April 2011

Social Justice and Water Sustainability and Management

Brian H. Bornstein  
*University of Nebraska at Lincoln*, bbornstein2@unl.edu

Alan J. Tomkins  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, atomkins2@unl.edu

Sarah Michaels  
*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, michaels2@unl.edu

Ashok Samal  
*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, asamal1@unl.edu

Yunwoo Nam  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/publicpolicypublications](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/publicpolicypublications)  
Part of the [Public Policy Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/publicpolicypublications)

Bornstein, Brian H.; Tomkins, Alan J.; Michaels, Sarah; Samal, Ashok; Nam, Yunwoo; Zellmer, Sandi; Hoagland, Kyle; and Olson, David, "Social Justice and Water Sustainability and Management" (2011). *Publications of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center*. Paper 118.  
[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/publicpolicypublications/118](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/publicpolicypublications/118)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Public Policy Center, University of Nebraska at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
Social Justice and Water Sustainability and Management

pp.271-282

Authors: Brian H. Bornstein, Alan J. Tomkins, Sarah Michaels, Ashok Samal, Yunwoo Nam, Sandra Zellmer, Kyle Hoagland and David Olson

Abstract:
As the challenge of maintaining adequate water quantity and quality mounts worldwide, increasing attention is being paid to the role individual behavior plays in water resources management. Yet water resources management has attracted very little scholarly attention by psychologists. This chapter identifies how selected theories and methods from social scientific research on justice might inform water related decision making. This chapter illustrates how insights from psychological research on social justice can be employed to advance water resources management. Social justice, including issues of institutional regulation and behavior modification, is an essential consideration in the design and implementation of sustainable strategies for managing limited natural resources. Like other ecological threats, water scarcity is “caused or exacerbated by human activities, and [it] can … be diminished or reversed by changes in human behavior, policies, or systems” (Oskamp & Schultz, 2006, pp. 82-83; see generally Bechtel & Churchman, 2002; Dean & Bush, 2007; McKenzie-Mohr & Oskamp, 1995). While psychologists have addressed environment-related concerns, such as resilience (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008), energy conservation and recycling (Oskamp & Schultz, 2006), and the psychosocial processes that underpin the work of environmental organizations (e.g., Dean & Bush, 2007), far less attention has been paid to water-relevant decision making. Still, there are several notable exceptions. For example, Bach (2004, cited in Oskamp & Schultz, 2006) demonstrated how principles of community-based social marketing (e.g., uncovering and targeting barriers to increased water-use efficiency) could be used to reduce Canadian citizens’ summer lawn watering. This study, and others like it (e.g., Corral-Verdugo & Pinheiro, 2006; Gregory & Di Leo, 2003; Pahl-Wostl, Craps, Dewulf, Mostert, Tabara, & Taillieu, 2007; Schultz, Folke, & Olsson, 2007), illustrate that psychology is well positioned to provide guidance on resolving water management issues, specifically, and environmental issues more generally. This is because:

- Individual behavior plays an essential role in environmental management.
- The concerted actions of group members, and of the groups themselves, play an essential role in environmental management (i.e., group dynamics come into play).
- Psychological considerations underpin all decision making, regardless of context,
- Psychological processes underlie individuals’ sense of what is fair in allocating scarce resources.