



Rethinking Social Justice: Institutions, Power, and the Politics of Everyday Inequality

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ABSTRACT

Distribution of resources, rights and opportunities are frequently used to measure social justice. This is still needed but isn't enough to understand how inequalities are created, legitimated and reproduced in institutional arrangements and in everyday practices. In this article, a critical integrative review of the literature on social justice, institutions, power and everyday inequality is presented. It is largely based on literature from 2015-2025, with some fundamental theoretical literature included where appropriate. This review brings together the distributive, procedural, recognition-based, capability, relational and structural conceptions of justice. It then explores the resource allocation, population categorisation, knowledge authorisation and discretionary practices of institutions in administrative, educational, employment, housing and digital contexts. This analysis reveals that power is exercised through decision making, agenda setting, structuring of dependence, and through ideological stories, symbolic classification, and differential credibility. The mechanisms are socially activated through a process of routine encounters that produce access, dignity, surveillance and political trust. The article creates an institutional-relational framework that posits historical inequalities shape the design of institutions, the rules of institutions create inequalities in experience, and repeated experiences cement the classifications that produced them. Resistance and counter-knowledge can break this cycle by changing decision mechanisms and devolve authority. The review concludes that social justice is not about an improvement of distributive outcomes. It also involves procedures that are accessible, equal recognition, substantive capabilities, epistemic inclusion and meaningful power to challenge institutions that govern social life.

Keywords: social justice; institutional inequality; power; everyday inequality; structural injustice; relational equality

1. Introduction

Social justice frequently is tackled as a problem of the distribution of income, wealth, opportunities, rights, and public goods. While this concern is important, it does not provide a complete answer to the question of where inequality is created, or why it continues. Differential results are found in institutional systems which categorise human beings, legitimate decision making, and create divergent levels of credibility, protection and social value. Social justice, thus, needs to be looked at as a multi-faceted issue of distribution, recognition, participation, substantive freedom and power relations (Lamont & Pierson, 2019; Powers & Faden, 2019).

Institutions are at the heart of this broader narrative. Beyond enacting pre-established social inequalities, laws, bureaucracies, schools, workplaces, welfare systems, housing markets, healthcare providers and digital platforms are all implicated in the production of these inequalities. They decide who is eligible, what is acceptable behaviour, they allocate resources and who gets institutional recognition for their claims. Classed, racialized, gendered and other inequalities based on groups can be perpetuated by organizational routines despite the apparent neutrality of formal rules (Amis et al., 2020; Ray, 2019). Thus, the existence of inequality should not be blamed entirely on the individual prejudice and unequal effort. It must also be related to the rules, the classification and the discretionary practices by which institutions act.

These institutional arrangements are guided and sustained by power. It determines who can affect policy, what issues get onto the agenda and what types of knowledge are regarded as legitimate. Dominant discourses of merit, risk, responsibility and deservingness are also ways in which power is enacted. These accounts can depict inequalities that

are generated by institutions as "natural" consequences of the ability or choice of individuals. Social justice is thus something more than the remedy of unequal outcomes. It involves an analysis of the relationality that shapes problem definition, decision-making, and challenges institutional decisions.

Institutional inequality manifests itself in the day to day life. Social structures are felt by people in regular interactions with their employers, teachers, administrators, health practitioners, landlords, police, and algorithms that make decisions. These experiences have an impact on employment, education, health care, housing, public assistance and legal protections. They also convey evaluations on competence, belonging and dignity. Today, discrimination often takes the form of a series of organizational practices and vague day-to-day decisions, instead of blatant expressions of prejudice (Small & Pager, 2020). The administrative demands may also create unequal learning, compliance and psychological costs for those with various levels of monetary, temporal, institutional and social protection (Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021).

Everyday inequality is employed in this article to refer to the repeated practices and interactions that enact, interpret and challenge structural and institutional inequalities. The concept is not about interpersonal behaviour and inequality. Instead, it pinpoints the point at which the rules and power dynamics in institutions become actualities. One of these simple delays, credibility assessments, disciplinary decisions, or documentation requirements may seem narrow on its own. Repeatedly can have cumulative impacts on material security, health, political trust and self-respect.

The literature on distributive justice, recognition, capabilities, institutional inequality, structural power, discrimination, stigma and everyday politics is important. But these literatures are often created in individual disciplinary discourses. They are fragmented and thus it is challenging to account for the interplay of institutional structures, power relations and routine practices. A review which would simply recite each tradition would replicate this separation. The current article, however, takes a critical integrative perspective to uncover some of the links, tensions, and explanatory power of these together.

The main argument of the article is that social injustice can be generated in a recursive relationship between institutions, power and everyday practice. Institutions make classifications and allocations of resources. Those arrangements are shaped and understood in the light of power. They are manifested in unequal experiences and outcomes in everyday practices. Implementation can over time help to normalize hierarchy and establish institutional legitimacy. This process can be interrupted and opportunities for change can be created by resistance, collective knowledge and institutional contestation.

The question for the review is: How do institutions, power relations and everyday social practices interact in the process of producing, legitimising, reproducing and challenging inequality? There are three objectives to it. It first examines the shift from distributive theories of justice to multidimensional conceptions of justice. Second, it is a synthesis of the research on the institutional, structural and everyday production of inequality. Third, it creates an institutional-relational framework to relate macro-level arrangements, organizational processes and lived experience.

The article starts with the description of the important integrative review method. It then looks at the key theories of social justice and analyses institutions as systems of allocation and classification. Power and the politics of the mundane inequalities are then combined in the next section. The last parts describe the institutional-relational framework, the research and policy implications, and potential conditions for challenging the institutional reproduction.

2. Review Methodology

2.1 Review design

The critical integrative review is used in this study. The method is appropriate for a research question with a range of theoretical, institutional, empirical and critical research on power. Integrative reviews allow for comparing different conceptually and methodologically diverse sources. They also do not just describe but also critique and support the development of theory (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). The aim of the review is thus to find connections between areas of scholarship which may not normally be seen as connected.

The review does not set out as a traditional systematic review of a narrowly defined intervention or outcome. Social justice, institutional inequality, power and everyday experience are subjects of discussion in various ways in different disciplines: sociology, political science, public administration, social policy, organization studies and critical theory. The review adheres to the principles of transparent search reporting, source selection, appraisal and synthesis (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

2.2 Scope and source identification

The review question is: How are inequality produced, legitimated, reproduced and challenged by institutions, power relations and everyday social practices? The majority of the publications will take place between 2015 and 2025. Earlier publications are kept if they offer basic theories of justice, power, institutions or methodological reviews.

The literature corpus was created by a series of iterations of searches in multidisciplinary scholarly indexes, journal databases, publisher repositories and citation networks. Search terms were grouped into the four areas of social justice, institutions, power and everyday inequality. Keywords were 'social justice', 'structural injustice', 'relational equality', 'institution*', 'organisation*', 'bureaucracy', 'governance', 'power', 'domination', 'discrimination', 'stigma',

'administrative burden', 'lived experience' and 'everyday inequality'. Other terms included in additional searches were resistance, participation, recognition, capabilities, intersectionality and institutional change.

Recent studies were identified and backward citation searching was used to locate foundational studies that were cited in the recent studies. Later applications, critiques and extensions were found via forward citation searching. Through this iterative process, coverage was enhanced across disciplines and reliance on a single vocabulary was decreased.

2.3 Eligibility and selection

Sources were included if they covered one or more of the review's main areas and were making a clear conceptual, empirical or methodological contribution to the review question. Peer reviewed journal articles were given priority. When major theoretical arguments not sufficiently covered in journal literature were found in scholarly books and chapters, they were included. Reports were only kept if they were from a well-known research institution or intergovernmental body, and had clear evidence.

Sources were excluded if inequality or justice was not a central issue, if the argument was not well supported conceptually or with evidence, or if the publication was duplicated by another one that presented the issue of inequality or justice more explicitly. Scholarship from various geographical locations was reviewed and special attention was paid to the scholarship on class, race, caste, gender, disability, ethnicity, migration, sexuality, and coloniality. These dimensions were explored as a combination of interacting institutional relationships and not as separate demographic variables.

The search strategy is a combination of terms stemming from four conceptual blocks: social justice, institutions, power and everyday inequality. Other terms include resistance, participation and institutional change.

Table 1. Search architecture for the critical integrative review

Conceptual block	Indicative search terms
Social justice	"social justice," "structural injustice," "relational equality," "distributive justice," "recognition justice," "procedural justice," capabilities
Institutions	institution*, organi?ation*, bureaucracy, governance, welfare, education, "labour market," policy, administration
Power	power, domination, hegemony, authority, "structural power," "symbolic power," discourse, intersectionality, political economy
Everyday inequality	"everyday inequality," "everyday politics," discrimination, stigma, exclusion, microaggression*, "administrative burden," "lived experience," routine practice*
Change and contestation	resistance, agency, participation, mobilization, reform, transformation, solidarity, collective action

A core Boolean expression takes the following form:

("social justice" OR "structural injustice" OR "relational equality") AND (institution OR organisation* OR bureaucracy OR governance) AND (power OR domination OR discrimination OR "everyday inequality")*

2.4 Appraisal and synthesis

The heterogeneous corpus was evaluated based on the criteria suitable for the respective types of sources. The empirical studies were analysed with respect to research design, transparency, contextual sensitivity and relation between evidence and conclusions. Theoretical sources were evaluated in terms of conceptual clarity, coherence, scope of explanation and consideration of competing positions. The methodological transparency and organisational credibility of institutional reports were assessed.

An iterative thematic coding approach was used in the synthesis. Firstly codes were allocation, classification, recognition, participation, discretion, domination, stigma, surveillance, normalization, resistance and institutional change. Literature mechanisms not included in the first scheme were coded as well. Comparisons between various themes were made both within and between disciplines and levels of analysis. Special focus was placed on how the arrangements of the macro-level are translated into the organizational routines and everyday experiences.

The last synthesis is an institutional-relational framework. It highlights where the institutions allocate resources and status, how power influences the priorities of the institutions and how everyday practices reinforce or contest inequality. The review process from the formation of the question to the integrative synthesis is summarized in Figure 1. This procedure mirrors the main goal of integrative review methodology, which is to create new conceptual understanding through the structured comparison, critique, and synthesis (Snyder, 2019; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005).

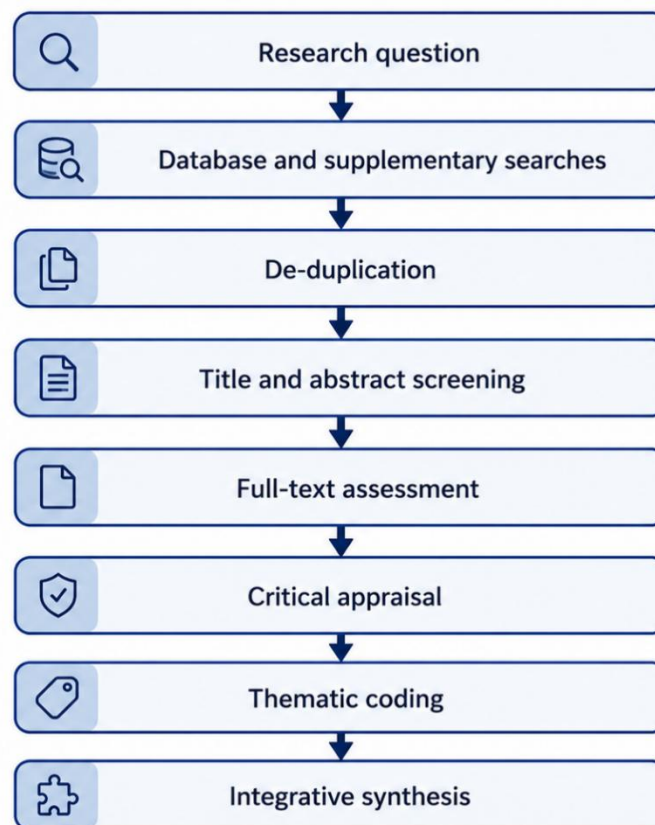


Figure 1. Review workflow

3. From Distribution to Multidimensional Social Justice

There are many different theories of social justice, which vary on what they take as the primary object of moral evaluation. Some concentrate on the sharing of resources and opportunities. Others focus on fair processes, social recognition, substantive freedom, equality of relations, and/or structural power. These methods are by no means mutually exclusive. Each depicts a facet of injustice which is incomplete without the other. Hence, literature advocates a shift from a one-dimensional understanding of distributive justice to a multi-dimensional justice.

3.1 Distribution and institutional allocation

Distributive justice is a way of assessing the distribution of benefits, burdens, rights and opportunities. Rawls (1999) puts the basic structure of society at the heart of this analysis as major institutions have a long-term impact on life prospects. He is a framework which safeguards equal basic freedom and fair equality of opportunities. It allows only socioeconomic inequalities when they enhance the situation of the least well off. There is ongoing debate about the currency and the principle of justice of contemporary distributive theory – it can be resources, welfare, capabilities, need, desert, equality, or priority (Olsaretti, 2018).

Distributive approach is still very important for measuring income, wealth, education, health care, housing and environmental pressures. Its restriction seems to come in when the justice is limited to a holding pattern. Different results can be achieved with similar resources as people have unequal social positions and different institutional barriers. Distribution also does not offer a complete picture of the creation of advantages. Historical exclusion and unpaid care, racialised property relations and unequal bargaining power are issues of the organisation of social relations as well as of the distribution of goods.

3.2 Procedure, participation, and political voice

The fairness of decision-making processes is referred to as procedural justice. It asks about the consistency of the institution, reason, opportunities for participation and respect for affected persons. There are no perfect remedies for procedures excluding those in the sphere of institutional power. Participation is important, as people are not only the recipients of resources, but political agents.

But when there is unequal time, knowledge, security or influence, formal opportunities to participate are inadequate. This issue is addressed by Fraser's (2009) idea of participatory parity, which is the connection between political voice and material and cultural conditions. Economic dependency undermines people's independence and institutionalized status hierarchies devalue their contribution, and thus prevent them from participating as peers. Procedural justice, *Journal of Progressive Social Inquiry*

thus, requires distribution and recognition.

3.3 Recognition and social status

Recognition-based theories focus on the equality of the people as members of society. Honneth (1995) links the concepts of recognition with self-confidence, self-respect and social esteem. Humiliation, invisibility and cultural devaluation are types of injustice that affect conditions for social participation.

Fraser (2009) proposes a status model in which misrecognition is possible because of the institutionalization of cultural patterns which preclude certain groups being able to interact as peers. This formulation does not involve diminishing recognition to the celebration of fixed identities. It focuses on the legal, organizational and cultural norms which create subordinate status.

Recognition is not without redistribution and vice versa. Stigma impacts both access to employment and housing as well as access to health care and public services. Material deprivation can also make people less likely to have a voice in politics and to be respected in the public arena. If there is no material change, there is a danger that recognition may turn into symbolic inclusion. Humiliating and paternalistic institutional relationships can be maintained through redistribution without regard to status.

3.4 Capabilities and substantive freedom

The capability approach has a vision of justice in terms of actual opportunities available to people to pursue valued ways of living. Sen (2009) makes a distinction between resources and the freedom to convert these into functionings. Equality of resources does not lead to equality of capabilities when the persons are different with respect to health, disability, care responsibilities, social norms, institutional access etc.

Nussbaum (2011) considers capabilities as fundamental rights related to human dignity. Her narrative features aspects of bodily integrity, health, affiliation, practical reason, participation and control over her environment. As Robeyns (2017) explains the capability approach is not a full theory, but rather a general evaluative framework. It highlights the difference between means, opportunity and choice, and outcomes.

The capability approach has an advantage over resource-based accounts in that it helps to understand the actual value of formal rights. The right to education is not very meaningful if the child cannot access the school, it is dangerous to travel to school, the child is discriminated against, or the school does not provide support for the child. But, capability analysis can be too individual – it can be a list of disadvantages without an account of social structures which generate it. Capacities need to be linked to institutional and relational conditions, therefore.

3.5 Relational equality

Relational egalitarianism is the question of 'how people relate to each other'. Anderson (1999) believes equality is about ending oppression and creating a democratic community where individuals are related to one another as equals. It is not the goal to eliminate all resource disparities. It is to eradicate relationships of domination, exploitation, marginalization and servitude.

Recent reports elaborate this position. Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) make a distinction between relational equality and distributive equality and demonstrate that there is a risk of dependency and social subordination when there is severe inequality in material resources. Schemmel (2021) highlights the importance of institutions in making clear that they are equally concerned and that there are no objectionable hierarchies. Policy is a message of judgments of membership and worth and is a distribution of benefits. Welfare can give benefits and at the same time condemn the recipient. Formal access can be provided in an educational setting, and status differences can be reproduced through discipline, assessment and informal expectations in the educational setting.

Thus, a relational equality brings an expressive and institutional dimension. What is required is to have institutions that are able to allocate resources fairly and create relations of equal standing.

3.6 Structural injustice

Structural theories account for how injustice may come about through the interplay of institutions, norms and actions in the routine. According to Young (2011), structural injustice is when "social processes limit possibilities for some groups and increase possibilities for others. There does not need to be an intention by one actor to cause the harm. Ordinary actions, seemingly acceptable in isolation, can continue the segregation of housing, stratification of the labour market, inequity of care work, and environmental exposure.

Young's social connection model also takes a new look at responsibility. Sometimes the root causes of structural injustice are not to be found in a single blameworthy agent. Responsibility is distributed across the actors involved in social processes and depends on power, privilege, interest and collective power. It is forward-looking because it sets out to change the structures that are causing harm.

Powers and Faden (2019) link structural injustice with compounding and intersecting disadvantage and unequal power. Institutions often spread vulnerability over multiple domains, which results in deprivations of health, security, respect, attachment, reasoning, and self-determination often occurring together. Structural justice thus demands a coordinated Institutional change and not just isolated compensation.

3.7 Synthesis

Each of the six approaches represents a unique aspect of social justice that is related to the other aspects. Distribution is a question of resource and burden. The fairness of the procedure is related to voice and institutional fairness. Recognition is about status, dignity. Capabilities refer to the substantive freedom. Relational equality is about domination and equality of status. Structural justice is the processes by which disadvantages are made durable and mutually reinforcing.

There is no one solution that will work. When there is no participation, paternalism can result from distribution. Different influence can be maintained by procedure alone. If there is no redistribution, recognition can be symbolic. The capabilities without structural analysis can individualize disadvantage. Relational equality with no consideration of resources can be an underestimation of the material basis of domination.

The review thus has a multi-faceted understanding of social justice. Justice is about distribution, decision-making, the recognition of identities and knowledge, and the freedoms people have to act, as well as whether social relations allow for equal standing. These dimensions are linked by institutions. They dedicate resources, create procedures, encode classifications and impact the exercise of rights in practice. These institutional mechanisms are discussed in detail in the next section.

4. Institutions and the Organization of Inequality

In the last section it was shown that social justice is not restricted to the distribution of goods. It also has to do with the way in which institutions structure social life, the procedures they use, the classification they make, and the relationships they establish. Access to resources, eligibility and authority are determined by institutions. They also define the categories into which individuals enter into view for state, organizations, and professional systems. These functions render institutions as the centrality of the production of durable inequality.

Inequality in institutions is not only due to explicit discrimination. It can manifest itself in seemingly detached regulations, which are part of everyday life. In the context of this paper, I draw on Acker's (2006) notion of 'inequality regimes' which refers to how organisations create classed, racialised and gendered hierarchies in an interdependent manner. Assumptions of competence and availability, and the ideal worker affect job design, recruitment, supervision, promotion, and evaluation. This argument is furthered by Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) using a relational approach. They recognize exploitation, social closure and claims making as mechanisms of distribution of resources and respect in organizations. Inequality is not merely reflected in institutions. They turn the social inequality into a formal inequality of opportunities.

4.1 Allocation, classification, and discretion

Material resources, opportunities, obligations and risks are allocated at institutions. They also categorize people as citizens, workers, tenants, students, patients, claimants or offenders. Every category has associated rights and/or evidentiary requirements. The consequences of classification are significant as it can mean the difference between receiving or not receiving support, between actions being held up for scrutiny or not, and between a story being listened to and believed or not.

Normative assumptions can be found in institutional categories. The categories of eligible and ineligible, employable and unemployable, low-risk and high-risk can imply notions of responsibility and deservingness. The categories are not automatically used. Rules are interpreted by frontline officials, managers, professionals and technical systems in particular contexts of the organization. While there can be a discretionary element to correct any rigid procedures, this can also lead to unequal treatment. Tummers et al. (2015) demonstrate that when working in an environment with limited resources, uncertain rules and a high demand, front-line workers resort to coping strategies. These include strategies that impact access to information, flexibility, and support.

This is because formal equality does not mean equality of institutional experience, which is a combination of classification and discretion. Individuals have differential access to resources, knowledge and social status when entering institutions. Having knowledge of the procedures, documentation and/or the ability to dispute a decision puts a person in a better position to achieve a favourable outcome. Institutional design thus affects the distribution and the ability to claim benefits.

4.2 Bureaucracy and administrative burden

Administrative burden research shows the effect of institutional processes on the substantive impact of rights. Moynihan et al. (2015) differentiate between learning, compliance and psychological costs. Learning costs are experienced when individuals have to find out what programmes are available, and learn complex rules. Compliance costs are associated with documentation, travel, waiting and reappointments. Psychological costs are stress, stigma, loss of autonomy and fear of poor decisions.

These costs are not the same for everyone. Heinrich (2016) demonstrates that the accessibility to programmes can be curtailed through administrative processes, and that administrative processes can diminish the desired effects of

policy. According to Peeters (2020), they can be found in the organizational context, where they stem from a lack of clear responsibilities, lack of resources and control-oriented administration cultures. Burdens can also be used as an indirect policy tool. They cut back on participation without altering the level of eligibility or benefits.

Administrative inequality is a relational as well as distributive inequality. Claimants have to provide personal details, establish their need and establish compliance to institutions that possess interpretive authority. Such an imbalance can turn social support into one of suspicion. The resulting costs are particularly harsh for those who have limited time, income, literacy, mobility, digital access, and/or institutional knowledge. Formal rights are thus unequal lived outcomes particularly when it comes to bureaucratic procedure.

4.3 Education, employment, and cumulative advantage

When prior social advantage is converted into credentials, income and status, it is in educational and workplace institutions. Selection systems often display results as an individual's worth or achievement. However, there are unequal opportunities with regard to preparation, institutional knowledge, influential networks, and cultural familiarity.

As illustrated by Posselt (2016), graduate admissions committees have an understanding of what constitutes excellence based on the disciplinary norms and institutional goals. The study of Jack (2019) shows that, students with similar socio-economic backgrounds are entering elite universities at varying degrees of familiarity with the norms of the institution. Going to the same school doesn't necessarily equal same access to mentorship, support and informal opportunity. Educational institutions thus provide more than qualifications then. They also spread confidence, recognition, and awareness of the running of institutions.

The same mechanisms seem to be present in the labour markets. According to Rivera (2015) the institutional pedigree and cultural similarity are used by elite employers as a way of judging a candidate. These criteria benefit individuals whose experiences are like that of current decision makers. Persistent discrimination is also shown from the field experiments. In an analysis of multiple decades of studies, Quillian et al. (2017) find no significant reduction in the hiring discrimination against African Americans. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) highlight significant ethnic discrimination in the correspondence tests carried out in Europe and North America.

Inequality is ongoing after organizational entry. However, transparency and accountability can help to diminish bias in pay decisions as demonstrated by Castilla (2015). This result supports the view that institutions can affect the degree of inequality. But, when promotion, sponsorship and valued assignments are based on informal networks, formal changes are limited. The benefits build up – if an institution succeeds at one level, it will have access to further opportunities.

4.4 Housing, place, and linked institutions

Housing institutions link housing, neighbourhood and public provision. Residential location has an impact on access to school, employment, transportation, health care, environmental security and representation in politics. Even eviction is not just a result of poverty, as Desmond (2016) demonstrates. It also exacerbates poverty by displacing people, putting them in debt, disrupting people's jobs and harming their rental history.

Opportunity is influenced by past policy decisions. In the case of housing, Faber (2020) shows that New Deal interventions had long-term impacts on racial geography and inequality. Korver-Glenn (2021) illustrates how segregation is perpetuated by real-estate practitioners, lenders, and other intermediaries and by current market practices. That these studies are an example of institutional path dependence. The property and infrastructure allocated in the early years affects the tax base, the quality of schools, access to credit, and mobility in later years.

Housing is also an indicator of the reason why institutions cannot be analysed separately. Residential segregation is a contributing factor to school inequality. Employment opportunities are related to where one lives and how they get there. Access to healthcare is reliant on provision in the local area. Thus, institutional disadvantages are compounded, across domains. When the reform is done in one sector, but the other sectors which are linked to it perpetuate unequal conditions, the reform may have limited effect.

4.5 Digital classification and automated inequality

Digital systems have helped to increase the capacity of institutions to classify, predict and monitor populations. Automated decision tools are frequently described as uniform substitutes for human judgement. They're constructed based on historical data and institutional goals, however. They can produce inequality by translating the past patterns as neutral evidence.

Eubanks (2018) provides a history of how automated systems in welfare, homelessness, and child protection, undermine and exacerbate surveillance of poor communities. Noble (2018) demonstrates how the technology of search can be a system that mirrors racial and gender hierarchies that are based on commerce. As these cases illustrate, technological systems are not outside of institutions. They 'inherit' institutional classifications and priorities. Another way in which algorithmic bias can occur is through the selection of proxies. Racial bias was found in a medical need algorithm that was based on expenditure, reports Obermeyer et al. (2019). Spending was not equal to equivalent

levels of illness across racial groups due to unequal access to care. Vyas et al. (2020) also demonstrate how clinical tools adjusted for race can attribute to medical decision making assumptions of biological difference.

The scale and opacity of institutional classification is increased by automated systems. People might not be aware of the data that were used to make the decision, or how to raise a dispute about an error. Thus, the training data, proxy variables, deployment settings, transparency, and appeal procedures must be looked at closely with respect to social justice.

4.6 Institutional persistence and transformation

Rules, resources, classifications and expectations support each other and institutional inequality remains. Organizations become the inheritors of previous distribution of authority and many times consider it as a normal condition. More than formal equality commitments are needed when it comes to change. It calls for a transformation of the decision-making and review processes.

Dobbin and Kalev (2022) demonstrate there are significant differences in the impact of organizational diversity interventions. Programmes with a control orientation may cause resistance while responsibility, engagement and continued contact produce more effective structures. The results of Castilla (2015) also suggest that accountability needs to be linked to tangible decision making processes.

From the literature we can draw four conclusions. Allocation, classification, discretion and cumulative effects are all ways in which inequality is created in institutions. The formally neutral rules can produce different results depending on the environment in which they are applied, as these environments are stratified. There are several institutional domains and a disadvantage in one domain affects access to other domains. Last, change in decision structures and accountability – not just the language of institutions – is needed for reform. These conclusions raise the question of power, and who or what institutional arrangements serve the interests of, and who or what can change them.

5. Power and the Politics of Everyday Inequality

Inequality is organized in institutions, while direction and durability of institutional arrangements is given by power. It helps to determine which interests are included in the rules, which problems are given public attention and which knowledge is accepted as authoritative. Power is also exercised in the daily interactions. Institutional classifications are socially enacted when they are operationalized by administrators, employers, teachers, clinicians, police and technical systems, and applied to specific individuals. Thus the politics of every day inequality is a way of connecting macro-level structures with everyday experiences of recognition, scrutiny, dependence and resistance.

5.1 Decision-making, agenda-setting, and structural power

The most obvious use of power is to make decisions that are authoritative. It is found in laws, budgets, directives of organisations and administrative decisions. This dimension is still relevant since decisions are about allocation of resources and the creation of enforceable rights. However, it is incomplete because it does not account for how decision-making access is gained or who are the alternatives that are not considered or even discussed before deliberation.

Lukes (2005) makes a distinction between the power to make decisions and the power to make something part of the agenda and the power to shape perceptions. Power to set the agenda is the power to decide which grievances are going to be identified as institutional problems. It can disclaim claims; it can make it appear that things are already in place, or that they are politically impossible. Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) also differentiate between power through ideas, power over ideas and power in ideas. Actors have power through persuasion, suppression of other interpretations and assumptions within institutional categories.

Structural power is based on the unequal relationship in economic and political structures. There's no need for firms, investors, landlords, and professional authority to constantly intrude to affect institutional decisions. The resources which are under the control of these actors are essential for governments, workers and households. This reliance reduces the options for policies and actions that are considered to be viable. Pistor (2019) demonstrates that law establishes long-lasting advantages via coding assets in property, contract, collateral and corporate rules. As Piketty (2020) also claims, political and ideological arrangements that establish legitimate ownership and accumulation also help to maintain inequality.

These are all types of power that interact with each other. Economics resources enable recurrent access to the political arena. Access to good rules is safeguarded by institutional access. Rules that have been established are then seen as neutral, since the distributive consequences are divorced from the rule making decisions. Thus, social justice analysis must not only play a role in determining who is the winner in a visibly fought fight, but also in determining who sets the agenda and who benefits from institutional dependence.

5.2 Ideological, symbolic, and epistemic power

The more unequal an arrangement is and the more natural, efficient, and/or deserved it seems, the more durable the power becomes. The ideological power influences the way in which people explain wealth, poverty, unemployment,

educational success, as well as social risk. According to Brown (2015), the citizens are treated as units of human capital by means of neoliberal rationality. The language of competition, investment and personal responsibility are used to interpret social conditions. This framing moves away from institutional arrangements, and towards individual adaptability.

The same legitimating role is served by meritocracy. But higher income inequality does not always lead to higher levels of beliefs that success is due to merit, as Mijs (2021) finds. Stratification can thus be understood in different ways in unequal societies, with narratives that downplay the significance of inherited advantage and institutional closure. Kraus et al. (2017) also demonstrate that Americans underestimate racial economic inequality to a large extent. Misperception makes the need for structural correction appear less.

Symbolic power is introduced in the institutions by means of categories and metrics. Fourcade and Healy (2017) demonstrate the markets' categorization of individuals, and how these categorizations affect access and treatment. While giving the classifications a sense of precision, quantification is normative in terms of the indicators. Risk scores, performance measures and eligibility thresholds determine which attributes matter and which experiences cease to matter in the evaluation.

The issue of epistemic power is who is recognized as a credible knower. Fricker (2007) uses the term 'testimonial injustice' to refer to prejudice that undermines a speaker's credibility, and 'hermeneutical injustice' to refer to a lack of shared concepts in marginalized groups to explain their experiences. These harms are institutional if professional standards, research priorities or administrative records are such that they privilege some knowledge over others.

The production of knowledge is a good example, as is the case globally. The foreign gaze in global health scholarship involves a set of institutions outside of the communities studied that often have the power to set the research agenda, the interpretation and authorship of the research (Abimbola, 2019). Epistemic injustice can remain even if researchers from marginalised settings are involved in projects, as Bakhuni and Abimbola (2021) reveal. The hierarchy of knowledge remains in place when participation is done without an interpretive authority.

The link between culture and material inequality is through ideological, symbolic and epistemic power. Stories of achievement drive policy. Opportunities are determined by metrics. Credibility assessments impact on diagnosis, employment and public assistance. So power is exercised in the norms that define institutional evaluations of evidence and social value.

5.3 Stigma, discrimination, and unequal recognition

Stigma turns into a social difference a state of inferiority. According to Pescosolido and Martin (2015), stigma is a process that consists of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination. It is these elements that make them significant: institutions and dominant groups have the power to impose classifications. Stigma thus is not just a negative attitude. It's a cultural meaning and power dynamic.

Tyler and Slater (2018) suggest that stigma is a mechanism of classification and control that is implicated in political processes. Those who are dependent or irresponsible, or dangerous or even underving can be subject to surveillance and conditional support. Tyler (2020) extends this idea and demonstrates that the interplay of policy, media and everyday interaction creates stigmatized populations.

These meanings are applied in everyday discrimination, through repeated interactions. It can include over-evaluating, under-evaluating, stereotyping, disrespecting or avoiding someone because of their disability. They can be misleading, taken as a stand-alone occurrence. The political significance of their patterned repetition and linkage with institutional outcomes. Williams et al. (2019) differentiate between interpersonal, structural and cultural racism, and also highlight the interplay between the levels. Paradies et al. (2015) report that a vast literature has consistently linked reported racism with negative mental and physical health consequences.

An intersectional approach is required as classifications do not work in isolation with each other. Intersectionality is an analysis of the ways in which systems of class, race, gender, disability, sexuality, citizenship and other divisions create each other, according to Collins and Bilge (2020). Different impacts of the same institutional rule can be created by a person's combination of social position. Intersectionality thus is about configurations of power, rather than adding demographic variables.

Stigma & discrimination at distribution – recognition. When someone is treated as less credible he or she may get less service. An employee who is perceived as a cultural "misfit" can be denied the opportunity to get a job or to be promoted. If a claimant is deemed to be undeserving, there may be more obstacles on the path to their claim. Thus, everyday recognition is a process that is material and institutional.

5.4 Administrative encounters, surveillance, and embodied consequences

Institutional power materialises in an encounter in which there is a control of information, classification and/or sanctions by one party. These contacts include welfare interviews, medical contacts, school discipline, police and child protection investigations. People can have rights, but be subject to institutional interpretation.

Policing illustrates how everyday encounters are a means of forming political membership. Soss and Weaver (2017) suggest that race-class subjugated communities tend to interact with the state in a coercive, surveillance, disciplining

and containing manner. Legal estrangement is a state of being, created by structural exclusion, institutional neglect and direct experiences with law enforcement, according to Bell (2017). Distrust can thus be a manifestation of an understanding of inequitable institutional treatment and not of a legal process misunderstanding.

The surveillance is also carried out in welfare and family institutions. Fong (2020) demonstrates how child protection investigations unravel family life to the state gaze. Poor families are more likely to be visible to authorities as they rely on public institutions and have less control over access to institutions. Even if formally universal, surveillance is unequally distributed when it comes to child protection.

These experiences impact on the emotional and embodied. It takes vigilance, interpretation and identity management to remove the recurring discrimination. Williams et al. (2019) describe ways in which racism impacts on health—by chronic stress and limited access to resources. Bor et al. (2018) report that police killing of unarmed Black Americans is linked with decreased mental health in Black adults in the same state. Violence in the institution can thus have communal effects that are not directly affected by the violence.

Everyday inequality accumulates. But one delay, one credibility determination, one intrusive demand can seem paltry. Replication of institution leads to loss of time, stress, and changes of access. Individuals might be reluctant to use services, hide parts of themselves or change their behaviour in preparation for unequal treatment. The burden must encompass completed harms as well as work that is needed to avoid the harms.

5.5 Everyday resistance and counter-knowledge

There is never a complete power. Participants make sense of institutional demands, challenge categorizations and obtain practical understandings of the operation of inequality. Resistance can manifest itself in formal gestures, but also in everyday acts of refusal, negotiation, documentation, support and affirmation of identity.

Everyday resistance is a type of resistance that is diffused and fragmentary, which is used to curb domination or maintain autonomy, as described by Johansson and Vinthagen (2016). They have political connotations that vary according to the context. Strategic compliance can be a way of survival in one context, and a form of covert resistance in another. These actions do not necessarily change institutions, but can help preserve dignity and help establish networks for collective action.

When institutions are denying patterned inequality, it is particularly important to have counter-knowledge. Apparently isolated events are linked by testimony, participatory research, community monitoring and collective documentation. They also confront hierarchies of epistemology by placing affected people in the role of interpreter and not as a source of data. Celikates (2018) theorises critique as a social practice, which is based on the capacities of those actors experiencing domination. Emancipation cannot just be the result of outsiders recognising harms for the passive subjects.

Routine discrimination can also be interrupted by allies and by-standers. Sue et al. (2019) describe microintervention strategies that reveal the biased assumptions, provide supports and targets, and confront exclusionary behaviors. So much for such strategies is still hierarchical. A response that a senior professional is able to do could lead to a student, temporary employee, patient or claimant being exposed to retaliation.

Resistance in everyday life shouldn't be idealised. Survival strategies involve labour and can involve not changing underlying structures. Those who are the victims of injustice can't be tasked with reform. When counter-knowledge is able to enter the institutional sphere and change decision making processes, and thereby establish accountability for recurring patterns, effective resistance turns into transformative resistance.

5.6 Synthesis

Power is manifested in institutions in a number of ways that link to everyday inequalities. Rules are rules of Decision-making power. The power of the agenda sets is which harms are recognized. The dependence of structural power. Classifications are given legitimacy by means of ideological and symbolic power. Epistemic power is what knowledge is valued. These forms come into being through regular contact that confers credibility, dignity, resources and exposure to visibility.

The relation is recursive. Practices are determined by the rules of the institution and repeated practices make institutional hierarchies seem normal. Collective knowledge and political claims can also be destabilizing institutions, as everyday experiences are made to serve as such. The institutional-relational framework developed in the next section is based on this interaction.

6. An Integrated Institutional-Relational Framework

As the previous analysis demonstrates, there are no levels of explanation for institutions, power and everyday inequality. Access to resources and social positions are organized by Institutions. Their rules, priorities and standards for judging are influenced by power. The arrangements are manifested in everyday practices, which provide concrete experiences. It is then repeated and the institutional categories become established and unequal relations seem normal. This recursive process is explained by an institutional-relational framework created in this section.

6.1 Core premises

There are four premises to the framework. First, it is a relation of inequality. Advantage/disadvantage is not just individual and is created through social relationships. The relationship of organizational position, citizenship status, employment status, and access to professional decision-making authority create unequal capacities to make claims and resist decision-making (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019).

Secondly, inequality is institutional. Rules, organizations and the public systems stabilize relationships over time. Eligibility, resources, procedures and authorizations of particular forms of knowledge are decided upon by institutions. Their impacts are not just in the formal policy as organisational routines are important in shaping the interpretation and application of rules (Ray, 2019).

Thirdly, inequality is multidimensional. Material distribution is related to recognition, political voice, substantive freedom and social status. A stigma or dependency can be created by an institutional arrangement and at the same time resources can be made available. It can also provide formal rights, but restrict the ability to practically invoke them (Lamont & Pierson, 2019; Powers & Faden, 2019).

Fourth, institutional reproduction is not automatic, it's not complete. Institutional classifications are interpreted, negotiated and/or challenged by individuals and groups. They can help to consolidate the existing system, but they can also create counter-knowledge and pressure for change. The responsibility for structural injustice is thus not just a backward-looking one in which one actor can be identified as the one who is blameworthy (Young, 2011).

6.2 The recursive production of inequality

The process is broken down into six interrelated steps. It starts with inequalities in wealth, status, political influence, spatial location and access to institutions that have been created over history. The design of laws, policies, organizations and professional standards are influenced by these conditions.

Resources are then assigned to institutions, and population is classified. Allocation is the means of determining who gets a job, a place to live, medical care and health insurance, public assistance and benefits, and political voice. Classification is the basis for determining eligibility, credibility, competence, risk or deserving. These processes create various locations to which people relate to institutional authority.

Power affects allocation and classification. Formal rules are influenced by the power to make decisions. Those harms that are addressed by the institutions are the ones that have agenda-setting power. Structural power makes people dependent, because it focuses on the control of employment, property, finance, expertise and/or public power. The symbolic and epistemic power will decide what categories and types of knowledge are considered legitimate (Fricker, 2007; Lukes, 2005).

These arrangements are put into practice in everyday practices. Administrators ask for evidence, employers make decisions about fit, teachers make sense of performance, clinicians make judgments about evidence, and machines determine scores. These are everyday choices that allocate material opportunities and social recognition. They also convey evaluations on dignity and membership.

There is unequal impact and experience when the implementation is repeated. The consequences of these are material deprivation, limitation of capability, administrative burden and surveillance, stigma, and diminished trust in politics. They can make the categories that they have generated seem commonplace. Existing classifications are then assumed as being correct when they are interpreted as institutional outcomes. This interpretation is reinserted in institutions, and thus inequality itself becomes an input in institutional design.

Resistance breaks the pattern. People and communities record patterns, contest categories, build alternative knowledge, organise together and call institutions to account. Resistance is transformative when it shifts rules, alters the distribution of power or modifies the criteria with which institutions assess claims (Celikates, 2018).

6.3 Mechanisms linking institutions, power, and everyday practice

Table 2 summarizes the principal mechanisms identified across the literature. Each mechanism connects institutional organization to a form of power and an everyday expression.

Table 2. Mechanisms in the institutional-relational production of inequality

Institutional mechanism	Operation of power	Everyday expression	Social justice concern
Allocation	Control over resources and opportunities	Unequal access to services, employment, housing, or education	Distribution and capability
Classification	Authority to define eligibility, competence, or risk	Labelling, sorting, and differential treatment	Recognition and status
Authorization	Control over valid evidence and expertise	Credibility judgments and exclusion of experiential knowledge	Epistemic and procedural justice
Discretion	Unequal capacity to interpret	Variable scrutiny, flexibility, or	Procedural equality

	rules	support	
Administrative burden	Transfer of learning and compliance costs	Documentation, waiting, stress, and non-take-up	Substantive access
Surveillance	Unequal exposure to monitoring and sanction	Policing, data collection, investigation, and behavioural adaptation	Autonomy and equal protection
Normalization	Legitimation through repetition and dominant narratives	Acceptance of hierarchy as merit, risk, or personal failure	Relational and structural justice
Resistance	Collective reinterpretation and contestation	Counter-knowledge, solidarity, appeal, and institutional reform	Participation and transformation

The mechanisms are analytically distinct but operate together. Classification determines how allocation occurs. Authorization affects whose evidence influences classification. Discretion shapes how rules are applied. Administrative burden and surveillance increase the costs of institutional participation. Normalization then presents the resulting outcomes as justified or inevitable.

6.4 Cross-level interaction

The framework is related to macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. Political economy, law, public policy and historical stratification at the macro level shape general patterns of resource and authority distribution. At the meso level, these arrangements are translated into recruitment systems, administrative procedures, professional standards and technological tools by the organizations. At the micro level, people are dealing with the outcomes of these structures through an everyday experience and identity-based judgements.

All levels are causally dependent. Policy is reliant on organisational implementation at a macro-level. Wider cultural and political categories lend a legitimacy to the routines of organizations. Those categories are reproduced and/or challenged in every day interactions. A credibility assessment in a welfare interview is a personal, organisational and political assessment. It is a reflection of the official's discretion, the agency's procedures and overall stories of deservingness.

This approach from one level to another avoids two types of reductionism. Structural reductionism is a way of seeing everyday interaction as a straightforward expression of macro-level forces and ignoring interpretations, variation, and resistance. Individual reductionism is the idea that unequal encounters are essentially "free" choices, and that the institutions which render them patterned and consequential are unimportant. The institutional-relational framework sees interaction as the location where structure is realized (not mechanically determined).

6.5 Normalization and institutional feedback

Normalization is a key element in institutional persistence. Observed variations in income, credentials, health, neighbourhood conditions and institutional records as a result of repeated decisions. These results are then used to further justify differential treatment. An unequal educational history can be seen as proof of the lack of ability. Limited access to health care can manifest itself as a lower spending record and be interpreted as proof of reduced health-care needs. Intense policing could lead to an increase in crimes reported and thus more policing.

There is also feedback on public understanding from the institutional level. Social groups are negotiated through categories which are inscribed in policy and professional practice. The repeated use of classification terms such as risky, dependent, and deficient give the classification the appearance of factual authority when used by institutions. There is thus a reinforcement of symbolic meaning and material distribution.

6.6 Resistance and transformation

Resistance is incorporated in the framework at each stage. Political mobilization can change laws, policy agendas. Evaluation criteria and accountability systems can be changed by organizational action. Stigma categories can be contested in everyday resistance, and lead to a record of unequal treatment. The institutional measurements can be deceptive and counter-knowledge can reveal the assumptions that are hidden.

Resistance is not enough in and of itself to change the system. When contestation transforms institutional relations, it occurs. This could include a devolution of decision-making, easier access, real appeals, experiential knowledge or accountability for cumulative patterns. Not just improvement of outcomes is a criterion of success. It's also whether impacted communities are able to achieve more status and influence in the institutions that drive their lives.

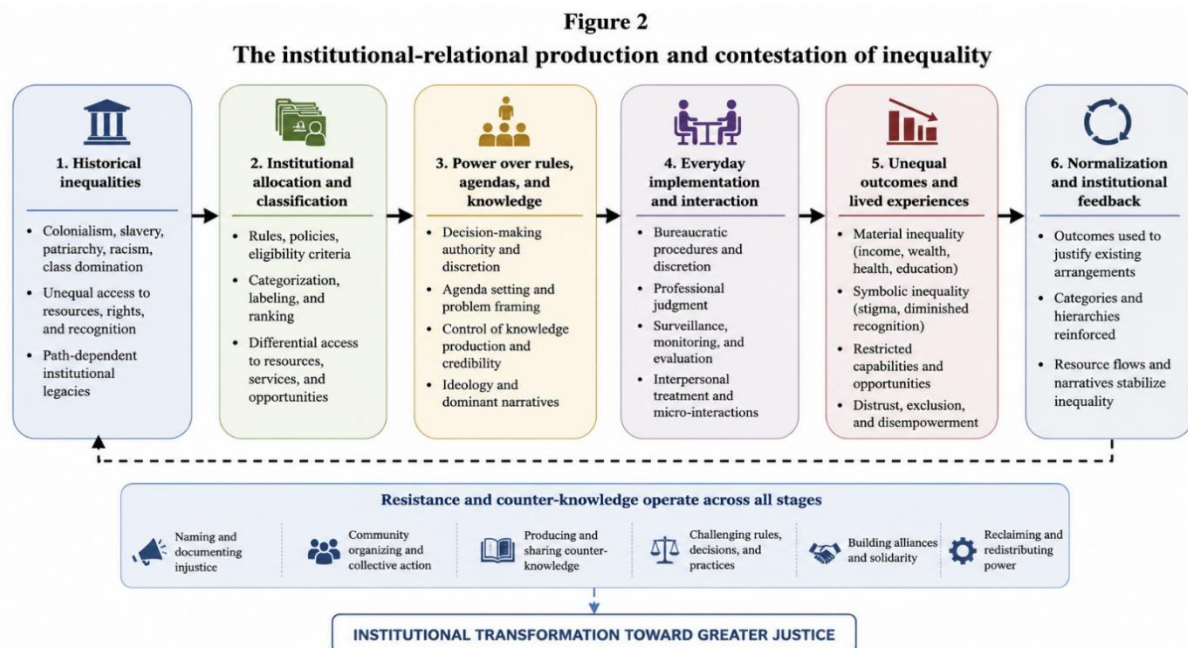


Figure 2. The institutional-relational production and contestation of inequality

The framework is an attempt to think of social justice as an institutional and political process on an ongoing basis. Justice is about the distribution of resources, but also about who categorizes, who rules, who knows and who can challenge institutional authority. This integrated account sets the scene for discussion of the research and policy implications that follow.

7. Discussion and Implications

This review has suggested that the distributive outcomes are not the only means to assess social justice. Relationships between institutional rules, unequal power and routine implementation are the source of inequality. Institutions fund and allocate resources, and they categorise populations, authorise specific kinds of knowledge and share the power to challenge their decisions. The institutional-relational framework's core is to link these processes together at different levels of analysis. It demonstrates the process by which macro level arrangements turn into routines in an organisation, and how routines turn into experiences in everyday life. It also states feedback mechanisms, whereby inequality can lead to inequalities that will produce even more inequalities.

7.1 Theoretical contribution

The framework builds on the multi-dimensional approaches to justice by defining the mechanisms which connect distribution, recognition, participation, capability and equal standing. These dimensions usually are studied as distinct normative issues. In reality they are institutionally dependent on each other. A cumbersome welfare process can simultaneously lead to a decrease of material access, an expression of stigma, a decrease of effective capacity, and a loss of political trust. An employment classification can be used to allocate income and to also determine competence and professional value.

This also helps to elucidate how structure and agency relate to each other. Structural injustice is not a thing that can stand alone. It is reproduced in decisions, classifications, and interpretations, which take place in limited institutional contexts (Young, 2011). However at the same time, unfair consequences can't be blamed on the individual actors. Decision makers and those impacted by their decisions are guided by organisation procedures and historical distributions (Ray, 2019). Thus, the site of everyday interaction is where structure is enacted, negotiated and at times disrupted.

7.2 Implications for research

Future studies should explore macro, meso, and micro inequality, and should be studied within the same analytical framework. Research on policy effects may offer little information regarding implementation and research on lived experience may offer little in terms of analysis of the institutional rules that generate lived experiences. Comparative and longitudinal studies can be used to find out if comparable rules result in different outcomes in different organisations, jurisdictions and social groups.

Studies need to transcend individual demographic factors as well. Intersectional analysis is more than just adding categories to statistical modeling, it is about how combined social positions are created through institutions (Collins & Bilge, 2020). In particular, mixed-method designs are valuable. Patterned outcomes can be identified through administrative data, and interpretations and contests of classifications can be understood through interviews,

ethnography and participatory methods.

There is also more epistemic inclusion in the framework. Community members should be involved in formulation of research questions, understanding research evidence and assessing proposed solutions. The data practices should consider unequal power and make excluded knowledge visible, D'ignazio and Klein (2020) argue. This applies to data science, and not just. Social justice research is incomplete if those who are unequal in the institution only become a research subject.

7.3 Implications for policy and institutional practice

Policy evaluation should include access, implementation and lived experience as well as being confined to aggregate outcomes. A programme can be offered beyond the formal eligibility but not be accessible due to documentation, time, language, mobility or digital requirements. Administrative simplification thus is a measure of substantive justice, not just an efficiency reform. Burden reduction should involve clear rules, minimal duplication of requirements, easily available assistance and meaningful opportunities for appeal of decisions (Herd & Moynihan, 2018).

Accountability of institutions should be directed towards decision making processes. Organizations can look at outcomes, how discretion, classification and informal practices are affecting them. Transparency is helpful when it helps to identify who made a decision, what evidence was used in making the decision, and how this decision can be challenged. It is not as effective if technical information is issued by institutions without altering authority or offering remedies. Dobbin and Kalev (2022) also demonstrate that organizational equality initiatives are more effective when it results in responsibility and continued involvement than in symbolic commitments.

One needs to have a sociotechnical assessment of automated systems. Fairness cannot be determined by considering the performance of a model without taking into account the institution in which a system is used. Selbst et al. (2019) demonstrate that harm can be hidden behind abstraction, as well as behind social, institutional, and historical dynamics that are at the root of the harm. Assessment should thus include aspects such as problem definition, data construction, proxy selection, deployment, human discretion, error distribution and appeal procedures.

There needs to be power-sharing in participation as well. Participatory justice does not result from consultation, per se, as there is a lack of control over the agenda and standards of evidence. Design justice is more powerful as it puts communities in the centre of decisions made by institutions and views them as design and governance actors (Costanza-Chock, 2020). It can be used in the fields of public service, organizational reform, urban planning, and digital systems.

7.4 Limitations

There are a number of limitations in the review. Because of its interdisciplinary scope, it is not possible to discuss all the theories, institutional areas and regional traditions. English language scholarship and publications continue to be overrepresented. The integrative design also combines theoretical, qualitative, quantitative and institutional sources that are not measurable with one evidentiary standard. The framework thus is an explanatory one, not a predictive one.

At the same time, mechanisms on a relatively high level of abstraction are identified during the review. Allocation, classification, discretion, surveillance and resistance manifest themselves in different ways in political and cultural settings. They must be evaluated in specific institutions by empirical research in order to determine their relative importance. These limits do not detract from the requirement for integration. They suggest that the model should be used to inform context-specific enquiry and not as a universal causal model.

The general lesson to be learned is that social justice reform needs to concern itself with outcome, but also the institutional relationships that produce them. These are, of course, necessary but not sufficient conditions for durable change, as redistribution is still needed. Justice is not only reached when there is a more equitable distribution of resources, but also when individuals have substantive power to determine the rules by which they live.

8. Conclusion

This review has maintained that social justice cannot be solely interpreted as a distribution of resources, rights or opportunities. While distributive outcomes continue to be key, these are achieved in institutions that categorize individuals, legitimate specific types of knowledge, and give voice, protection, and credibility to some and not others. These are all shaped by power, which impacts the rules, agendas, criteria of assessment, and definition of social issues. Then everyday practices become a way to enact institutional structures as the lived experiences of access, exclusion, recognition, stigma, surveillance, and resistance.

These dimensions are integrated within the institutional-relational framework in this article. Explain inequality as a recursive process. Institutional design results from historical inequalities. Resources are allocated and populations classified by institutions. Power is the key in the making and interpretation of rules. The regular use results in inequalities in outcomes and experiences. These results can then be used to validate the categories and assumptions that have produced these results. The durability of inequality is a result of co-constitution of institutional arrangements, public narratives and everyday practices.

This history also explains why the formal equality can sometimes not lead to substantive justice. Different effects of equal rules may result from various resources, social status, and capacities to contest decisions for people entering institutions. Legal rights have the potential to exist but are not easy to implement. There may be a formal participation but influence is concentrated. Recognition can be done in a symbolic form without changing material and organizational hierarchies.

Therefore, a progressive approach to social justice entails an analysis of results as well as institutional relationships. While redistribution is needed it should also be coupled with accessible procedures, equal recognition, substantive capability, epistemic inclusion, and meaningful opportunities for contestation. Institutional reform needs to focus on decision-making, the source of knowledge for institutions, the distribution of costs, and the presence or absence of actual influence of affected groups on the institutions that rule their lives.

It also maintains the option of change in the framework. Institutional reproduction is strong but automatic only to a certain degree. People and communities produce counter-knowledge, contest categorisation, record types of harm and mobilise for change. Resistance is transformative when it changes decision-making structures, shifts power and breaks down feedback mechanisms that reinforce inequalities.

Thus, to rethink social justice we need to ask the question not only what societies distribute, but also what are the processes of institutions, what power do they uphold, what experiences do they acknowledge, and how is equality manifested in everyday life. Improved outcomes are not the only means of justice. It is realized when individuals are able to engage as equals in the processes of designing institutions that constitute their opportunities, relationships and social status.

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