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**The 3-Pound Project: A Teaching Tool to Highlight
The “Weight” of Psychological Characteristics**

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ABSTRACT. This paper provides an overview of an experiential activity that students conduct outside of class. It focuses on students’ carriage of physical items (such as books, clothing, and photos) that (a) are meaningful to them and (b) collectively weigh approximately three pounds. The activity is used to highlight the “weight” of psychological characteristics (cognitions, emotions, beliefs [CEBs]). The activity is not designed to judge the content of students’ CEBs. Instead, the activity is designed to heighten their mindfulness about these characteristics. Given the polarizing and intense context of many Covid-19 topics (such as vaccines, lockdowns, and mask mandates), this activity can be used as an entry point to help students (a) acknowledge the CEBs they bring to these topics and (b) be more mindful that others carry different CEBs. This activity can be integrated with other techniques to address broader societal issues such as minority-majority status, prejudice, racial/ethnic justice, and privilege.

Keywords: Teaching, experiential, psychology, prejudice, race, privilege

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In US universities there have been multiple reports of heightened tensions in face-to-face and as online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic. Faculty have reported that students are overwhelmed and apprehensive (Lederman, 2020). If instructors try to address Covid-specific topics (e.g., mask mandates, social distancing, vaccines) or overall family functioning, they are entering terrain that, for many, is attached to deeply polarizing issues (such as politics, religion, media, and conspiracies). In this environment, instructors can find it challenging to open pathways of communication (a) among students or (b) between faculty and students.

I recognize that some instructors may be drawn to techniques which match intensity with intensity. One rationale for an intense experience is its effectiveness in breaking down barriers. In previous decades, confrontational and shocking experiences were used by cult deprogrammers to “snap the [family] member out of the cult mindset” (Autenrieth, 2017, p. 51). More recently, educational programs such as the Tunnel of Oppression (ToP) have been used to immerse learners in environments permeated by derogatory elements (e.g., words, images) that some individuals and groups endure in their daily lives. The goal of such programs is to jolt pupils into awareness of these social issues. However, there is a risk that the shock could be more than learners can process. According to Lechuga, Clerc, and Howell (2009), ToP has been criticized as “too disturbing both for students who have never experienced oppression as well as for those who have” (p. 236). Considering such concerns, I do not use highly confrontational techniques (nor do I allow teaching assistants to use them).

In interacting with students during the past two years, have been mindful of training I received in a Marital and Family Therapy (MFT) program. At that time, the program focused specifically on structural-strategic therapy. One element of structural MFT is the joining process, in which therapists initially seek to understand their clients. Joining is reflected in meeting clients at their current level of functioning (Reiter, 2000). This meeting does not inherently reflect an endorsement of clients’ choices (e.g., their beliefs or behaviors). Rather, it reflects willingness to listen and find a starting point of respectful connection. This joining approach means therapists are (a) open to clients’ viewpoints and (b) offering openness to start a collaborative communication process (Eddy, Clayton, & Hertlein, 2021). Joining is one way in which counselors demonstrate respect by acknowledging clients have unique knowledge of their own experiences (Hammond & Nichols, 2008). If clients perceive they are being heard, this becomes a foundation for building trust and possibly facilitating change (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). I am aware that learners are not clients and I am not their therapist. However, I see how a nonconfrontational and joining orientation can help shape teaching choices during a highly charged societal period.

Since the beginning of my teaching career, I have been thoughtful about the challenges of guiding pupils to conceptualize events or processes beyond their own life experiences. I see this conceptualization as critical to their professional development because they will likely need this skill to meet future career demands (as service providers, researchers, theoreticians, or policy consultants). Yet students often underestimate the degree to which (a) experiences are shaped by their worldviews and (b) they bring such views into the classroom (Barber, 2012). Similarly, students can have difficulty discussing controversial issues (Fitzpatrick, Boden, & Kostina-Ritchey, 2010a) or empathizing with diverse groups (Wright, 2013).

To expand my teaching options, I routinely peruse the academic literature on various teaching techniques. I have seen that in-class techniques such as role plays (Wright, 2013) or reading circles (O'Brian, 2004) had the advantages of experiential immediacy and allowed me to directly supervise student interactions. However, I have concerns about potential limitations, such as artificiality or disconnectedness (pupils' inability to relate to scenarios). In the context of Covid-19 I can anticipate that some students will perceive such activities as putting their CEBs "on trial." This could exacerbate student withdrawal or resistance to CEB awareness.

An alternative is out-of-class (external) assignments. Compared to in-class techniques, externals often make greater demands on learners' time and effort. In balance, externals can be achieved with greater flexibility in terms of when, where, and how they are completed (Ballard & Blink, 2010). I recognize that flexible course components can help pupils living under nebulous pandemic conditions. External assignments also give them opportunities to make linkages between a course and real-world environments (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010a). These connections can be enhanced when experiential assignments are personalized, which is consistent with student empowerment principles (Fitzpatrick, 2016). Experiential techniques might also bring greater insight and build empathy for others (Bohecker & Horn, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to summarize a teaching technique that requires students to (a) select items that are personally meaningful, (b) carry the items for a 24-hour period, and (c) engage in reflection (via papers or discussion) to facilitate linkages between the activity and course concepts. Cumulatively, the collection of personal items must weigh at least 3 pounds¹ as a continuous reminder of the psychological characteristics (CEBs) the items represent. This activity is a means by which instructors can draw attention to the "weight" of CEBs. Such awareness can highlight self-other distinctions and be a stepping stone toward more complex processes such as recognizing privilege (McIntosh, 2015) or enhancing other-orientedness.

Theoretical Salience

I have taught undergraduate and graduate theory courses since 1988. This has led me to think about theoretical linkages to teaching techniques. More specifically, I view a potential assignment through several theoretical lenses to determine which theory aligns best with course parameters (e.g., concepts, goals, activities). For example, a theory helps me to consider under what circumstances I would use a technique or how it aligns with course content. For this assignment, I selected symbolic interactionism. According to this theory, individuals develop psychological characteristics (including CEBs) based on their (a) interactions with other people and (b) exposure to general societal messages (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Hollingsworth, 1999). Via repeated exposure or interactions, CEBs become ingrained. Indeed, they can become so habitual that individuals lose self-awareness. That is, people might not realize that they (a) have psychological filters through which they judge what is right or wrong (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Oswald, 2000), (b) do not share the same filters as other people (Bell & Hastings, 2015), and/or (c) have the power to change their CEBs (Snow, 2001).

According to symbolic interactionism, individuals imbue objects, events, and routines with meanings. Behaviors can be seen as expressions or manifestations of CEBs (Horowitz, 1999). Meaning is infused by societal standards as well as by personalization. For example, there are societal messages about birthday parties, but families often create their own birthday rituals. Indeed, individuals might be unaware of the extent to which they have imbued meaning

until their CEBs are challenged or violated (Bell & Hastings, 2015; Horowitz, 1999; Oswald, 2000).

Consistent with these theoretical principles, this teaching assignment encourages pupils to choose items that are personally meaningful to them. The physicality of weight emphasizes the ways in which individuals commonly carry CEBs. The 24-hour requirement can remind them that this is often a continuous process (e.g., LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) and they may take CEBs wherever they go. This requirement can also reveal that some individuals lack the luxury of “dropping” or “letting go” of their challenges (such as illness, disability, gender identification, minority group status, poverty, and age).

Description of Teaching Assignment

Students are required to carry a set of items that weigh at least three pounds (1.37 kilograms). They have considerable freedom in their choice of items, but each must be meaningful to them (see Appendix A for instruction details). Consistent with symbolic interactionism principles (Snow, 2001), the objects should reflect significant events, ideas, beliefs, or relationships. For example, photographs can serve as representations of relationships, and nostalgic items can be reminders of happier (or sadder) days. As part of the assignment, pupils are not required to inform me or anyone else of the items that are selected. Thus, their confidentiality is maintained and selection (of items) is less likely to be affected by social desirability. However, some students have chosen to self-disclose about their items, which have ranged from the commonly known (religious books, sporting equipment) to deeply personal (urn of relatives' ashes).

Students are instructed to have containers that hold the items with them for a continuous 24-hour period. To the best extent possible, these containers are to go everywhere that they go. It is understood that there are some private spaces in which it is not always workable to carry containers. In such spaces, the pupils should have their containers as close as possible to where they are. If it is impossible to take containers into specific spaces, then students are expected to reunite with (retrieve and resume carrying) their containers as soon as they leave such spaces.

If other people notice the container and make inquiries, then pupils have the right to (a) decline to respond or (b) respond in a manner they choose. Other than informing students that they must comply with university civility requirements and laws, I do not give guidance on how they should manage public reactions. The lack of guidance might seem questionable, but it gives learners exposure to relational processes that many individuals experience daily. For example, adoptive families (Hollingsworth, 1999), interreligious couples (Horowitz, 1999), and children who have siblings with disabilities (Barr & McLeod, 2010) routinely face unscripted situations in which they must determine how they will react.

After the 24-hour period, pupils engage in a reflection task. This task is not simply a record of thoughts or moods. Rather, it is an opportunity to demonstrate linkages between their experiences and course concepts. In undergraduate courses students typically write a brief paper (see Appendix A). In graduate courses they typically participate in group discussions. I provide guiding questions or comments to focus attention on linkages. For example, I inquire about similarities/differences between carrying (a) physical items and (b) CEBs. Similarly, I ask how (a) holding physical items is consistent with (b) historical issues carried across generations (Zaloudek & Barnett, 2015).

Potential Linkages

By itself, I do not expect this assignment to increase empathy or change attitudes. Rather, the assignment might simply increase learners' mindfulness about their CEBs. In alignment with dimensions of privilege, some pupils might think that (a) they have no psychological filters or (b) their filters have no impact (Oswald, 2000). This activity could challenge that view. The acknowledgement of CEBs can be a stepping stone to addressing specific course concepts or broader social issues such as disabilities (Barr & McLeod, 2010), race/ethnicity (Hollingsworth, 1999), ethics (Zaloudek & Barnett, 2015), majority–minority status (Bell, Hopson, Craig & Robinson, 2014), or emergent societal trends (Barber, 2012; Snow, 2001).

At a basic level, instructors can simply address the pervasiveness of CEBs. Consistent with symbolic interactionism principles, they can explain that most social knowledge is learned, but the initial learning process can be forgotten (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Thus, students might perceive that they do not choose their CEBs, but rather they simply see the world as it objectively exists. This perception can be reinforced if individuals seek to engage mostly or only with others who are like them (Oswald, 2000). In this context, this teaching activity can simply emphasize that (a) everyone is making choices which are valid for him/them/her and (b) there can be substantial differences in these choices.

This emphasis can be used as a low-threat transition into the content and consequences of differences. For example, instructors can engage in an in-class group variation of this activity. More specifically, faculty can bring empty containers to the classroom and ask pupils to add various items to create relative differences in weight. In reference to intrafamily concepts, the differences can be used for exemplifying power disparities among family members. Such disparities can be obvious in some contexts (such as parent-toddler interactions), but more obtuse or ambiguous in others (such as multiple parent alliances in remarried families). Indeed, the activity can physicalize discussions about when family members are allowed to “weigh in” on issues.

The weight differences can also be used to highlight the (a) ease of privileged/majority status and (b) burden of disadvantaged/minority status (Hollingsworth, 1999; Snow, 2001). In specific reference to this pandemic, these weight differences can be used to explain the phenomenon of vaccine “jumpers.” Jumpers are individuals who, during a particular timeframe, were not entitled to vaccines by their employment (essential worker), residential (nursing home), or health status. If they complied with the standard rules, then these individuals would have to wait until vaccines were offered to lower-priority groups. Rather than wait, jumpers take advantage of systemic loopholes such as upgrading their statuses on website registries, going to other regions in which vaccines are available (Feldman, 2021), or even using fictitious identities. For example, a wealthy Canadian couple chartered a plane to a remote location and pretended to be local hotel workers to receive the vaccine (O’Neill, 2021). It has been noted that line-jumpers have several advantages (wealth, transportation, flexible schedules, technical savvy) which make it considerably easier for them to receive vaccines than individuals in high-priority groups.

Beyond the pandemic, this activity can be adapted easily to address other recent events or ongoing social justice struggles. For example, the container weights can be decreased to demonstrate ways in which families are treated as insignificant or increased to demonstrate encumbrance of prejudice. The activity can also be used to help learners process their reactions

to events at the local (Alsharif, Akbarzai & Snyder, 2021), national (Ruiz, Edwards & Lopez, 2021), or international levels (Austen & Bilefsky, 2021).

The opportunity for historical linkage sometimes emerges from current events. For example, there have been recent reports of mass indigenous child graves at the former site of residential schools (Austen & Bilefsky, 2021). In previous decades, children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to schools that were designed to immerse the children in Euro-American (or Euro-Canadian) culture. The children were often abused, and survivors carried scars (psychological and physical) throughout their lifetimes (Gram, 2020). Parallel to other communities/groups that experienced systemic abuse, there are reports that these discoveries have been retraumatizing across generations (for survivors and their descendants). There have also been calls for “accountability, comprehensive truth, and full reparation” (United Nations, 2021).

If I were addressing this event in a course today, I recognize that it might be overwhelming for students who have (a) indigenous family members/ancestry and (b) little or no prior knowledge of childhood mass graves. If I attempted to press pupils to engage with this topic openly (such as via a whole class discussion), I can anticipate that this might be unduly intense and difficult. Even if some students want to share, they could have trouble articulating their CEBs. I also see the possibility that some pupils would not participate in discussion because they are concerned about peer reactions to their comments. Such tensions can contribute to a spiral of silence, in which learners’ inhibitions have a cumulative effect (Fitzpatrick, Boden, & Kostina-Ritchey, 2010b).

In comparison to open discussion, the 3-lb. project offers some advantages. For example, the 3-lb. project allows students to process their CEBs at their own pace (rather than within the confines of a class period). The project also gives them a means to articulate their CEBs nonverbally via selection of extant items or creation of new items (such as artwork). The container also becomes a means to physicalize or externalize their CEBs. If some pupils find themselves stuck or overwhelmed in rumination, then physicalization can provide some relief. This physicalization or externalization is consistent with self-distancing strategies recommended for dealing with traumatic events (Kross & Ayduk, 2011). The 3-lb. project could be a venue via which students feel they are memorializing or speaking for victimized individuals. In reference to the mass graves, some pupils may want to use this project to express care and respect for the unidentified children. I have offered such pacing and expression strategies when exposing students to other intense course content, such as Holocaust survivor documentaries.

Along with national or international events, it is important to note that pupils can experience issues of prejudice, abuse, marginalization or vulnerability within their school systems. For example, students who live in Bucknell University’s LGBTQ housing reported that when they called campus safety officials (in response to a violent group attack), the officials aligned themselves with the attackers (Shammas, 2021). In California, a school superintendent called for creation of safe spaces “to support White students who would like to discuss how the trial, verdict, and experiences related to the George Floyd murder are impacting you” (Mossburg, 2021). Although administrators offered an apology, some students (who did not self-identify as white) reported being “segregated” by the school (Mossburg, 2021). Several students sued Indiana University because they perceived a vaccination mandate was “forcing them to receive unwanted medical treatment” (Smith & Davies, 2021). In contrast, other students (and faculty)

feel “unsafe” returning to colleges without these mandates (Yahoo News, 2021). When such events occur, learners can see university administrators as unwilling to listen or provide sufficient support when they have been threatened/abused. In this context, pupils might perceive those traditional forms of expression as not productive or worthwhile. It is possible that the 3-lb. project could be a/an (a) individual means to process their experiences or (b) collective group means to express their needs in a nontraditional format. This aligns with other forms of object- or behavior-based expression such as wearing “Black Lives Matter” masks or *Handmaid’s Tale* robes to bring attention to marginalized groups’ oppressions (e.g., Best, 2020).

It is true that faculty can use ongoing events such as screening LivingwhileBlack videos to address pressures of increased monitoring and adverse consequences while engaging in daily life activities (Bell et al., 2014). Similarly, this teaching activity could be linked to pressures that exist for families addressing other issues including disabilities, adoption, and interreligious holiday celebrations (Barr & McLeod, 2010; Hollingsworth, 1999; Horowitz, 1999). However, I would emphasize that faculty are not limited to a focus on problems or differences. Instead, they can use the disparities to help students identify potential solutions (e.g., how they would rebalance the scales to reflect social justice). Parallel to a pass-the-problem technique (Ballard, 2001), instructors can give learners some containers in which they either reallocate extant resources or add new resources to enhance family/societal wellness. Pupils can also use this reallocation–addition process to evaluate policy changes. For example, the process can be used for discussing parameters (cost, eligibility, duration, benefits) of Covid-19 policies such as eviction moratoriums, vaccine lotteries, or quarantines.

Another variation is the use of containers to demonstrate diverse or Covid-19 contradictory viewpoints. There are major discrepancies in CEBs about vaccines, community spread, personal versus communal obligations, political leadership, trustworthy sources, and facts versus hoaxes. Such discrepancies have been reported as a source of conflict and/or relationship dissolution among multiple family subsystems (siblings, spouses, parents-children), friends, neighbors, religious group members, and co-workers (e.g., Bhardwaj, 2021; Houghton, 2021; Rainer, 2020). Indeed, there have been advice articles focused on prevention of “Covid-19 workplace violence” (Rasnick & McManus, 2020). Since so many individuals perceive pandemic consequences as affecting their quality of life (e.g., health, freedom, dignity, control) directly, there is a distinct intensity to expressions of self-defense and countering others’ positions.

In reference to the 3-lb. project, it could be adapted to represent the range of responses to a specific issue. For example, students could be assigned to one of four mask groups (enthusiasts, compliers, hesitators, resisters). Each group would be asked to create a container that reflects the relevant CEBs. After this task is completed, each group would be asked to show their items and explain how each item fits the group’s identity. A parallel approach could be used for other pandemic issues (e.g., vaccine passports, school openings/formats, workplace conditions, social gathering/crowd sizes).

It is also possible to use an opposing-viewpoint approach. To build on the previous example, after groups completed their containers, they could be asked to either change the items or create a second container to reflect a divergent/contradictory perspective (e.g., from compliers to resisters). As an individual activity, students could be asked to complete the 24-hour carriage of a container representing an opposing set of values or behaviors. I would not use these options

to change or challenge pupils' values. However, I would seek their comprehension of the elements of others' choices. This is consistent with role-reversal tactics used in empathy training and in instructional debates (Budesheim & Lundquist, 1999; Gunn, Ghosh, ter Horst, Markossian, & Molina, in press; Houser, Worzella, Burchsted, Marquez, Domack, & Acevedo, 2018).

Another element in divergent or conflictual Covid-19 communications is *restraint*. In recognition of these conflicts, there have been multiple summaries of communication advice. These summaries offer guidance for what individuals should and should not do when interacting with others (e.g., Fetters, 2019). Restraints are exemplified in phrases such as “don't pile on”, “don't ridicule,” and “don't give up” (Freyne & Gallagher, 2021). However, it can be difficult to abide or sustain restraints during conversations about (literally) life-or-death topics.

To demonstrate and address this difficulty, it would be possible to modify the activity to focus on restraint. For example, students could write common phrases they think individuals might be tempted to say, but would likely be counterproductive (e.g., mock a family member's intelligence). They could compile other elements to represent temptation (e.g., taking keys to stop family members from driving to a superspreader-risk event) and carry the container for the same 24-hour period. This weight would reflect the strain some individuals feel when anticipating they will have generic or Covid-specific interactions with social network members. The restraint process would also demonstrate ethical communication principles by which pandemic professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses, social workers) must abide. Some doctors have described comments they are tempted to make to Covid-19 patients but withhold in their efforts to provide ethical care (e.g., Benen, 2021; Neville, 2021). Similarly, some nurses have described the pain they experience internally while dealing with (a) pandemic patients in the hospital and (b) pandemic-denial neighbors outside the hospital (Jamison, 2021). These professionals indicated that ethical communication restraint is another dimension of Covid-19 work that is draining for them.

Beyond group disparities or interpersonal conflicts, instructors can focus on intrapersonal experiences such as disenfranchised grief. For example, this grief is commonly addressed in media psychology. More specifically, the literature focuses on fans' disenfranchisement when others don't understand their media-based connections, such as commitment to a program or celebrity. Given the depth of investment (such as time, money, and emotional energy), it makes sense that fans experience sadness about celebrity death (Cohen, 2004). Yet fans can view others as unsympathetic or dismissive of their losses (DeGroot & Leith, 2018).

I recognize that students could feel disenfranchised emotions about many experiences during the pandemic. The obvious losses are deaths of significant others, which can be hidden for fear of associational prejudice (Bhattacharya, Banerjee & Rao, 2020). Individuals might experience large disruptions such as evictions, as well as smaller disruptions such as the closure of favorite restaurants or the end of rituals (e.g., bedtime hugs between essential workers and family members).

Indeed, there have been many reports that individuals and families have experienced various forms of trauma during the pandemic. For example, restaurant employees have experienced “maskual harassment” (Haymond, 2021). More specifically, customers require employees to lower their masks so that customers can evaluate their full-face appearance as part of the tipping process. Along with psychological exploitation, this practice increases workers'

risk of viral exposure. Another form of trauma has been the likely increase in domestic violence. Although exact numbers are difficult to specify, it is expected that victims are experiencing more abuse in the context of overly stressed societal resources (such as first responders), increased financial instability (which prohibits exit planning), and decreased social contact outside the home (Rauhaus, Sibila & Johnson, 2020). There have also been many reports of seemingly random acts of viral violence (e.g., people being punched, spit upon, having their masks ripped away). One mother reported that when she asked a stranger to maintain social distance in a store, this stranger intentionally coughed into her infant's face (Haworth, 2020).

Although first responders might have been prepared for professional demands placed on them, some have experienced unexpected family traumas. For example, several judges have ruled that divorcing/divorced responders lose custody of their children for the pandemic's duration (and perhaps permanently). The custody rationale is that the responders' work means they carry health risks into their own homes, and the courts must protect children's welfare (Twohey, 2020). In the recent wave of the Delta/Iota/Lambda variants, there has been concern about issues such as compassion fatigue (Maxouris, 2021), difficulty of rebuilding in-person communication skills (Hemsley, 2021), and vaccine disputes within social networks. Indeed, it has been reported that some individuals are wearing disguises while being vaccinated in hopes that family/friends will not learn of their decision (Place, 2021).

Many forms of pandemic trauma have been private matters. In the context of social distancing, remote schooling, business shutdowns, and travel lockdowns, many typical couple or family experiences are now less obvious to outsiders. Given the social stigmas attached to issues such as unemployment, poverty, and stress disorders, it is reasonable that many families would not openly discuss these problems with others. Even when individuals are victims of abuse (maskual harassment, violence), they may feel shame and suffer silently (Joseph-Edwards & Wallace, 2021). Unless pupils know other peers or families who are sharing their experiences, they might feel quite alone or disenfranchised. Indeed, some universities are taking a trauma-based approach to prepare for students' return to campus in a new academic year (Brown, 2021).

In the disenfranchisement literature, there is recognition of a communal and individualized duality. There are common events experienced by millions of people, such as pets' deaths. Yet each individual or family might perceive that their pet was unique, and therefore their grief is also unique (e.g., Cordaro, 2012). Given this uniqueness, individuals/families anticipate that others are either unable or unwilling to listen to them (Jones & Beck, 2007; Mitchell, 2018). There can also be an inhibitory effect of social comparison – given that others have more serious problems, it would be inappropriate to share their experience or seek support (Benot, 1994; Robson & Walter, 2013). For example, some high school pupils were unable to have senior proms due to Covid-19 restrictions (Hughes, 2020). Although the loss of this ritual might be deeply affecting for them, undergraduates would likely recognize that some classmates had more severe losses, such as deaths or homelessness.

This 3-lb. project aligns with individual and communal elements of disenfranchised experiences. In reference to individuality, learners must select items meaningful to them. As noted in the instructions (see Appendix A), the only restriction I impose is that they cannot bring to campus items that violate laws or university policies (such as weapons and illicit substances). Otherwise, they are free to personalize their containers. In reference to communality, I typically have required students to complete this activity during the same timeframe (e.g., same day, same

week). Given the open nature of the instructions, pupils know this is a parallel occurrence for their peers. Although there are some variations in parameters (e.g., where they go, what type of container they choose), students can perceive they are engaged in a shared process. In reference to this pandemic, it is possible to extrapolate this communality on a global scale. For example, after a class has finished the project, I can explain that millions (and arguably billions) of people have been affected by Covid-19 in some ways even if the impacts are not always obvious. Thus, our common human bond is carrying the pandemic “weight” simultaneously.

Potential Disadvantages

In balance with its advantages, I note that this assignment has the same disadvantages as other out-of-class activities. For example, it can be difficult or impossible to know whether learners cheated. More specifically, instructors cannot verify the nature of pupils’ interactions (or lack thereof) with others in relation to the containers. It is also possible that some students will have strong or unanticipated reactions for which they might need professional guidance (such as counseling services). For this reason, instructors may want to decide whether this activity should be (a) purely optional or (b) accompanied by trigger warnings (Boysen, Wells, & Dawson, 2016). For example, I would not force pupils to address disenfranchised grief; this is simply one choice available to them. There may also be substantial variations in learners’ self-reflection skills. If they have not been required previously to engage in activities requiring sustained attention and articulated insights, then some might struggle with the assignment. In anticipation of this possibility, instructors are advised to take a tiered-approach in which pupils engage in smaller (briefer, more topic-specific) reflections before starting this activity. This aligns with recommendations to use tiered approaches when addressing intense or controversial course topics (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Misco, 2011).

Instructor Mindfulness

Up to this point, discussion of this teaching activity has focused on students’ insights or mindfulness. However, it is also important to note that instructor mindfulness is significant element in this activity. Instructors engage in mindful teaching when they (a) maintain an ongoing awareness of their own CEBs, (b) use teaching activities that offer options, (c) empower pupils to have some control over their learning experiences, (d) demonstrate curiosity about students’ knowledge/experiences, or (e) are responsive to learners’ feedback (Fitzpatrick & Gerrity, 2012; Sottile, 2021). Consistent with these principles, teachers would be likely to gain insights if they tried this 3-lb. activity for themselves before assigning it to a class. This would give them an “insider’s view” of how the activity is experienced (Kalchman, 2011).

If this experience leads them to think about using an activity, then they should have a clear rationale for doing so (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Fitzpatrick, et al., 2010a). For example, instructors should consider how the activity (a) aligns with learning objectives, (b) demonstrates or is easily applied to course concepts, and/or (c) can uniquely enhance student knowledge (beyond other assignments or activities). I have used various forms of this activity in a/an (1) advanced teaching skills course to demonstrate experiential learning principles, (2) relationship development course to exemplify impression management concepts, and (3) theory course to exemplify how a single phenomenon can be interpreted via multiple frameworks. In reference to learning objectives, two of the university’s core objectives focus on development of learners’ critical thinking and personal responsibility (choice-outcome linkage) skills (Texas Tech

University, 2021). From my perspective, this activity can be a component in addressing these objectives.

Concluding Thoughts

At the time of this manuscript's submission, three Covid variants (Delta, Iota, Lambda) were on the rise in various parts of the world. Within the US, there are daily updates about policy changes at schools, workplaces, and local/state governments. Throughout US universities there is considerable variation as to whether programmatic (e.g., vaccine/testing requirements) or personal responsibility (e.g., individual choice in all Covid-19 domains) approaches are prioritized. In this context, instructors may decide that traditional teaching activities are not a good fit or sufficiently flexible. It is hoped that this activity can be one resource in their efforts to connect with and guide students during this pandemic period.

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Author's Notes

¹There might be a question as to why this specific weight was chosen. Consistent with teaching recommendations (Kalchman, 2011), some colleagues and I tried the activity before asking learners to do the same. There was consensus that this was the minimum for the weight to remain noticeable over the hours. In addition, two colleagues reported that it was unwieldy to carry more weight when they were engaging in some tasks (cooking, tending to children or pets). Based on this feedback, I chose the 3-pound standard. Of course, other instructors can set a different standard (1 pound, 5% of body weight) for their pupils.

Consistent with university policy, the assignment parameters would be altered for learners who have disabilities. For example, if some students are unable to carry their containers throughout one day, then they would be permitted to keep the containers in a single location and engage with the items (e.g., feel, view, listen) periodically over several days. If pupils have attention disorders which might hinder their recall about the experience, then they could be given periodic digital prompts. These prompts can (a) remind them that this is an ongoing activity, (b) remind them to keep track of their containers [to avoid loss], and (c) ask them to briefly record their extant reactions (CEBs). These recordings can be used subsequently to foster completion of reflection tasks (such as papers or presentations). This type of accommodation is consistent with recommendations to deconstruct assignments into smaller units for students with disabilities (Tincani, 2004). If pupils have sensory overload disorders, then they might learn more effectively by engaging with their items in a controlled environment. For example, some universities have low-stimulation or meditation rooms (Des Moines University, 2021; John Carroll University, 2021). Learners could reserve a room time during which they focus on their items and CEBs. Although this period could be less than 24 hours, it might foster sufficient clarity for students to complete the reflections. If the entire assignment was unworkable for some pupils, then an alternative assignment (of equal value) would be provided.

²The division of the assignment format (papers for undergraduates, discussions for graduates) is not essential. This division has been used in response to issues such as class size and formats of other assignments. Thus, instructors are free to reverse (paper for graduate students) or combine (discussions plus papers) formats. In addition, instructors might use entirely different formats (sharing artifacts – Stueve, 2002; reading groups – O'Brian, 2004) which best fit their teaching styles and pupils' needs.

³It should be noted that there are communities/groups for whom the pandemic and/or medical care is associated with past abuse and trauma. Parallel to the example of indigenous mass graves (see Potential linkages portion), is it possible that elements of the pandemic (e.g., blaming Asian/Asian-Americans, vaccine inequities, forced lockdowns) are retraumatizing for older adults who experienced these elements in prior decades. Such elements are associated with a legacy of pain and suspicion/doubt about medical systems (Bunch, 2021; Lira & Stern, 2014). There is also a layer of multigenerational trauma for family members who have ancillary (such as elder empathy) or direct experiences themselves (such as pandemic assault from strangers – e.g., Kukulka, 2021). In addition to addressing racial/ethnic injustices at a general level, this activity can be adapted for exploration of health/medical-specific historical linkages.

Appendix A

Sample Syllabus Description and Paper Assignment Instructions

There will be one experiential project; this project is worth 15 points. There will be two phases to this project (carriage of personal items, paper). The first phase is a precursor to the second phase.

PHASE ONE:

For a 24-hour period, the student will carry a collection of personal items that weigh at least 3 pounds (1.37 kilograms). The student can choose whether to use only one item or multiple items to meet the 3-pound requirement. Each item must have a personal significance or meaning to him/them/her. Personal items might include, but are not limited to photo albums, musical instruments, sporting equipment, diaries/journals, religious books or symbols, art supplies or objects, mugs/dishware, jewelry, CDs/DVDs, decorative items and clothing. These personal items must be in addition to items that a student carries and/or uses on a typical daily basis (e.g., laptop, Iphone, wallet, keys). In addition, the personal items cannot simply be electronically stored (such as downloading a favorite song). Rather, these items must have an explicit physical existence.

The student is prohibited from carrying any items that violate public laws or university policies (such as weapons or illegal substances) onto campus. In the selection process, the student should be mindful of the possibility that the items might be seen or heard by others. Thus, she/they/he should not select items that would violate the university's civility standards. The student is solely responsible for the items during this project. He/they/she should be careful about using any items if there concerns about the risks of irreplaceability (if lost or damaged). All items need to be carried in a single container (bag, box, backpack, purse).

The student is required to keep the container in her/their/his immediate possession for a continuous 24-hour period (such as 8am Monday-8am Tuesday). When she/they/he is tending to personal hygiene needs, the container does not need to be in the restroom or bathroom. However, the container should be immediately back with the student after needs have been addressed. He/they/she is not permitted to simply leave the container in a space (car, locker, desk drawer) for an extended period (more than 10 minutes in a 24-hour period). In addition, it cannot be handed/allocated to another person for an extended period. As the student goes through a daily routine, the container should go with him/them/her as much as possible. Other than carrying the 3-pound container, the student does not need to make any other alterations in the routine.

PHASE TWO (PAPER INSTRUCTIONS):

Part A (0.5-1.0 Page) – *Most Salient Context*

It is possible that attention to psychological characteristics (cognitions, emotions, beliefs [CEBs]) can vary across a day (more noticeable at some moments, less noticeable at others). In parallel, it is possible that attention to the container (and its items) varied across time. Describe the period (within the 24 hours) during which the items were most noticeable. It is not required to describe any details that would be considered personal or confidential. Rather, a description of general context would be sufficient (e.g., alone vs. with other people, type of location, approximate time of day).

Part B (2-2.5 Pages) – *Integration of Course Topics*

Select only one option (B1, B2 or B3). During the 24-hour period, it's possible that the student –

(B1) became more mindful of his/their/her CEBs. This mindfulness would be consistent with new teachers' adjustments. As noted in the Hamre and Oyler (2004) article, new teachers experienced a heightened self-awareness as they interacted with students and adapted to the educational system. Describe three specific ways in which this activity is consistent with issues identified in this article.

(B2) experienced diverse reactions from others. For example, other people might have asked questions, made comments, averted their gaze and/or excluded the student from typical interactions. These people might not have been overtly hostile, but simply treated him/them/her as 'different'. This differentness is consistent with the experiences of gay/lesbian individuals at heterosexual weddings (Oswald, 2000), interracial/interethnic families (Bell & Hastings, 2015; Hollingsworth, 1999), and interreligious couples (Horowitz, 1999). Describe three specific ways in which this activity is consistent with issues identified in one of these articles.

(B3) did not experience greater cognizance or diverse reactions from others. Indeed, the student might not have experienced any differences between (a) the 24-hour period and (b) any typical day. Thus, he/they/she might hold the viewpoint that people are universally similar and CEBs don't make a difference. This universalism is consistent with international rankings on partner attractiveness. Shackelford, Schmitt and Buss (2005) reported that individuals from diverse countries identify several similar priorities in selecting partners or spouses. Describe three specific ways in which this activity is consistent with the issues identified in this article.

Part C (1-1.5 Pages) – *Integration of Additional Unique Course Topic*

Address C1 and C2. Topics B1, B2 and B3 focus on specific course readings. However, it is possible that there are other connections that can be made between a course topic and this activity.

(C1) Describe one specific topic-activity consistency that was not addressed in Part B.

(C2) Describe one specific topic-activity inconsistency that was not addressed in Part B.