

Serving Whose Ends? Psychology and the Study of Social Justice in South Africa

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Introduction

The year 2004, for many, has been marked - and celebrated - as the end of South Africa's first decade of democracy. In fact the changes that led to what has widely become known as South Africa's 'transformation' started before the official marker of our first democratic election. The impetus for broad societal change has, arguably, been a priority for many institutions since the late 1980's. Every area of our society's functioning, both public and private, has been challenged by the changes happening in the political, economic, social and legal spheres. Notions of social justice, both in relation to questions of redress as well as defining new points of departure for social policy and practice, have been central to the ways in which these challenges have been met. Given the importance of justice for a society such as South Africa, it is unsurprising that its investigation is central to many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Attempts by these various disciplines to contribute to national debates and initiatives around questions of social justice are an important part of the transformation of both the disciplines themselves in response to changes in the national agenda, as well as the knowledge systems that underpin societal practices. Because of the way in which it defines itself and its research practices as being most primarily about individual functioning and well-being, the contribution that the discipline of psychology can make to questions about social justice in a post-apartheid South Africa can be viewed as having a particular role. Despite this, psychology as a discipline has been surprisingly absent from many of the research and policy development initiatives undertaken over the past ten years. The self reflective practices of the eighties that gave rise to strong critical voices from within the discipline appear to have difficulty locating a new intellectual position within the post apartheid academic landscape, particularly in relation to the advancement of social justice. This paper will argue that the ways in which psychology has approached the study of social justice has restricted its usefulness within the South African context, and has limited the role the discipline has been able to assume within the broader national process of democratisation.

Psychology and the Study of Justice

There are a number of different levels at which issues of justice manifest themselves, and the discipline of psychology has largely focused on two such levels – interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of justice. At an interpersonal level questions about justice emerge in relation to the relationships between people and groups, the ways in which justice defines relationships, the effects of injustice on relationships, as well as in matters such as discrimination and redress (For reviews of this research see Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997, Cropanzano, 2001,). At an intrapersonal level, justice has been looked at in relation to the moral development of people, as well as the role that personality and other individual differences play in justice perceptions (For examples see Kohlberg, 1963, Piaget, 1932/1965

, Lerner, 1980). Within psychology these questions about justice and moral reasoning have been explored largely under the domain of two areas of study – developmental psychology and sub-fields of social psychology. Within developmental psychology theorists have explored the ways in which people develop moral reasoning. The approach has been primarily cognitive in nature, and explores the ways in which people make decisions about what is moral or just, and what is not. This focus is on the intrapersonal aspects of justice, as it looks at factors internal to the individual in attempting to explain the development of morality. For example theorists such as Kohlberg (1963) and Piaget (1932/1965) have looked at infant and child development, with a specific focus on how the capacity for moral reasoning evolves within children. When looking at personality constructs, theorists such as Lerner (1980) have looked at individual beliefs about fairness (now termed Belief in a Just World) as a personality trait, and have explored the extent to which this trait affects other attitudes and behaviours. Social psychologists, on the other hand, laid the foundation for research focussed on justice in the context of interpersonal relationships through their exploration of the ways in which social forces governed such perceptions. While in the 1960's, 70's and 80's much of the psychological research into justice was located broadly in the area of social psychology, an overwhelming amount of the current literature and exploration is now focussed on the ways in which justice concerns manifest within the workplace. As such the field of 'organisational justice' has developed into a well-defined domain of research and application, and accounts for the majority of work being done on interpersonal aspects of justice in the discipline of psychology. As such, it is the work that emanated from this field that is the predominant focus of this paper.

While organisational justice researchers acknowledge their roots in social psychology, they assert that this area has developed an identity that is now independent of these origins (Cropanzano, 2001). Within this paradigm, the differential allotment of goods or conditions to individuals or groups is seen to be central to the concept of justice (Randall & Mueller, 1995), and organisational justice concerns itself with the ways in which employees determine whether they have been fairly treated in their jobs, and the way in which perceptions of justice impact on other work related variables.

Why has the study of justice emerged so dominantly in this sub-field? Most obviously there are many characteristics of the workplace that make issues about justice a key concern, and that make the workplace an almost ideal setting for the empirical study of justice. Firstly, justice concerns are formalised in workplace settings through organisational policy and procedures. For example, people are graded in relation to a given set of criteria and are paid a salary and accorded status in relation to those gradings. In addition, behaviour is strictly governed by a clear set of standards that are based in the legal framework of broader society and that are central to organisational functioning and effectiveness. An additional characteristic of workplace settings is the idea that due to the profit-making motive of the organisation, the distribution of resources has to be limited. The success of such organisations lies in its management's ability to limit expenditure (e.g. salaries, benefits) while maximising income (e.g. through increased productivity). As such the distribution of resources within such settings has very immediate importance. Finally, there are domains that are unique to workplace settings, such as wage negotiation, conflict resolution, labour disputes, and union-management agreements, where concerns about justice are easily observable. It is argued that these (and many other) characteristics make organisations a "rich venue" for studying justice, and as such "...we have learned a great deal about organisations by studying justice and a great deal about justice by studying organisations." (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997: p. 318).

In many ways the organisation functions as a microcosm of the larger society, with distinct rules, processes, boundaries, and ways of functioning, making it an interesting, as well as easy, context for the study of justice. There may, however, be other sets of less obvious reasons for organisational psychology's interest in workplace justice. Organisational psychology relies on a partnership with industry in order to create a market for their professional and academic practice. This partnership relies on the needs of management, as the decision-makers and holders of resources, being met. As such issues of fairness are explored to the extent that they emerge as a concern for managers. So while justice has been researched rather considerably within this sub-field, it is in relation to a particular set of managerial concerns. Organisational psychologists study justice because managers want them to answer related questions about the effective functioning of their organisations. This may be because within this paradigm justice theory is seen predominantly as a theory of motivation.

In their book *Co operation and Groups*, two social psychologists, Tyler and Blader (2000), state "Justice must be able to motivate both the acceptance of rules and decisions and efforts to help the group even when either departs from individual or group self-interest. In terms of social co ordination, justice has little value if it does not influence how people feel and what they do." (p.70). They argue that research findings that support the notion that justice perceptions influence people's attitudes and behaviours point to important policy implications in that "They suggest that we can encourage desirable behaviour from the people in groups by creating group frameworks that are experienced as fair." (p.8). The view that justice perceptions can be used to mitigate the negative effects of certain workplace policies or enhance employee functioning is a common thread running through this type of research. Employee commitment, morale, turnover intentions, organisational citizenship behaviours, productivity, theft and a host of other attitudinal and behavioural variables have all been explored in relation to perceptions of organisational justice (For an overview of this research see either Cropanzano, 2001, or Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). As such justice is not seen as a virtue in itself, but as a factor than produces either desirable or undesirable behaviours from people. Within this conception, justice takes on the language of compliance. It is clear, therefore, why this particular paradigm appears to be flourishing in the workplace – a context in which profit-making is the primary motive, and human behaviour is key to this motive. In this way, organisational justice is emerging as a managerial science, rather than a social science. This is also clear when regarding the theoretical framework that underpins this paradigm.

Much of the organisational justice research has been based on the theoretical notion that justice can be regarded from three different perspectives or in relation to three separate concerns, namely distributive justice - which refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes (Ball, Trevino and Sims , 1994), procedural justice- where the focus is on process and the influence such processes have on fairness perceptions (Thibaut and Walker, 1975) , and interpersonal justice - the quality of treatment an individual believes he or she has received from decision makers, and the extent to which they feel that the formal decision making procedures are properly enacted (Leung, Chiu and Au, 1993). These are often referred to as 'types' of justice (Cropanzano, 2001) which are looked at either independently or in relation to one another. The division of justice into these three areas is based on an a priori logic that gained popular support by researchers. The use of these three justice dimensions has become the most prevalent approach to understanding and researching justice, and each dimension has received a differing amount of individual attention. Essentially, the psychological study of justice regards justice as pertaining to an event or a series of events around about which certain decisions are made, which result in a given outcome. An individual forms a perception of whether that outcome and the means used to reach that

outcome are congruent with their expectations. As such, they make a justice judgement. That justice judgement, in turn, impacts on their response to the individual or group who they perceived as having made the outcome decision.

This psychological approach to the study of justice poses some concerns, particularly within the South African context. It is interesting to note that despite a real and immediate need for a focus on justice and the presence of an academy very active in the exploration of notions of justice and related concerns, very little research embedded in this psychological paradigm has been conducted in South Africa. There may be a number of reasons for this, the most obvious related to both the relevance and appropriateness of this paradigm for the South African context. These concerns can perhaps best be articulated through the discussion of two key criticisms. The first pertains to the isolated manner in which justice is studied, without any resonance with broader issues or institutions. The second relates to the way in which knowledge systems are generated within this paradigm.

As mentioned previously, the study of justice within the discipline of psychology, while having emanated from social psychology has most recently fallen mainly into the domain of organisational psychology. In both the United States and many European countries the subject of organisational justice gained so much popularity that it developed into a sub-field, with a very particular identity and approach to the subject. Despite this it is acknowledged that the community involved in the study of organisational justice is small and particularly self-referential (Cropanzano, 2001), and the theoretical paradigm that has emerged from this area can be criticised as being particularly insular. Very little of the research conducted within this area accounts for the workplace as an institution of society, and as such as a constructed context that is embedded in a set of practices, with issues emanating in the workplace being, in many ways, just echoes of the practices and beliefs of the society in which they are located. This psychological framework thus tends to describe justice concerns in a very linear fashion, often failing to recognise the complexities of the phenomena manifesting themselves in the workplace. How, for example, in the South African context, can you attempt to account for black employee's experiences of justice in their workplace, if you are not accounting for their experience of Apartheid, and the way in which work served to form part of their oppression? Perceptions of workplace relations, procedures and distributions will all be viewed through the lens of such experiences. It is not only past events and contexts that impact on perceptions – a person's current living conditions will also influence the way in which they experience the workplace (and many other contexts). In a country where many people, even those who are employed, are living under intractable conditions, and are confronting crime, poverty, HIV/AIDS and a range of other life threatening problems as part of their dailiness, attempts to isolate those experiences from the experiences they have in the workplace are both problematic and misleading. For example, when a person has to catch several taxis to work, and thus starts his/her day at 5:00a.m. and finishes it at 8:00p.m., is supporting a large family of people who are unable to find work, when access to even basic health care is exceptionally difficult, workplace policies, salary, and work sponsored medical aid take on a particularly urgent meaning. To attempt to account for a person's perception of a particular policy by simply questioning them about the procedure used to develop the policy, the way in which the policy was relayed to them, or even in terms of their perception of the policy itself, fails to account for how that policy is an echo of much larger policies and practices, both present and past.

This becomes particularly pertinent within the South African context given our history of the perpetration of gross and systematic injustice at every level of society. There is no doubt that broader

societal concerns about past discrimination, race relations, poverty, unemployment, as well as politics, are all emerging as important workplace concerns. In addition, new labour legislation is having a direct impact on almost every area of workplace functioning, including selection, recruitment, discipline, assessment, and training and development. Concepts about justice that emanate elsewhere in society are, therefore, clearly imported into the workplace. These cannot then be taken to stand independently as workplace concerns. The Employment Equity Act with its legislation of Affirmative Action is a clear example of this. Concerns about redressing past injustice to black, coloured and Indian South Africans have resulted in a statutory policy with regards to recruitment of the previously disadvantaged. The psychological paradigm would, in attempting to explore perceptions of fairness related to this policy of affirmative action, explore people's perceptions of the affirmative action policy, their attitudes to the way in which this policy was developed, and would attempt to account for a relationship between these sets of attitudes and other workplace behaviours or attitudes (such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, or organisational citizenship behaviours) (See Bobocel, McCline & Folger, 1997; Bobocel, Davey, Son Hing, & Zanna, 2001; Kravitz, 1995; and for a review see Kravitz, Harrison, Turner, Levine, Chaves, Brannick, Denning, Russel, Conrad, 1997). What it would fail to do is account for how affirmative action policies are representative of a societies attempt to address past (and present) practices of oppression and human rights violations, and how such policies are associated with a range of other changes occurring in that society (such as a new constitution). In addition to this, such a policy is representative of huge social shifts, in which different groups have large investments. As such a person's belief about the 'fairness' of affirmative action cannot be separated from their experiences and perceptions of what is happening in the much larger context of the society, as well as their past experiences of that society.

It is not simply a concern that the study of justice accounts only for workplace variables – that is something that is relatively easily rectified. It is a concern that the theoretical paradigm itself is based on a dissection of justice into three (or sometimes two) 'types', which then direct lines of questioning, and in turn generate conclusions that are, in fact, misleading – they only present some of the picture, and as such are circumstantial. An investigation that accounts for interpersonal aspects of justice in isolation from broader institutional relations not only fails to account for the whole picture, but also misrepresents such interpersonal relations as being unaffected by such broader concerns. This limitation is partly as a result of the psychological theoretical framework being developed largely in isolation from the many other disciplines concerned with justice (in particular those that focus on justice at the broader institutional levels), and partly due to the next concern under consideration, that of the way in which knowledge systems are generated within this paradigm.

The psychological approach to research and knowledge generation is primarily empirical in nature. The study of justice, with its roots in social psychology, emanates in particular from an experimental research paradigm. While it is argued that the study of organisational justice deals with real world issues that are of relevance to people, and that much field research is conducted (Cropanzano, 2001), the majority of research is still conducted within the experimental paradigm, often using fairly homogenous groups of students as samples. Indeed the existing theoretical paradigm most certainly has its roots within this experimental paradigm. This presents two obvious concerns. The first pertains to the (widely known and debated) limitations of the experimental paradigm, which observes people's reactions to situations that are removed from actual events or experiences – people are either asked to imagine scenarios, or the researcher attempts to simulate conditions. As such the researcher is defining the parameters of the 'just' or 'unjust' situation, rather than people's actual experiences. Given the self-

referential nature of the psychological body of research, they are often doing this on the basis of other research conducted in similar ways, and on the basis of an a-priori theoretical framework. There is, therefore, a danger that the responses being received are confirming a particular line of thought simply because of the way in which the questions are being asked and the experiments set up. As such when research is conducted in the field, it is on the basis of a framework that directs research and responses in a particular direction.

The second concern regarding the experimental research paradigm relates to the nature of the samples upon which the research is being conducted. Many of the samples are, as mentioned previously, student samples, and are fairly homogenous with regards to demographic composition. Very little meaningful attention is paid to the limitations this presents to the research outcomes. The argument is often that ideas are tested out within the experimental setting on student samples in order to develop theoretical ideas. These ideas then need to be tested in the field. This is problematic in that it indicates that only particular types of ideas are being tested in the field –those that emerge as interesting or significant within the experimental mode. As such what is being taken to the field are research questions based on the experimental experiences of predominantly white American or Western European university going students. While much of this may prove to be both significant and relevant in other 'real world' contexts, it is problematic to imagine that the theoretical framework emerging from this research is at all representative of the larger population's experiences. In addition, there is little indication that much of this experimental research is actually being tested in the field, rather than just being used as the basis for further experiments.

A further concern regarding the systems of knowledge generation within the psychological paradigm is the tendency to reduce very complex issues into 'variables', which are then measured by a set of questions and taken to accurately represent the whole of that experience. A very clear example of this can be seen in relation to the notion of culture. What constitutes culture, the ways in which culture is used, and the role that culture plays in a range of phenomena are highly complex questions that many disciplines are engaged with. Explorations and debates regarding culture are indeed becoming increasingly complex, and as with many other disciplines, psychologists have been interested in the role of culture in people's work and social lives. The role of culture in relation to perceptions of justice has received considerable attention from psychological justice researchers (For reviews see Bhagat & McQuaid, 1982; Cascio & Bailey, 1995; Hofstede and Bond, 1984, McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001). In a chapter entitled Cross-Cultural Applications of Organisational Justice (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001), the authors begin by acknowledging that the explanation of what culture is "...is a worthy research goal in itself" (p. 68). However they state that from a range of possible definitions of culture the one they agree with defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another." (Hofstede, 1993, in McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001: p.68). Despite the very significant normative claims such a statement makes, they engage in no further discussion as to the reason for their choice. They argue that the recognition that culture can contribute to divergent beliefs and attitudes towards workplace variables resulted in researchers attempting to "...identify basic cultural dimensions and then use them to categorize countries..." (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001: p. 69) so as to help international managers lead and motivate employees from different cultures in the best possible way. In the McFarlin & Sweeney's view the most successful attempt emerging from this effort was based on a survey by Hofstede (1980 in McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001) of over 100 000 workers in 40 countries, which produced a model of four cultural dimensions into which all of these countries and workers can fit.

The concerns with such a model are numerous, and a complete discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper. However there are two particularly pertinent concerns that warrant elucidation. Firstly, it is clear that such an approach is reductionist in the extreme, both in the belief that an entire country can be characterised by a set of cultural dimensions in the first place, and the notion that four dimensions can encapsulate the whole experience of culture. Both the complexity of culture as well as multi-culturalist reality of every single country is ignored – no cognisance is given to the fact that different groups in every country have completely different accounts and experiences of culture. In addition to this the model does not begin to account for even some of the dimensions along which cultures vary. While the writers do acknowledge that this model has limitations in that many eastern European, African, and Asian countries were not included in the survey (which given that these countries represent aspects of culture which are remarkably different from the United States and western Europe, could be considered an insurmountable problem), as well as the fact that 'within-country differences' were not accounted for. In relation to this they state "New immigrant populations coming to the United States have put managers in the position of having to motivate employee from various cultural backgrounds." (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001: p.70). The 'othering' of cultures different to that which is imagined to be the mainstream is quite alarming, as is the assumption that multi-culturalism in the United States is both recent and as a result of foreigners moving into the country. This introduces the second concern about this model - whose culture is being represented in this account, or perhaps more importantly, whose is not? This model does not just fail to account for other groups' experiences of culture, but it accounts for the whole experience of culture on the basis of the dominant culture. As such a particular version of culture is being represented, one which denies multi-culturalism, and even goes to the extent of implying that some very questionable practices that arguably violate human rights are an inevitable and uncontested part of that culture. Such a model then serves to perpetuate inequalities of voice and power in accounts of culture, and therefore in all resulting research that is conducted using this theoretical framework of culture – in this case, a study on cross cultural differences in justice perceptions.

This unidimensional, static view of culture is perhaps even more apparent in descriptions of culture in African countries. McFarlin & Sweeney, for example, say "In fact, for many Africans, 'just management' is captured by concepts like ubuntu. This cultural perspective views organisations much like an African village where an informal communal orientation holds sway. As such ubuntu stresses supportiveness, co-operation, and people working for the common good..." (2001: p.76). This view perpetuates a number of stereotypes, and once again a discussion of all of these fall beyond the scope of this paper. Unfortunately such reductionist views are perpetuated by the South African popular media (and very often management consultants) as is evident from this account - McFarlin & Sweeney are citing a South African management text (Khoza, R., 1994). This, however, is evidence of the blurred distinction between psychological academic enquiry into organisational practices (which should be emanating from a particular theoretical base and have appropriate standards for argument construction) and that of the business sciences (which have different theoretical bases and applications of knowledge).

Despite a set of limitations that make such a theory both conceptually and ethically flawed in the extreme, it is this type of theory that continues to be used and applied in the field of organisational psychology, and in relation to justice research. McFarlin & Sweeney argue that despite its limitations, this work "...continues to have a tremendous impact on international management." (p.70). This is

perhaps particularly alarming within the area of justice research. There is an inherent irony in using what could be considered to be unjust theories to explain and describe experiences of injustice, and as such continue to perpetuate problematic beliefs and practices. It is not just theories about culture that are reductionist. It can be argued that the psychological framework of justice described above, is just as reductionist, focussing on two or three 'types' of justice, which are seen to apply to organisations in any context. This criticism of the psychological paradigm is perhaps underpinned by another concern - that of the split between normative and empirical approaches to exploring justice.

Social justice, as an area of research and theoretical development, falls within the scope of many disciplines, each of which adopts particular methodologies and approaches in order to generate systems of knowledge about the subject. Most comparative discussions about these interdisciplinary investigations of justice focus predominantly on what is viewed as the split between normative and empirical approaches to the development of theory – a division which has long been debated and criticised. Psychologists working in the area of organisational justice state quite clearly their empirical, descriptive orientation. In a chapter aimed at providing an overview of organisational justice research over the past decade, Cropanzano and Greenberg state

In keeping with social science tradition, our treatment of justice is completely descriptive in orientation ... This is in contrast to the large body of work in moral philosophy... which is inherently prescriptive, specifying what should be done to achieve justice. As such when organizational scientists talk about justice, they are generally referring to individual perceptions, one's evaluations as to the appropriateness of a given outcome or process. (1997: p. 318).

This is perhaps one of the most widely accepted views among psychologists working in the area of justice. Such a view, however, poses a number of concerns. The view that normative and empirical work sets out to accomplish different ends, or answer different questions, appears to be taken on board as meaning that one need not take account of the other. As such, the psychological study of justice has developed virtually independently of the work done in the area of political theory. It is important to note that this does not simply refer to political philosophers such as John Rawls and Robert Nozick, but also to economists such as Amartya Sen, Political Scientists such as Iris Marion Young and Martha Nussbaum, sociologists, educationalists, and feminist writers. It seems that there is a multitude of disciplines, both normatively and empirically orientated, concerned with the study of justice, whose work intersects and forms an inter-disciplinary base for the exploration of the subject. It also seems that psychology is virtually absent from that interaction, both in our own use of such research, as well as the use of our research by others. Our belief that we are purely descriptively orientated appears to have absolved us of any meaningful engagement with this inter disciplinary forum.

This view is not useful. Iris Marion Young argues that she does not accept the division between empirical and normative social theory. She states that

While there is a distinction between empirical and normative statements and the kinds of reason required for each, no normative theory meant to evaluate existing societies can avoid empirical enquiry, and no empirical investigation of social structures and relations can avoid normative judgements. Inquiries about social justice must consider the context and causes of actual distributions in order to make normative judgements about institutional rules and relations." (Young, 1990. P. 31).

While studies or approaches can quite usefully position themselves as being empirical or descriptive, as organisational psychologists have done, advocating a complete dichotomy of the two approaches undermines the usefulness of the research. It is not possible to say that any study is devoid of a normative stance. Defining justice in the way that it has been, in relation to three types, can be regarded as making a normative statement – the perspective that justice comprises distributive, procedural and interpersonal concerns or aspects is commenting directly on what it is believed constitutes justice. It may be argued that this model emanates from empirical investigation and simply describes how justice is experienced by people in the workplace. However, as discussed earlier, it is the normative stance of the researchers that in fact directs empirical investigation. Normative research does not simply attempt to prescribe standards for just treatment, as proposed in Cropanzano and Greenberg's quote at the beginning of this section. It also offers ways of conceptualising justice – what is it that we are referring to when we talk about a just or unjust situation. In order to meaningfully answer this question, which has to be the point of departure for any research on the subject matter, would mean appropriate engagement with what is considered 'normative' theorists. A failure to do so results in research that firstly is fundamentally misleading, and secondly runs the risk of becoming self-referential and stagnant.

This is clearly evident within the psychological research framework. Despite protests to the contrary, this model of justice is based on a set of normative judgements that define justice in relation to a distributive paradigm. This can be seen in the definitions provided by psychological researchers. For example, the definition provided earlier in this paper (under the section Organisational Psychology), views the differential allotment of goods or conditions to individuals or groups to be central to the concept of justice (Randall & Mueller, 1995). Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997) state that organisational justice has had two major foci, that of "...employee's responses to the things they receive – that is outcomes – and the means by which they obtain these outcomes – that is procedures." (p.319). As such procedural justice is defined in relation only to distributive concerns. These definitions are representative of almost all of the organisational justice literature, where justice is defined as being most predominantly about distributive concerns, and where procedural or interpersonal justice are seen in relation to these outcomes.

Such a distributive paradigm is not uncommon to a range of disciplines. Iris Young asserts that this distributive paradigm has dominated thinking about social justice, and that inquires into social justice have been constrained by the view that it is a coextensive concept with distribution (Young, 1990). She argues that most theories of justice conceive of it very narrowly, restricting its meaning to the appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens among members of society. Young's criticism of the distributive paradigm is two fold. Firstly, she argues that it has as its predominant focus the distribution of material goods such as money, resources, and social positions. As such it ignores the role that social structure and institutional context play in determining distributive patterns. Such a context is central to concerns about justice as it influences people's ability to participate in deciding on their own actions as well as their ability to develop and effect their capacity. Aside from ignoring the institutional context, many theories and debates about social justice fail to scrutinise the social structures that are presumed in their discussions.

Young's (1990) second concern with the distributive paradigm pertains to the way in which theorists try and account for the distribution of non-material things such as power, opportunity or self-respect, when

they do make such attempts. Many theorists have extended their conception of distribution to include non-material goods, as is evident in the psychological literature. Despite this, Young argues that these non-material goods are still considered as commodities that are distributed among people. She identifies this failure to recognise the limits of the 'logic of distribution' as the main problem with the distributive paradigm. She asserts that certain social goods are not quantifiable, and applying a distributive framework to them is to produce a misleading conception of the issues involved (Young, 1990). She states

The distributive paradigm implicitly assumes that social judgements are about what individual persons have, how much they have, and how that amount compares with what other persons have. This focus on possession tends to preclude thinking about what people are doing, according to what institutionalised rules, how their doings and havings are structured by institutionalised relations that constitute their positions, and how the combined effects of their doings has are cursive effects on their lives. (Young, 1990: p. 25).

Young's focus on a paradigm other than the distributive is echoed by other justice theorists such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Sen, for example advocates a focus on the freedoms engendered by income, rather than on the income seen on its own (Sen, 1997). He states

If the objective is to concentrate on the individual's real opportunity to pursue her objectives... then account would have to be taken not only of the primary goods the persons respectively hold, but also of the relevant personal characteristics that govern the conversion of primary goods into the persons ability to promote her ends." (Sen, 1997: p.74).

From this discussion it is clear that 'normative' researchers have a tremendous amount of real value to add to empirical studies. The normative stance adopted by psychology directs our empirical enquiry, and yet this stance is being challenged, with a tremendous amount of credibility, in arenas other than our own. This has important implications for our empirical work. If we assumed a different point of departure for our questioning, as such criticisms would dictate, by looking, for example, at a capabilities approach, or defining justice in relation to oppression and domination as Young does, the questions we ask people participating in our studies would be different.

As such it is clear that the distinction between what constitutes normative and descriptive research is not as clear cut as psychological researchers are perhaps assuming. This failure to view normative research as inherently pertaining to the psychological line of enquiry (i.e. not simply as empirical research testing out normative theories, but as laying the foundation for our own descriptive methodology) is both caused by, and as a result of, an almost complete lack of interdisciplinary engagement, and a consequent assumption that relevant literature is confined to our own work.

The positioning of organisational justice research as a managerial science, the lack of its resonance with broader issues in our society as well as with other disciplines working in the area, along with the limitations of the way in which psychology generates knowledge systems has meant that the psychological contribution to progress in the area of social justice within South Africa has been particularly limited. In fact it may be argued that psychology has, through its representations and positioning, allowed for spaces in which psychological bodies of knowledge are misused.

As discussed earlier, psychologists see their role as not being about commenting on the 'right or wrong' of practices, or prescribing standards of fairness, but rather to describe the standards people use in making justice judgements. As such no account is given to whether a practice is actually fair or not – only to whether some one perceives it as fair (and subsequently the ways in which such perceptions then motivate people). This has particular problems in a country like South Africa, where systematic injustice is inherent in almost all of our institutions and structures. Within such a context it is not unexpected that people's perceptions of justice may not be linked in any way to practices that are fair. Sen (1999) criticises the utilitarian notion of well-being as not being particularly robust as it fails to account for the fact that people may adapt their notion of their own well-being according to what they feel they may expect. As such a poor person may consider themselves well-off under circumstances that a richer person would not. Sen argues that "...deprived people tend to come to terms with their deprivation because of the sheer necessity of survival, and they may, as a result, lack the courage to demand any radical change, and may even adjust their desires and expectations to what they unambitiously see as feasible" (1999: p.63). In neglecting to account for this, the psychological approach to justice research can be accused of serving to perpetuate certain injustices.

The failure of psychology to provide a normative context to research (or to deny normative assumptions underpinning research) is also to deny a role for psychology as being able to be active in debates about policy development and the recognition and protection of human rights, as well as the implementation of policies that are designed to further social justice in South Africa. Where psychological justice research is used to intervene in practices, it is done so within the framework of motivating people to accept changes or encouraging their co-operation. As such our research becomes an instrument of compliance for interest groups whose agendas we support.

The challenges for psychology are numerous, but possibly more so for South African researchers. There has been an almost complete failure to engage critically within this paradigm, despite the fact that it is our context that, in particular, demands more of our discipline. If we are to play a meaningful role in South Africa's transition, the onus of challenging existing forms of knowledge and generating alternative frameworks is ours. An appropriate point of departure would be to consider and acknowledge the normative assumptions that underpin our research, as well as to evaluate such assumptions in relation to work being done in other disciplines. Meaningful inter-disciplinary engagement that we allow to challenge our paradigm and assumptions is essential if we are to find a place for psychological knowledge about justice on our national agenda. Such an exploration will also allow us to acknowledge our own research agenda, and will create the opportunity for us to reformulate this in a more conscious manner in line with what our context demands of us. As such we need to give careful consideration to what we view the role of psychological enquiry within the South African context to be, and thus we need to resist the temptation to simply follow the research trajectory emanating from the United States or Western Europe. Such thinking needs to be applied within our own discipline, where there is a tendency for interest groups to split up into isolated units with well defined parameters that demarcate our areas of interest and focus. This inhibits the development of a useful and critical paradigm. As such there needs to be far more resonance with and articulation between sub-disciplines within psychology.

A reformulation of our research agenda and research questions in this way should inevitably lead to a change in research methodology. This is not to say that quantitative or experimental paradigms lack

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any value for us, but rather more systemic thinking that acknowledges the complexity of justice will demand research methodologies that extend beyond linear thinking. The recognition of complexity demands that we move away from trying to simplify or reduce variables into measurable units, but rather find methodologies that can account for and help explore this complexity. As such what questions we ask, the way in which we ask them, to whom we ask them, and what tools we use to analyse them all need to fall under close and critical scrutiny – the limitations of current methodologies need to be given far more meaningful attention, and problems with such methodologies that are in fact insurmountable need to be acknowledged.

Ten years after our first democratic election, South Africa remains a country that is grappling with the realities of social injustice. Both our history and our current context demand something particular of people committed to the transformation our country. The overwhelming challenge facing the psychological enquiry into justice is a meaningful scrutiny of what it is that is needed from us and by whom in order to meet the demands of this post-Apartheid South Africa. A failure to scrutinise the ideological underpinnings of our paradigm will not just mean that our work has limited value, but that we will contribute to the perpetuation of injustice through allowing our discipline to systematically misrepresent people's experiences of social justice, representations that then are misused by consumers of our research.

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