

Book Group Discussion Questions *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Social Justice Committee (SJC) developed this guidance document to offer school psychologists, and other educators, a structured way to engage in discussions about the first recommended group read of the 2019–2020 school year, *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice* by Carla Shedd, PhD. The questions are designed to help readers think both broadly and specifically about how the issues discussed in the book connect to social justice for youth who live in low-income and economic marginalization (LIEM; see [Low-income and economic marginalization as a matter of social justice: Foundational knowledge](#) for more information).

NASP included social justice as a goal in its most recent strategic plan and developed and adopted the following definition of social justice:

Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.

Keeping in mind the centrality of social justice to school psychology practice (see [Demystifying social justice for school psychology practice](#)), the SJC encourages school psychologists to organize groups (e.g., school-based colleagues, district colleagues, graduate education program faculty and students) to read the book and to facilitate group discussions using some of the questions below to anchor conversations.

GENERAL CONNECTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. How would you describe social justice as it relates to the work of school psychologists?
2. Based on the NASP definition of social justice above, what do you see as the most critical social justice issues in the book?
3. In Chapter 1, the author describes the process of crossing boundaries that LIEM and racially minoritized youth experience. How does the concept of crossing boundaries—described in the book as race, place, and class—apply to social justice as defined by NASP (see [Demystifying social justice for school psychology practice](#))?
 - a. How do these boundaries promote an oppressive and discriminatory system of education?

- b. What boundaries do the students you serve in your schools cross, and how does the process of crossing these boundaries influence their educational progress?
4. In Chapter 4, the author introduces the concept of the *universal carceral apparatus*, a systematic infrastructure that intertwines school discipline, safety, policing, and imprisonment. How is the universal carceral apparatus—and schools as part of the disciplinary society (p. 81)—a social justice issue?
5. How can the field of school psychology play a meaningful role in the lives of kids, like the ones described in the book, who are navigating societal injustices?

SPECIFIC CONNECTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND LIEM

1. The book includes several illustrations of the intersectionality between LIEM and race, gender, geographic location, age, etc. In your work, how does the intersection of students' identities interact with systems (e.g., educational, juvenile justice, welfare) to oppress or privilege them?
 - a. As articulated in the NASP definition, social justice is “both a process and a goal that requires action.” Consistent with this conceptualization, to facilitate social justice, how might we address these intersections as educators?
2. Geography and LIEM are outlined as contributing factors in students' perceptions of school climate (particularly safety) and available resources in schools (see Chapters 1, 4, and 5). How does school climate and resource allocation relate to social justice?
3. In Chapter 2 (p. 28), the author discusses how “housing instability led to greater education instability” for students. What other factors associated with LIEM might contribute to the educational instability and inequities experienced by youth?
4. How does LIEM contribute to the process of disciplinary culture, police exposure, and school safety as outlined in the book (see Chapters 4 and 5)?

SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

1. The author describes the adolescent geography as “neither child nor adult” (Chapter 1, p. 5). Given this description, what is our role as school psychologists in terms of advocating for adolescents' autonomy and voice while also protecting them?
2. The research presented in the book found that Black and Latinx¹ students at integrated high schools have higher perceptions of social and criminal injustice than do their racial counterparts who attend majority Black or Latinx schools. What roles could school psychologists play in supporting students of color at highly integrated schools who may be experiencing acculturative or race-related stress?
3. Of the scenarios described across the four schools, is there one that you often see in your practice? How did this book help you develop ideas for addressing those issues?
4. The students the author interviews in Chapter 3 have an astute understanding of the difference between racial diversity and racial integration as well as class divisions in student bodies. The author mentions that the implications of these differences may escape policy makers. What can school psychologists do to bridge the gap between student experiences and policy makers' impressions of progress?

¹ Although Hispanic was used in the book, we use the gender neutral term Latinx.

5. What is the role of school psychologists in dismantling the carceral process presented by the author in Chapter 4?
 - a. What can we do at each of the levels of advocacy to help dismantle the carceral process?
 - b. How do we promote restorative justice in light of the zero tolerance culture that still lingers?
6. What strengths do you bring to the table as a potential agent of social justice?
7. In what areas do you need to grow as a potential agent of social justice?

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