

Psych 149: Community Psychology Praxis Assignment: Day of Social Justice¹

Social-community psychology strives for praxis, or an embodied theory. Partly because of this emphasis, there are many values that are at the forefront of community psychology. As outlined in your text, these values encompass three broad areas: personal, relational, and collective well-being. One collective value is social justice, or “the fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in society” (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005, pp. 65). You will attempt to live one full day embodying social justice to the highest degree possible. It is essential to think about how this value relates to how you behave toward others given the definition. To minimize any bias in social reactions, it is best if you do not tell others about the class assignment until after the due date.

Part I: Participate in a Day of Social Justice

Your challenge is to live each minute of a 24 hour period embodying social justice as much as possible. In other words, for 24 hours, you should do your best not to use unearned privilege, not participate in oppression, and to enact egalitarian power structures. When participating in this day, examine all your behavior -- from what you wear to getting to class to eating lunch to interacting with other people. As you do this, think carefully about each and every thing you do and ask yourself the following questions: “What are the social justice implications of what I am doing?” Do not limit yourself to “easy” things like giving an elderly person a seat on the bus even though you got there first; think about social injustice in the world, and strive for the greatest impact and deepest level of social justice without being phony or insincere. It is up to you to operationalize social justice, and to decide how best to realize it. Be sure to operationalize the construct, or decide on the behaviors that embody social justice, before you begin your 24 hour period, and make sure that your operationalization is specific/concrete (see reverse side for more detail).

Part II: Write About Your Experience

At the beginning of class on the due date, turn in a social-community psychology analysis of what the day was like (no less than one and no more than two typewritten pages using 12-point font and 1" margins). Here are a few questions you must address:

- How did you choose to behaviorally operationalize social justice? How does this operationalization relate to the definition of social justice? (8 points) (Note: See reverse side for more detail.)
- Who were the recipients of your efforts and why? (8 points)
- How did others respond to your efforts at enacting social justice? (6 points)
- How was the "Day of Social Justice you" different from the "normal you"? What are the situational/environmental factors that create these differences? Why are you not always the "Day of Social Justice you"? (10 points) (Note: see reverse side for more detail.)
- What are the psychological costs and benefits of behaving in a socially just way? In your view, do the benefits outweigh the costs? Why or why not? (8 points)
- How does this exercise relate to your own accountability, privilege, or oppression (choose one)? (10 points) (Note: see reverse side for more detail.)

¹ This assignment is inspired by and modeled after Scott Plous’s assignment, “Social Psychology Day of Compassion” at Wesleyan University.

Further explanation

To *operationalize* your construct, you need to figure out how you might embody it. Make this link explicit. For example, if we were focused on the personal value of caring and compassion, I might operationalize that value by saying that I show caring and compassion by engaging in the following behaviors: (1) smiling and saying hello to everyone I pass that day, (2) calling my friends and asking them how they are doing, and listening without interrupting, bringing up my own issues, or offering advice, and (3) eating only vegan foods that had been picked or processed by people who were paid a living wage and who were not exposed to pesticides. These are related to caring and compassion because these behaviors demonstrate care and concern for the physical (#3) and psychological (#1-3) well-being of others. Notice that my three behaviors are specific, concrete, and they provide a blueprint that anyone else could follow. Your operationalization should have the same characteristics. [Note: Do not use any of these examples when you operationalize social justice! They are not appropriate because caring and compassion is an individual-level value, and social justice is collective value. Come up with your own operationalization that is consistent with the text's definition of social justice and that is collective in nature!]

Situational and environmental factors refer to those things in the context that shape behavior. Think about how people are generally quiet in a library and talkative in a café. There might be the same number of people in both places, sitting at tables, but the environmental factors facilitate different kinds of behavior (being quiet and working alone on academic work versus visiting and talking about any number of academic or non-academic things). You might also think about classrooms where desks are clustered together versus classrooms where the desks are all facing forward and bolted down. Here, situational factors might facilitate small group cooperation in the former case and independent working in the latter case. Refer to chapter 4 and the in-class exercise on ecology.

When thinking about *accountability, privilege, or oppression*, refer to chapter 6 and our class on commitment, accountability, and inclusion. You might ask yourself: What was easy to do and why? What was hard to do and why? Who and/or what is affected (think broadly) by what I am doing? What processes had to occur or what did other people do that now enable me to do this? What larger impact will my actions have? If it is true that I do not always behave in ways that are consistent with social justice, why is that? For example, what if I cannot afford, or do not know where to look for, or simply cannot find vegan food that is picked or processed by people who are paid a living wage and are not exposed to pesticides, but what if I can easily smile and say “hi” to people? What if I find it easier to smile and say hi to women versus men, or to younger people versus older people, or to students versus faculty? How do these “facts” relate to my accountability, privilege, or oppression? (See the questions above.)