



Teach the Children Well: Social Justice in College Predicts Preference for Socially Responsible Jobs



Figure 1 Image from Pixabay. Used under CCO

We can leverage existing resources to fix significant societal problems and systemic injustice. Higher education and the private business sector are underutilized tools of social change. Through higher education, we can foster a commitment to social justice and civic engagement within all students, so that they enter the workforce ready to generate societal change in their chosen industry. College graduates increasingly value corporate social responsibility (CSR), and expect it will ultimately impact their job selection and future employment decisions.

A socially responsible corporation is one that that balances profit-making and benefiting society (e.g. hiring women and minorities, protecting the environment, supporting local communities.) Societal insistence towards corporate responsibility has the potential to impact internal shifts within organizations to become more attractive to potential employees.

For companies who may not be motivated on their own to practice good CSR, this pressure may push changes in internal regulation, norms, and culture. Therefore, shaping the next generation into socially responsible citizens who value social justice and CSR moves us towards large scale, positive social change in society.

Highlights

Taking a social justice focused course or participating in extracurricular volunteering made it more likely for students to believe they would sacrifice some benefits of a post-college job (e.g., pay, commute length, etc.) to be able to work for a socially responsible company.

Methods

This study was part of a student assignment in a mid-sized Midwestern university from 2013-2014. This study surveyed 480 undergraduate students (69% female). The average age of the students surveyed was approximately 21 years old. Most students identified as White/Caucasian (57%), while 18% identified as Latino/Hispanic, 9% as Black/African American, 7% as bi-racial/multiracial, 6% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% as other race/ethnicity, and less than 1% as Native American/Alaskan Native. Most students (38%) were in their first year of college.

Students completed an online survey assessing their sensitivity to the social performance for places of prospective employment (i.e., completing the SPESR scale responding to items such as, “I would be willing to get paid slightly less to work for a more socially responsible employer”). The survey also included items assessing their commitment to social justice (i.e., goals/intentions to engage in future social justice advocacy), social justice self-efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to engage in future social justice advocacy behaviors), civic action (i.e., plans for future community involvement), type and frequency of various social justice related experiences in college, constraining financial factors (e.g., family household income, number of dependents), and some basic demographic information.

We modified and tested, the *Sensitivity to Prospective Employer Social Responsibility (SPESR)* scale to better understand if someone would be willing to make some job-related sacrifices (e.g., lower pay, longer commute length, etc.) to be able to work for a socially responsible company. This scale is now published and available for other researchers to use as well.

See the SPESR link in the original article: [Exploring Social Change Through College Students, Journal of College and Character, 19:4, 275-291, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2018.1517648](#)

Results

- Students taking social justice focused courses in college and participating in extra-curricular volunteering were more likely to believe that they would sacrifice some benefits of a post-college job (e.g., lower pay, longer commute length, etc.) to be able to work for a socially responsible company. Study results were still significant when controlling for students' financial supports and constraints (e.g., if the student had any dependents), as these can restrain and impact students' post-college job choice decisions.

- Students who endorsed greater commitment to social justice (i.e., goals/intentions to engage in future social justice advocacy), greater social justice self-efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to engage in

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?

Community psychology focuses on empowerment and positive change across multiple levels including larger systems and networks, as well as cultural norms, values, and structural societal frameworks and systems. The corporate sector, explored in the business literature, is largely ignored in the community psychology literature. As businesses use much of society's economic and human capital, it is important for community psychologists to help leverage corporate power and resources for positive social change.

future social justice advocacy behaviors), and greater plans for future involvement in their communities showed a greater sensitivity to prospective employer social responsibility.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: Prior to this study, no scales existed to examine if individuals value working for a socially responsible employer, to the extent that they would make future employment decisions based on valuing CSR. The SPESR scale offers an empirically validated measure to explore the degree to which job applicants perceive their values related to working for a socially responsible company impact their future job choice decisions.

Practice: It is important for university staff to understand which college experiences help shape students to hold positive pro-social values. Taking social justice-related courses is associated with students' CSR values, thus impacting their perceived future employment decisions. We can explore college general education requirements or other ways to promote or increase opportunities for students to take social justice-related courses. In addition, colleges may consider promoting volunteering opportunities such as supporting volunteering-based student organizations, offering a campus-wide day of service, building and strengthening relationships between the college/university and local community partners.

Social Action: These findings confirm that when controlling for demographic variables and factors constraining job choice flexibility, students are more attracted to socially responsible companies and willing to sacrifice some personal preferences in order to work for one.

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