

## Reviews of *Psychology for a Better World*

Summarising fascinating research and insights from social and positive psychology, Niki persuades us in a personable and convincing way to look more deeply at our motivations and strategies when advocating for improved social and environmental conditions. Our intuitive approaches of arguing more aggressively with our perceived opponents, and telling others how wrong they are, are often not effective ways to get lasting behavioural change. Instead Niki provides a wide range of evidence to show that boosting positive emotions, role modelling, understanding the power and dynamics of identity and moral context all need to be authentically applied if we are to be effective change agents. This involves looking at our own motivations very carefully, which can be uncomfortable, but which Niki admirably does herself throughout the book. This book provides an urgently needed example of using sound evidence from the social sciences, particularly psychology, to engage people more positively in environmental sustainability. It also has a broader applicability, providing insights on effective advocacy for other areas of social change, for instance health promotion.

**Hugh Norriss, Mental Health Foundation, New Zealand**

Psychology is the study of mind & behaviour and should therefore harbour essential information for anyone interested in how humans may be able to change in order to create a more sustainable society. Alas, little has been done to take full advantage of this and so Niki Harré's new book is particularly welcome. A key argument of her crisp and lucid discussion is the need to drag environmental issues from the conventional into the moral domain for the next generation. Harré manages to navigate the complexities of moral psychology with admirable ease and insightful purpose – balancing the objective of scientifically informed political advocacy with her own struggles to be the change she wants to see in the world. This book should inspire.

**Thomas Suddendorf, Professor, University of Queensland, Australia**

As a long term environmental and social justice activist, many times have I bemoaned a campaign's seeming inability to inspire people to action. While we all have good personal reasons of our own why we choose to work for environmental justice, it's sometimes hard to convey that to others in a way that makes them want to get involved.

It's too easy for critics to dismiss us as starry-eyed idealists when they can't relate to the masses of facts and doom-saying we sometimes resort to in an effort to impress others of the urgency of our

cause. Where we see hope and human social change, they see entrenched human nature and inevitability that can engender hopelessness. Combine that with the daily struggle that is most people's lives under capitalism and just getting through the day can be hard.

And let's face it, nuclear weapons, global climate change, these are big and complex problems. They won't go away overnight. The military, corporations and the fossil fuel industries are huge, rich and powerful. Are we not mere blades of grass standing up against a juggernaut? Yet we continue to fight the good fight year after year. We know conquering such a massive social problem will require both an inspirational core of advocates for justice and a critical mass of people wanting change for it to happen. Why on earth do we do it?

This book by Niki Harré – an associate professor at the University of Auckland where she has taught social and community psychology for over a decade – looks at sustainability as a collective social enterprise, and effort to change society, not just solve one or two "problems". From that angle, social psychology is invaluable. Research has a lot to tell us about how people interact and go beyond actions that are just personal, ineffectual or symbolic.

Religious groups and PR firms are leagues ahead of us in this respect: knowing how people tick and taking advantage of our natural tendencies to want to belong, to be meaningful and to communicate with others to sell a belief system or a product. We, as environmental justice advocates, are not selling people a crock, we are enjoining them to work alongside us to build a better world. It is that focus on alternatives to the way things (don't) work now, that Harré says is the advantage that we have.

Secondly, she focuses on the positive. The half-life of plutonium, for instance, is a scary idea and a negative one that leaves us feeling hopeless. There is a strong stream of hopelessness in the environment movement that shows itself in trends like the end of civilisation movement and the likes of James Lovelock who paints a very grim picture of the future affected by climate change. It should be no surprise, given the obvious fear that Lovelock has for the future, that he would grasp at equally horrific solutions like nuclear power (Monbiot is another case in point). Fear stops people acting sensibly, to blurs the judgement, clouds the ability to reason effectively.

We need to embrace the fun and creativity in our actions, what Emma Goldman asks for in her "dancing" revolution. Research indicates that, "positive emotions make us more creative, better at sifting through complex information, more open to information that is personally threatening but potentially important, and better negotiators".

While dry reality has its place in submissions and scientific documents, we need to be aware of

how all the information we know can affect others emotionally. No-one wants to be immobilised by the terror of the next Fukushima, we need to know these things, but how do we impart that information to new volunteers and advocates?

Harré points to research that indicates that information is but one of the ways that people decide what is a right action, people look at what they have learnt, authority figures in their lives, and other people they respect, as well as the behaviour of their peers and their own sense of self-efficacy. We ourselves, with our heartfelt desire for a better world to live in, can be more persuasive advocates by being emotionally genuine than with facts alone. Empowering people to feel they can act and use their skills in engaging tasks are better ways of embracing them into our community than expectations of sheer will power and sacrifice.

Thirdly, Harré focuses on what we know about how people change: their beliefs, their attitudes, their behaviour. It's not about tricking people, but learning some skills of persuasion that can help a person who is somewhat rigid in their views be able to safely start to consider alternatives. This involves the psychological principle of "unconditional positive regard". She tells us to look for out common humanity, "think of ourselves as part of a negotiation with equals". In this respect she asks us to examine our own motivations for activism:

"[W]e are subject to all the confusion, hesitation and egoism that hold back progress on this issue. I believe that one deeply committed person can make a tremendous difference, but I also know that most of us are not that person – including me. It's a fine balance between letting yourself and others off the hook when the going gets tough, and being unrealistic about what is manageable. I finally came to accept my own and others' limitations as eco-warriors when I discovered fascinating research on how willpower appears to operate like an energy source – each of us only has a limited amount and we can use it up." Important words for those of us who have suffered the guilt of burn-out.

Harré offers us some practical suggestions in chapter 2. She reminds us to stop fighting battles we can't win and learn to know when to let go: "A consequence of this approach is letting go of those people who are way out of reach. Some people are, and will remain, resistant to sustainability. Maybe your neighbour really will be the last person in the world to give up driving his V8 to the corner store for a bottle of French mineral water." We put a lot of energy into trying to persuade these kind of people, they are obvious. Less obvious are those who 'sit on the fence'.

Harré ends the book with some very practical tasks and worksheets for assessing your own and others capacity at personal, local and community levels.

This book walks the talk on truly wanting to help people use the information learned by

psychology to create a better world. Harré has written a book that is freely distributed, well referenced, easily accessible and eminently useful. Take an empowering journey into psychology, read this book!

**Kim Stewart, Friends of the Earth Brisbane, <http://foe.org.au/psychology-better-world>**

I strongly recommend Nikki Harré's book for all community-minded academics and advocates who are curious about how to apply psychological theory and research to address real world concerns. Within the text, the reader will find many strategies to inspire others to make a difference. The entire text is derived from research clearly and artfully presented in the form of case examples and stories. Harré's writing flows seamlessly from how to frame your thinking about sustainability, to tips on building a movement.

In this book, Harré culls literature from a variety of disciplines (e.g., social psychology, perception, community psychology, positive psychology, cross cultural psychology, learning and development etc...), making clear for the reader how recent developments in research and theory can be interpreted and applied to sustainability at the individual, group, and systems levels.

Harré's book is at once credible and appropriately cited for academics as well as accessible for a lay audience. The values and perspectives in the book are presented clearly and honestly. The format is consistent and easy to follow: beginning with personal connections or stories to illustrate each issue, followed by a presentation of research on an array of topics, and concluding with concrete examples of how to apply these findings or concepts to sustainability work.

The broad and practical scope of this book can be appreciated from the chapter headings in the Table of Contents:

- Chapter 2- Positive Emotions and Flow: Encouraging creativity and commitment
- Chapter 3- Copying: The power of doing and telling
- Chapter 4- Identity: The role of who we are and where we belong
- Chapter 5-Morality and cooperation: Making the most of our desire to be good
- Chapter 6-A Self help guide for sustainability advocates

A particular high point in the text is the strong argument Harré makes, emphasizing the importance of encouraging creativity and commitment to solve our society's toughest challenges. Another great strength of the book is Harré's ability to hold two ideas in tension at once. For example, Harré makes the case for the benefits of increasing positive states while decreasing fear and anxiety-inducing states. Yet she avoids over-simplifying the issue, and emphasizes the benefits and drawbacks to

both types of psychological states and even discussing optimal ratios of these positive and negative states for individuals and groups.

Harré reminds us of the skill and frequency with which humans learn by copying one another. Then she expands on how this knowledge can be applied in community settings to encourage sustainability. She does this by presenting findings from research areas such as both modeling throughout the lifespan and social psychological factors such as normative influence.

She also reminds us of the power of stories, and provides concrete suggestions for how to apply all of the concepts in the chapter to our work toward greater sustainability. Also consistent with our field of community psychology the section on keys to identities reminds us of the interplay between our actions and our identities as well as our need for affiliation and a fundamental, interdependent sense of community.

The publishing of this book is both innovative and timely.

**Judah Viola, National Louis University, Review published in *The Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, Volume 3, August 2012.**

**<http://www.gjcpp.org/en/review.php?issue=11&review=12>**

Subtitled *Strategies to inspire Sustainability*, this very readable book delivers all that it promises and more. The opening sentence gives the flavour and intent of the book straight away: "I wrote this book for people (like me) who believe it is worth trying to make a better world in which both our species and the ecological systems we are part of can flourish."

I found the introduction to the psychology of human beings and what makes us want to do things, bad or good, fascinating on its own. While I have read other works on creativity and positivity, they have mostly been directed to personal development. (They are often not well-written too.) Harre, however, while acknowledging the need for personal fulfilment throughout, always refers to the groups within which human beings function and which all of us need.

She explores the psychology of groups, identity and belonging and offers strategies for influencing one's own networks, whether in the workplace or other groups. Insights about the responses activists get from people who do not share their world-view or who fear change: this is a very valuable section as most of us encounter varying levels of scepticism, derision and hostility when we mention such things as climate change or economic inequality. This part alone would be worth reading.

Having given the basic tools for understanding how people and groups are influenced, Harre goes on to talk about copying behaviour and the power of doing and telling. This is about modelling

behaviour, walking the talk and story-telling, one of the most powerful ways of transmitting ideas that humans have developed over millennia. But, just in case we lose sight of the reality of most of our lives, the section on Moral Leadership reminds us that none of us is perfect: "I am going to be blunt. *We take a lot of action in the name of sustainability that contributes to the problem.*"

I think that this style, at once intimate and authoritative, engages the reader and itself models an approach we can take. The conclusion is a practical self-help guide for activists.

Highly recommended.

**Janine McVeagh, Te Awa**

In *Psychology for a Better World: Strategies to Inspire Sustainability*, Niki Harré provides strategies to advocate for sustainability based on research from across the field of psychology. The book explores the role of positive emotions, imitation and modeling, identity, and morality as they apply to sustainability, summarizing the research on each of these themes, and suggesting strategies to use research results to make community change. While it is aimed at anyone working as an advocate for sustainability, this book may be of particular use to students and other emerging organizers as well as activists, teachers, and university professors.

This book makes an important contribution to the psychological literature related to sustainability. Multiple authors have pointed to many psychological questions that arise in the context of global climate change and other environmental challenges and to the important contributions psychology, including community psychology, can and should make to promote environmental sustainability (e.g., Riemer, 2010; Riemer & Reich, 2011; Swim et al., 2009). There is also certainly interest among sustainability advocates to apply psychological knowledge. When the environmental psychologists McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) published their book on community-based social marketing, for example, they made psychological theories and empirical findings from social and environmental psychology accessible to a broad audience and the book became an instant hit across the world. Most literature on the mitigation of global climate informed by psychology, however, has focused on behavior change, communication, and (social) marketing techniques (Dittmer & Riemer, 2012). A common mantra is that we have to make it easy for people to change and focus on one behavior at a time. Niki Harré takes a different approach. She considers the transformation toward a sustainable society as a challenging collective social enterprise. Her book also looks at a person more holistically with complex identities and personal stories navigating challenging moral dilemmas. As a result she draws from a broader range of psychological literature than other contributions from psychologists that

focus more on behavior change strategies. She also focuses on actions at the group and civic level in addition to the personal level. Similar to McKenzie-Mohr, however, Harré writes in a way that is very accessible and does not require previous academic training. As such, her book provides an important complement to the existing literature by providing insights from psychology on how to inspire sustainability without having to rely on marketing techniques.

In the first chapter, Harré outlines the three key principles underlying her work. The first is an emphasis on sustainability as “a collective social enterprise, aimed at new ways of managing ourselves” (p.6). This definition of sustainability differs from traditional, problem-based approaches in that it focuses on creating viable alternatives for sustainable living, rather than finding solutions to specific environmental issues, allowing us to broaden our visions, and make space for multiple creative and collaborative actions. The second principle is a focus on positive strategies, which Harré argues are more uplifting and engaging, and more sustainable, compared to negative approaches. Finally, this book emphasizes that sustainability advocates are human, too. Rather than pretending that researchers and advocates have access to an ultimate truth, her work positions advocates on equal footing with others in our communities to build sustainable futures. With this emphasis, she discusses how sustainability advocates are subject to the same confusion and hesitation that holds others back, and that we must strike a balance in acknowledging both our limitations and our power to change.

In the second chapter, Harré discusses how positive emotions can inspire creativity and motivate people to work for change. While negative emotions have their place in addressing immediate environmental crises, she demonstrates clearly how positive emotions fosters innovative solutions, and action inspired by these emotions is more sustainable for those involved. She also presents a balanced perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of both positive and negative emotional appeals, and the value of each for different circumstances. Finally, in this chapter Harré also introduces the concept of “flow,” a state of high interest and engagement, leading to great productivity and creativity. She suggests creating suitable opportunities for people to engage in sustainability work in ways that fosters their passion, and aims to create this state of “flow.”

While imitating others is often seen as a negative thing, humans are born to copy, and Harré shows in chapter 3 how learning from past successes and modeling positive behavior ourselves can be great ways to inspire change. People formulate their goals and undertake activities based on the possibilities demonstrated around them. By telling people about our successes, and providing detailed narratives of successful sustainability initiatives, we can make these actions seem more achievable for others, and inspire them to try and make their own change. Finally, Harré introduces the concept of self-

modeling. Just as hearing about how others have made change increases the salience of their actions and goals, imagining ourselves accomplishing change can inspire us to take action.

The fourth chapter focuses on identity, which at its core “is about how we think of ourselves and our position in society” (p. 69). Harré rightly argues that our identity plays a key role in how we choose to act in this world and, as such, is critical to understand if the goal is to inspire sustainability. The first part of this chapter provides a theoretical overview in regard to six aspects of identity drawing from a variety of psychological literature: the importance of action in making an identity real, the social nature of identity, self-worth, how identities are held in place, identities are not just what we are but also what we are not, and identity as a filter through which we see the world. Similar to other chapters, the second part considers more directly how to apply this knowledge about identity to promote sustainability.

The fifth chapter covers the issue of morality and the related issue of cooperation. Harré’s goal for this chapter is not to present a moralistic view of what is right and what is wrong, but rather, describe how people decide what is right and what is wrong, which certainly matters in making decisions about sustainability. In this chapter she draws from the work by Elliot Turiel and Larry Nucci, who differentiated among moral, conventional, and personal domains. Using this domain theory as an organizing framework, she presents primarily findings from the literature on moral development. The second part tries again to apply this knowledge more directly to the goal of inspiring sustainability, but, in our opinion, comes short of providing a clear understanding of how this knowledge may be applied. In the final chapter Harré offers a self-help guide for sustainability advocates. She presents this at three levels of actions: the personal level, the group level, and the civic level – going beyond most existing self-help guides for those who want to live more sustainably. The chapter presents why one should get involved at each of these levels and what some of the common challenges are. But, if one is looking for concrete instructions of how to carry out specific actions at any of these levels, this is not the right book.

In the appendix, Harré provides some worksheets that help sustainability advocates analyze what they do or want to do at each of the three levels of action.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is that it considers the path to sustainability as a collective social enterprise that will require significant personal transformation as well as collaboration with others. Harré was able to relay some of the complexity of social and personal transformation for sustainability while keeping the book accessible to a broad audience. The fact that she has not only studied this issue extensively academically, but also is somebody who has gone through this personal transformation herself, gives her both credibility and personal insights that she shares with us in this



book. The book draws both from well-established psychological knowledge and many personal stories making the concepts she presents easily understandable and relatable. Another strength of the book is that it makes psychological studies that are hidden in the hundreds of academic journals and thousands of books accessible to those who would be interested in applying it. This is facilitated by the clear application of the theoretical consideration to sustainability advocacy at the end of each chapter. Finally, it must be positively noted that Harré is making this book accessible for free in the public domain, reducing a significant barrier for many who try to access books written by academics.

Despite the overall quality of this book, it has some limitations. First, Harré's summaries of the literature can be somewhat lengthy at times, and readers who are not seeking in-depth research reviews may find some sections excessive. While the book is well-written, it is quite text-heavy, and could use more tables, figures, and other visual aids to incorporate other ways of learning. It would also have been useful if Harré had provided more examples to illustrate how programs or interventions might apply the knowledge presented in each chapter. In addition, the techniques suggested in the book are already in use by many advocates, and although they may benefit from research support for their approaches, this book might not have as much to offer for those already immersed in sustainability advocacy. Finally, the review of the literature that this book provides is selective rather than systematic, and may, therefore be of less interest to those who are looking for a comprehensive review.

Through her accessible synthesis of a broad range of psychological literature to guide and support personal and social change, Dr. Harré makes an important contribution to the literature on sustainability advocacy. This book is a great introduction to the psychological literature on motivation and change for newcomers to advocacy. It could be an excellent tool for new organizers, as well as for teachers, university professors, or anyone who works to develop new leaders in environmental advocacy.

**Allison Eady & Manuel Riemer, *The Community Practitioner*, a publication of the Society for Research and Community Action, a division of the American Psychological Association. Spring, 2012.**

**<http://www.scra27.org/documents/tcp/tcp-2012/tcp-spring-2012pdf>**

A sensational book by a visionary psychologist and thinker. You are a national treasure, Niki. Keep up the inspiration.

**Pam Corkery , Broadcaster**

Congratulations on your fabulous new book which I read, thanks to you, as a free PDF. It is so wonderful

to see members of the psychology community applying their knowledge and insights as you do in order to make a positive difference at this dangerous point human history.

**John F. Schumaker, Author of *In Search of Happiness: Understanding an Endangered State of Mind***

Niki Harré is a highly regarded academic social psychologist and a sustainability advocate. Her book applies the latest psychological research to understand the dilemmas sustainability advocates and activists face and gives sound advice on how to grasp opportunities for change. Her account of the role identity plays in Chapter 4 is simply magnificent! This chapter makes the task of building a workable synthesis look easy. But identity is not only one of the most important human motivators but also one of the most vague and confusing areas of the social sciences. Niki offers a compelling and highly accessible analysis of this difficult territory, putting together in Part One a hugely impressive review of all the relevant work and the latest findings. Part Two is then an original and thoughtful application of the action principles she deduces from the research. Anyone interested in understanding the wellsprings and implications of belonging, action and affiliation must read this chapter.

**Margaret Wetherell, Emeritus Professor in Social Psychology at the Open University, UK**

Psychology for a Better World is really easy and enjoyable to read and offers so much insight and resources and depth. Thank you so much for putting it in the world, it is a brilliant resource.

**Maya Nova, Mindbalance**

Psychology for a Better World: Strategies to inspire sustainability is a labour of passion that carries the reader all the way through to the end. It is largely targeting sustainability advocates and those who have strong inclinations towards a more sustainable world. Dr Niki Harré draws on different approaches to sustainability and shows which ones work best and then explains why. As you turn the pages, you will be exposed to a variety of issues and concepts from identity, intention, and morality to copying and the long lasting benefits of positive emotions. It is well researched, accessible, easy to read, and packed with case studies and practical examples. The most important message? If sustainability is to work, it needs to become a way of life. This book tells you how. If you believe in a better world or are flirting with sustainability, this may be the addition your library is waiting for.

**Tomas Pernecky, Ph.D, School of Hospitality and Tourism, AUT University, New Zealand**

As the title suggests, Psychology for a Better World aims to enhance our understanding of the

psychology involved in inspiring those around us to live more sustainably. Written for the interested layperson, the book is aimed at professionals engaged in facilitating sustainable practices, as well as everyone who wishes to encourage family, friends or work colleagues to adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

Niki Harré is well qualified to be the author of this book. As an academic psychologist who teaches in the area of sustainability, she incorporates sustainable living into her daily life as well as being active in her local transition town.

Psychology for a Better World begins by outlining the author's professional approach to facilitating societal change. Subsequent chapters aim to assist the reader to understand why people behave as they do and how we can 'win' them over to become sustainable practitioners. There are chapters on the roles that modelling, personal and group identity, and morality play in creating and sustaining change. The book ends with a useful chapter offering self-help advice and exercises to the sustainability advocate.

Niki blends her scientific understanding with wisdom and a clear set of personal ethics. The book clearly articulates its academic focus around change that acknowledges the need for collective effort, promotes making changes that are life enhancing, and that strengthens moral awareness rather than specific behaviour change.

The author backs up her arguments well with studies, mostly from the social psychological field, that are referenced and described in sufficient detail to allow the reader to come to their own conclusions. Unfortunately studies from the behavioural literature are absent that could have supported her arguments in places. This book would also benefit from an index and some visual relief from the rather dense text.

I thoroughly recommend this book to everyone engaged in the sustainability movement.

**Maureen Howard**

**Maureen Howard has a PhD in psychology and is contracted by the Dunedin City Council to provide courses and workshops for adults on sustainable living. This review appeared in Organic NZ Magazine, January/February 2012.**

Do you want to make this world a better place?

Do you dream of a sustainable future where humans, animals and their ecosystems can live in harmony?

Do you wonder why so many people appear apathetic in the face of the pressing issues of today and do you want to encourage others to get more involved in a cause that is close to your heart?

Are you interested in psychology and wonder why we as humans act as we do?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, I highly recommend you read *Psychology for a Better World*.

In 2011 Niki taught a new graduate class at Auckland University on Psychology and Sustainability. I was lucky enough to be enrolled in the class and it was while reading the course book (a draft edition of *Psychology for a Better World*) that I was inspired to start this blog.

*Psychology for a Better World* explores the themes of positive emotions, imitation, identity and morality as they relate to the sustainability movement and provides thoughtful and practical advice for sustainability advocates on how they can be more effective change-makers in their own communities. Niki has written the book specifically for sustainability advocates but the insights and advice are equally applicable to all who work for the social good.

Throughout, Niki's writing style is conversational – she works hard to make the research she discusses accessible for all and shares many personal anecdotes from her own life to bring the ideas to life. I have read the book three times now and each time I get a richer understanding and new ideas for my work and passions.

**Posted by Cassandra Chapman, <http://mylifeismymessage.org/2012/01/08/psychology-for-a-better-world/>**

I bumped into Niki at the SBN Sustainable Cities Showcase manning (personing) the Transition Towns Pt Chev stand. She was smiling. She smiled a lot as we spoke for 15 minutes or so during which time we got onto the topic of her book and her psychology for creating a better world. Her belief in focussing on the positive and the fun comes through from her core and is at the core of her book which is an inspiring read, particularly for someone at the coalface of industry working to change attitudes and behaviours towards our precious planet and communities. There can be a tendency to see the negative too often and people aren't inspired by the negative. Niki took up an invitation to speak at my work without hesitation and was again generous with her smile and ideas and quickly won over my team including one of our senior managers who didn't hesitate to buy a copy of the book. I highly recommend *Psychology for a Better World* and acknowledge Niki for her outstanding contribution to positive change in the world.

**Campbell Sturrock, Environment Advisor, Fulton Hogan Ltd**

Why do so few people “get” sustainability? Do they really believe that the world is flat and limitless,

accommodating a boundless reservoir of oil below and an infinite sink for CO2 above? Niki Harré's book doesn't address this exasperated question of mine, but it does offer something far more useful: it gives practical advice on how to gradually get the sustainability message across and more effectively communicate our goal of a strongly sustainable civilisation.

By presenting the results of research on human psychology Niki explains what shapes beliefs and behaviour and how they can be influenced to advance the cause of a sustainable lifestyle. She explains why it's futile and counter-productive to confront people with facts that challenge their world views. Rather we need to imagine a sustainable and pleasurable way of living and communicate it to other New Zealanders so that they want to live it. Frightening the living daylight out of your acquaintances with threats of peak oil and climate change will only lead them to take a firmer grip on their blinkers. Niki offers encouragement to keep on trying when your words and actions appear to be having no effect, because despite their resistance the people you encounter will be receiving some of your messages and observing your actions.

I was especially interested in the discussion of morality and how exacerbating climate change can be seen as a moral issue, in that it results in harm to "innocent others". It may seem that morality doesn't hold much sway in today's society and I wondered what the response would be if when asked by friends why I refuse to fly to Australia for a holiday with them I replied "Because to me it's immoral!" But there are still some things that Western society regards as immoral and surely jeopardising the lives of your own children and grandchildren ought to be one of those things.

I was also encouraged to read that research shows that living up to one's principles confers a "sense of personal wholeness" and is beneficial to the psyche. Perhaps more importantly it engenders respect and can lead to others emulating at least some aspects of your behaviour. Niki emphasises the importance of practising what you preach and the value of a community of interest (e.g. a Transition Towns group) in keeping you true to your ideals.

I found the book an inspiring and at times entertaining read. Some of the discussions of psychological research dragged a bit, but I found the many snippets from Niki's personal experience lightened the tone and validated some of my own personal experiences.

**Dave Evans of Sustainable Otautahi, Christchurch**

Niki Harré's book "*Psychology for a Better World - Strategies to Inspire Sustainability*" could have been written for Friends. Most Friends in Australia and Aotearoa / New Zealand are well aware of the perilous position our planet is in but we are often unsure about how to adopt more sustainable lifestyles so that

humans, animals and their ecosystems can live in harmony. We are baffled by the apathy of people and government's and their failure to act in spite of the dire predications of climate scientists. For 350 years Quakers have observed testimonies to living simply and with integrity as an expression of our spirituality in action for a just and peaceful world. More recently we have been called to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God and that peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity.

Niki says in her introduction " *I wrote this book for people (like me) who believe it is worth trying to make a better world in which our species and the ecological systems we are part of can flourish*".

Although Niki is an academic psychologist who lectures in sustainability, this book is not written for academics but for those seeking strategies to inspire others to join them in making a difference. She moves from the safe ground of discussing research findings to the riskier terrain of offering advice for action deduced from the research findings.

She incorporates sustainable living into her daily life as well as being active in her local transition town and draws on many personal examples to illustrate the research findings she cites...

The book ends with a useful chapter bringing together the strategies for change discussed in the book, and providing worksheets to enable the reader to analyse what they are doing or would like to do to advance sustainability in the personal group or civic realm.

This is an inspirational and often entertaining read. Niki does not ignore the negative but her emphasis is mostly on the positive, thus encouraging her readers to envisage a sustainable and pleasurable way of living and finding ways to communicate it to others so that they want to live it too. Caring about the wellbeing of the planet is a whole of life commitment for Niki in which she works to make all her actions consistent with her beliefs. She demonstrates the value of "walking the talk" and explores research that shows that "*a commitment to heal the world also seems to create a sense of personal wholeness – a sort of psychic healing*". The Quaker Testimony to Integrity is essentially a call for consistency between what a person professes and their actions in "real life." We are charged with "being patterns" by George Fox and Niki has given lots of good suggestions about how we can not only be good examples but understand how we can share our message with others and have lots of fun and satisfaction in doing that.

**Gael Howell, Australian Friends.**

Not all lessons for business come from business. That perhaps is not a new message, but seldom have I seen it delivered in such a direct and effective way as in Niki Harre's book entitled *Psychology for a Better World - Strategies to Inspire Sustainability*.

This is not to say this slim volume is in any way simplistic. Harre uses many credible and pertinent examples of academic research in her field of applied psychology to underline her points. She packs a lot into the book - but all her material is presented in a very accessible way. I found myself re-reading the book, delving into it at random after the initial read-through; a good sign for any inspirational text, I reckon. They're not much good if they just lie there, are they?

Harre is an associate professor at the University of Auckland where she teaches social and community psychology. Previously she edited, together with Quentin Atkinson, the book *Carbon Neutral by 2020: How New Zealanders Can tackle Climate Change* (2007)

*Psychology for a Better World* is accompanied with a video conversation with Harre, illustrated with delightful animated clips, traversing her main points. These are used by Harre and her associates at the University of Auckland, as support in seminars promoting her core messages.

In the video, Harre introduces the metaphor of the kuaka (godwit) using a well-chosen tailwind to assist in its epic non-stop migration flight from the Arctic to the shores of New Zealand. Harre's underlying message is that sustainability is becoming a positive wave, which advocates can only benefit from in their work, and which will have ever wider-reaching effectiveness. So, naturally, *Psychology for a Better World* is a heartening and positive read.

"People are happiness seekers," says Harre, "We want to grow year by year."

"The bottom line is, as change agents, if we don't offer people happiness, they won't be attracted to what we do, and they won't stick with what we're proposing."

She emphasises three strands of effectiveness in this area (and indeed in any change agent scenario): creativity, co-operation and open-ness to change.

Throughout *Psychology for a Better World*, Harre approaches sustainability from a moral and ethical perspective, and turns these into powerful persuaders.

"Ultimately, sustainability is a moral issue," Harre rightly asserts. "We should protect innocent others, and promote fairness.

"These behaviours are held in place by very positive emotions." She talks about creating a 'moral disturbance' to promote social justice.

But on occasion Harre can be direct, too. "I am going to be blunt," she writes in the opening lines of the section about moral leadership. "We take action in the name of sustainability that contributes to the problem." But in true Harre style, she returns to and finishes this section with positive responses to this conundrum.

The book is marketed in a way consistent with its intent. I've got a hard copy in my hands, but mostly *Psychology for a Better World* is read from downloaded e-books. An important note from the author inside the front cover reads: "Please do not circulate the electronic version of this book. Instead, pass on the website address [psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld](http://psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld) and encourage people to download a free copy. I need a means to keep track of the book's reach and the website is critical to this."

Maintaining her positive approach, Harre spells out a cautionary message about spinning "too many tales of terror," in introducing sustainability issues to the wider community.

"It's a dangerous tactic for a species that set up to imitate." Rather, she says, it's better to "make visible those tales about a flourishing future."

*Psychology for a Better World* is rounded off with a practical self-help guide for sustainability advocates. This allows you to think about the possibilities for action at three levels:

- lifestyle level - your own life, your habits and routines
  - organisational level - this is where and how you contribute to the sustainable running of the business you work in; and in Harre's case it's being a part of the Transition Town movement Pt Chevalier, and being on the staff at the University of Auckland.
  - civic level - making submissions, campaigning, being active politically, being part of the debate
- Harre offers all this as part of "My own imperfect tale of joy, in the hope we can all work together to create a better world."

In all, the package - the book, the videos, the innovative marketing - are a must-have for any sustainability professional's bookshelf and role modelling. If only we could all have "imperfect tales of joy" as effective as Harre's.

**Alex Stone, *Just Good Business*, Issue 2, 2012**



Harré, N. (2011). *Psychology for a better world: Strategies to inspire sustainability*. Auckland: University of Auckland, 192 pages. ISBN 978-0-473-19304-1 (paperback) and available as a free download from [www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld](http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld)

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Niki Harré's book *Psychology for a Better World* is a book about climate change and other big environmental problems, but with a focus on how we can change our own behaviour and influence the behaviour of others, to make sustainable behaviours normal and enduring. Then, we and other species can all flourish.

Harré, Associate Professor in the School of Psychology at Auckland University, teaches applied social and community psychology and has strong research interests in sustainability, citizenship, and political activism. She uses concepts from all these areas of psychology to show the reader how people can better address complex environmental threats, not just as professionals, but as citizens, moral leaders, and community members. And an overarching theme throughout the book, from the field of positive psychology, is the importance of positive emotion and flow in getting and keeping people engaged in sustainability. Positive emotions, argues Harré, encourage creativity, invite people to participate, and make it easier for people to consider change. She quotes Beavan, "If we aren't going to joke around, is the planet even worth saving?" (<http://noimpactman.typepad.com>) and Mitchell, "In the long run a boring system cannot last" (Mitchell, 1988).

Harré dedicates a section of her book to discussing identity and the importance of encouraging 'sustainability identities' in

order to enhance and maintain pro-environmental behaviours. Whilst Harré only skims the surface of the large social science literature on worldviews, ideologies, and the power they have to influence environmental beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (see for example Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, Smith, & Hmielowski, 2012; Lewandowsky, Gignac, & Oberauer, 2013), she makes a few very important points about the value of identity, concluding that identity matters, and that identity is a virtuous circle: "Identity is created by action. The more we act for sustainability, the stronger our identities as advocates and the more we feel compelled to act for sustainability."

The best parts of the book, I think, are the sections on modelling, copying, and the enormous power of social norms to change people's behaviour. How we think and behave around climate change is very much influenced by our peer group, by what the people around us think and do. "People are social animals, and what we see people doing matters," argues Harré. Most importantly, implying that pro-environmental behaviour is normal has been shown to be a more powerful way to encourage that behaviour than direct pleas to protect the planet. She writes, "Unsustainable behaviours are relentlessly modelled around us. However, the capacity to copy that keeps us doing what we do now can be utilised for the opposite purpose" – for pro-environmental purposes. Being visibly sustainable yourself, and leaving behind as many behavioural traces as you can, is very important. Harré encourages people to make efforts to show their sustainable behaviours – for cyclists to carry their helmets with them into their offices, for workplaces to locate bike racks prominently on the pavement, for each of us to carry around visible signs of our sustainable behaviours. "Modelling is the x-factor that makes one behaviour option rise to the surface; pick me, pick me!"

In addition to leaving traces, Harré also

argues that you strengthen your power as a model if you are able to not only demonstrate the behaviour itself, but also transmit its meaning. This might involve providing explanations for why you do what you do (she does acknowledge that this can be easier to do for your children than for adults, and that finding a way to not sound preachy is one of the challenges!). If you can provide a compelling reason for an action, then it is more likely to catch on.

Harré further argues that demonstrating your sustainable behaviours also shows that there is no gap between what you do as a sustainability advocate and what you do in the rest of your life. And this leads to the final section of the book on morality. Harré bravely leaps in at the deep end, with a daring statement, “Once we know an action is damaging or unjust, we are morally culpable when we undertake that action.” Burning fossil fuels as we feel the temperature rising will be something we will look back on in a few decades and see clearly as a moral wrong.

Moral leadership, explains Harré, is when people openly live their values: When people take the bus or train to an interstate conference rather than fly; when people don't outsource the catering, but commit to sourcing local, sustainably produced food for conferences. She brings in the concept of costly signalling as a way of demonstrating why moral leadership showing a personal commitment to the cause is so powerful. In animals, costly signalling might be a feature that seems counterproductive to their survival – for example, a peacock's highly visible and cumbersome but glorious tail. The very cost of the tail signals something important. Likewise, when an organisation can be seen to make a big effort, one that might cost them something of relative value, to demonstrate their sustainability, this is costly signalling. It encourages us to pay attention to the principles that are being discussed. Harré concludes that we need a lot more moral

leadership – “Imagine how seriously the world would take climate change if the leading climate scientists pledged to give up their cars.” Even better, imagine how seriously the world would take it if politicians or corporations did this!

Throughout *Psychology for a Better World*, Harré illustrates her points with many personal examples from her own years of advocacy, campaigning, and sustainability practices, as well as her work as a psychologist and even her role as a parent. She relates the personal struggles that she, as a long-time sustainability advocate, still goes through in striving to be morally staunch and enact her environmental values, often in the face of considerable inconvenience, risking other people's negative perceptions, and struggling against the status quo. Her person-centred writing style not only makes the book very accessible and easy to read, but gives readers the sense that the author is ally, confidante, mentor and coach on their own sustainability journeys. The book works very well as an engaging, up-beat, how-to, and can-do guide to getting on with the job of changing our own and other's behaviour.

Of course, psychology has much more to contribute to the sustainability debate than what is captured and highlighted in Harré's book. Psychologists have been working on these issues for over 50 years, and have important contributions to make not just in terms of promoting changes in behaviour but in understanding the human causes of environmental problems, the enormous impact that climate threats have on our wellbeing, and the many complex reasons why we are not doing enough, fast enough, to address these massive problems.

And therein lies one criticism of the book. The environmental challenges that we face are far greater and more devastating than portrayed in this book. Whilst there's no doubt that Harré herself fully understands the scale of the problem and the enormous threats that climate change poses to our entire

planetary system, she chooses not to address this head on, focusing instead on the positive. The tension between frightening people with the full truth, so much so that they risk becoming overwhelmed, or tuning out, and wanting to engage and motivate people with positive messages, arises over and over in the social science and environmental and advocacy field.

David Spratt, activist and co-author of *Climate Code Red*, argues this point in a series of recent articles (<http://precariousclimate.com/2012/06/10/stop-saying-yes-bright-siding/>). According to Spratt, if you avoid including an honest assessment of climate science and impacts in your narrative, it is pretty difficult to give people a grasp about where the climate system is heading, what needs to be done to create the conditions for climate safety, and how to avoid increasing catastrophic harm. Harré's book skirts close to 'bright-siding' with its focus on positive solutions to a problem without getting people to examine it fully. According to Spratt, the risk of bright-siding is catastrophe.

*Psychology for a Safe Climate* (<http://psychologyforasafeclimate.org/>), also takes a different approach to Harré. They tackle the difficult questions about why society is failing to respond effectively to the threat of climate change by looking at the impact of conflicted feelings, the temptation to avoid what is appalling to contemplate, and the importance of first coming to terms with deep and complex feelings about the planet, like grief, fear, shame, anger and longing, before being able to take effective action. Unlike Harré's book, they underline the importance of exploring the issues of denial, minimisation, and avoidance. They argue that this is a critical step in understanding the climate problem along with the scale of the human problem, and then being motivated to take sufficient action. In Harré's defence, however, it could be argued that the contrasting approaches of 'positive

psychology' versus 'reality testing' could be applicable at different stages of awareness/motivation. For example, someone who is 'pre-contemplation' might need to be confronted with the harsh facts, whereas someone who is contemplating change might need the positive approach illustrated in Harré's book. And someone who is actively working to change but often despairing might need support in dealing with the grief and loss of the world as we know it.

Despite these limitations, Harré's book remains an excellent resource for activists, psychologists, sustainability advocates, and indeed anyone who cares about sustainability and understands the urgent need for action and change. It's "our turn to inhabit the earth" and we need to do it in a way that enables our species, and the ecological systems we are part of, to flourish.

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