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**SOCIAL JUSTICE: FROM ATTITUDES TO INTENTIONS. A CONDITIONAL
PROCESS ANALYSIS ON A ROMANIAN SAMPLE**

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Abstract

Torres-Harding et al. (2012) proposed combining the defining elements of social justice, with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) in order to grasp the potential predictors of social justice-related behaviors. The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between the components within this theoretical framework, by testing for a moderated mediation model comprised of attitudes, behavioral control, subjective norms and behavioral intentions, while controlling for social desirability. The sample comprised 194 Romanian participants (Mage = 21.79; SD = 6.01) who completed two self-report questionnaires. The results indicated a significant but somehow counterintuitive conditional indirect effect.

Keywords: social justice; attitudes; behavioral intentions; social justice self-efficacy; theory of planned behavior; social cognitive theory;

1. INTRODUCTION

Social justice has been referred to the significance of "valuing the fairness and equity in resources, rights and treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society because of their immigration, racial, ethnic, age, socioeconomic, religious heritage, physical ability, or sexual orientation status groups" (Constantine et al., 2007, p.24). The importance of social justice has been widely stated in the field of community psychology. For example, the concept of wellness as fairness has been introduced to emphasize justice as a force that governs the engagement of the various existing resources (objective, subjective, medical, social, economic, psychological, and cultural) for enhancing the individual, interpersonal, organizational and community well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012). Moreover, one of the most ardent goals of service learning, community-service, multicultural, feminist, and community psychology courses has been training students to become aware of oppression and inequalities determined by membership of particular groups, and to further take more social responsibility (Torres-Harding et al., 2014). Torres-Harding et al. (2012) proposed that the effectiveness of pro social justice interventions could be increased, by obtaining a better understanding of the cognitive mechanisms by which individuals choose to engage in social-justice related practices. In addition, they hypothesized that this desiderate could be accomplished by combining the defining elements of social justice, with the theory of planned behavior elaborated by Ajzen (e.g., 1985, 2015). This would be helpful in grasping the potential constructs that predict social justice-related behaviors, namely social justice attitudes, perceived behavioral control, social justice subjective norms, and social justice behavioral intentions. In addition, according to this conceptual framework, social justice behavioral intentions should be predicted by the other three components of social justice (Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

To date, few studies (e.g., Miller et al., 2009; Todd et al., 2014) have tried to depict the cognitive path between attitudes related to social justice, and behavioral intentions towards social justice efforts. The purpose of this study was to take a closer look at the relationships between the theorized predictors of social justice intentions, by exploring the hypothesis that the persons with stronger pro social justice attitudes could be more inclined to declare social justice intentions, partially as a result of their confidence in their ability to perform behaviors with positive social impact. However, this associative mechanism would be stronger, when the proximal social support/encouragement towards social justice, increased. In addition, we sought to test these assumptions while adjusting for social desirability bias.

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2. METHOD: PARTICIPANTS, PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

The present sample consisted of 194 Romanian participants ($M = 21.79$; $SD = 6.01$) recruited from the students attending the same university in Bucharest. 69 of them were studying psychology, 50 – pedagogy, 71 – special psychopedagogy, 4 – other specialties (communication, theology, social assistance, economics). 19 of them were also employees. There were 13 males and 181 females. 6.18% were members of organizations that promote social justice, while 2.57% were engaged in activities for reducing social injustice. We used a convenience sampling, based on students' voluntary agreement. There were no special eligibility criteria. The study took place in the faculty informatics lab where the participants were asked to complete a computerized form that included the measures we used, along with a brief instructing for completing the items. The researchers also explained the participants the research procedure and were available for answering their questions. All participants signed an informed consent form.

The components of social justice, were operationalized by the scores on Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding, Siers & Olson, 2012). In addition, the short version of Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) proposed by Rudmin (1999) was applied for a minimal control of social bias. Both scales were translated by a native Romanian speaker with high proficiency in English. On our sample, SJS showed good internal consistency, while the scale for social desirability had a low value of Cronbach's alpha, as seen in Table 1.

SJS is a reliable and valid self-report questionnaire that includes 24 items related to a series of defining elements of social justice: empowerment of members of disadvantaged groups, helping others to access community/societal resources, reducing power imbalance, collaboration with others, acknowledging harmful inequalities, making society fairer for all people, working for social justice (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The answer choices range from 1 to 7 on a Likert type scale, and their sums reflect quantitatively four constructs: 1) the intention to engage in social justice-related behaviors (4 items); 2) attitudes towards social justice (11 items); 3) perceived behavioral control with respect to social justice goals (5 items); 4) subjective norms – social support/encouragement provided in one's proximal environment for engaging in social justice-related practices (4 items). The instrument was inspired by the theory of planned behavior and its scales correspond to the components of Azjen's model (1991).

Norwegian Social Desirability Scale consists of 10 items that had been selected from the original 33-item Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, based on eight elimination criteria (2 – qualitative; 6 – quantitative) and a procedure for scale accretion in a Norwegian sample (Rudmin, 1999). Compared to long form, this short version appeared to bring some advantages without losing important psychometric proprieties. The responses are dichotomous and the final score is obtained by summing up the numerical codes attached to respondents' answers (1 = true; 0 = false). There are 5 reversed items. The higher the score, the higher the chances for the answers to be affected by social bias.

3. RESULTS

Our hypothesis was that the perceived behavioral control would mediate the relationship between attitudes towards social justice, and behavioral intentions, and that this effect would be contingent on high values of subjective norms, the moderator variable. Specifically, the moderator would affect the path "attitudes → perceived control", as well as the path "perceived control → behavioral intentions", with both positive relationships stronger when subjective norms increased. Furthermore, we expect these relationships to occur even though we adjust for social desirability. The conditional indirect effect of attitudes towards social justice, on behavioral intentions was tested using the Process Macro, version 2.13.1 (Hayes, 2013) for SPSS.

Table 1. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, means, standard deviations and scales' internal consistency.

		r coefficients					M	SD	Cronbach's α
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.			
1.	Attitudes towards social justice	-	.66**	.46**	.58**	.22*	68.30	6.09	.81
2.	Perceived behavioral control	.54**	-	.49**	.61**	.35**	28.84	4.04	.82
3.	Subjective norms	.37**	.40**	-	.57**	.31**	19.47	4.56	.79
4.	Behavioral intentions	.48**	.51**	.47**	-	.36**	22.67	3.80	.84
5.	Social desirability	.15*	.24**	.21**	.25**	-	5.42	1.98	.57

Note. Above the diagonal – r corrected for attenuation; below the diagonal – r not corrected; N = 194; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The correlation matrix indicated that the social justice-related variables were positively associated one to another, with effect sizes medium to large, but not excessive. In addition, it was noticed a slight tendency of the participants to report stronger pro social justice attitudes, perceived control, subjective norms and behavioral intentions, as the social desirability scores increased. This result was an extra argument for adding social

desirability as a covariate in the conditional process analysis, in order to statistically remove its potential confounding effects.

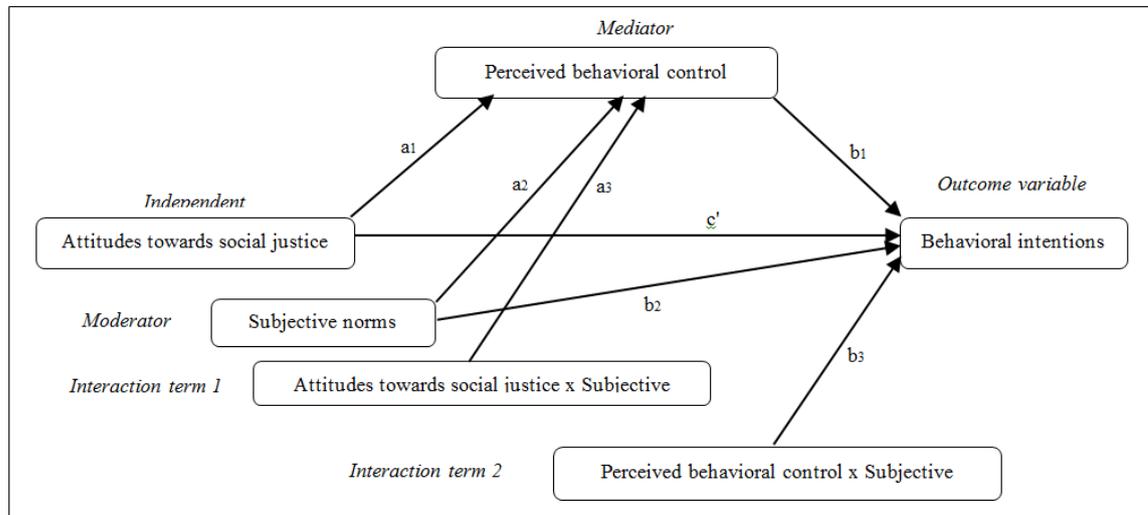


Figure 1. The statistical diagram of the conditional indirect effect of attitudes towards social justice, on behavioral intentions.

Table 2. The conditional process analysis - the regression coefficients

Predictor variable		Outcome variable						
		Perceived behavioral control			Behavioral intentions			
		B	SE	p		B	SE	p
Attitudes towards social justice	a ₁	.25	.04	.000	c'	.13	.04	.001
Perceived behavioral control		-	-	-	b ₁	.19	.06	.003
Subjective norms	a ₂	.17	.05	.001	b ₂	.21	.05	.000
Attitudes x Subjective norms	a ₃	-.018	.007	.009		-	-	-
Perceived control x Subjective norms		-	-	-	b ₃	-.016	.007	.03
Social desirability		.26	.11	.02		.23	.11	.04
Constant		-1.26	.69	.06		21.54	.64	.000
		R ² = .37				R ² = .40		
		F(4, 189) = 28.91; p < .001				F(5, 188) = 26.04; p < .001		

Note. Attitudes towards social justice, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms were mean centered prior to analysis, as their measurement scale did not include 0; The letters a1-a3, b1-b3 and c' are the paths between variables, as displayed in Figure 1; Social desirability = covariate; N = 194.

The regression coefficients revealed that the stronger the attitudes towards social justice, the stronger the behavioral intentions, when holding constant perceived behavioral control, subjective norms and social desirability (path c'). Furthermore, the participants higher in social justice self-efficacy, with average scores on subjective norms, and equal social desirability and attitudes towards social justice, were more inclined to declare that they intended to participate to social justice-related practices (path b₁). However, the effect of perceived behavioral control on behavioral intentions, was contingent on subjective norms, as suggested by the statistically significant interaction illustrated by path b₃. On the other hand, the confidence in one's ability to inflict social justice results, was predicted by stronger attitudes towards social justice, at average subjective norms and equal social desirability (path a₁), but the relationship between attitudes and perceived control was also moderated by the subjective norms, as indicated by the significant regression coefficient for the product between attitudes and norms (path a₃).

Table 3. Conditional indirect effects of attitudes towards social justice, on behavioral intentions, at different values of subjective norms

Subjective norms		The conditional indirect effect of attitudes on behavioral intentions			The direct effect of attitudes on intentions			
Percentiles	Scores	Effect	BC 95% CI	Boot SE	Effect	SE	t	p
10 th	-6.46	.114	[.029, .204]	.044	.134	.04	3.14	.001
25 th	-2.46	.071	[.028, .130]	.025	.134	.04	3.14	.001
50 th	.53	.045	[.015, .089]	.018	.134	.04	3.14	.001
75 th	3.53	.025	[-.0001, .070]	.017	.134	.04	3.14	.001
90 th	5.53	.015	[-.007, .071]	.019	.134	.04	3.14	.001

Note. The confidence intervals were produced with bootstrap bias-corrected method, based on 10000 resamples; The results were statistically significant when BC 95% CI did not contain zero; N = 194.

The bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals suggested that the indirect effect of attitudes towards social justice, on behavioral intentions, via perceived behavioral control, was statistically significant at very low,

low and medium values, but not statistically significant at values of the moderator corresponding to and above the 75th percentile. Similarly, in participants with subjective norms one standard deviation above the mean, the conditional indirect effect was not statistically significant ($B = .02$; BC 95% CI $[-.003, .069]$), while in those with values one standard deviation below the mean the result was statistically significant ($B = .09$; BC 95% CI $[.03, .16]$), sustaining the moderated mediation model. More specifically, this mediated relationship between attitudes and intentions progressively decreased, as the proximal social support/encouragement for social justice-related behaviors, increased. The Kruskal-Wallis test ($H(3) = 181.77$; $p = .000$), followed by the step-down stepwise analysis revealed that the scores within quartiles were statistically different one from another, with the highest conditional indirect effects for the scores in subjective norms found below 25th percentile (sum of ranks = 171.50), followed by the ones corresponding to 25th-50th percentiles (sum of ranks = 127.00) which were higher than the ones corresponding to 50th-75th percentiles (sum of ranks = 79.50) which were higher than the ones above 75th percentile (sum of ranks = 27.00).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Social justice has been conceptualized as one of the most important values that shape the community psychology practice, as it might have the power to establish and/or maintain the balance between theory-research and social action, as well as between personal/relational wellness and community wellness (Prilleltensky, 2001) and it is not surprising that, to date, it has constantly received great attention as a potential goal within both school education (e.g., Adams et al., 2007) and training of mental health professionals (e.g., Constantine et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the research regarding the cognitive processes engaged in the formation of social justice behavioral intentions that originate, at least partly, in one's attitudes towards social justice, has rather been scarce and not sufficient. Therefore, our study has the potential to bring a significant contribution to the field of community psychology and educational psychology, by presenting a way to explore one of the possible intricate paths from social justice attitudes, to behavioral intentions. This approach was based on the recommendation of Torres-Harding et al. (2012) to define social justice components within the frame of theory of planned behavior. In addition, our particular hypothesized conditional process model was designed using the key tenets of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory that basically describes a complex triadic reciprocal determinism between person, behavior and environment (e.g., Bandura, 2005). Thus, we expected to obtain an indirect effect of attitudes to intentions, via perceived behavioral control, contingent on higher values of subjective norms. Instead, this indirect effect decreased, as the proximal social support/encouragement for social justice, increased. These results could suggest that, under some circumstances, the social justice practices within the proximal environment, when perceived at excessive rates, may dissolve, or at least weaken, the "attitudes – perceived control - behavioral intentions" connection. Such findings, if replicated and further tested with appropriate scientific methods, could help professionals develop more efficient programs for enhancing social justice behaviors.

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