives) have gone unanswered. Historically, the product of structural violence is unequal access to resources; the subjective symptom is often social unrest. Yet, to locate the workings of structural violence, it is useful to explore the social and political ideologies that allow such oppression to exist. There is increasing evidence of economic exploitation and structural violence that is committed within working conditions. Our recent history, including the financial bust of 2008 and the growing income disparity and wage debate currently taking form, demands a re-envisioning of Schwebel's arguments. The proposed presentation forwards Schwebel's thesis and highlights not only the structural forces that have extended inequality and created more hostile work environments, but also explores the role of cultural violence as a tacit accomplice in condoning vocational policy that has restricted the rights of workers in the US. Offering a three part perspective built from peace researcher Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) the current paper explores the concepts of cultural, structural, and personal violence in the current labor market. Illuminating these concepts with recent policy and political debates as well as recent research on the pernicious impact of poverty and unemployment. The current presentation offers implications for research, psychological practice, advocacy, and policy across disciplines as well as strategies to empower those who are disenfranchised.

Presentation 2:

Title: Psychologists' Role in the Prediction and Prevention of Mass Shootings: Implications for Challenging Structural Violence

Abstract: Psychologists have a duty to protect society from violent others, which includes responsibilities to predict and prevent violence. This presentation explores the application of psychologists' duty to protect to mass shootings, defined as four or more shooting-related deaths in the same location and period of time. In the process of this exploration, the assumptions of individual psychologists and biases within the field of psychology become evident. This presentation identifies the assumptions and flaws that arise in the context of mass shootings, and then uses them to question the adequacy of psychologists' prediction and prevention methods overall. One assumption commonly made by psychologists is to attribute violent behavior to inherent, individual flaws instead of considering the influence of structural violence and cultural oppression. Another bias explored within this presentation is the overlap of psychology's renewed focus on gun violence with the burgeoning impact of violence on White suburban communities via mass shootings, while gun violence overall disproportionately impacts communities of Color and historically has not received much attention from psychologists. In addition to these biases and assumptions, flaws in traditional methods of prediction and prevention also come to light while exploring counseling psychologists' ethical role as it relates to mass shootings. One such flaw is psychologists' use of individual-level, decontextualized risk factors (i.e. mental health status) to predict violence despite limited research linking risk factors to mass shootings or gun violence overall. Recommendations will be made for psychologists' use of cultural and contextual risk factors and the use of Threat Assessment, a risk assessment model that expands current methods to include social- and cultural-level factors. Lastly, this presentation recommends that psychologists' ethical role in the prediction and prevention of violence should be expanded to challenge structural violence by engage in culturally-transformative prevention efforts.