

The Just World

End Product: Students will turn in a private podcast where two or three of them discuss their examination of subjects they interviewed. Each subject would have been recorded and asked a series of questions. These questions look open-ended to the subject. To the students, they are examining the “just-world bias” as each subject both tell stories of their lives and talk about other, less fortunate lives. The podcast will have the students talking to each other, as if in a podcast to a broader audience that is unfamiliar with the concept of the “just world” developed by Melvin Lerner, and subsequently reassessed by other social psychologists. The students will splice the interviewees own words, as well as anything else they deem pertinent. Artistic freedom is granted. To end, students will “re-perform” a twist using the *undesirable elements* model.

Approach: Students will present the “river story” format that Sara Katz introduced to us. They will first do it themselves. Then, they will modify the timeline questions to be geared towards questions that draw out if the subject has a *just-world* bias and, if so, the extent of the bias. Ideally, students will interview a family member, a friend of the family or a friend, and an acquaintance.

Preparation: Students will have read Ping-Chong’s *Undesirable Elements*. Students will have performed a piece at the Gelb black box modeled on *UE*. Students will have written a piece reflecting on the experience. Students will then have to read articles and studies about the “just-world bias.” Students will have written a piece in thinking of the *just-world* through the theory presented in *UE*.

Implementation: Students will identify three subjects to interview. Students will work together to select questions from a list of studies on the just world bias and add two of their own questions. Students will work together to discover how producing a podcast is done.

Background: The “just-world” bias (the belief that world is a just place, that actions and consequences balance out) is a fallacy in which a person assumes that things are fair in the world and if something bad happens, subjects first tend to look at the character or identity of the affected person for the source of the failure or tragedy. Identity markers are also often noted. The structure surrounding the person is ignored or rather, is pre-occluded from even being considered. (For example, even in extreme cases, such as the Jack the Ripper murders, the story is often presented that it was tragic but that the women, who were prostitutes and worked at night, thus deserved “to some degree” their fate.) Another example, on a societal level, the example given is that poor people are blamed for their condition as a result of bad habits and bad traits. It even reflects the way we treat poor children, who have no control of being born poor, and the way their behavior is pathologized from an early age. This is tied to the sense that the fortunate in society are so because of good character or actions. In doing so, subjects tend to cherry pick which actions correlate to their social condition or tragic event and ignore the rest. If an event does not work under this scheme, then it becomes a “tragedy,” such as the kidnapping of a white child versus the killing of black men.

Interview: looking for structures of support in a person’s success or failure. Students ask questions like, and who was your biggest supporter when you were in med school? How so? How were you able to live in that apartment in NYC? Focus on three aspects: self “success (career) stories”; others/fictionalized “nonsuccess stories.” Students may select other angles such as “health.”

Re-Performance: After receiving all the podcasts, the instructor will select five to six characters presented (the interview subjects). These interview subjects will be performed by the student who interviewed them in a twist to an undesirable element production. The interviewers will be embodied, the chasm between how they viewed themselves as meriting their success (without acknowledging the structures of support to their success) and how others did not have support yet are blamed for their characteristics and bad choices, will be exposed. Their bias will be presented as *the* undesirable element in our society.