# Social Problems are Social: Empirical Evidence and Reflections on Integrating Community Psychology into Traditional Curriculum

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**Author Biographies:** *Lauren B. Cattaneo,* earned her doctorate in Clinical/Community Psychology from the University of Maryland (College Park) in 2001, and joined the faculty of the Clinical Psychology Program at George Mason University in 2003. Dr. Cattaneo's interest in psychology centers on its relevance for addressing pressing social problems, which she explores through community-based work. Within the area of intimate partner violence, Dr. Cattaneo's research has focused on empowerment and survivor-centered practice. Dr. Cattaneo is also interested in the ways in which higher education can catalyze civic engagement. In addition to her mentorship of graduate students, she is active and innovative in undergraduate teaching: She is a trained Inside-Out instructor, and is collaborating to create an minor in social justice and to strengthen civic engagement curriculum at GMU. Dr. Cattaneo has won awards for excellence in teaching and mentorship from GMU and from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. *Rachel Shor*, doctoral candidate in George Mason University's Clinical Psychology program and is currently completing her Psychology Internship with the PTSD Clinical Team at VA Boston Health Care System. She has focused on interpersonal violence and multicultural counseling, both as a doctoral student and as a trauma counselor. Rachel received her Master's in Counseling Psychology at Arcadia University. She was won several awards and received prior recognition for her teaching and clinical work, and was most recently awarded the Wilbert J. McKeachie Teaching Excellence Award, presented by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Division 2 of the American Psychological

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Association) in May 2018. Rachel's current research investigates interpersonal dynamics of power, implicit social cognition, and help-seeking following a trauma. *Jenna Calton* , staff psychologist at The Tree House Child Advocacy Center of Montgomery County, MD. She specializes in delivering evidence-based trauma-focused therapies to youth and families and serves as the Internship Program Director. Dr. Calton is also an adjunct clinical supervisor at George Mason University's Center for Psychological Services. Her research interests include ally development, intimate partner violence survivors' perceptions of justice, and barriers to help-seeking for LGBTQ-identified survivors of violence. Dr. Calton received her PhD in clinical psychology from George Mason University. She completed a psychology internship at Children's National Health System in Washington, DC, and she earned undergraduate degrees in psychology and women's studies at The University of Florida. *Kris T. Gebhard* (*pronouns: they/them*), came to the clinical psychology doctoral program after spending several years community organizing with trans, queer, and LGB+ communities in Minnesota.  Kris is passionate about research that directly benefits communities who are historically and presently marginalized in the United States, and whose experiences have been under-researched in psychology, including transgender women, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Kris is currently engaged in research on masculinities relating to violence, seeking to better understand how to prevent male violence against trans women.  Kris's work has found that shame-related responses to threatened masculinity appear to be key players in male violence (Gebhard, Cattaneo, Tangney, Hargrove, Shor, 2018). Kris's dissertation seeks to further illuminate the role of threatened-masculinity shame in male aggression, to inform prevention efforts. In addition, Kris is interested in other research that will benefit the LGB, queer, and trans communities, especially work on resiliency, community resiliency, and empowerment. *Syeda Buchwach*, Clinical Psychology PhD student at George Mason University. She earned her Bachelor's degree in International Economics and worked to support economic development in marginalized communities before pursuing a career in psychology. Her past research experience includes co-parenting among Latino and African American parents and help-seeking among Asian/Asian American students. As a

volunteer program leader for the National Alliance for Mental Illness, Syeda is committed to promoting self-efficacy and community among individuals who have received diagnoses for chronic psychiatric conditions. She is interested in the development of accessible mental health resources for ethnic minorities through community-based initiatives, particularly within immigrant enclaves. Syeda's current research involvements concern undergraduate civic engagement, domestic violence survivors' experience of public assistance, and community resilience among systemically marginalized groups. *Nour Elshabassi*, volunteer in the Lab for Community REACH, a previous student in the Community Engagement for Social Change course, and a George Mason University alumnae. After completing her undergraduate degree, she worked as a case manager for America Works of Washington, DC, assisting participants in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program with employment goals. Currently, she is employed at Community Science, a community psychology research and development organization that contracts with nonprofits, government agencies, and foundations to achieve their mission of building healthy, just, and equitable communities. Her research interests include exploring how social factors such as socioeconomic status, religious identity, education, etc. have contributed to the spread of diseases in the United States and abroad. Nour is also interested in learning about resilience among vulnerable populations and how protective factors vary cross-culturally. *Stephanie Hargrove*, clinical psychology PhD student at George Mason University. Her research interests are focused on culturally competent treatments for gender-based violence and factors that promote holistic healing. Her clinical interests focus on helping Black women and girls heal from traumatic experiences. Stephanie would ultimately like to work with underserved communities as a clinician and she plans to use research to inform her practice and as well as develop prevention efforts, interventions, and influence policy. In 2017, Stephanie was awarded the APA Predoctoral Fellowship in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to further her efforts to serve underserved populations. Personally, and professionally Stephanie works to achieve the mission of the Association of Black

Psychologists: "liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivenment and illumination of the African Spirit."

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## on Integrating Community Psychology into Traditional Curriculum

### Abstract

The paper will describe the development and impact of a course that exemplifies the principles and values of community psychology, but does so outside the bounds of a community psychology program or concentration in a large, diverse, public university. The class, Community Engagement for Social Change, has two aims: to teach undergraduates that social problems have social causes, and to engage students in a range of social problem-solving approaches that incorporate that understanding. It accomplishes these aims by introducing a "multi-level analysis" of social problems, using a case study of the social problem of poverty, and requiring that all students complete 20 hours of service in community organizations. The development of the class required strategic thinking and significant retooling in order to attract and promote learning across a broad range of students. It has now been offered each semester for seven years, and has evolved into an opportunity for the first author and her graduate students to integrate social justice-oriented teaching and research. For the past three years, the authors have been engaged in a longitudinal project evaluating the impact of the class on student outcomes. This paper provides an overview of this course, and describes lessons learned from two sources: (1) the experience of teaching and refining the class, and (2) the longitudinal dataset collected from students who did and did not take the course. Data show that the class is effective in shifting attitudes both specific to poverty and more generally to social problems. Results also show that implicit bias did not shift over the course of the semester, and that individual and systemic attributions for social problems are only moderately related. We hope that sharing our experience is useful to those interested in similar coursework in other institutions that lack an explicit focus on community psychology.

The authors of this paper are faculty (Cattaneo), graduate students (Shor, Gebhard, Buchwach, Hargrove), and graduate and undergraduate alumnae (Calton, Elshabassi) of a large, diverse university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The psychology department at this university does not have a community psychology curriculum or concentration at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Our home doctoral program is in clinical psychology.

While the department emphasizes the need for research and practice to go hand in hand – consistent with the tenets of community psychology – it is not primarily oriented toward justice or community wellbeing, nor does it require collaboration with community partners[2].

In this context, the first author developed an undergraduate course that embodies the principles of community psychology, both in

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[2] While we would like to be clear that the emphasis of our work is distinct from the emphasis of our program and department, we do not wish to convey that there is a lack of support for our work. To the contrary, the program and department have been positive about our efforts, and there are others in the department who consider social context and work with community organizations in various ways.

terms of learning objectives and teaching strategies. The authors have worked together in the teaching and refinement of that course, as well as in research exploring its impact. Our work has served as an opportunity both to teach community psychology content to undergraduates, and to integrate community psychology into our conversations and work more broadly. As suggested by Lichty and Palamaro-Munsell (2017), the teaching of this course represents a key component of our community psychology practice, and we believe our experience has relevance for other psychologists who wish to infuse community psychology pedagogy into their teaching. In order to write this paper, the authors discussed our experiences teaching the class, analyzed and interpreted data together, and asked our undergraduate alumna author to comment on her experience as a student in the class. While the majority of the paper is the result of consensus within our group, we have noted our alumna's comments throughout the paper, to make her unique perspective stand out in sharper relief.

The overarching aim of this paper is to share the lessons we have learned in teaching and evaluating this course, in order to provide useful information for others interested in infusing the values of community psychology into contexts where the fit is not immediately clear. While our university serves both undergraduates and graduate students, this course serves undergraduates, and the implications of our work are relevant to primarily undergraduate-focused settings. Before sharing those lessons, we will first describe the genesis of the course and give a brief overview of its content.

## Overview of Community Engagement for Social Change

When the first author joined the university as an Assistant Professor and began teaching the typical courses for a clinical psychologist (e.g., Abnormal Psychology), she noted a frequent narrative among undergraduates: People's problems are of the result of bad choices. Students often seemed to believe that those who commit crimes, live in poverty, misuse substances or otherwise violate the norms of "good" citizenship do so because of individual-level factors: They don't work hard enough, they don't know enough, they were raised without a sense of right and wrong. This kind of deficit-oriented thinking– in which problems and solutions exist within individuals - is described by William Ryan (1971) in his foundational book, *Blaming the Victim*, and it seemed to be alive and well in the general undergraduate population.

A singularly individual-level view of social issues is problematic (e.g. Velonis et al., 2015; Whitaker & Holum, 2015). Perhaps of greatest importance, an individual-level view limits the avenues through which students might address social ills. Psychology students are generally oriented toward helping others; if they learn primarily about individual-level causes of problems, they assume that the primary way to channel their wish to help is to work with individual people. They leave college unaware of a whole world of possibilities for change, which is a loss not only for them but also for the world into which we are releasing them.

Our university explicitly aims to graduate "engaged citizens" who are "knowledgeable of important issues affecting the world… and committed to building a just society" (George Mason University, 2012). For students of psychology to be prepared to address the pressing issues of the day, they need a holistic view of those issues, and while there are many wonderful courses offered in the psychology department at our university, this broader perspective is not a main focus. This absence also affects students who do not lean toward blaming individuals but are unaware

of other explanations for social problems. For example, our undergraduate alumna author notes that before taking the class, she believed that people who are poor were not at fault for their poverty, but she was unsure why they were not at fault, or what to do about the situation. After completing the class, she recognized that while she had previously been aware that larger forces were at work, she had not understood the systemic mechanisms that perpetuate poverty or other social problems, and so she could not effectively communicate her perspective.

A limited understanding of the source of social problems is particularly detrimental in the context of our diverse student body. Our university hosts students of many races, ethnicities, nationalities, social classes, and life experiences. Without the awareness that social arrangements systematically advantage some groups over others, students are ill-equipped to address the problems affecting their own communities beyond attempting to support the individuals affected by those problems; on a personal level, students from marginalized groups may be less likely to internalize experiences of discrimination if they are more aware of systemic influences (e.g. Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Puhl & Brownell, 2003). Thus, a narrow focus on the individual level is problematic both in terms of how students might think about the world at large and in how they might think about their own experiences.

Community psychology offers the broader perspective that is under-represented in general psychology curricula. It "goes beyond an individual focus and integrates social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and international influences to promote positive change, health, and empowerment at individual and systemic levels" (SCRA, 2018b). The first author developed the course "Community Engagement for Social Change"

in an effort to teach students to understand and apply this broader perspective. Specifically, the course aims to complicate students' understanding of social problems, and to engage them in addressing those problems based on that broader understanding.

The class earns the standard amount of credits for our institution and meets on a typical schedule: twice a week for an hour and fifteen minutes. Typical enrollment is between 25-35 students. Using poverty as a semester-long case study, we employ the framework of a "multi-level analysis" (an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, see Figure 1), to guide students in analyzing the causes and effects of social problems at the individual, interpersonal, and social context levels. The latter is most important, because it is both harder to see and more pervasive, operating through broad influences like marketplace dynamics, policy, media, and cultural narrative. This methodology fits squarely within the ecological perspectives principle of community psychology. Because the course also situates the understanding of poverty within a broader understanding of social class, it also builds competencies within the socio-cultural and cross-cultural competence principles of community psychology (SCRA, 2018a).
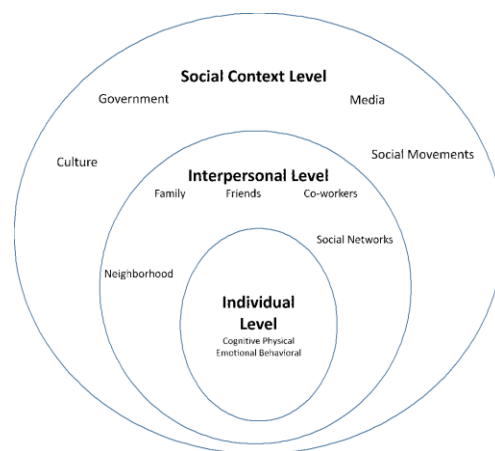
*Figure 1.* The multi-level model used as a framework for Community Engagement for Social Change. The model is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

A central piece of the class is the 20 hours of community service each student completes in a community organization that serves clients in poverty. In partnership with the organizations, we design these placements so that students have direct contact with clients. In class and through assignments, students integrate their service experiences with readings and exercises to shake up previous assumptions and try on a different way of seeing the world. Consistent with the framework of community psychology, we do not minimize the importance of the individual level of analysis, but we broaden the lens to understand individual struggles, choices and resources within a larger picture.

In the remainder of this paper, we draw from our experiences in a way that we hope informs others' efforts. First, we articulate what we view are the key components of the course that make it effective. We will then describe a longitudinal study that tested the impact of the class, including the scholarship that frames it, the method and results of the project, and its limitations. Finally, we integrate the results of the research with our experience in the classroom to generate recommendations for others interested in this kind of work.

## Designing For Impact: Key Components of the Course

The development and teaching of the course was initially the purview of the faculty member author (Cattaneo) and the graduate student author who served as teaching assistant its first semester (now alumna, Calton). Over time, the course piqued the interest of other graduate students in our research lab, and they became both instructors and teaching assistants themselves. Our undergraduate alumna (Elshabassi) took the class the first semester it was offered, and returned after graduating to volunteer in our research lab. At least one of us has now offered the course each semester since Spring 2012. There has been significant trial, error and refinement in the course over time. While we continue to discuss and revise, in our collective experience, there are a number of key components that are a consistent part of an effective semester. We drew these conclusions from experimenting with different strategies in the classroom over multiple semesters and reflecting on both systematic (e.g. evaluations) and anecdotal student feedback.

## Socially Just Practice in the Classroom

Given the nature of the material we cover and the likelihood that it touches on deeply held beliefs and personal experiences, it is possible for students to experience micro-aggressions in the classroom, to feel stigmatized as a member of a group that is being presented in a negative light (even if this is done with the best of intentions), or to feel that their experiences are ignored, if they are not part of the general story being told. In order for change to occur, students need to feel safe, valued and heard as they express their thinking, doubts and questions about material that can be emotionally loaded and/or personally painful. As articulated by Lichty and Palamaro-Munsell (2017), in addition to shaping content, community psychology values have great relevance for structuring and facilitating the dynamics of the classroom in this vein. One such value is to acknowledge that as the person in the room in a position of power, one's own identity plays a significant role in those dynamics.

As a group, the instructor-authors represent social identities that are associated with privilege and with marginalization. Four of us identify as White, one of us as African American, one of us as a second-generation Bangladeshi American. Five of us are cisgender heterosexual women, and one of us is genderqueer and queer. Our experiences of social class are complex. Graduate students experience a combination of financial strain and high educational status; they are aware that while they struggle financially, they possess a level of privilege through their status, and a safety net through the resources of their social network, that sets them apart from poverty status. One of us shifted from lower to upper middle class over the course of her upbringing, and two others experienced episodes of homelessness as young adults. The diversity of our group is helpful to us when we have discussions. When we are in the classroom alone, however, our experiences with privilege and marginalization interact with our teaching in varying ways. Cultivating awareness of the ways in which our identities intersect with our teaching of this course is an ongoing effort, and we do not pretend to have found the answers to these complex issues. However, we have adopted several strategies that have seemed to increase the sense of safety and openness in the classroom.

First, we discuss issues surrounding social identity, privilege, and marginalization with each other on an ongoing basis, supporting and challenging each other, and providing a space for us to practice difficult conversations. Second, we collaborate with students to develop discussion ground rules at the start of each semester, allowing us to preview and normalize talking about difficult topics. Third, we model a willingness to talk about our own social locations and potential blind spots throughout the course. For example, one instructor who experienced several months of homelessness shares this experience as a way of illustrating that one cannot "see" who falls in this category. We also model openness to feedback. In some cases, we identify students (through their writing, for example) who may benefit from one-on-one conversations with instructors to process class material or give feedback, and invite them to meet. We seek anonymous feedback from all students during the semester, and explicitly make changes in the classroom in response. Fourth, we emphasize the importance of language to curb "othering" during the semester: We use person-first language (e.g. "people who are poor/experiencing poverty" rather than "poor people") throughout the class, and take pains to use the pronoun "we" rather than "they" (e.g. "here is how we experience chronic stress…") Finally, we emphasize throughout the semester that in this course, students vary in whether they have personal experience related to the content. We are explicit that our aim is to create a set of common reference points for the class, and students are welcome to also share their own experiences if they like, but they are certainly not required to do so. These common reference points come from course content, community placements, and interactive exercises. We describe these aspects of the class next.

**Course Content**

During the semester, we aim for students to increase their awareness of systemic influences of poverty, and decrease their attributions of individual blame. There are several pieces of content which, based on our anecdotal experience and reading of student evaluations, have seemed particularly effective in facilitating these shifts. A TED talk describing the impact of the gap between rich and poor in the United States allows us to show that social arrangements vary in ways that have major implications for wellbeing (Wilkinson, 2011). In a similar vein, Chetty's

groundbreaking work on social mobility shows that specific aspects of neighborhoods, such as education quality and racial integration, dramatically influence the ability of children to grow up and make more income than their parents did (Opportunity Insights, 2019). A podcast from the radio show *This American Life* regarding housing discrimination shows the power of history and policy in shaping the ability to gain housing and grow wealth. Readings from *Born on Third Base* (Collins, 2016) provide the perspective of an activist who grew up in extraordinary wealth, and communicate the ways in which cultural narrative shapes the willingness to change. Finally, a profile of a mother working two jobs to try and support her children provides a close-in view of the ways in which policies influence individual experience (Boo, 2001). Another key to effective content is variety, as different modalities (readings, podcasts, graphics, interactive websites) are effective for different students. We also change content as the world and salient narratives change around us.

**Community Placements**

The most obvious way the course differs from others in the department happens outside the classroom. Placements include homeless shelters and a variety of programs for families who are housing or food insecure, and roles include greeting residents at front desks, serving meals, tutoring, running teens' groups, and assisting with job and housing searches. Simply interacting with people who are struggling with poverty in the vicinity of our university is an eye-opener for some students. Our undergraduate alumna author explained that her conception of poverty had been confined to developing countries; learning about poverty locally "blew [her]

mind." This experience not only disrupted her belief about poverty in the U.S. but also was a powerful example of how poverty is made invisible. There is always a sizable group of students who express similar realizations at the end of the course; other students are well aware of poverty because of their own personal experiences. Having all students serve at placements where they can personally witness the existence of poverty, regardless of their prior awareness, is one way we create a common set of reference points.

The literature on service learning is clear that experience does not promote transformation on its own; structured reflection is key (e.g., Kiely, 2005). Structuring reflection requires both listening to students in class and anticipating what they will experience. In addition to gathering feedback and noticing trends informally, we conducted a qualitative study to explore which aspects of their placements they found "eye-opening" (Shor, Cattaneo, & Calton, 2017). Our findings suggested that these experiences can be transformative in multiple ways, and also identified themes. For example, we found that the majority of students (75%) who were placed in a homeless shelter had an "eye-opening" experience by learning about a resident's life or history[3], and that it was *not* necessary for a student to have repeated contact with the same resident in order to be emotionally or cognitively affected by that information. Insights from this study have helped us to guide class discussions and design writing prompts.

Knowing which experiences tend to be eye opening also helps us have conversations with community partners about the structure of placements. As there is significant turnover of staff at our partner organizations, the nature of placements is dynamic. To ensure

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[3] At the beginning of the semester, we are clear with students that they should not pry into residents' situations for their own edification. Instead, we suggest that they remain open to

chatting if residents want to talk, and that they simply observe what is happening around them. Students learn from these kinds of informal interactions.

that the arrangement works for all sides, including the clients served at the organization, we review student experiences at the end of every semester and have conversations with our community partners before the start of each semester. In these conversations we ensure the placement meets our criteria (students have direct contact with clients; students volunteer 20 hours; we must give more to the organization in terms of student contribution than we take in terms of training and supervision) and make sure we are meeting the organization's priorities and needs (including client wellbeing) as well. When the structure needs to change, we consider how this will influence students' experiences, and revise our reflection activities as needed.

## Common Experiences inside the Classroom

During class time, interactive exercises have proven particularly useful as points of reference. We find that students point back to these experiences repeatedly over the course of the semester, and thus they seem influential in changing thinking. Here we describe exemplars.

**Why can't Pat read?** To introduce the idea of a "multi-level analysis," we use an exercise that makes those levels concrete. The instructor begins by telling the class that "Pat" is in the 5th grade, but cannot read. The instructor then draws a stick figure on the board, and asks the class "Why can't Pat read?" Once students have generated a handful of reasons, the instructor chooses one, and applies the "5 Whys" technique to it. This technique is used in multiple disciplines (e.g., business contexts; iSixSigma, 2000) to identify the "root cause" of a problem. In this case, the aim is to brainstorm causes of Pat's problem that go beyond Pat. For example, if students have suggested that Pat's parents did not teach him/her to read, the instructor

asks, "why didn't Pat's parents teach him/her to read?" After generating a few explanations from the class, the instructor will choose one, and ask again, "why?" The instructor repeats the "why" question five times. This technique yields a brainstorm that progresses naturally from explanations in Pat's personal world to the systems surrounding it (see Appendix B).

Mapping out the multiple influences on Pat's problem illustrates several critical points. First, if we had stopped our analysis too soon, we would have missed some very important influences, particularly those that affect *many* Pats, now and into the future. Second, there are many places we can intervene, as reflected by the multiple nodes in the diagram, and where we attribute blame dictates how we apply resources to solve the problem. For example, if we believe that the problem is Pat's lack of motivation, we may focus on incentives and individual attention for Pat. If we believe that teachers aren't well trained, the solution might be for the school to apply for a grant to develop adequate training. If the source of the problem is a lack of a living wage, then political advocacy is necessary. By brainstorming causes and then using the resulting diagram on the whiteboard to discuss solutions, students can see which aspects of the problem are addressed or overlooked when we choose explanations at various levels.

**The Mushroom Exercise.** Two particularly abstract aspects of social context that play a role in the perpetuation of social inequities are cultural narrative and privilege; an interactive exercise has proven effective in communicating them (see Appendix C for full description). In this exercise, the instructor organizes a competition in which some groups secretly have advantages over others. Students are initially unaware the game is rigged, and the winners and losers are treated as if they earned their rewards and losses. Both through the experience of playing the

game and receiving the feedback from the instructor, students have an in-vivo experience of the power of the narrative of meritocracy. The feelings and discoveries in this exercise are useful reference points when these abstract concepts arise throughout the semester.

**Connecting with the experience of being homeless.** While students often have some experience with financial struggle or housing instability, it is less common for students to have experienced extended periods of homelessness, or to have panhandled for food. It is quite common, however, for students to encounter people who are panhandling in their daily lives. We add to our set of common experiences in the classroom near the end of each semester when we invite a speaker's bureau from the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH; https://nationalhomeless.org). NCH trains and coordinates a group of speakers who have experienced homelessness, and for a small fee, select two to come to a venue and tell their stories. Students often find this to be the most powerful experience of the semester, as evidenced by their comments at the end of the course and in course evaluations; our undergraduate alumna author remembers details of the presenters' stories six years after she heard them. The stories often involve the shock of becoming homeless, and the circumstances that led the presenter to lose the resources he or she had. In the most recent semester, one instructor received a card from a student commenting on all she had learned, but highlighting that she "never realized that just anyone could become homeless." This statement suggests a loosening of the assumption that if a person is

homeless, there must be something different about them.

This panel would likely be impactful on its own, but we have added several reflections to tie it to course objectives. First, before the presentation, we have students reflect on experiences when they have encountered a person who is panhandling, and we have students do a free-write in response to the prompt: "When you see people who are panhandling, what do you think, what do you feel, what do you do?" We then use class discussion to connect this free-write to the interpersonal level of poverty by examining how we distance ourselves from others' pain. This often links to students' experiences and observations at their placements. When the guest speakers then describe how they felt invisible to passersby during their experience of homelessness, it has a much greater impact; students see their own role in these experiences. As with the other common reference points, we use these connections as touchstones throughout the remainder of the class.

## Developing Research Questions about Course Impact

Over time we repeatedly noticed the impact the class had on students: We noticed it in the nature of conversations in class, from the comments students made on evaluations at the end of the semester, and from the contact we began to receive from former students in the class, telling us about its long-term impact on their thinking and career choices[4]. Anecdotally, we were also aware of the challenges of teaching the class, and that not all students have the same experience as the ones who contact us. We became curious

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[4] As one example, an email from a former student the first author happened to receive while revising this paper includes this statement: "I believe that your class helped me grow not only as a student pursuing a career in Psychology, but as a person as well. Ever since your class, I have pushed myself to

further analyze situations and looking at all the factors that could have led an individual to their specific situation. I have continued doing this not only in an academic sense, but in my own life as well." These kinds of comments are common.

about the impact of the course more broadly. In order to explore it we reviewed relevant scholarship and devised our own set of questions to build on the knowledge base. Delving into the research literature, we discovered several overlapping bodies of scholarship relevant to courses such as ours. First, scholars have described the process of "transformational learning," in which "previously taken-for-granted assumptions, values, beliefs, and lifestyle habits are assessed and, in some cases, radically transformed" (Kiely, 2005, p.7). This kind of learning is prompted by a "disorienting dilemma" (Brookfield, 2015; Kiely, 2005) in which an idea or incident leads students to question their beliefs. The process is, unsurprisingly, acknowledged to be uncomfortable; in fact authors refer to "a pedagogy of discomfort," in which "discomforting emotions play a constitutive role in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and in creating possibilities for individual and social transformation" (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012, p.41). We discovered considerable evidence that service learning courses, in which working in a community setting is part of the curriculum, have a positive impact on academic, civic, and social justice outcomes (e.g. Astin et al., 2006; meta-analysis by Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Mayhew & Fernández, 2007).

Pulling together the threads from these bodies of work, theoretically, students encounter disorienting dilemmas in service learning courses that prompt shifts in their beliefs, promote deeper learning and create a greater likelihood of engaging civically in the future. In addition to providing a framework for the process of change we hoped for in the class, this literature helped us to identify a key outcome of that process as "civic

engagement," an umbrella term for the many ways in which students might become aware of and active in identifying and solving community issues (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2019).

Building on this literature, we wished to explore whether our particular course does in fact increase civic engagement through increasing awareness of systemic sources of social problems. We also aimed to add to the literature by exploring both implicit and explicit attitudes, and both attitudes targeted in the course and the broader social justice attitudes to which they might generalize. Finally, while racial and ethnic differences are sometimes explored in the literature, social class is rarely a focus. Because our course focuses on poverty, we felt this last omission was particularly important to address. Through exploring these questions, we aimed to both fill gaps in the scholarship, and to inform our own teaching of this specific class.

## A Quantitative Test of the Course's Impact

With a grant from the Spencer Foundation, we conducted a longitudinal study comparing Psychology majors who took the class to Psychology majors who did not take it. We hypothesized that the course would change skills, attitudes and knowledge related to poverty in particular and social change in general, and that those shifts would then predict behavior change. We also explored the possibility that students' social class might influence those changes[5]. Participants were recruited at the beginning of the semester, took a baseline survey, completed a follow up survey at the end of the semester, and then took a final survey one year later. For the purpose of this paper, focused more tightly on the content of the course, we report

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[5] The measurement of social class in a college population, and modeling its influence on change over time, involves a level of

complexity and explanation that precluded including it in this paper. In press and in preparation papers will fill that gap (e.g. Cattaneo, 2016).

the subset of changes that we hypothesized would occur during the semester.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** Our public university is one of the most diverse in the region. It enrolls roughly 25,000 undergraduates, the vast majority of whom attend full-time. A significant minority (38%) report being first generation college students, and just under half identify as White (43%); the largest minority groups are Asian (19%), Black or African American (10.8%) and Hispanic (13.5%). Approximately 1,000 students are Psychology majors. A total of 278 racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse students participated in the study, 113 of whom took the course (see Table 1 for full sample description). We recruited students from the class and from department listservs, offering both pay and research credit for participation. Of the 278 students who participated in the baseline data collection, 230 completed the survey at the semester's end (99 students who took the course, and 131 who did not). These students did not differ from each other significantly in terms of demographics or their baseline scores on study variables with two exceptions: There were significantly more women in the control group than in the course (86% versus 74%), and those taking the course began with a higher score on the CSAS-Connectedness subscale (see below; $M$=5.86 versus 5.66), suggesting that they felt a greater obligation to contribute to community.  The parent study included a wide array of variables assessing student attitudes and behaviors. For this paper, we focus on a set of outcomes that are tightly related to the goals of the course.

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of total sample (N = 278)*

| Variable | $n$(%) |
|---|---|
| Age [a] | 23.26 (5.52) |
| Female | 227 (81.1) |
|  |  |
| Ethnic Heritage |  |
|     European | 102 (36.7) |
|     African | 38 (13.7) |
|     Asian | 34 (12.2) |
|     Hispanic | 51 (18.3) |
|     Middle Eastern | 7 (2.5) |
|     Other | 8 (2.9) |
|     Multiple | 31 (11.2) |
|     Prefer not to answer | 7 (2.5) |
|  |  |
| Employment status |  |
|     Not employed | 77 (27.7) |
|     Part-time (<20 hours) | 84 (30.2) |
|     Half-time+ (21-34 hours) | 73 (26.3) |
|     Full time (>35 hours) | 44 (15.8) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Born in the US | 205 (73.7) |
| Both parents born in the US | 131 (47.1) |
| Subjective Social Status [a,e] | 4.56 (1.54) |

[a]*Mean (SD)*
[b] 1 = no schooling, 2 = 1st-8th grade, 3 = some high school, 4 = finished high school, 5 = trade school, 6 = some college/associate degree, 7 = 4-year college, 8 = graduate school
[c] Neither parent attended college
[d]Self-reported importance of financial aid to ability to pay for school; 1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neither important nor unimportant, 4 = important, 5 = very important
[e]Students were shown a picture of a ladder representing social status with the description: "At the top of the ladder (10) are the people who are best off – those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom (1) are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job." They were then asked to select the rung "where you think you stand at this time in your life, relative to other people in the United States"(Adler & Stewart, 2007).

## Measures

***Systems and Individual Responsibility for Poverty Scale.*** The Systems and Individual Responsibility for Poverty Responsibility Scale (SIRP) was created by a subset of the authors for the purpose of evaluating this class (citation removed for blind review). It assesses attribution of blame for poverty in the United States using two subscales: Systems Blame and Individual Blame. Items are statements about people in poverty with which participants agree to disagree on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For example, the item, "If you are motivated enough, you can get out of poverty" gauges individual blame, while the item, "If you are experiencing poverty in the United States, it is the result of problems in our economic system" assesses system blame. Scores from the current sample demonstrate good internal consistency (Individual blame scale: $\alpha$ = .86 [Time 1], .88 [Time 2]; Systems scale $\alpha$ = .83 [Time 1], .88 [Time 2]).

***Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS).*** The Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS; Shiarella, McCarthy, & Tucker, 2000) measures the awareness of community needs and intention to help fulfill those needs through community service. For this paper we used two subscales: Connectedness, or the sense of connection to the community (e.g., "I feel an obligation to contribute to the community"), and Action, or the belief that community service can have an impact (e.g., "Volunteer work at community agencies helps solve social problems"). Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with statements using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Scores from the current sample demonstrate good internal consistency (Action scale $\alpha$ = .85 [Time 1], .91 [Time 2]; Connectedness scale $\alpha$ = .91 [Time 1], .93 [Time 2]).

***Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ).*** In order to evaluate attitudes about civic engagement that are not specific to community service, we used the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (Moely, Mercer, Ilustre, Miron, & Mcfarland, 2002). For this paper, we focused on two subscales: Political Awareness (e.g., "I understand the issues facing this nation") and Social Justice (e.g., "In order for problems to be solved, we need to change public policy"). Participants are instructed to indicate the level to which they agree on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Scores from the current sample demonstrate acceptable internal consistency (Political Awareness scale $\alpha$ = .78 [Time 1], .83 [Time 2]; Social Justice scale $\alpha$ = .82 [Time 1], .84 [Time 2]).

***Civic Behaviors.*** Our main hypotheses about behavior change focused on the follow-up one year after taking the course, drawing subscales from Astin and colleagues' longitudinal study of college student service learning and civic engagement (Astin et al., 2006). Most of these behavior changes cannot be assessed during the semester, because they are required as part of the course (e.g. volunteering or talking with others about social issues). However, the Political Expression subscale is relevant in a short time frame, as it evaluates behavior related to current events that is not required in the class (e.g., "Have not bought something or boycotted it because of the social or political values of the company"). Scores from the current sample demonstrate good internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .83 [Time 1], .82 [Time 2]).

***Implicit Association Test- Classism (IAT-C).*** Literature on social cognition is clear that explicit attitudes – those one can self-report on a survey – are only part of what drives behavior (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009; Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le, & Schmitt, 2005). Implicit associations are the "gut reactions" one has that are based on accumulated associations. For example, if one has repeatedly seen race and criminality paired in a particular way, one will retain that learned association, and that bias can drive behavior. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) was initially developed to test for racism, but it has been adapted to measure associations about other social identities. Included in over 43% of implicit social cognition studies, the IAT is the most commonly used measurement tool for implicit processes (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011). We modeled the Implicit Association Test - Classism (IAT-C) that was used in the current study closely after the original IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT-C is a computer-based sorting task that requires individuals to rapidly match words in target categories (people living in poverty

and the middle class) with positive and negative attribution labels. Millisecond Software's *Inquisit 4 Web* (Inquisit, 2013) calculates effect sizes for participants based on latency response times and errors made during classification. We retained the effect sizes as our measure of implicit classism; they ranged from -1.67 to .28 at Time 1 and -1.55 to .73 at Time 2; negative values indicate stronger negative associations with poverty-related targets; 0 indicates no preference between poverty and middle-class targets, and positive values indicate stronger negative associations towards middle-class targets.

## Results

As detailed in Table 2, students who took the course shifted in their attitudes in the directions that are consistent with course objectives: Compared to their baseline scores, at the end of the semester they blame individuals for poverty less, and they place more blame on systems. They report greater awareness of what is happening around them politically, and they express a greater commitment to social justice. They also view themselves as more responsible for acting to address community problems. For each of these scales, the change in students who took the course was significantly greater than any change in students who did not take the course, indicating that the class caused these shifts. There was one measure of attitudes on which students' scores did not shift to a greater extent than students who did not take the class: their attitude toward community service as a way of addressing social problems. Students who took the course did not change on two additional measures described above. First, students' implicit bias did not change in a way that was significantly different than the control group. Both groups' scores increased, but there is no evidence that the class had an impact on this outcome. Finally, students' scores did not change on the measure of behavior we included (political expression.

**Table 2**

*Change in from Time 1 to Time 2 in Students who Did (CESC Students) and Did Not (Control Group) Take the Community Engagement for Social Change Course (*n = 230).

| Measure | Control Group (n = 131) | | CESC Students (n = 99) | | Group Differences in Change Scores |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Time 1 | Time 2 | Time 1 | Time 2 | t(228) |
| SIRP-I | 3.10 (.68) | 3.09 (.71) | 3.04 (.74) | 2.48 (.73)** | -7.26** |
| SIRP-S | 3.43 (.65) | 3.57 (.60)** | 3.55 (.61) | 4.06 (.61)** | 5.24** |
| CASQ-PA | 3.21 (.70) | 3.27 (.73) | 3.22 (.67) | 3.63 (.67)** | 4.46** |
| CASQ-SJ | 3.99 (.53) | 3.99 (.52) | 4.10 (.53) | 4.42 (.48)** | 5.27** |
| CSAS-Ac | 6.07 (.53) | 6.03 (.58) | 6.15 (.54) | 6.22 (.66) | 1.66 |
| CSAS-C | 5.68 (.77) | 5.66 (.84) | 5.87 (.79) | 6.01 (.82)* | 2.10* |
| CBS-PE | 2.15 (.77) | 2.14 (.74) | 2.14 (.76) | 2.20 (.73) | 0.89 |
| IAT | -.86 (.39) | -.79 (.41)[a] | -.85 (.33) | -.75 (.40)[b] | .53[c] |

*Note.* All p-values refer to associated t-tests – either between time 1 and time 2 scores, or between the two groups' change scores. SIRP-I: Systems and Individual Responsibility for Poverty (SIRP) Scale – Individual subscale; SIRP-S: SIRP Scale – Systems subscale; CASQ-PA: Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) – Political Awareness subscale; CASQ-SJ: CASQ – Social Justice subscale; CSAS-Ac: Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS) – Action subscale; CSAS-C: CSAS – Connectedness subscale; CBS-PE: Civic Behaviors Survey– Political Expression subscale; IAT: Implicit Association Test.
*$p$<.05
**$p$<.01
[a]$n$ = 122
[b]$n$ = 88
[c]$t$(208)

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

Before describing the implications of these results, some limitations to this study should be acknowledged. First, because of the sample size and diversity, the dataset is not able to isolate the experiences of meaningful subgroups of students. In particular, while forthcoming papers will explore the role of social class in students' attitude and behavior change, these analyses will not capture

whether such students experience distress in the course, nor will they explore whether our

strategies for naming and navigating power and marginalization in the classroom are effective. Future work could oversample or include focus groups to make sure the experience of subgroups is not hidden in the aggregate, and to evaluate strategies for facilitating a just classroom (Lichty & Palamaro-Munsell, 2017).

Second, we did not find significant change in students' scores on our behavior measure. It may be that the attitude shifts we found are slow to translate into behavior, or it may

simply be that behavior does not shift. Another possibility is that the course is effective at changing behaviors, just not the ones included in the present analysis. Our longer-term results will tell that story in part, but there may be other types of relevant behavior we simply did not measure.

Third, students' attitudes about community service (CSAS-Action) did not change. This subscale specifically measures attitudes about the need for and impact of volunteering for community organizations. Students' lack of change in this regard may have resulted from performing community service in tandem with learning about the complexity and scope of social problems. This experience may have left students feeling that community service, while necessary, is not likely to prevent large-scale problems like poverty from persisting. We did not measure this possibility. It is also possible that the null finding reflects a ceiling effect: Students' scores on this measure were already high – both groups were close to a mean score of six (out of a possible seven) at baseline. Finally, it may be that change is complex. Our undergraduate alumna author described the change in her thinking this way:

> *I can volunteer and put in time and effort, but I am just one person in a complex web of problems and ultimately do not have the power to move the needle. However I do believe my experience in the class piqued my interest in conversations about topics like community organizing, civic engagement, the community and how they are all interconnected... After this class I am much more likely to engage when I hear those words. Previously, those words would not have enticed me to engage further and would have repelled me. I had an uninformed understanding of 'volunteering,' I genuinely thought of it as so dull and*

> *just imagined picking up garbage on the side of the road (which is also impactful but not necessarily as enjoyable). My definition of civic engagement has become more complex as well as my understanding of community. Previously, I thought of community as an abstract enormously complex concept that no one could ever make a change in. After my placements and engaging in the class, I realized community can be as small or large as a school or an entire school system.*

In other words, it may be that after taking the course, students have a more complex view both of "community" and of "service." Our measures did not capture this kind of change.

This dataset is also limited by the nature of our placements. As described in detail below, the placements put students solidly in the "helper" role. Ideally, placements would challenge that hierarchy by putting students and community members on equal footing, working toward a common goal (Whitaker & Holum, 2015). While we warn students about the risk of adopting a "savior" mentality, our dataset does not allow us to explore whether this admonition has impact, nor does it allow us to evaluate our placements relative to another model. We also do not have data on the impact of our work on organizations or on the clients the organizations serve.

Finally, this study did not explore mechanisms of change within the course. Future work might systematically vary components of the course, such as the length, nature or necessity of a service requirement, and investigate the difference.

**General Recommendations**

In this final section, we share lessons we have learned that might apply to a range of courses that integrate community psychology values.

These lessons are derived from our discussions as instructors and students, as well as our data.

## Make use of Empirical Evidence that Supports Community-Oriented Courses

The central learning objectives of the course are to increase students' understanding of the social causes of social problems, and to increase their interest and sense of possibility in addressing those problems. These objectives are consistent with community psychology competencies and with the goals of our university, which, like many other institutes of higher learning, aims to produce civically engaged graduates (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2019). By including a matched sample, results add to existing literature that attests to the effectiveness of coursework that incorporates service learning (e.g. Celio et al., 2011), and community-based learning (Whitaker & Holum, 2015). Compared to other students with the same major at the same institution, over the course of the semester, students shifted their attitudes about a particular social problem, and about social problems in general, including an increased sense of responsibility to contribute to the wellbeing of communities. Others interested in making the case for such a course might rely on the evidence presented here and in the body of work on which it builds.

## Connect with Others Doing Social Justice Teaching

Teaching that delves into the causes, consequences and pathways to addressing social injustice has unique challenges and rewards. We have found it energizing and valuable to connect with others doing this kind of work. While for us, these conversations have been within our research team, the faculty author has also developed a faculty network. Many faculty she has identified are not within psychology, but do work that is under the umbrella of social justice, and finding this community has made an inestimable difference in morale, sense of connection, and concrete ideas. Disciplines in which she has found likeminded educators have included Women and Gender Studies, Sociology, Criminology, and Education. Associations such as SCRA also have groups focused on teaching that can be a source of connection. Finally, the scholarship connected to these issues is vast, and offers another way to connect and grow.

## Find Ways the Course Satisfies Requirements, and be Ready for Variety

In order to give our class broad appeal and consistent enrollment, the faculty member developed it to meet graduation requirements. First, it is a "synthesis" class, which includes the perspectives of multiple disciplines; all students must take one such course in order to graduate. Second, it counts as "applied psychology," which is a category from which psychology majors must choose a course. Constructing the class in this way has ensured that enrollment will be sufficient to make the course run, and has also ensured that students will come to the course with a variety of interest levels and awareness. This variety is something to prepare for: The first iteration of the course overestimated the degree of students' knowledge of relevant material, such that students reported feeling a bit lost and asked for more explanation of fundamental concepts. Subsequent iterations were revised to include primers on the conceptual underpinnings of the course, such as wealth inequality, power, oppression, privilege, and social class. The first third of the class is now oriented toward "setting the stage" – providing the building blocks to discuss the causes and consequences of poverty at multiple levels. The need for this kind of primer will likely vary by institution.

**Consider the Specific Attitudes that the Course Might Shift**

Our quantitative results underscore the differences among attitudes relevant to social justice, and suggest that changing one attitude does not necessarily mean another attitude will shift. In particular, in our dataset, systems and individual attributions for problems were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the correlation between the two was only moderate (-.3 at Time 1, see Table 3). Students may understand that systems put particular groups at a disadvantage and may also believe that individuals are responsible for their own responses to those circumstances. In our experience, the vast majority of students endorse both beliefs simultaneously, and this paradox needs to be discussed openly in class. It is particularly important to discuss given the diversity of our student body; many students may be reflecting on their *own* ability, or the ability of their own communities, to make change given the enormity of the structural problems they face. In this case, system attribution can actually feel disempowering (Shor, Calton, & Cattaneo 2018). This finding underscores the importance of supporting students in learning about not only risk but also resilience, and in identifying the many levers for system change.

The non-significant findings in the longitudinal dataset also highlight the distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes. At face value, the lack of change in implicit bias may seem to contradict the desired effects of our course; however, this finding is consistent with other research on the intransigence of implicit bias (Banaji, 2016). Implicit bias results from associations made over long periods of time and is not mediated by conscious thought, so its failure to shift in response to one semester of exposure to other ideas is not surprising. After all, implicit associations as measured by the IAT reflect how easily people make biased connections, but they do not reveal whether people *endorse those beliefs*. Our finding highlights the value of making students aware that their gut reactions are unlikely to shift along with their carefully formed opinions. In other words, even after taking a course designed to deconstruct stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs, students may still experience aversion when they see someone who is panhandling. However, they can make a conscious choice about the behavior that follows that reaction. Such choices are easier to make if students are ready for them.

**Table 3**

*Correlations for Time 1 (N = 278)*

|               | 1        | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5       | 6       | 7      |
|---------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1. SIRP-I     | -        |         |         |         |         |         |        |
| 2. SIRP-S     | -.30**   |         |         |         |         |         |        |
| 3. CASQ-PA    | -.15*    | .06     |         |         |         |         |        |
| 4. CASQ-SJ    | -.54**   | .50**   | .11     |         |         |         |        |
| 5. CSAS-Ac    | -.09     | .32**   | .16**   | .48**   |         |         |        |
| 6. CSAS-C     | -.13*    | .24**   | .35**   | .35**   | .65**   |         |        |
| 7. CBS-PE     | -.32**   | .23**   | .49**   | .25**   | .20**   | .28**   |        |
| 8. IAT[a]     | -.13*    | .09     | .10     | .03     | .02     | .09     | .15*   |

Note: 1: Systems and Individual Responsibility for Poverty (SIRP) Scale – Individual subscale; 2: SIRP Scale – Systems subscale; 3: Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) – Political Awareness subscale; 4: CASQ – Social Justice subscale; 5: Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS) – Action subscale; 6: CSAS – Connectedness subscale; 7: Civic Behaviors Survey– Political Expression subscale; 8: Implicit Association Test.*p<.05 **p<.01[a]n= 274

## Pepare for Student Distress

Whether the information is new to students, or whether it provides new context for their own personal experiences, exposure to the details of social problems can be very distressing. In early iterations of the class, we most often learned about students' distress in one of two ways – in their written reflections, when they repeatedly asked "but what do we DO about all of this?" and in course evaluations. In an extreme example, one student shared in her course evaluation that the class triggered a depressive episode for her. We have learned to be intentional about expecting and managing this distress.

Several strategies have proven useful in navigating student distress. First, we prepare students for the experience by creating a shared vocabulary to describe it and providing opportunities to talk and write about it. On the first day of class, we introduce the concept of "creative maladjustment," drawn from a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968). Dr. King argues that there are some things "to which we should never become adjusted;" we explain that in class, through assignments, and through service at their placements, students are going to learn and reflect on things that make them uncomfortable. In line with work from transformative education scholars and community psychology pedagogy, our explicit aim is to not shrink away from that discomfort (Langhout, 2015; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). The "creative" component of the phrase is helpful here. The goal is not to drown in misery but, rather, to allow discomfort to fuel action. We explain to the students that a more complex understanding of a problem leads us to *more* solutions, not fewer. We refer back to this idea throughout the semester. By opening the door repeatedly to talk about discomfort, we both normalize it and identify it as a potential source of positive action. Students are thus encouraged to stick with that discomfort when it arises, and are supported in finding ways to channel it.

Relatedly, a second strategy for handling students' distress is to support their natural wish to take action. As instructors teach students about each level of the problem of poverty, they weave in exemplars of interventions that target that level, showing the class that there are many ways to contribute to solutions. Instructors also talk with students, both individually and as part of class discussion, about what they might be interested in doing to intervene, given their own interests and strengths. For example, students have been interested in other courses they might take, places they might volunteer or work, groups they might join, and graduate school opportunities. Even after the course is completed, some students approach their former instructors for guidance on utilizing their skills to address social problems. For example, our undergraduate alumna author graduated shortly after taking the course with a major in biology. She reported that she felt unfulfilled in her first job out of college and found herself reflecting on the course frequently as part of her thought process about what career direction might be meaningful. She contacted the course instructor two years after graduating and has since participated in the lab in various ways. While her professional trajectory is still evolving, she now works for a community psychology research and development organization that contracts with nonprofits, government agencies, and foundations to help build the capacity of disenfranchised communities. She identifies the class as the impetus for seeking employment that advances efforts to achieve positive social change.

Other students have described small actions they have taken throughout the course to channel their distress and increase their sense of agency, even temporarily. For example, students have reported providing meals to others, babysitting for a neighbor who cannot afford childcare, and lodging a formal complaint about a classist policy in a medical practice. Other students have described their efforts to spread knowledge and decrease stigma by engaging in conversations or debates with friends and family about course topics. Despite the knowledge that these actions are not solutions to the problem writ large, students report that the actions help them to continue learning without being overwhelmed by a sense that there is nothing they can do in the here and now. Throughout the class, we share examples of ways to take action, large and small.

**Prepare for Instructor Heart-Work**

In Langhout's (2015) powerful paper about the role of emotion in scholar-activism, she notes that "social justice commitments often come from seeing a chasm between the activist's values and the world as it is" (p.267). The course is one way that we, as scholar-activists, infuse our values and hopes for the world into our work. Given that this work matters deeply to us, it is unsurprising that the challenges in the classroom – witnessing student distress, encountering resistance to change, hearing and managing micro-aggressions, wondering if one has navigated power dynamics well - can lead to instructor frustration, sadness, and worry. Anticipating this reality, we must, as Langhout suggests, "build our heart muscles" (p.268). We have discovered several strategies toward this end, making our teaching of the class sustainable.

One important strategy is to take a semester break from teaching this course from time to time and come back to it with fresh eyes. A second key strategy is to connect with others doing similar work, as noted above. A third strategy to sustain our energy in teaching is to recall the lessons we teach our students: It is normal to feel frustrated with the enormity and complexity of social issues. We remind ourselves to use our discomfort with student distress as fuel to develop more effective methods of teaching and facilitating change. Similarly, it is useful to remember that students' difficulties in the course naturally ebb and flow. To maintain confidence in the process of the course, several instructors have taken to reading older course evaluations, where students often detail the overall positive impacts the course has had despite their initial or intermittent challenges. Finally, while it is wonderful to make teaching a component of one's commitment to social justice, it is also helpful for it to not be the *only* outlet for this passion. The faculty author frequently reminds herself that teaching is about planting seeds – efforts may bear fruit later, or they may not. It is essential to have other plots in the garden as well.

## Conclusion

An unanticipated benefit of this course has been its profound impact on our lab. Collaborating on the teaching of the course and on the project evaluating it has served as a point of connection and synergy for us. If we were in a program or department with a community psychology emphasis, this experience might be less influential. In our department, it provides a set of experiences, vocabulary, and conversations that support our social-justice-oriented work more broadly, and give a sense of legitimacy to our social justice identity.

The course has also introduced us to scholarship we may not have accessed otherwise, giving us a common and growing lexicon on social problems and social change. As with any course, one never learns a topic so well as when one has to teach it. As instructors and TAs of the course, we are immersed in the course content and continue to experiment with strategies to teach it well. When we use the terms oppression, privilege, deficit ideology, or social context, we have common definitions and reference points. This shared understanding informs both our conversations with each other and our contributions to other contexts where these issues arise, including classes in clinical psychology.

Finally, going back and forth between teaching the course and reviewing the data on its effectiveness has pushed the lab to wrestle with important questions relevant to community psychology pedagogy, including how to most effectively promote learning across students at varying stages of understanding and openness, and how to manage the emotional impact of the course material on students with a range of life experiences. This process has generated a sense of accountability in the classroom, as we are all aware of what outcomes are being measured. When instructors consider adding content or shifting a strategy, we refer back to the outcomes we know we are assessing and ask ourselves how the potential alteration will relate to what we hope to see. For all of us, this empirical approach to course instruction has generalized to our teaching of other subjects.

Like the social problems we teach our students about in class, the absence of formal community psychology programming at our university may be viewed as a structural barrier *and* as an opportunity to generate creative solutions to address public needs.

This course was developed in the spirit of community psychology to help address a gap for our academic community within the bounds of available resources. In developing and effectively meeting course objectives, we have found a way to infuse community psychology content and practice into our undergraduate curriculum as well as our graduate students' experiences. In so doing, we hope to arm our future graduates with the broader perspective needed to both diversify their scope of potential careers and meaningfully address social issues.

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**Appendix A**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**
**Course Description**

Typical enrollment: 25-35 students
Meetings: 1 hour and 15 minutes twice a week, 15 week semester

## Course Description

This class explores influences on social problems and approaches to addressing them by drawing from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. By definition, a social problem is a problem that affects many people, but such issues are often viewed primarily as individual-level problems that require individual-level solutions. In this class, students will learn to understand social problems and approaches to addressing them at both the individual level (typically the focus of fields such as Clinical Psychology and Medicine) and the social level (typically the focus of fields such as Community Psychology, Sociology, and Public Affairs). The class will achieve its goals through a semester-long case example of the social problem of poverty. We will explore this social problem through students' service to community organizations, readings, class exercises and both written and oral projects.

## Goals

In this course, students will:
- Identify and understand the individual, interpersonal and social context levels of a social problem, drawing from the perspectives of multiple disciplines.
- Identify and understand approaches toward targeting different aspects of a social problem.
- Apply the above skills in oral and written products.
- Identify ways in which they might engage in addressing social problems that concern them.
- Complete a minimum of 20 hours of service to a community organization coordinated by the instructor and in the context of this service:
  - Deepen understanding of a social problem through contact with both people it affects and people trying to do something about it;
  - Provide concrete value to the community organization;
  - Connect course concepts to concrete experiences.

## Requirements:

***Participation and Preparation (35%)*** Students are required to attend class **(10%)**, and to complete exercises throughout the semester **(10%)**. Students are also required to read/listen to assigned material before class. Preparation is evaluated by either a quiz or an entry in a critical reading journal each class (**15%**).

***Connection Papers (20%).*** Students will write two three-page double-spaced papers that connect course material and experience at placements.

**Final Project (30%).** Students work in groups during the semester to analyze a social issue of interest to them, other than poverty. *Each student* identifies a program or organization that targets that problem, and writes a 4-6 page paper using scholarly sources to conduct a multilevel analysis of the social problem and an analysis of their organization's approach to addressing it. As a group, students construct a poster that provides an overview of their social problem and an organization that works to address it. During final exam time, there is a poster session in which all students share their work.

***Service (15%):*** A fundamental goal and requirement of the class is to provide concrete value to our partner organizations in exchange for the experience we are gaining. The grade for this requirement is assessed at 2 points, according to completing orientation, required number of hours, and an OK from their supervisor, and then averaged. However, if students do not complete the 20 hours they cannot pass the class.

**<u>Topics Covered and Example Content:</u>**
What is Service Learning?
      (Definitions, introductions to placements)
Understanding social issues through multi-level analysis
      (Introduction of multi-level model, Why Can't Pat Read?)
Setting the stage for our case study: wealth and power in the US
      (Wealth inequality, defining building block concepts like power, privilege)
Poverty as a case study: What is it?
      (Defining building block concepts like living wage, federal poverty line, class, classism)
Poverty as a case study: How do we understand social context?
    (Minimum wage debate, Housing, Cultural narrative, Social mobility, mushroom exercise)
Poverty as a case study: How do we understand the interpersonal aspects?
    (Wealth inequality and interpersonal relationships, networks as stress buffers and drains, stigma, parenting, workplace)
Poverty as a case study: How do we understand the individual-level aspects?
     (Wealth inequality and happiness; psychological and physical effects of poverty; strengths)
Identifying and addressing multiple aspects of social problems
     (NCH speakers' bureau; examples from news, according to student interest)
Extending our analysis to other social problems: Mass incarceration

**Appendix B**

**The 5 Whys**

This technique is used to brainstorm the root causes of a problem. The technique can be applied in a group discussion setting, or with paper and pen. In either case, ask "why?" this fictional character struggles with that particular problem, and generate multiple possibilities. Then, for each reason listed, ask why that reason exists and continue asking "why" at least 5 times.
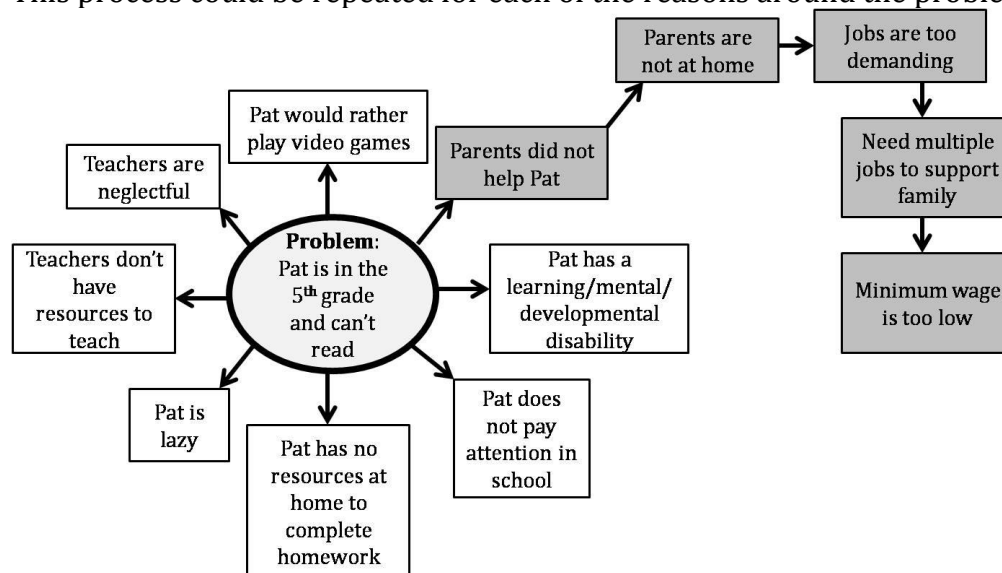
**Step 1**          Identify a problem.
**Step 2**          Ask yourself, "Why is it like this?"
**Step 3**          Continue asking, "Why?" at least 4 more times
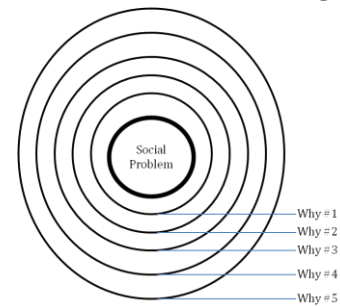
*EXAMPLE:*
**Problem-** Pat is in the 5th grade and cannot read
*Why? Pat cannot read because* his parents did not help him learn
*Why? Pat's parents did not help him because* his parents were not home when he needed help
*Why? Pat's parents were not home* because they were working so much
*Why? Pat's parents were working so much* because they each needed multiple jobs to support the family
*Why? Pat's parents needed multiple jobs* because the minimum wage where they live is not enough to support the family

This process could be repeated for each of the reasons around the problem.

**More examples of applications of this technique can be found at:**
http://casachirilagua.org/meet-pat-a-5th-grader-who-cant-read/
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1292997/

**Appendix C**

**The Mushroom Exercise**

The course instructor (hereafter "facilitator") introduces the activity under the guise of a teamwork exercise. Teams of four to five students are told to gather in designated spaces which are placed such that students cannot hear or see what other groups are doing. The facilitator then tells students that they are competing for a prize.

The facilitator asks each team to select a "translator," and speaks to these students individually, out of earshot of the others. All translators are shown a large, colorful drawing of a mushroom and are told, "Your task is to get your group to draw this mushroom, exactly like this picture." Unbeknownst to the students, each translator receives different instructions and materials. The Team 1 translator receives working markers of the correct color, with no limits on communication; the Team 2 translator is given some non-working markers and may only answer questions from their group rather than providing instruction; the Team 3 translator is given mostly non-working markers of the wrong colors and is limited to yes or no questions, and so on.

The facilitator walks around observing the students at work. When the first team finishes their drawing, the facilitator ends the competition, tapes each team's drawings up for all to see and then "debriefs" the exercise by playing the voice of unjust systems. When Team 1 shares about their experience, the facilitator compliments their "hard work," "cooperation," and "clear ability to communicate effectively." As other teams share their experience, the facilitator comments on their performance using common cultural narratives that rationalize injustice by locating the responsibility for injustice in those experiencing it. For example, the facilitator might state to a group with a half-drawn design, "Maybe if you had focused on the task at hand, rather than being distracted by the markers, yours would look as complete as Team 1's." As students share, they start to realize they were given different instructions and materials; when asked, the facilitator denies any unfairness, stating, for example, "Everyone was playing by the same rules." The facilitator then asks, "Who would like to fire me as your facilitator?" giving students the chance to "overthrow" the unjust leadership. The facilitator agrees to be fired and leaves the classroom, returning as the instructor.

The instructor then begins a second debriefing, admitting that groups were given different instructions and materials, and asks the students questions to connect their experience with major course concepts. For example, each group is asked what assumptions they made about the exercise and about other groups. Generally, students assumed that the competition is fair, and that they were given different supplies for a reason. As the instructor questions these assumptions, the class uncovers cultural narratives that undergird wealth inequality (e.g., people get what they deserve). Students are asked to share how they felt at various stages in the exercise, and the facilitator connects these feelings with a discussion about unearned privilege, its reliance on cultural narratives, and other course concepts (e.g. internalized stigma).